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## POST-EVENT BRIEF

# ESPON Peer Learning Workshop The Future of Cruise Tourism in the Adriatic Sea

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## Summary



The ESPON virtual peer-learning workshop focused on land-sea interactions relating to tourism and COVID-19 as a potential game changer. Particular emphasis was given to the future of cruise tourism in the Adriatic Sea. The main goal of the event was to inspire policymaking and practices for a more sustainable and resilient development of hosting port-cities. Based on ESPON evidence and reflections from academics and key stakeholders, the workshop aimed to define good practices and approaches that can serve as base for future collaborations between the host port cities and the cruise sector. The main target groups were policymakers, regional stakeholders and experts.

The workshop showed a need for further debating the 'winners' and 'losers' of cruise tourism, and their spatial distribution. Dialogue and governance arrangements must be established based on those distinctions. In these arrangements, the increased specialisation of cruise tourism should be taken into account, as some types may be 'better' than others. Also, the power of the destination itself is essential. Cruise lines need destinations more than the other way around. In terms of planning, there is great potential in defining integrated 'one-space' territorial perspectives, which, again, will usually require 'soft' and cross-boundary governance arrangements. Building up such arrangements on the basis of well-identified challenges is highly recommended. In practice, collaboration between cruise companies and host cities, but also between port and city authorities, is crucial to regulate the flow of cruise tourists, as well as to manage communication of the implications of this to both cruise companies, local stakeholders, residents and the tourists themselves.

## Objectives and target groups

The European seas have become an important area where many interregional interests and challenges interact. In particular, a focus on Land-Sea Interactions (LSI) has emerged in order to further a dialogue between the policy fields of marine and terrestrial spatial planning. This peer-learning workshop focused on an important aspect of this: the specific topic of cruise tourism, and specifically for the Adriatic Sea basin. The cruise market has become dominated by only a few major players, who have begun to invest in tourist resorts and amenities at the embarkment points. Here, the ESPON MSP-LSI report has indicated a need for better Land-Sea Interaction in relation to host port cities, and in order to meet challenges concerning the increasing impact of cruise tourism on the natural and heritable environment. In addition, it is being questioned whether the current COVID-crisis might lead to a new 'game-changing' agenda for such interactions.

The workshop delved into a specific region, the Adriatic Sea and especially the port city of Dubrovnik, in order to learn from a 'closer to context' approach when debating LSI challenges of cruise tourism. The main objective was to share knowledge, views and experiences on the topic between policymakers, key stakeholders and researchers, particularly in Croatia and more generally in the Adriatic Sea. Three main questions were discussed:

1. ***How can coastal regions enhance the benefits and the added value of cruise tourism for the specific regions in question?***
2. ***How can MSP-LSI ensure a sustainable development of cruise tourism that is environmentally and culturally resilient?***
3. ***How to develop pandemic-proof cruise tourism and what would be its focus in the post-COVID period?***

## Program and presentations

The workshop was introduced by professor **Luuk Boelens**, from UGent and the chair of the ESPON outreach programme. Boelens described the situation of cruise tourism in that there are 3-4 market-dominating major alliances and cruise tourism has expanded massively with more and much larger ships. Whereas earlier this may have been a very positive perspective for port cities, the situation today is more complicated. Cruise



customers. Also, since the boat needs to move, there is a 'forced mobility' at play. Attempts have been made to buy and reconstruct islands only for cruise visits. But customers want more, not just a manufactured place, and they expect to see several destinations. This could help reverse the perception of the power relation between cruise companies and their destinations, in favour of the latter. It implies that, when destinations are unique, cruise companies are prevented from using their ability to go elsewhere as leverage in negotiations with host destinations.

In part three, two local stakeholders from Dubrovnik reflected on the evidence presented previously and discussed how this could be related to their own policy context. **Ms Jelka Tepsic**, the Deputy Mayor of the city of Dubrovnik, discussed the city's latest approaches to cruise tourism. In 2017, the global media focused on Dubrovnik, claiming that 'the city is dying because of mass tourism'. This became an incentive to change. The association of cruise companies, CLIA, was contacted with a request for help to overcome the problem of over-tourism in Dubrovnik. CLIA was unfamiliar with this type of contact but chose to sponsor an assessment of Dubrovnik as a sustainable destination. Spatial restrictions, the famed UNESCO site, serious congestion challenges and dissatisfied residents added to the incentive for change. A new program was set-up, 'Respect the city', including strategic planning for cruise tourism. This has resulted in a management plan for the UNESCO zone, smart tech solutions for handling the flow of people, and increased communication activities. A successful cooperation between the city and the state-owned harbour is essential for this, through city membership in port management. Other actors involved concern tourism stakeholders. COVID-19 has influenced Dubrovnik significantly, with a drastic downturn in number of visits. Despite this, Croatia has insisted on maintaining a new tourism taxation that include cruise taxes. The companies have been informed, and the tax revenues will be invested in city infrastructures. The city is determined to maintain strict rules regarding visitor management. Finally, Tepsic claimed, with reference to Renaud's presentation, how Dubrovnik shows the power of the destination in cruise tourism.

The final reflection was provided by **Mr. Hrvoje Kulušić**, Assistant Director of the Dubrovnik port infrastructure and security. Kulušić mentioned how the port is a partner in the program 'Respect the City' and how this has helped to improve issues of congestion and uncontrolled numbers of cruise tourists. These issues are now regulated and managed, e.g. with controlled arrival and departure times for each ship which influences and distributes traffic through the city in a better manner. Kulušić also mentioned the importance of a new local government initiative, a park-and-ride solution outside the city to manage land-based tourists. COVID-19 does not affect the program, as it is a system for handling sustainability in all situations.

## Delivered input (was the target group reached?)

Originally, the event was intended as a roundtable discussion and a physical event between a limited number of participants, e.g. 10-15 key stakeholders. Instead, and as a virtual activity, the peer-learning workshop was joined by 30-35 participants throughout the event. The number of registrations were 45, resulting in a 'no show' rate of 29%. More than a third of the registered 45 participants (17 in total) were 'locals' from Croatia. 6 were from Bulgaria, while the remaining 22 were from Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Albania, Canada, USA, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Denmark. In terms of work profiles, most of the registered participants (25) were from governmental/ public bodies (ministries, municipalities, local authorities, and territorial agencies). 10 were academics from universities and schools, while the remaining 10 were from NGO's, other research organisations, ESPON, and LGI. This shows that a rather broad group of people had an interest in the workshop. It can be concluded that major stakeholders, particularly in Croatia and the Adriatic Sea, had chosen to join the workshop. In addition, both stakeholders and knowledge professionals (policymakers, regional stakeholders and researchers) had chosen to participate. As such, the target group was sufficiently reached.

Throughout the workshop, and as indicated above, three types of input were generated. In part one the focus was on ESPON evidence and policy recommendations, part two provided academic reflections for post-COVID-19 options, and finally, part three gave room for reflections from two local stakeholders as well as for a broader debate between all involved presenters and participants. Thereby, the workshop both disseminated ESPON knowledge, provided input for policymakers and practitioners, and engaged relevant stakeholders in debating the future of cruise tourism in the Adriatic Sea.

## The efficacy of the proposed structure

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, ESPON outreach activities were adapted to be held virtually, instead of physically. This peer-learning workshop has been one of several virtual ESPON outreach events during autumn 2020. The

event was organised to take place in the afternoon from 13.30 to 17.00, including two breaks. Microsoft Teams was used as platform for the event. The event started as planned and scheduled, with an introduction by Luuk Boelens, the chair of the ESPON outreach programme. From the beginning there were around 30 participants, which quickly increased to 35. The remaining programme was structured in three parts. The first two parts with the intention to present, disseminate, and discuss ESPON evidence and provide academic reflections on post-COVID-19 options. The presentations each took approximately 20 minutes, followed by a Q&A session of around 10 minutes. This generally worked fairly well. It was well moderated, and the Q&A sessions had a few questions for each presentation and they also provided space for opening up broader reflections on the presentations as the afternoon progressed. Feedback comments mentioned satisfaction with the presentations, noticeably the combined span of their experience, the high level of their insights, and their ability to contextualise. On the other hand, and based on feedback meant for improvement, one participant suggested the use of more practical examples and room for sharing planning experiences from different countries.

For some reason, the connection to one presenter suddenly failed in the beginning of part two. However, this was managed quickly, by switching around the two presentations in this part. It is quite likely, that such a switch-over would have taken longer in a physical setting. Also, the failed connection was restored (in the meantime), so that both presentations could be carried out. As a consequence, no time was wasted, and there was only a minimum of discomfort involved for both presenters and participants. In addition, all slides came through easily through the virtual platform. However, the number of slides used for presentations varied significantly, from 5 to 47. Here it would have been preferable to have an upper limit (max number of slides), as too much information, on too many slides, in too short a time (20 min) can endanger the communicative quality of a presentation. Also, as a participant has commented afterwards, access to slides in advance would have been useful.

The third part contained reflections on different topics from two local stakeholders in Dubrovnik, Croatia. In their reflections, the two stakeholders commented on the previous presentations, but most of all they provided a specific context for discussing the challenges and opportunities of cruise tourism around the Adriatic Sea. The presenters from the earlier sessions were included in the discussion, and some participants also joined with a few questions and remarks. This worked rather well and was well moderated, with useful insights into how practical matters could be related to the conceptual aspects and inputs from the ESPON projects. Feedback comments seemed to favour this part, also due to the dialogue between the presenters. On the other hand, and meant for improvement, some participants would have liked more exchanges among invited stakeholders from different countries and suggested finding ways to enhance facilitation and to involve the participants even further. Finally, Tom Goosse, from UGent, concluded the afternoon with a short summary of some of the key aspects of the workshop. In a feedback note from one participant, it was mentioned how such a workshop could perhaps be used for a next phase of ESPON work: implementing and re-launching the topic through a new applied research project.

Altogether, the peer-learning workshop proved efficient in disseminating ESPON results and in relating ESPON results to a specific context. The event generally received high satisfaction scores. On average, the digital format received the highest level of satisfaction, which is rather comforting, given the current COVID-19 circumstances, where this is considered one of the only options to meet in real-time for groups of people. On the other hand, this event, alongside many other virtually-based events, also showed that there is often a larger group that do not become actively involved, e.g. by joining the conversation and raising their opinion. However, one should perhaps keep in mind that this is also common to many physical settings of workshops or seminars.

## Main conclusions

The workshop illuminated both challenges and potential pathways for a more sustainable cruise tourism. Here, a number of observation points and aspects relating to land-sea interactions and cruise visitor management turned out to be particularly interesting:

- When dealing with cruise tourism, one must consistently ask, who are the winners and losers, and where are they located (spatialised)? Dialogue and governance arrangements must be established based on those distinctions.
- A multi-criteria decision analysis approach indicates that there is rarely one solution that can make everybody satisfied.
- Cruise tourism is specialising and adapting, which creates opportunities for discussing whether some types are better than others, and how this could be dealt with in planning.

- The power of the destination is essential. Cruise lines need destinations more than the other way around. Local authorities should perceive and apply this power, such as in Dubrovnik. It is up to the destination to make a difference.
- There is a need for an integrated 'one-space' territorial and planning perspective, which implies a new way of thinking and stepping into the complexities of LSI, seen from the particular context of particular places.
- Such an approach would require 'soft' governance, cross-boundary, arrangements that will typically work best, when set up for specific challenges or issues. It generates immediate purpose for actors, and often also a positive spiral of interaction, with more issues being added to the original (successful) arrangement.
- Collaboration between the actors is crucial to regulate the flow of cruise tourists, between cruise companies and host cities, but also between port and city authorities.
- Actions should be followed by communication of their implications to both cruise companies, local stakeholders, residents, and the tourists themselves.

## Further recommendations

In addition to follow up on the above-mentioned conclusions, the workshop also provided fuel and input for recommending to further research and discuss the aspects below. This may also imply future policy needs or possible policy pathways.

- One must realise the complexity of cruise tourism: that there are different kinds, with different positive and negative effects for different kinds of communities and places. Given such an increased diversity and specialisation of cruise tourism, what specific types of cruise tourism are we actually looking at? Who are the key actors, and the winners and losers, concerning each type?
- What are the relations between land-based and cruise tourists? How do they interact and have impacts on each other? And, do the localities have enough control of this?
- If the power relations between cruise companies and destinations are changing in favour of the latter, then how do destinations manage to resist, adapt, and cooperate? What is the actual power of the customers in these relations? In which ways is this interacting with the unique composition of place and community qualities in each destination? And, how can the destination regroup itself along these lines?
- How can large cruise companies be influenced in unison from several destinations at once, to serve a shared agenda?
- How do destinations convince large cruise alliances to follow their agenda, if such alliances fail to see the uniqueness and competitive edge of the destination?
- Soft governance arrangements and planning interventions on cruise tourism increasingly tend to be concerned with improving land-sea integration, however mostly with a better integration of activities on land. How is this taking place in practice, both inside port cities, in city-hinterland settings, and in larger regions?
- How are different regional-local governance activities on cruise tourism aligned locally in order to pursue common but specific goals, such as in Dubrovnik? How is such governance efficiency achieved?
- How, and to what extent, does the actual character of a country's planning system matter to all the above?





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