

Welcome Speech 15 November 2007

by

Bent Normann Olsen, 1st Vice Chairman of the Regional Council, Region Zealand

Dear friends, dear guests.

It is with great pleasure I welcome you here in Sorø, the capital of Region Zealand. We have participants from 16 countries, from Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Western Europe, Eastern Europe. And even special guests from Tibet.

1. Characteristics of the region

Our region with its 812,000 inhabitants and 17 municipalities is in good shape. Yet, we have a number of challenges but also big potentials for developing new solutions and initiatives. In the field of tourism we find such potentials.

2. Tourism

The tourism sector in Region Zealand has an annual turnover of 1 Billion Euro, and the sector accounts for more than 11,000 full time job. And the sector and its actors are making a great effort to develop existing and new services and experiences opportunities for our guests.

3. DestiLink

The DestiLink project, aiming at capacity building and innovation, fits nicely into the needs of our region. With its focus on destination development, cooperation patterns, development of enterprises, and mobilising local resources, it is an important instrument in the regional development.

We have gained a lot of inspiration and knowledge from all over Europe through this project. And I would like to express our thanks to all DestiLinkers for your valuable contribution.

4. Sustainable Development

Let me just briefly mention that Region Zealand right now is in the process of developing its Sustainable Development Strategy, the so-called Local Agenda 21 Strategy, based on a multi-stakeholder involvement process. Thereby we have followed the recommendations of both the United Nations and the European Union.

Sustainable tourism will become one of the key areas of this strategy. It is my hope that in this way the DestiLink methods, tools and good practice examples can be utilized in Region Zealand via cooperation among the stakeholders.

Another key area is Climate Change. In 2009 the UN Climate Summit will take place in Copenhagen 2009. In that context Region Zealand is going to develop a regional climate strategy, which of course also will incorporate the tourism sector.

5. Sustainable Tourism

Later today the new EU policy on sustainable tourism will be presented. When it was first presented just a couple of weeks ago in Algarve in Portugal, the Vice-President of the European Commission Günter Verheugen expressed it like this:

“In the 21st century a project that is not environmentally sustainable can not be economically sound”.

Let me follow up on Günter Verheugen by saying that sustainable tourism is even broader than that. Sustainable tourism is a symbiosis of economic, social, cultural, environmental challenges and opportunities.

And in combination with the experience economy it represents huge potentials for innovation, in all European regions and destinations.

In Region Zealand we find numerous examples of good practice.

We have very committed pioneers among tourism enterprises and destinations.

In the fields of camping sites, holiday homes, sustainable destinations, coastal tourism, local produce, nature interpretation, cultural events, we find some of the first movers in Denmark, and these innovative actors are also recognised internationally.

And still we have, as far as I can estimate, huge unexploited potentials.

6. International cooperation

I find it extremely important and inspiring to meet colleagues, politicians and experts - be it researchers or practitioners - from other countries and regions. We need each other for jointly developing our society in the right direction.

And the DestiLink partnership fully demonstrates that based on commitment and common action we can create new knowledge, promote innovation and good practice and thus strengthen the regions and the tourism destinations of Europe.

7. This conference

This conference is a challenging Learning Platform. Seize this unique opportunity and get into dialogue with colleagues from all over Europe, during the afternoon workshops, and not at least during the breaks and the dinner to night.

I am convinced we will have a fruitful conference, and I wish you an enjoyable stay here in our wonderful region.