Panel 2 - Digitalisation and Innovation in Tourism

Digitalisation of tourism is not a megatrend of the future. For many years now, the sector has faced gradual transformation of the playing field, product development and service provision lifecycle, and last but not least of the customer behavior. Today, technology underpins the entire cycle of a tourism experience and thus requires the businesses to react accordingly. Over 95% of travelers use digital resources in the course of their travel. As a result, market survival is conditioned by the capability to provide an adequate response to the "smart tourists' requirements.

Adaptation of the sector pertains to a whole range of aspects, from interoperability of the technological infrastructure, through education and training of tourism professionals, to delivery of personalized services. The travelers have turned to "prosumers" co-creating their travel experience in real time. Future provision of the tourism services must be personalized, multi-channel, responsible and sustainable.

Given the speed, nature and complexity of the technological progress, legislative framework governing tech-enabled business transactions must also reflect upon this transformation. Regulatory ecosystem is an important determinant, which can either stifle or boost this digital transformation. On the one hand, any intervention must avoid harming the sector's innovation capacity. On the other hand though, it must ensure a level playing competitive field and a responsible use of big data and innovative technologies, while minimising unintended consequences both on the market environment and the travellers' privacy.

The results of the public consultation on the European tourism of the future conducted by the European Commission in 2014 indicate that the framework governing tech-enabled transactions is not always adequate in terms of clarity, scope and approach to the modern realities of e- and m-tourism. In-depth stakeholder discussion is required to shed light on areas such as cross-border e-transactions, sharing economy or big data analysis. The industry is therefore invited to consider whether current representation of the actors on the digital tourism market is adequate to facilitate such policy discourse.

Public-private cooperation is also necessary to facilitate an evidence-based policy-making. It is a fact that current research in tourism and hospitality is not sufficient to enable as data-driven decision-making as desirable. Efficient but responsible use of data science can help businesses tackle many of today's competitiveness challenges but also the public sector when tailoring the policy responses.

The European Commission is well aware of the importance that tackling the digital divide has for exploiting the potential that tourism industry has for creating jobs and growth. It has developed a series of policy actions and tools to be used by the industry; such as Tourism Business Portal, TOURISMlink and pilot series of live events on digital tourism.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. Is the competitive level playing field the most important element determining ability of the European tourism sector to tap into the growth potential of the digital revolution?

2. Can the national and EU-level regulatory authorities contribute to removing barriers to digitalisation of tourism sector, without stifling its innovation potential?

3. The Commission envisages to set up a MultiStakeholder 'Digital Tourism Advisory Group'. This Group would have 3 to 4 months to make recommendations on the issues listed in the discussion paper. Would you be ready to take part?