



Deutsche Fassung

EU Regional Policy 2014 – 2020 and promotion of tourism regions

Thomas Bausch

The euro crisis and the continuous reporting on the rescue of the European currency have distracted attention away from the fact that the decisions on the European Regional Policy 2014-2020 are currently being made. This article gives an insight into the principles and instruments of the EU Regional Policy and identifies the interfaces with tourism.

Europe 2020: the central political development targets of the EU Member States

The Regional Policy is a component part of European policies for achieving common European targets. Against the background of the effects of the first financial and banking crisis in the year 2008, the European Commission in 2009 drafted a strategy paper "Europe 2020" and presented it to the Member States for ratification. After intensive negotiations this was then passed on 17 June 2010 by the EU Heads of State or Government as a basis for European policy in the coming decades. It provides the foundation for future EU Regional Policy.

Under the title "EUROPE 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (EU (2010a)) targets and fields of action for the five areas employment, innovation, education, social integration and climate/energy are defined, which the EU Commission wants to see implemented by 2020. Each member state has set its own national targets for each of these areas (EU (2011a)). Moreover, this strategy is supported by concrete measures for its implementation on an EU level and on the level of the Member States.

Together with the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policy and the further development of the trans-European networks (TEN), the Research and Development (R&D) field

and the Common Foreign Policy, the European Regional Policy with all its instruments is one of the cornerstones in the EU. In the draft budget ca. one third of all funds are allocated to measures for regional development.

The overarching objectives of the EU 2020 strategy are set completely independent of individual sectors of the economy. The Member States have committed themselves to the following five core targets:

1. Employment: 75 % of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed.
2. R&D and Innovation: 3 % of the EU's GDP (public and private combined) to be invested in R&D and innovation.
3. Climate change and energy: greenhouse gas emissions 20% (or even 30%, if the conditions are right) lower than 1990; increase in the percentage of energy from renewables to 20 %; increase in energy efficiency by 20 %.
4. Education: reduction in school drop-out rates to below 10 %; increase in the percentage of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education to at least 40 %.
5. Poverty and social exclusion: the number of people in Europe in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion to be reduced by at least 20 million.

On the basis of the existing European Treaties, the EU Commission does not possess any explicit competencies in the field of tourism (cf. the treaties of Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001) and Lisbon (2007) (cf. EU (2008))). The Member States have always reserved this area of policy as a national responsibility. The Commission is merely authorized to implement supporting measures in the field of quality promotion, identification or higher-level communication. Thus tourism is

mentioned only once in the EU Strategy 2020, in the section "Sustainable growth – promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy" as a possible field of action in the flagship initiative "an industrial policy for the globalisation era". On a European level, the Commission will work towards improving the competitiveness of the European tourism sector.

It could be concluded from this that there is little scope for promoting tourism on a regional level, even with the instruments of the European Union. This, however, is by no means true, as a lack of competencies on a European level does not rule out EU funds being used to help promote the tourism sector in selected regions through the Regional Policy. A precondition for this is that on the one hand the overarching objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy are supported, and on the other hand the general, basic rules for dealing with state funding are observed.

Principles and instruments of the EU Regional Policy 2014 – 2020

The European Regional Policy is based on two political principles (cf. also the information on the internet portal of the EU on Regional Policy http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy):

- 1) EU Regional Policy aims to stimulate investment and improve the general climate for investment. The primary aim is to create jobs, support competitiveness and economic growth, improve the quality of life and support sustainable development.
- 2) Equalization of the living and economic conditions in all the European regions in the sense of a lived solidarity. Where there are big economic and social disparities, these are to be reduced quickly by directing the funds to those areas and sectors which need them most.

The overarching objective is thus economic development and cohesion within the European Union. At the same time it must be guaranteed that the supporting measures do not cancel out the market mechanisms in the domestic market.

To achieve these aims, various financial instruments are available for implementing the Regional Policy. These include the drafting of so-called operational programmes. The financial instruments are:

- 1) ERDF (European Regional Development Fund)
- 2) ESF (European Social Fund)
- 3) The Cohesion Fund

For the financial instruments ERDF and ESF, the geographical area eligible for funding is the region. Under the Regional Policy, the term "region" is defined by administrative boundaries and the relative minimal number of inhabitants and size of the region. This was done by creating a system, the so-called NUTS statistical units (Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques). In Germany, regions at level 2 of the NUTS classification are regions with as a rule between 800,000 and 3 million inhabitants, usually administrative regions or the city states or the very small federal states. In Italy, NUTS 2 regions are identical with the political "region", for example Lombardy, Veneto or Piedmont. In Austria on the other hand, the federal states are identical with the European regions. For smaller Member States such as Luxembourg or Slovenia for example, the national level and the level of the European region are identical.

The European Regional Development Fund ERDF

ERDF funds are on principle available to all regions in the EU. The ERDF supports regional and local development and contributes to achieving objectives in all thematic areas. To do so, detailed priorities are set, with particular focus on:

- Research and development as well as innovation;
- Enhancing access to, and the quality of, information and communication technologies;

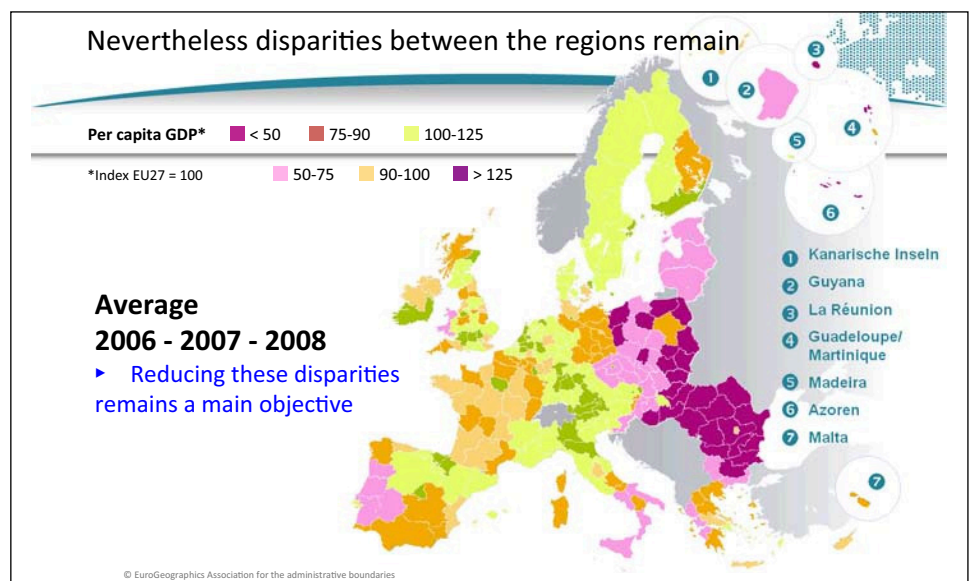
- Climate change and steps towards a low-carbon economy;
- Support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- Services of general economic interest;
- Telecommunications, energy and traffic infrastructures;
- Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration;
- Health, education and social infrastructures;
- Sustainable urban development.

on, ...) will again receive considerable funds. There are indications that the transnational programmes are to be strengthened. The very small interregional network programmes, which any of the regions of Europe can use to network and exchange ideas and information, will continue to be a part of territorial cooperation.

The European Social Fund ESF

The measures financed through the ESF aim at improving employment opportunities for EU citizens. At the

Figure 1: There is still however a great disparity between the regions.



The amount of funding and the possibilities to use the financial instrument ERDF depend on the per capita gross domestic product. For the less-developed regions (GDP per capita < 75% of the EU 27 average) all the above-named priorities are supported. For transitional regions (GDP per capita between 75% and 90% of the EU 27 average) and for more-developed regions (per capita GDP > 90% of the EU 27 average) the focus is strongly on the areas energy efficiency and use of renewable energies, innovation and support for SMEs.

Added to this is the financial support for activities under the European Territorial Cooperation, the so-called INTERREG programmes. Both cross-border cooperation programmes (e.g. Bavaria – Austria, Bavaria – Czech Republic, Italy – France, ...) as well as interregional transnational ones (e.g. the Alpine region, the Baltic Sea region, the central European regi-

same time it supports actions in the field of education to help improve the situation of those most threatened by poverty. Four thematic objectives are followed here:

- (I) Supporting employment and the mobility of workers;
- (II) Supporting social integration and fighting poverty;
- (III) Investments in education, qualifications and lifelong learning;
- (IV) Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration.

These four overarching objectives are at the same time intended to contribute to other objectives of the EU Strategy 2020. The Commission recommends focussing on the following issues: promoting the shift towards a low-carbon, climate friendly and resource-efficient economy; promoting the use of information

and communication technologies; support for research, technological development and innovation as well as improving the competitiveness of SMEs.

The Cohesion Fund

[Member] States with a GDP per capita of < 90% of the EU 27 average are to receive further funding in addition to regional funding under the ERDF and ESF, in order to catch up more quickly with the overall European economic development.

The Commission's proposal for implementing the funds of the Cohesion Fund (EU (2011b)): "In the environmental field the Cohesion Fund will promote investment in connection with adapting to climate change and with risk prevention as well as investment in the water and waste sector and in urban living space. In accordance with the proposals of the Commission regarding the multi-year budget, investments in energy are also eligible for support. The precondition here is that they have a positive effect on the environment. In the field of transportation, investments in low-carbon transport systems and in inner city passenger transport are promoted, provided they are not already covered by the expansion of the Trans-European Networks /TEN."

Taking tourism into account in the programming phase

The legal basis for the Regional Policy for 2014-2020 which is currently being agreed on with the Member States is merely a strategic framework and a broad setting of priorities by the Commission. Even this stage requires the approval of the Member States and presupposes agreement on which regions should get how much money, and in the case of the Cohesion Fund the distribution of the funds according to state. In federal systems such as Germany or Austria this step of course also means interstate agreement between the federal regions and the nation-state level.

As soon as this framework has been found and finally approved by the European Parliament and the European Council, in other words passed by the Heads of State or Go-

vernment, the Member States and the regions are required to draw up programmes. For the current state of the preparations for the new period 2014-2020, reference is made to the constantly updated online information from the Directorate-General for Regional Policy under "EU Cohesion Policy 2014.2020: legislative proposals". An overview of the current proposals is given in the presentation "Cohesion Policy 2014.2020: Proposals of the European Commission" (EU (2011c)).

These so-called operational programmes are drafted by the regions or by the Member States (Cohesion Fund). The Commission merely monitors whether these programmes comply with the strategic guidelines of the EU Regional Policy and the formal guidelines for management of the programmes in accordance with the regulation on financial instruments which is still being prepared. Examples of operational programmes in the current funding period 2007-2013 are the "Regional Competitiveness and Employment" programme for Bavaria (StMWIVT (2011)) and the current Alpine Space Programme of the joint initiative INTERREG IVB (ASP (2007)).

The EU Commission thus adheres strictly to the principle of subsidiarity. It avoids any direct intervention in the content-based discussions by the regions and Member States. It al-

ways goes by the principle that those responsible locally have the best insight into the problems and the concrete action options available. It is however increasingly insisting that broad participative processes ensure the involvement of as many actors as possible in the regions in the drafting of the programmes.

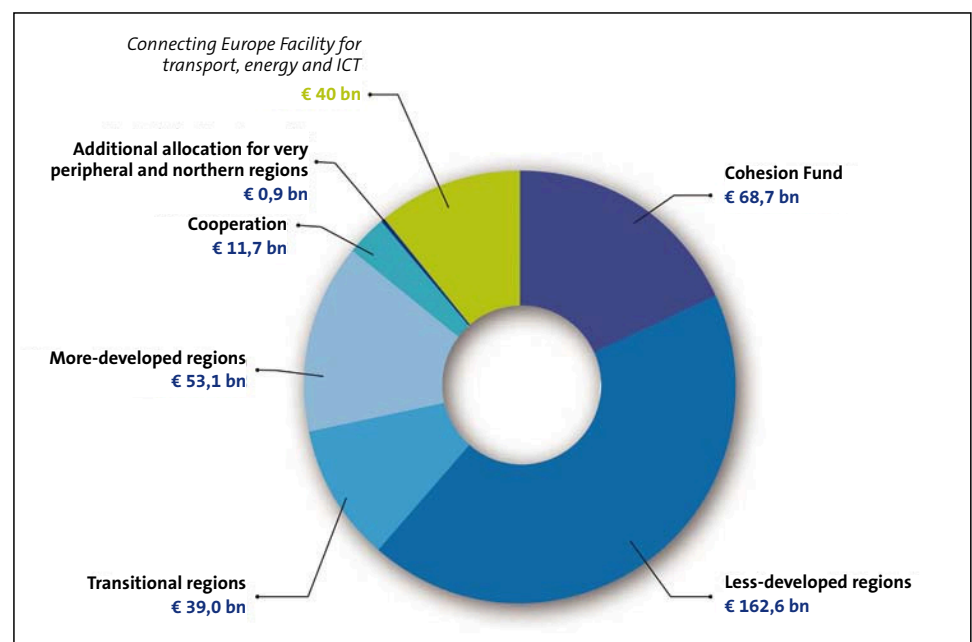
Giving tourism weight in the programmes

The regions can give the tourism sector considerable weight in the new programmes. The only requirement is to follow the EU 2020 strategy guidelines and ensure that a programme priority does not involve direct intervention in free competition.

The priorities set by the Commission for the ERDF can be taken as an example to illustrate this. First of all the Commission specifies that each region concentrates on only a few, at most four, of the nine priorities named. Purely hypothetically it is now assumed that a region, or in the case of territorial cooperation a cooperation space, will agree on the following three priorities:

- Enhancing access to, and the quality of, information and communication technologies;
- Climate change and steps towards a low-carbon economy;
- Health, education and social infrastructures

Figure 2: Allocation of the planned 376bn euro for the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020
Source: EU (2011b)





For these priorities, the regions now have to define fields of action in the programmes in which promoted projects are to be implemented. Fields which explicitly apply to the economy sector tourism can be specified here. Under point one for example, measures to improve regional booking and reservation systems, in particular with a view to accessibility, could be specified here. Point two could also specify an action programme for carbon-neutral destinations, and under point three the strategy search and profile formation of touristic health regions could be incorporated. Moreover, the budget allocates funds to each priority, which offers a further opportunity to give appropriate weight to tourism. It is up to the regions to incorporate tourism in the selected priorities and give it a concrete strategy.

Conclusions and outlook

In the first place it is up to the regional tourism actors to formulate their interests and general issues of overriding regional importance and include them when programme objectives and fields of action are being formulated. The contact persons are usually the Ministries in the Federal States or in the political regional units. Those working in this sector have to actively involve themselves in the increasingly participative processes. Through proactive dialogue with other sectors of the economy they should also create as many points of contact as possible for future promoted activities for other priority issues.

Transnational exchange as part of the EU project Demochange, which develops strategies for adapting spatial planning and regional development to the demographic change in the Alpine space.
 ☞ Freie Universität Bozen

In Bavaria, the Economics Ministry is responsible for funding from the ERDF for “most developed regions”, the Ministry of Social Affairs for the ESF, the Economics Ministry again for the cross-border programmes, and the Ministry of the Environment for the transnational programmes. Each ministry has a department which is responsible for EU policy. It provides information on the current work being done on preparing the programmes and it can put forward proposals.

Even if the programme period 2014-2020 still seems a long way off, in the year 2012 the course will be set as regards which issues will receive particular attention in future funding programmes. By early summer 2013 at the latest all fundamental decisions will have been taken. It is therefore important, especially now in 2012, to help tourism acquire appropriate importance. This will however only succeed through concrete proposals which, as shown in the examples, are on the one hand sufficiently broad and very clearly based on the EU Strategy 2020, and on the other hand are backed up by well-founded reasons.

The general proclamation about the importance of tourism that we have heard in the past will alone not have any effect. On the one hand because, on the level of the regions, this in reality is usually not strictly true, and secondly because, expressed in such general terms, the specialist departments in the ministries which are in charge of the programme work cannot pick up on it. Tourism on the level of the regions, e.g. in Upper Ba-

varia or in Lombardy, as measured by its share of gross domestic product, is usually not a key economy. For this reason one possible strategic approach may be to form strategic alliances with other sectors of the economy. For carbon-neutral destinations as mentioned above, the tourism sector could for example work together with manufacturers of vehicles for public transport, the building industry and manufacturers of building materials, or with energy producers to together gain enough influence in a field such as energy efficiency and carbon neutrality.

In tourism especially, the instruments of Regional Policy are a good opportunity to increase innovation and competitiveness. Guests have long been crossing national borders and view their holiday destinations as regional multi-optional spheres of action. Also, the large coastal regions and mountain regions within Europe and beyond are, as a whole, competitors in the tourism market. European cooperation can make a significant and positive contribution to promoting Europe's travel destinations for tourism which is international anyway. ■

SOURCES:

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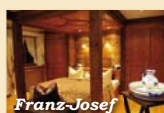
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