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DISCURSO INAUGURAL

TURISMO SOSTENIBLE EN EL MARCO DE LA NUEVA AGENDA URBANA

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"Turismo e impacto en el territorio desde una perspectiva sostenible"

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Barcelona, 18 de mayo

I am quite honored to be once again standing here today, in the trendsetting city of Barcelona, celebrating yet another milestone for sustainable tourism. This would be the third time Barcelona has been the stage of iconic changes in sustainable tourism, setting not only a precedent with its own commitment to sustainability, but also by hosting those events that have marked important steps towards a global approach.

In October 2008 during the IUCN World Conservation Congress, with an audience of over 6600 leaders from government, public sector, NGOs, businesses, social organizations and the UN, the first international global sustainable tourism standard was launched: The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

Philanthropist, and Chair and Founder of the UN Foundation Ted Turner, Director Achim Steiner – UNEP, and former Secretary General of the UN World Tourism Organization Francesco Frangiali, joined by Travelocity/Sabre and Rainforest Alliance, presented the GSTC to the world. The criteria brought for the first time an umbrella standard that would unify the language to define and implement sustainable tourism. It was endorsed by governments, businesses and civil society, in a process the current Secretary of UNWTO has called the largest stakeholder outreach in tourism. The criteria have lived up to their expectation and are widely recognized as the minimum principle of sustainability.

In June of 2011 Barcelona once again became the stage of yet another important breakthrough with the international launch to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Established in 2010, the GSTC was established as public-private partnership under the auspices of the UN and it had grown to house over 250 organizations, all seeking to promote and implement sustainable tourism under the umbrella of the GSTC Criteria. Despite being 20 years later than other industries, sustainability in tourism now had a global movement. This was also an important milestone for Barcelona as, during that same event, it was announced as the first city to be certified as a sustainable destination.

Today we are here again, this time to address one of the most complex topics of sustainable tourism: URBAN TOURISM. And to unveil the new Standard of Biosphere Urban Destination and the work that has been done with Barcelona.

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As Barcelona has learned and showcased, implementing sustainability in an urban environment is filled with challenges:

Tourism is not desired: “Tourists go home” – this is a billboard I saw on the streets of Broadway in New York in 1998, when my friends and I decided to visit this fascinating city. Suddenly all the adds of the tourism board that welcomed us to the city seemed contradictory. It wasn’t until I experienced the challenge of overcrowding in my own city – Washington DC, that I understood what this meant for those living in an urban environment – going 5 blocks in DC during Cherry Blossom time can take 30 min, between the lines of buses and the tourists crossing the street. Trying to find a place in a restaurant is nearly as impossible as the prices you pay if you do get to eat. If we take a destination like the Island of Manhattan this problem is even worst: for a population of 8.5 million having 59 million visitors a year in 90 square km has significant impact. Barcelona has a similar ratio of inhabitants in the inner city with 1.6 million inhabitants vs. 30 million visitors a year.

Managing tourist and their needs: A person that comes to NYC as a tourist is expecting all basic provisions: accommodations, food, water, energy, entertainment, transportation - all primary services. They also will leave behind sewage and garbage. All of these are services that the population of the island need as well. How to project consumption, acquire the resources and dispose of waste is a complex task, and not always accomplished. Coordinating the provision of services and products for tourists is not an easy task, and who should be doing it? This leads to the next problem

Governance: Who is responsible for provision of services for tourists? In general this would be the agencies responsible for the provision of services for the inhabitants of the destination. However for tourism this is more complex. In destinations that are primary tourism attractions the Destination Management Organization (DMO) is a coordinating agency that can plan, implement and monitor, working closely with local and national authorities. The issue in cities becomes much more complex as tourism is not necessarily the primary priority of local entities. To address the surge of travelers the coordination between agencies needs to be flawless. Reality however demonstrates that this is probably the hardest challenge to address in the implementation of tourism, not to mention for the provision of sustainable tourism. The traditional concept of governance cannot be applied for sustainable tourism and interagency collaboration at local, regional and national level is a must.

But what is the value of tourism: All of the points stated before could be addressed; however the biggest question to ensure sustainable tourism is the value of tourism to the local population. A type of tourism that brings a positive impact for the cities while providing the best visitor satisfaction. This answer in rural destination or cultural destinations may be clear as it can provide distinct social and economic benefits, preservation resources, and guidance for development. However in urban destinations the value does not always outweigh the cost. Maybe one of the most demonstrative examples is Venice, where the local population has been replaced by: second-home buyers and mass tourism. The backdrop of giant cruise ships visually pollutes the view of the Piazza San Marco. The once unique cultural mecca, the city that drew the artists and nobles, has turned into a “made in

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china” giant souvenir shop for herds of tourists. Living culture examples like the Murano Glass factory have disappeared, and cheap trinkets have substituted traditional Carnival masks. Not to mention the environmental problems that can be identified. It is difficult to see the value of tourism there.

While you can make a case for conservation of protected areas, safeguarding of species and cultural places through the engagement of sustainable tourism in rural areas, it is my believe that nowhere is the concept of sustainable tourism more needed than in an urban environment.

Only through a tourism development that minimizes environmental and cultural impacts and maximizes the social, economic and cultural benefits of the destination and its inhabitants, while providing a satisfying traveler experience can the destination thrive in a manner that benefits all stakeholders.

What does that mean?

The approach that Biosphere has followed is to use the Sustainable Development Goals as a guideline to define sustainability and align them with the tourism sector. For the urban destinations Biosphere draws from the New Urban Agenda to ensure that where applicable to tourism appropriate indicators are provided. These guidelines along with a number of international treaties and committees lay out how tourism can become sustainable.

Let’s analyze some of the SGD’s in this context:

Goal 1: Inclusive Economic Growth and Poverty Eradication: Tourism is without a doubt an important driver of economic development. In some cases, it represents the main source of hard currency inflows. Sustainable tourism is the way to ensure that this revenue supports an inclusive economic growth, focusing on poverty eradication.

Goal 2: Food Safety and quality: This is a critical element in the urban environment. The city of Barcelona has 1.6 million inhabitants that need food; however the city needs to ensure supplies for an additional 30 million people. There is also an opportunity to engage surrounding communities in the food production processes, linking back as an opportunity of inclusive economic growth. As an urban destination it will be important to look beyond its boundaries to ensure that these elements are met.

Security, hygiene and quality of the food is very important in an urban setting where much of the food needs to be imported. Where it is not regulated, as it is in the EU, systems to ensure health and safety should be in place. Restaurants and food services strive in a city environment, generating waste. This should be an important concern in food management.

Goal 5: Gender Equality and women empowerment: The tourism industry is the largest employer of women; however these jobs are primarily service positions. The industry should also be able to

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empower women to either aim at leadership positions or build their own tourism enterprises or enterprises that service the tourism industry.

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth. Tourism attracts workers, often migrating into cities seeking that opportunity they would not have in their rural towns. However tourism does not pay, in general, fair wages. Loopholes in the legislation, lack of controls, enough offer are some of the reasons that lead to low wages, no contracts and a high rotation of staff. Looking at the appropriate legal frameworks is important and looking at them beyond the destinations. Adequate pay will ensure that local labor stays in the destination.

Goals 6: Sustainable Use of Management of Water. Many cities, particularly along the coasts and on islands are faced with a limited water source. Management of water for tourism to ensure that locals are serviced is important. The demand of resources of the visitors to a destination puts water provision in danger. In Grenada certain days a week water is rationed for locals, but some cruise ships docking still will acquire water there, or the tourist that are visiting the island may consume it as well. This inequality needs to be addressed in a sustainable destination.

Goal 7: Ensuring access to sustainable Energy. The tourism industry can be a trend setter in this goal and cities can provide modern and intelligent services that improve efficiency and increase the use of renewable sources.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and communities translated to tourism means sustainable destinations including preservation of our heritage.

Sustainable tourism can aid in establishing a plan for city development that will help preserve cultural and natural heritage by actively engaging the tourism industry. It can be a driver, as it is in many cities in France, for conservation of cultural and natural heritage in urban settings.

Goal 12: Sustainable Production and Consumption patterns: This goal specifically sets a target for tourism “Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”

These are just a few examples of how sustainability can be defined for an urban destination.

There are a couple of additional elements that need to be addressed particularly in an urban environment:

Mobility - Transportation is affected by tourism, particularly by cruise tourism. Ensuring a mobility plan that allows locals to move effectively during peaks of tourism visitation is important. While transportation is a broader city concern, the tourism industry can be an ally in incentivizing sustainable transportation.

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Technology – Adequate technology can aid with mobility, regulating flows; technology is essential to the renewable energy component as well as adequate resource management.

Zoning: Cities establish zoning to regulate development. Incorporating tourism into the zoning plans is critical. One aspect is the development of tourism services as hotels and restaurants. But another aspect to consider should be the zoning for tourism visitation – very much as you see it in protected areas. Areas for mass tourism, areas that offer more unique attractions to those seeking experiences, and areas that are left to the local population. This is particularly important when confronted with cruise tourism which brings thousands of people at a time into a destination. Areas should be established that attract and manage mass tourism that limit the interaction with the locals and disrupts to a minimum the lives of the people. For those travelers that are looking for experience and are willing to take in the life of the city the boundaries are open, but the expected disruptions will also be less.

How do you achieve these goals?

This is not an easy task as the tourism industry is a very fragmented one. And since in an urban setting tourism is only one component of the equation the formula becomes more complex. Here are some recommended steps:

1. Setting clear and achievable goals that all stakeholders can align with. Who determines these goals? They should derive from a stakeholder consultation process; however it is always good to have a baseline. The Sustainable Development Goals are guiding principles for the sustainability of any destination, but they are not the only measures to use. The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, different international treaties, Code of Ethics, Fair Trade. Destinations can prepare a set of goals or they can engage in certification processes that provide clear guidelines and goals to follow. The Biosphere-Barcelona initiative for example sets these goals.
2. Convene stakeholder engagement processes: Identifying all relevant stakeholders will be critical to the success of engagement and ownership. When establishing the GSTC Criteria we made sure that each relevant stakeholder group was represented, particularly those that would raise more objections. In an urban environment it is important to go beyond the traditional tourism players or the government entities that manage the services, and look at consumer organization, local groups that represent the communities and neighborhoods, labor representatives, chambers of commerce amongst others.
3. Adapt governance for sustainable tourism: I cannot stress this factor enough. Developing a strong governing structure is essential to address many of the challenges that we are faced with today.
 - a) Coordination vs. imposition: change the traditional practices and understand that in tourism, while there are actions determined by law and clearly assigned agencies to implement many of the tasks, it is important that there is a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism. Governance becomes more of a coordinating role.

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- b) The process has to be multidisciplinary: so as to address all elements that are relevant to implementing a cohesive strategy. This means that all agencies that have a stake in tourism service provisions or services that will be impacted by tourism should be around the table.
 - c) It has to incorporate different levels of government and diverse political stakeholders. One of the biggest challenges is change of government and the disregard of past policies. There is a need for support by many so that the change of a few will not deter from the goal. Also, there is need to incorporate stakeholders at all levels of government. In Cozumel, high paying overnight tourism that came to the island to dive was substituted by cruise tourism, making it the premier cruise tourism destination in the Caribbean. This was a national strategy that never considered the local views. The recently elected local government is pushing for a change and taking a more coordinated approach, demonstrating the value of a more diversified tourism strategy that will draw again on higher paying tourist that have less of an environmental footprint.
 - d) Public and Private partnerships: the private sector will more often than not pull towards their own interest rather than the social good. However if they become an actor in the game, they may aim to find a lower common denominator than what other may have in mind, but at least they would be committed to that one goal. The success of the GSTC came by integrating the voice of the industry.
4. Change of tone: The word sustainability evokes all kinds of reactions, some positive, but mostly negative. Tourism should always be an experience and that is just what sustainability actually provides. Through quality product, well trained and satisfied employees, quality food and services, interaction with local culture, the traveler has A BETTER AND UNIQUE EXPERIENCE. People understand experience. That is what travelers are paying for. But so is the local population, we tend to forget these are taxpaying people that leave more income per person than a tourist, and they pay it to experience the city as a resident without the disturbance and adjustments that need to be made to meet tourist demands. A better experience will continue the flow of money to the destination and a worst will reduce it. A better experience usually allows for a higher price tag that people are willing to pay. This is the creation of value for travelers and locals.
5. An agreed upon process: the establishment of a plan, a strategy or a road map, any way you want to define it, that dictates the goals and the way to achieve them. In this process certifications play an important role as guiding principles and established processes that stakeholders can follow.
6. Monitoring and evaluation: As Barcelona has experienced, the implementation of sustainable tourism is not static, but changes are constant. Actions have to be measured to determine effectiveness and monitoring of the destination can identify threats, opportunities and successes. It is important to have the mechanisms in place to react to the outcomes of the monitoring.

How do you operationalize the implementation of sustainable tourism?

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I would like to use the example of Barcelona to showcase how this is possible.

As mentioned in the beginning of my presentation Barcelona became the first certified urban destination in 2011. At that time they had undergone an already monumental task of stakeholder engagement and consultation, had established a multiagency collaboration and had launched their sustainable tourism plan. But as indicated, reality brings new challenges. When I came in 2011 Barcelona was phasing a change of government and an uncertainty of whether the plans they had designed would withstand the government changes. Luckily it did. The next government change brought more favorable conditions that have led to an even stronger commitment to sustainable tourism to be designed in a way that minimizes the negative impacts to the local population, which feels threatened by an accelerated growth in tourism.

New challenges are phased continuously as urban environments change. Some of the critical problems facing Barcelona today include the growth of the informal tourism sector as are the Air B&Bs and Ubers of the world. While one may conceive the idea of “reusing” as a sustainable alternative to massive development or increased transportation, the “reusing” has actually led to an increase in second homes in some destinations creating a building boom. In Barcelona there is a small difference between the number of beds offered by hotels (67,640 in 2016) and the ones offered by housing for tourism purposes (almost 60.000). Mind you these are the ones that can be tracked and do not account for the occasional resident that puts the house on the market for a weekend while they are traveling. This situation is severely affecting the rental conditions for locals, making it very expensive to the local population. Without the availability of controlled housing tenants are at the mercy of the market prices, driven today by the opportunity to gain more money from short term leases to tourists. It is the same with the transportation business, rather than the original concept of higher occupancy vehicles that were already circulating in cities like San Jose, Costa Rica people who would not qualify for a taxi licensed are buying cars and dedicating themselves to being drivers. Given the excess in offer, many of these drivers end up in dept.

Another challenge is the growth of cruise tourism and Barcelona becoming a hub destination. With ports being controlled at national level, the development of the cruise tourism is, like in Mexico, handled as a national approach, but with a local impact. Increasing capacity of ports will lead inevitable to the increase in mass tourism to the city that creates problems but leaves little income behind.

It is important to note that in surveys conducted by the city amongst residents there is still a perception that tourism is beneficial to the city, whoever one of the reasons the political party in office won is the promise to address the challenges presented by tourism. The same survey indicated that people felt that the capacity to provide tourism services has been exceeded.

Fortunately Barcelona has made sustainability an integral part of its urban DNA and has followed the steps to implement sustainable tourism. This is the only way to address the growing concerns of the local population. Important steps taken:

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1. Identified and convened the key stakeholders: in an open process it is important to identify the main stakeholders of a sustainable destination process. Barcelona reached out to quite a large audience and convened different local agencies, associations representing businesses, consumers, labor unions, chambers, neighborhood representation. Several surveys have been conducted to engage public opinion as well.
2. Created the appropriate governance structure: Barcelona had in its early stages set up a tourism council. This council has been expanded and today includes representatives from the general public, local residents, tourism business, commerce, restaurants, social groups, districts, experts, managers and representatives from each municipal group. Its role has been defined to plan and manage tourist activities, opens a door to involve the public in tourism governance and seeks to support the government by providing recommendations to policies and strategies, but also for its implementation. This model is not unique and can be found throughout Europe for the implementation of tourism, it is less common to see it for the sustainable implementation of tourism. However this model is an example that can serve to other less developed urban destinations around the world.
3. Established clear goals as defined in their 2020 Strategic Plan. The 2020 tourism plan of Barcelona was built on a participatory diagnosis process and an active stakeholder engagement process. Its goal is to promote sustainable tourism, promoting maximum economic return from tourism activities, increasing visitor satisfaction, while preserving the way of life of the inhabitants of the city. The plan includes 10 programs: governance, communication, sustainability of the destination, mobility, responsible housing, urban balance (which speaks to the zoning aspect addressed before), equitable distribution of the benefits of tourist, tourism information, addressing tourism impacts, legislation and regulation.
4. Adoption of the new Biosphere Standard I was honored to witness 6 years ago when Barcelona was granted its sustainability standards. Today, I have the pleasure to witness the next steps, which is the launch of the Biosphere-Barcelona Declaration which extends its commitment to sustainability by adhering to the Sustainable Development Goals through adoption to Biosphere's new urban destination standard.

However, my personal opinion is that the success of Barcelona is its ability to ADAPT. Understanding the changing needs and reacting to them! The Barcelona tourism reality has changed since my last visit, but so have the steps taken to address them.

I would like to conclude today by leaving you in a positive note:

Tourism is here to stay. It is a reality and one that can be put to good use. Sustainable tourism is the way to ensure we maximize benefits while reducing negative impacts. It is also the way to guarantee visitor satisfaction while maintaining the quality of life of the local population. We cannot make tourism go away, nor should we want to.

Tourism is a power of good. If you think the alternative of what can substitute that level of income generation you will find that with a few exceptions the quality of life or the impacts to the

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destination can be worst. In the case of my home country, Costa Rica, it is through tourism, that displace massive cattleing that we have been able to preserve and recover 25% of the territory under protected area and forest coverage.

Tourism pays: In an era where development and conservation funding is quickly dwindling, tourism is an important factor to get resources to conservation and preservation, but also a promising revenue stream for destinations.

Tourism conserves or recovers our heritage: While globalization is contributing the disappearance of living cultures, local traditions and even languages. Monetizing the value through a unique service provision is enabling many of these traditions and practices to survive. In Croatia during the Soviet era many of the handworkers traditions were lost, younger generations did not take an interest in these practices – filigree jewelry is an example. Tourism has revived the interest in these practices.

Sustainable tourism, particularly in urban settings is a driver of CHANGE. The models that can be implemented by seeking a better, more attractive and more sustainable destination can serve as the model to create better urban environments. Addressing mobility, worker rights, sustainable resource consumption will without a doubt prove to be the model that then can serve to a sustainable development of the city.

However an urban sustainable destination is a work in progress. The baseline is identified, the goals, which may change over time, are outlined and the process is defined. Implementation will yield new objectives and the process will continue in a constant cycle.

We require a change in paradigm. Even those of us working in the field of sustainability have to stop and think how technology can aid us, how consumer demand changes, how economic factors alter the social and culture offerings. Nothing is static and we need to adjust to the times.

Tourism is local so local actions are required, but it is also global. Collaboration, information exchange, joined actions with other destinations will make sustainable destinations stronger.

Sustainability is a journey and I invite you all to continue down this path, while there is no end, every step of the way is an important and meaningful one.