Opinion on the proposal for a Council Directive on the collection of statistical information in the field of tourism [1]

(95/C 236/06)

On 26 April 1995 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the second and third paragraphs of Rule 23 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an Opinion on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Regional Development and Town and Country Planning, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 19 May 1995. The Rapporteur was Mr Bernabei.

At its 326th Plenary Session (meeting of 31 May 1995), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion unanimously.

1. Introduction

1.1. The European tourism sector differs positively from other areas of economic activity in that there are ever new possibilities for substantially increasing its contribution towards Community GDP.

1.2. It is now widely accepted that tourism has a role to play in development and economic integration, and this role can also be enhanced by providing basic statistics on tourism at Community, national and regional level.

1.3. The Single Market could boost EU citizens' propensity to travel, and not just for business and holidays, but for other reasons too (study, research, health reasons, etc.), thanks to the removal of internal borders and the socio-economic trend towards more leisure-time. The wish to take advantage of the greater opportunities provided by a single continent-wide market is also a factor.

1.4. Quick access to reliable, comparable and up-to-date statistics is vital for a full understanding of the sector. It can help the tourist authorities, at all levels, to work out a coherent policy for tourism, the private sector to assess and develop its market strategies, and customers to make an informed choice thanks to a better, more exhaustive picture of supply and demand.

1.5. The development of a Community methodological framework for data collection and processing is necessary to ensure comparability of statistics whilst remaining compatible with existing international standards (OECD and WTO), which currently provide a clearer, more detailed picture of the situation.

1.6. The data collection system cannot be developed independently of the priority-areas of computerization and data communication networks. Thanks to the European information superhighway, these are vital for reducing space-time gaps for all sectors, and particularly for tourism. The use of data communications technology ushers in a new operative philosophy, making for a more interactive system for public and private operators.

1.7. Sustained Community efforts to develop a harmonized methodological framework for statistics on tourism are vital in paving the way for the definition and implementation of a genuine European tourism policy. In this respect the Committee would reiterate the need for a fruitful discussion of the Green Paper on tourism, presented by the Commission on 4 April 1995 (COM(95) 97 final), particularly in view of the fact that tourism policy will be included in the 1996 revision of the Maastricht Treaty.

2. General comments

2.1. The Committee deeply regrets that the Council did not deem it necessary to consult the ESC on such an important issue for the development of tourism policy, despite the fact that the Committee has contributed to the debate on several occasions.

The Committee largely endorses the Commission proposals to establish a harmonized information system at Community level on tourism supply and demand. These proposals respond to recommendations made on several occasions by the ESC, the European Parliament and the Athens European Council of 15 April 1994, and represent a further step forward in standardization of definitions and towards compiling complete, reliable statistics on tourism. However, the Committee feels that there may

[1] OJ No C 35, 11. 2. 1995, p. 5.

be a case for introducing instruments which are more binding than a Directive, in order to achieve standardization of definitions and provide common, consistent reference categories.

2.2. The Committee would point out that it would be advisable to set up forthwith a data collection methodology which is compatible from the outset with existing and future Community computerization and data communications installations. A data communications system would pay for itself in just a few years (five or six), and would provide more sophisticated appraisals for the same expenditure and in real time.

2.3. The proposed measures to enhance coordination between national statistics organizations are to be endorsed, given the continuing discrepancies, particularly in the collection of data on international travel and the way in which accommodation is dealt with, and the lack of harmonization in procedure and basic definitions.

2.4. The geographic breakdown used by Community statistics on tourism should be in line with the WTO breakdown and, in any event, must be amended to include the new EU Member States: Austria, Finland and Sweden.

2.5. Furthermore, the proposed measures could make up a preliminary frame of reference for the establishment of a reliable subsystem of macroeconomic variables (income from tourism/GDP) in order to assess the economic contribution of tourism at regional, national and Community level, and to encourage the greater integration of tourism policies with other EU activities which was urged in the Opinion on Tourism adopted on 14/15 September 1994 (CES 1021/94).

3. Specific comments

3.1. *Article 1*

The Committee would include a reference to data communication networks by inserting 'on paper or via computer and data communication networks' (cf. 1.6 above) after 'transmission' (line 4).

3.2. *Article 2*

In Article 2(a), after 'the capacity' it would be advisable to insert 'and occupation rates'.

The references to the NACE classification for collective accommodation lack clarity and are, at any rate, out of step with those contained in the EEC Regulation 761/93 referred to. Furthermore, a more comprehensive treatment of accommodation types would require more detailed headings, to include holiday flats, holiday villas and rented rooms and other accommodation.

The classification could be better set out as follows:

Types of tourist accommodation available to the public:

a) Hotels and similar establishments [1] (NACE group 55.1);

b) establishments other than hotels [2] (camping sites and provision of other short-stay accommodation, NACE group 55.2), broken down as follows:

b 1. youth hostels and mountain refuges (class 55.21);

b 2. outdoor tourism (camping sites, holiday camps and caravan sites) [3];

b 3. holiday lodgings (class 55.23);

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[1] Whilst hotels make up the most clear-cut category for statistical purposes, there are considerable differences from country to country (Germany, for instance, has no hotel classification system), and from region to region (the classification criteria used in some Italian regions differ from those used by other regions). It is therefore suggested that the heading hotels and similar establishments be used alone, thus ignoring the headings for motels, and hotels with/without restaurant, which are difficult to quantify. More specifically, 'hotels and similar establishments' means: hotels in the proper sense of the word or 'hoteles' (Spain); tourist/service apartments; motels; boarding houses; hostales (Spain). National statistics organizations should state the coverage for the individual headings.

[2] Establishments other than hotels, divided into the maximum number of subcategories. Individual national statistics organizations may use just one of the specific headings, but they must then declare which one they are using. There may even be some countries which do not collect statistics on tourism in establishments other than hotels.

[3] Heading b 2. covers the outdoor tourism category, including holiday camps, which would otherwise appear together with other types of accommodation. Here too, the individual national statistics organizations must report on coverage.

b 3.1. holiday flats (1) (subcategory 55.23);

b 3.2. other provision of lodgings n.e.c. (subcategory class 55.23) (2).

3.3. *Article 2(b)*

It would be advisable to insert, after 'guest flows' (line 1), the phrase 'of tourists-customers travelling for holidays, business or any other reason'. The purpose would be to introduce the concept that the tourist is a customer who buys goods and services, just like any other.

After the heading 'inbound tourism' (2nd last line), it would be advisable to add 'or international tourism' (OECD/WTO terminology).

3.4. *Article 2(c)*

National travel includes outbound travel (abroad) and domestic travel for holidays, business or any other reason, and is calculated according to the number of nights spent at the destination.

The following simple system should clarify this concept:

Nationals in home country Foreign visitors	Nationals abroad	National travel
National tourism	Outgoing	

3.5. *Article 7(2)*

The Committee considers that the time allotted for compilation of annual figures is too lengthy in comparison with that for quarterly and monthly figures: all final figures should be submitted within six months at the most.

3.6. *Article 7(3)*

A more forceful wording seems better suited to the greater emphasis to be placed on the increased use of data communication services. This could be achieved by changing 'may establish' to 'shall establish'.

3.7. *Appendix*

3.7.1. With reference to fig. A.1.2, given that the 'room' is increasingly the main reference unit for tourism, the Community might look further into the possibility of including the number of rooms, and for campsites, the number of tent/caravan-spaces under the heading 'other collective accommodation'.

3.7.2. With reference to fig. C.1-2, data on the characteristics of the trip should be standardized in accordance with those used worldwide.

3.7.3. In fig. C.1.2.4, the heading 'specialized accommodation' should either be defined in greater detail or deleted, whereas the collective accommodation category should be explained further, so as to avoid misinterpretation.

3.7.4. The Committee reiterates the need for information on tourist expenditure (fig. C.1-4), so that supply strategies can be more in tune with demand. It is to be hoped that national statistics organizations will agree on common standards for the various tourism domain categories.

4. Conclusions

4.1. The Committee wishes to congratulate the Commission on its work, but feels that the above comments should be taken into consideration when the issue is discussed in depth.

(1) Holiday flats includes rented accommodation, rented rooms, holiday homes, cottages, various types of service accommodation, etc. Statistics relating to individual headings may be collected and reported. However, even when each national statistics organization gives the overall figure for b 3., it must still report on coverage for the different headings, the classification criteria used and the problems encountered. This is one of the most controversial aspects of the statistics collection system, both at Member State and Community level. The greatest caution must therefore be used. We cannot, however, ignore a category which, in many countries, and according to reliable sources, accounts for two thirds of all rooms and beds available for tourism. Owner-occupied holiday homes and flats, or those occupied by the owners' family and friends, are wholly excluded from the survey. Flats for business use are also classed as holiday flats, whilst ordinary student flats are not. This classification is to be regarded as provisional.

(2) This heading covers all other categories, such as rooms and beds on cruise liners, in religious institutions, etc. Individual statistics organizations must report on coverage. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that some types of accommodation have not been included, e.g. holiday dwellings, since this category relates more to the demand side. The appeal of farmhouse accommodation, for example, comes from the fact that it is private accommodation in a farming area. It will therefore be dealt with under statistics relating to demand.

4.2. The Committee believes that harmonization of existing statistics and improvement of the data to be used in a more efficient and comprehensive European system of tourism statistics can: (a) promote the desired improvement in the quality of services, (b) provide clearer guidance for public and private operators — particularly smaller firms — by giving a more reliable overall picture of the situation; (c) further cooperation between Member States and other international organizations; and (d) provide valuable assessment criteria for a European policy on tourism.

4.3. In keeping with the recommendations made in the ESC Own-initiative Opinion on tourism (cit.) regarding the need to develop new tourist products in order to involve more EU citizens in the various tourist activities, the Committee would wish to see the harmonized data collection system gradually extended to cultural, social and youth tourism, and also to rural tourism, which has already been the subject of ESC and COR Opinions (cf. Own-initiative Opinion CdR 19/95 of 2 February 1995).

4.4. The Committee would emphasize the need for a thorough debate on the Green Paper on tourism, so that operators — and SMEs in particular — will have access to a methodical Community frame of reference, and thus be able to tailor their strategies to the continuous changes which are so typical of the tourist industry. The debate on the Green Paper in indispensable if tourism policy is to be fully incorporated in the revised Treaty.

Done at Brussels, 31 May 1995.

The President

of the Economic and Social Committee

Carlos FERRER