

EU Project 'Sustainable Urban Tourism'
Involving Local Agents and Partnerships for New Forms of Governance
(SUT-GOVERNANCE)



Benchmarking Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism

The European Experience

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Abstract

European cities face high and growing demands from tourism, and the pressures and problems associated with the management of visitors have to be systematically tackled by all parties concerned. Government alone, however, cannot resolve such problems, requiring instead involvement of all stakeholders, the development of consensus, and the promotion of public-private-community partnerships. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are thus considered innovative instruments for promoting and implementing sustainable forms of tourism in urban environments. Assessing success and implementing improvements in stakeholder efforts in European cities to promote partnerships for sustainable tourism by benchmarking with lead practices across the continent is a powerful and effective tool for quality management of urban tourism activities. The present paper presents the results and the lessons learnt of the first such International Benchmarking Program implemented in 125 cities across Europe. Specifically, the role of the city authorities in promoting partnerships with the private sector, community representatives, and other stakeholders is considered in regard to their capacities and opportunities to directly face the immediate and longer-term challenges of the sustainable management of tourism in their cities in the context of the wider European and international framework and the strategic policy pursuits of the European Union.



R&D Project of Key Action 4 "City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage",
"Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Development" Program,
"Fifth Framework Program" of the European Union.



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1. Study Background

This work draws on a 3-year international research and policy project “SUSTAINABLE URBAN TOURISM: Involving Local Agents and Partnerships for New Forms of Governance” (SUT-Governance). The principal aim of the project is to develop, validate, and deploy a general framework for urban sustainable tourism partnerships that is applicable to a variety of urban municipal contexts. The broader goal of the project is to elaborate and promote innovative forms and instruments of local governance to improve urban tourism development involving the principles of Sustainability and Participatory Decision-making.

The project's national and case study research focuses in Germany, Austria, Greece and Bulgaria. Within these countries, case study work centred around selected tourism cities: Heidelberg (Germany), Graz (Austria), Thessaloniki (Greece), and Veliko Turnovo (Bulgaria) where ‘Best Practice’ multi-stakeholder partnerships are examined to identify factors and agents determining the success of joint actions aiming sustainable urban tourism. . Nomination is based on four main criteria:

- Tourism
- Partnership
- Sustainability
- Impact

The three-year initiative is a collaborative effort involving the Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe GmbH (Ge) (Coordinator), The University of Economics and Business Administration and Regional Consulting Ziviltechniker, GmbH in Vienna (Au), The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Gr), and The Veliko Turnovo University in Bulgaria. In the course of the project, success has depended on close cooperation between the researchers, city officials, tourism stakeholders, and community representatives from the participating countries, cities and partnership initiatives. The selected cases demonstrate the practical ways in which communities, governments and the private sector are working together to improve tourism practices towards a better urban governance and long-term community prosperity.

The ‘SUT-Governance’ project is designed to advance knowledge, tools, and practices to assist decision-makers, governments, and other stakeholders in urban tourism development, including the private sector and non-governmental groups, to implement more sustainable tourist practices. Key end-user groups include:

- European and national decision-makers
- Local and urban administrations
- Tourism and urban developers
- Research and development agencies
- NGOs, community and citizens groups
- ‘Best practice’, urban and professional networks and databases

The project's results¹ are expected to contribute to an enhanced understanding of sustainable urban tourism and its practical applications and create knowledge that can help foster improvements in urban governance and sustainability. It will also assist a number of important strategic areas of concerns of the European cities and the Community such as ‘Promoting European-wide Sustainable Development’, ‘Endorsing Governance’, ‘Achieving a Balanced

¹ The main outcomes of the project are of two types:

- Study results with a potential to influence future policies in governance of sustainable tourism in Europe: (1) Set of European ‘Best practice’ Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism (2) Unified Framework Model for Effective Partnerships of Sustainable Urban Tourism (SUT Partnerships) (3) SUT Partnership Benchmarking Method and Tool for assessing practice, measuring success and improving performance of existing or planned collaborative initiatives in tourism (4) European Platform and Forum for enforcing Governance for Sustainable Urban Tourism¹.

- A set of concepts, methodological approaches and policy recommendations for use by tourism decision-makers and stakeholders across Europe (see Section 2 for more details).

Spatial Development', and 'Developing Citizens' Networks and Participation'².

The research study is part of the Key Action 4 'City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage' of the 'Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development' Program within the 'Fifth Framework Program' of the European Union. The project commenced March 1, 2000 and concluded in August 2003.

2. Research Areas and Key Concepts

2.1. Partnerships and effective governance of sustainable urban tourism

Europe's cities and towns contain a rich cultural heritage. Yet, maintaining this heritage presents many challenges, including dealing with the adverse environmental and social impacts of mass tourism. Demands from urban tourism alike are high and growing, hence the pressures and problems associated with the management of the sector have to be systematically tackled by all parties concerned. In their quest to further foster democracy and community prosperity, local authorities must seek tighter relations with a wide range of actors so the necessary political and operational consensus can be achieved to tackle problems successfully in benefit of all residents. Developing and operating public-private cooperations between the concerned parties is thus fundamental to effective urban governance of sustainable tourism. Achieving this involves advancing knowledge and practice about the types of partnerships that can be formed to promote urban sustainable tourism; the roles of government and other stakeholders; how local governments can apply such partnerships to long-term local tourism management and development; and the critical issues and challenges to local governments seeking to create such partnerships.

The 'SUT-Governance' project has addressed these challenges by inter-linking and advancing a set of concepts and methodological approaches relevant to European urban tourism in the new Century.

Sustainable Development implies linking and balancing environmental stewardship, economic development, social prosperity and community viability. With regard to these aspects sustainable development must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs and aspirations³.

Sustainable Urban Tourism (SUT)

- is a holistic, equitable, and future-oriented development strategy, part of the wider Urban Sustainable Development Agenda
- is part of the principles and objectives of urban integrated development
- is consistent with long-term community progress and prosperity
- is a tool to increase social welfare, achieve greater and more equitable distribution of local wealth and enhance the integrity of the local ecosystems

Thus, proof of Sustainable Urban Tourism is the sustainable development of the tourist destination.

Operationalisation of Sustainable Urban Tourism requires the recognition of two fundamental principles imbedded in the sustainability-induced integrated development paradigm:

- Sustainable tourism implies sustainable ends (outcomes of tourism products);

² For more on the project's strategic objectives, the European Union's policy relevance and the results, please see the Project Final Report and other deliverables at: <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>

³ Based on the Brundtland Report - 1987: <http://www.usda.gov/agency/oce/oce/sustainable-development/secmemo.htm>.

- Sustainable tourism involves effective delivery means (strategic policymaking and implementation) to deal with the complexity and the feasibility of the process and ensure the fulfilment of the desired objectives).

Sustainable Tourism depends on the endorsement of all – suppliers, users, and hosts. To succeed:

- Tourists must demand and seek sustainable and quality services and products;
- Industry must recognise and consider the benefits;
- Tourism communities must enforce sustainable tourism practices.

Policy for SUT calls for the adoption of working approaches to sustainable urban tourism. In this respect, SUT must be viewed as a consistent, continuous and integrated development strategy ensuring the balance of the present benefits of tourism with the future opportunities of the host community while maintaining its cultural, environmental, and economic quality, diversity, integrity and viability.

From its 'Delivery' Perspectives thus Sustainable Urban Tourism

- is a means of
 - enhancing local development
 - promoting local identity and cultural and destination image
 - meeting the needs of quality of visitors experience and quality of life of residents
- is a policy option with community-centred objectives
- is a process of governing which has to be sustained
- must affect urban policy and development, considering both, industry and community long-term progress
- must account for both
 - tourism product and its sustainability implications
 - direct and indirect impacts

Thus, Sustainable Tourism maintains the capacity and offers potentials to the way we develop our cities.

Implementation of Sustainable Urban Tourism Requires a Multi-Stakeholder Approach:

Sustainable Urban Tourism must deal with a variety of problems such as improving the urban fabric and infrastructure, conservation of historic and cultural buildings and zones, controlling pressures for development, overcrowding, pollution, quality of jobs, new technologies and innovative business forms. The multifunctional nature of policies and actions call for a local participatory decision-making process to build consensus and share the responsibilities, risks and benefits from urban tourism in context of

Urban Governance is taken as relationships and collaborative actions between urban actors to plan and manage the city affairs aiming fostering democracy and societal and community prosperity and involving government, private sector, and civil society. In its 'good' application, Urban Governance must involve sustainability, decentralisation, transparency, accountability, equity, efficiency, civic engagement, and security. To accomplish this,

Public-Private Partnerships are necessary. They are generally considered as effective means to facilitate multi actor collaboration and development of sustainable urban tourism since they can provide for :

- enhanced tourism resources and services responsive to human needs
- broad based sustainability gains
- utilisation of community and business links
- increased effectiveness and efficiency of organisations
- reduced conflicts, boosted trust and actor confidence
- improved public policy and greater policy legitimacy
- collective responsibility for planning, decision-making, problem solving, project implementation and evaluation
- increased local capacity of action and control
- networks to share knowledge, resources, and common goals
- community dialogue, solutions, and change

- creating responsible, engaged and involved locals and tourists
- combating local inequalities and inclusion

Thus, forming partnerships must become a key principle of quality management of public services in urban tourism towards urban sustainability and more local democracy.

Success of SUT Partnerships depends on the efficacy of the

- partnership process
- tourism activity and its implementation
- activity resolutions for a long term and far reaching community sustainability

Both, 'Development' and 'Marketing' SUT Partnerships have the potentials for promoting sustainable community development:

- The first, by increasing and effectively managing the use and increase of the local tourism 'stock'
- The second, by sustaining and enhancing the partnership process and collaborative culture in the community

Implementation Opportunities for SUT Partnerships are multiple. Some include:

- sustainable tourist facilities
- cultural heritage attractions
- historic districts
- environmentally friendly transportation
- mitigating damage to destroyed environment
- informing on behavioural and risks
- education, research and information networks

Benchmarking SUT Partnerships is a key way to improve practices. It provides:

- opportunity to integrate and internationalise the common understanding of the key principles, approaches, aims and role of forming and sustaining collaborative actions for sustainable urban tourism
- lead indicators for various cities to assess their practice and improve future undertakings compared to other EU cities
- chance to cities to re-evaluate past and current experience.

Therefore, Benchmarking should be further established as a tool for improving tourism partnerships to become a comprehensive system providing for references to best practice examples and a consistent part of urban tourism quality management practices.

2. Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism: The 'SUT-Governance' framework approach

3.1. Conceptual approach

Sustainability figures high on the Strategic Agenda of the European Union as part of the implementation of the 2002 Lisbon process. Early this year, in her Welcome Speech at the 'Environmental Governance and Civil Society' Conference' in Brussels, Commissioner Margot Wallström, called for 'Sustainable development becoming a Governing Principle underpinning everything that the Union does' with, 'the principle of participatory democracy turning into the indispensable premise for consolidating the European agenda for sustainable development'.

On their part, tourism experts from around the world claim the sector has well much to offer in this regard. Urban professionals alike assert city tourism in particular, as the fastest growing sector in Europe and a new phenomenon on the cutting edge of a trend, should be in the vanguard. The increasing importance of the sector as a major contributor to local and regional economies and overall community prosperity highlights the need to pay a special attention to

the relationship between sustainable tourism and participatory local governance involving all concerned actors.

Stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism development can foster a sense of attachment and ownership to local initiatives and help maintain the socio-cultural, natural, and built environment. As the study has proved evident, to deal with the complexity and the relationships, which co-exist within urban tourism, a comprehensive framework is needed, which can synthesise the multiplicity of factors, processes, and issues affecting the process of participatory governance and sustainable urban tourism in different contexts. The objective of developing such framework is to encompass a range of multi-disciplinary perspectives, the total experience of urban tourism and its impacts on the host community.

Whilst sustainable tourism practices are increasing, partnerships, as policy mechanisms for achieving a shift towards broad-based sustainable development of the tourism destination as a locality, which is the vision of many initiatives, have not been adequately used. Principal among the causes has been 'the lack of integrative approach to community sustainable development' (Paskaleva-Shapira 2001⁴). While any specific strategies may draw on situational and local factors, which are equally unique, and which will not immediately generalise to common situations, this research asserts that it is possible to define a set of main attributes and certain components which highlight the interrelated nature of the different factors affecting the effectiveness and success of partnerships for urban sustainable tourism and reduce the complexity of the holistic approach. This research offers a framework model of multi-stakeholder partnerships at the local level involving the factors that are useful in understanding partnerships in different circumstances but particularly for sustainable tourism practices in urban contexts.

2.2. Integrated model for multi-sector urban tourism partnerships

The SUT multi-stakeholder partnership scheme involves a conceptual approach building on three classes of attributes and the interfaces between and among them. The three attributes are 'context', 'activity', and 'resolution'. The interfaces between and among these attributes are 'public involvement' and 'multi-stakeholder partnerships'. Establishing effective partnerships is identified as second and key to the issue of 'effective governance' of local sustainable tourism, which includes features among which core is the issue of establishing an institutionalised (government) approach to involving partnerships in the decision-making process for tourism development. While extensive knowledge exists about the subsets of the attributes, to date no integrated approach has been established to reflect the relationships between all attribute classes to show their relative and/or collective influence on the success of a sustainable tourism-focused urban partnership project.

The Unified Framework Model combines a range of dimensions, factors and indicators of the SUT Partnership success, combining the systematic assessment of the (i) framework conditions, (ii) the effectiveness of the co-operation process, (iii) the sustainability of the outcomes and the (iv) long-term impacts of the tourism activity on the urban locality.

This holistic theme is what brought together the twenty partnership study cases, which otherwise represent a wide spectrum of forms and types of tourism partnerships, establishment mechanisms, functions, objectives, co-ordination, implementation and feedback arrangements (Gindl *et al* 2002).⁵ The study of 12 pilot and eight detailed 'Best Practice' Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism across the European continent verified and further advanced the

⁴ Paskaleva-Shapira, K. 2001, 'Innovative Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism: Framework Approach', SUT-Governance project deliverable 2, <http://www.sut.itas.fzk.de>.

⁵ M. Gindl, K. Paskaleva-Shapira, S. Stuppäck, U. Schubert, F. Wukovitsch 2002, 'Best Practice Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism: International Cross-Case Synthesis and Success Indicators', SUT-Governance Project Deliverable No. 4, <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>.

Initial Partnership Model⁶. Four main criteria for a Best Practice SUT Partnership were established by the project framework (a) Tourism (b) Partnership (c) Sustainability (d) Impact.

The final SUT Partnership Model⁷ can assist developing partnerships in the context of local (urban) tourism development despite the richness of places and forms of tourism.

3.3. Effective partnerships for sustainable urban tourism: Key factors of success

Despite the fact that each partnership case was generally unique based on the local specific conditions and its objectives, the case study work allowed to formulate a set of key factors of partnership success supported by a comprehensive set of indicators, the leading of which include: (i) Framework conditions (adequate funding and public support, favourable tourism development and capacity, adequate urban infrastructure, commitment to integrated sustainability and local governance) (ii) The partnership and the cooperation process (effective division of roles, contractual agreements, planning, transparency, efficient management) (iii) The partnership activity and its resolution (fruitful target area, assessment arrangements, outreach activities and (4) Implications for sustainability (sustainability background, potentials for eco-business, preservation/improvement of physical environment, job creation for social inclusion, self-organisation, networking, and new forms of governance)⁸. Notwithstanding the diversity, ultimate to the success of the SUT partnerships, however, appeared the strong commitment and trust between the participating agents and institutions as well as the transparency and clarity of the partnership arrangements and agreements during the life of the cooperation.

The role of the urban authorities in catalysing and facilitating these partnerships appeared generally central to their success. In terms of their participation, the adaptation and use of the Local Agenda 21 principles and programs for urban tourism were outstanding.

4. Benchmarking Governance for Sustainable Urban Tourism

4.1. Tourism benchmarking: The challenges

Globalisation, increasing market liberalisation and competition, and the need for better quality services, whether in the public or in the private sector in tourism, sustainable development, or other spheres of life, have resulted in a growing demand for benchmarking in the sense of undertaking international comparisons and learning from good practices. The European Union's 2001 'White Paper on European Governance'⁹ refers to 'benchmarking' as one of the main tools for improving governance in Europe and contributor to the relevant national policies in the member states. Benchmarking, therefore, is considered one of the key mechanisms of cooperation, learning and innovation in Europe's future.

Earlier, in 1997, when the European Commission issued its Strategic Communication, benchmarking was promoted as 'utilisation of a reference to best practice as a tool to identify necessary changes and to encourage social and economic initiatives and actors in order to progress in that direction'. Since then, benchmarking has been largely referred to as an 'important tool to improve competitiveness' available to both economic actors and public authorities¹⁰ in European policies and practice.

⁶ See Annex 1 for information on the SUT 'Best Practice' case.

⁷ See Annex 2: Unified Framework Model.

⁸ For more on the indicators see Annex 2: Unified Framework Model.

⁹ European Commission 2001. 'Enhancing democracy: A White Paper on Governance in the European Union', http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/index_en.htm.

¹⁰ European Commission 1997. Benchmarking: Strategic Communication. COM/97/0153.

In tourism, despite the general progress, however, Benchmarking is still in its onset (Paskaleva-Shapira 2003¹¹). It has only been used, yet limitedly, in the past several years in tourism destinations and less in industry, particularly in assessing specific performance of hotels, resorts, attractions, and transport¹². A number of benchmarking indicator systems for the tourism sectors and activities have been promoted and several performance indicators and benchmarking models have been advanced. Fragmentation among these, however, is large and linkages are non existing.

To improve co-ordination and uniformity in tourism benchmarking, the European Commission is currently supporting a study on “Measurement tools and methods needed for monitoring the availability of tourist destinations and services indicators and benchmarking” aiming to ‘encourage innovative practices and foster the integration of sustainable development in the operation of small and medium-sized enterprises and in entrepreneurship, through the monitoring of progress of a quality improvement strategy and benchmarking against other members of the peer group’¹³.

In the framework of the SUT-Governance project, Tourism Benchmarking is considered fundamental for achieving sustainable tourism in the host communities. The study views Benchmarking as a ‘comparative analysis of performance of organisations, processes and policies against ‘Best Practice’ cases (Coenen 2003)¹⁴.

4.2. Benchmarking SUT Partnerships: Tool design and implementation

The SUT Partnership Benchmarking Method and Tool were built based on the SUT Partnership Framework Model employing the following two main concepts (i) multi-stakeholder partnerships are effective means of promoting sustainable tourism and governance in urban environments and (ii) the success of a partnership depends of the efficacy of the partnership process, the tourism activity and its implementation and the resolutions for long-term urban sustainability. The Institute for Technology Assessment and System Analysis of the Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe (Germany) was lead to the effort supported by OGM (Brussels, Belgium)¹⁵ and external experts.

The aim was to provide urban localities and other stakeholder groups in Europe with a tool to assess and improve performance in developing participatory sustainable tourism. The core objectives pursued included:

- Assist urban government decision-makers in benchmarking, evaluation and design of strategies to improve practice in successful partnerships of urban sustainable tourism
- Help other tourism stakeholders in assessing and improving practice and policy of partnership co-operation
- And in broader terms, to encourage urban governments to put forward LA21 for tourism and motivate its supporters in fostering partnership activities.

¹¹ Paskaleva-Shapira, K. 2003. ‘Governance for Sustainable Urban Tourism: Final Report, EU ‘SUT-Governance’ Project Deliverable No. 14, <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>.

¹² Relevant initiatives include: The UK ‘Best Value’ programme (assessment of local authorities’ performance in delivering tourism services and ‘value for money’ appraisal; The Austrian ‘TourMIS’ project (provision of on-line tourism data and evaluation program to transform data into management information); The Marca de Calidad Turística Española initiative (Spain) (management model based on key criteria for six tourism sectors); The Q1000 of the Travel Development Centre in Finland (common quality criteria and instruments for SME tourism businesses), and; Destination 21 (Denmark) (labeling scheme for tourist destinations with sustainable development) (Based on Burhin, F., K. Paskaleva -Shapira and S. Santamaria 2003. ‘European governance for sustainable urban tourism: Benchmarking Report’, SUT-Governance Project Deliverable, <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>.

¹³ European Commission, DG Enterprise -Tourism 2002, http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/services/tourism/policy-areas/study_quality.htm.

¹⁴ Coenen, R. 2003. ‘Benchmarking SUT Partnerships: The SUT-Governance project approach and the tool’, presentation made at the Final SUT-Governance Project Conference, Heidelberg, Germany, June 23-24, <http://sut.fzk.de>.

¹⁵ OGM Brussels, <http://www.ogm.be>

Benchmarking Method: A systematic methodology was used to design and implement the Tool, providing for consistency and complementarity of the content and structure:

From	Unified Framework Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All preceding work packages - Detailed case studies
	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introductory letter - General information on the SUT-Governance project - Survey Questionnaire - Glossary - Benchmarking Code of Conduct
To	Benchmarking Tool	
Applied to	Pre-selected Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SUT Team Cities - ECT Cities¹⁶ - Other Cities
Aimed at	DATA COLLECTION and ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-announcement - Questionnaire mail - Follow-up calls and e-mails - Help desk - Personal meetings - Presentations and conferences - Project Website - Expert involvement <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Other outcomes</p>
In order to	Validate the Unified Framework Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supplementary information on European cities with SUT Partnership - Feedback for improving the Survey - Promotion and dissemination of the 'SUT-Governance' Project and its objectives
	Revise and finalise the Benchmarking Tool	
	Design and provide individual Customised Benchmark Reports	

Central to the development of the Tool was the **Benchmarking Survey Development** which underwent a comprehensive reiterative process with the main efforts aiming to (i) identify key benchmarks reflective of the SUT Partnership Framework Model and the key indicators of partnership success and (ii) elaborate a user-friendly Questionnaire potential serving a variety of tourism stakeholder groups in different urban environments.

The **Benchmarking Questionnaire** was built using quality management models drawing particularly on results of the 'Best Practice' SUT Partnerships. It provides a set of key factors of success, lead indicators and benchmark targets based on the Integrated Framework Model of Partnership Success promoted by the SUT-Governance project.

The Questionnaire consisted of two main parts. The first, being more factual, reflected the role of the city and the framework conditions supportive of partnership initiatives for sustainable urban tourism. The second core part mirrored the central aspects of the SUT Partnership Framework Model and required more comprehensive interpretation (opinion, attitude, specific knowledge) on the part of the respondent and its completion implied prior or current involvement in urban tourism partnerships leading to local sustainability. The second part was designed to allow the participating institution to self-assess its experience in partnership(s), including the

¹⁶ European Cities Tourism Network, <http://www.europeancitiestourism.com>.

The **International SUT Partnership Benchmarking Survey was administered** in 2003 in 125 European cities. It invited local administrations to self-assess their experience and success in promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships, including the different activities and processes involved in the establishment, management, implementation, evaluation and collaboration with regard to urban sustainability. Of 125 Questionnaires mailed, 33 responses were received (See map 1 above).

The **Customised Back Reports**, which were sent out to all survey respondents provided summary information on the city performance and success in building and maintaining effective partnerships for sustainable urban tourism in regard to the framework conditions, the partnership process and activity and the implications for urban sustainability. In particular, the partnership strategies, methods, capabilities, and performance were analysed against the whole database and against one or more specially customised city subsets with similar characteristics. In addition, the Report also underlined the strengths and weaknesses in SUT partnerships and identified the priorities for improving governance for sustainable tourism.

4.3. Benchmarking results

The statistical analysis of the survey results offered in-depth insights of the success factors and indicators of forming and maintaining multi-stakeholder tourism partnership for sustainable urban tourism. Assessment was made using three statistical parameters (average, median, and standard deviation). The analysis was carried out with respect to a comprehensive set of key factors of success, lead indicators and benchmark targets deriving from the Integrated Framework Model of Partnership Success. The level of success of the participating public administrations was evaluated using information from the Customized Benchmarking Reports developed for each of the participating city.

■ **Urban framework conditions:** Results indicated a substantial progress in sustainable tourism development with the activities being continuously on the rise, many of which employ SUT plans and programs (66%); Sustainable tourism issues are increasingly being considered in local policies (66 %) with around 44% of all cases involving sustainable tourism considerations; Local Agenda 21 Programs plays a substantial role in urban development (66%) but only 44% of the cases involve sustainable tourism objectives; Urban tourism policies are predominantly formal (80%) but in only 66% of the cases sustainable tourism issues are being regarded. On the less optimistic side, partnerships in urban tourism are just recently emerging and only half of the cities participate in stakeholder joint activities. Majority of these are in tourism in general (61%) and only 14% pursue sustainability objectives.

Overall, among the framework indicators, key to partnership success are 'partner commitment to collaborative action', 'competent and strong leadership', 'local political support' and 'availability of financial and other resources'. In this, driving are the local authorities and some lead tourism entrepreneurs¹⁸.

■ **Partnership process and activity:** Results confirmed the importance of the leadership role of the public sector in forming SUT partnerships (sector provides 35% of the funding despite the fact that in most cases multiple stakeholders share the activity costs). Other factors of success include 'strong partner motivation to collaborative action', 'effective leadership' and, and again, 'political commitment of the local authorities'. In regard to the partnership arrangements, majority prefer formal partner agreements (58%), 75% evaluate the partnership effectiveness but only 40% monitor the success of the cooperation process. On the less 'rosy' side, few cities use indicator systems for evaluating partnership effectiveness. Among the success indicators of partnership effectiveness, most common are the 'partner satisfaction', and 'goal achievement'. Issues of 'mutual trust' and 'sufficiency of management capacity' do not appear to be of serious appreciation.

¹⁸ Based on Burhin, F., K. Paskaleva -Shapira and S. Santamaria 2003. 'European governance for sustainable urban tourism: Benchmarking Report' SUT-Governance Project Deliverable, <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>.

- **Implications for sustainability:** With all the cautions regarding interpretation of the Survey results (sample size, standard deviation, possible distortions) in mind, yet, it was clear that partnerships impact primarily the local urban economies. Yet, many contribute significantly to improving the urban eco-system, townscape development, and protection of historic heritage and preservation of green spaces, areas also identified in the study of the 'Best Practice' SUT Partnerships. Sustainability, whether an explicit or implicit objective of the surveyed partnerships, appears, however, an ultimate end-result of all the cases.

It must be noted, however, that the survey results above should be considered with care, due, first, the potential 'margin of error' deriving of the relatively small number and the 'quality' of the responses (in view of the comprehensiveness of their completion) as well as the complexity of the questionnaire. Second, despite the large number involved in the benchmarking Survey, along with the care to ensure a high response rate, only 34 of them responded (25%). This response rate, nevertheless, can be taken as satisfactory, considering the 'uniqueness' of the Survey and the targeted issues yet generally unknown to city officials in their comprehensiveness and uniformity. Overall, the respondents were mainly cities with strong aspirations for tourism development and sustainability or cities experienced in partnerships activities in tourism.

4.4. Benefits of SUT Partnerships benchmarking

The results of the Survey can be useful for both, those who have been already involved in SUT partnerships as well as those willing or planning to establish and participate in such activities in their cities.

What did the participating cities benefit from the Survey?

- Appreciated the advantages of forming and maintaining partnerships for SUT;
- Recognised the importance of considering the relations and interconnectedness between the framework conditions, the partnership process and the activities with the implications on various aspects of urban sustainability from long-term perspectives;
- Critically assessed their current practices in promoting SUT Partnerships;
- Learnt the methodology (basic steps to success) of starting and implementing a multi-sector SUT partnership;
- Received a Customised Report to position themselves in the set of participating cities
- Ultimately, can develop a successful benchmarking programme for SUT.

Overall, the SUT-Partnership Benchmarking Tool is expected to strengthen the institutional capacity of the stakeholders to undertake and participate effectively in the further development of partnerships initiatives for sustainable tourism and urban development and to result in the increase use of governance and sustainability benchmark assessments by the decision-makers and businesses executives.

5. Lessons Learnt and the Opportunities Ahead

Overall, the Survey analysis highlighted the most significant trends in European governance for sustainable urban tourism and put forward the lessons to be learnt for improving future practice and policies. First, the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable urban tourism, the need for exchange of information and learning from others to improve practice towards enhancing tourism actions, social fabric and the environment in the European cities was strongly advanced. Second, the Survey also helped identify the achievements and the gaps in the current and evolving efforts.

5.1. Endorsing sustainable tourism with view of local governance

In particular, it became evident, that even if tourism in planning is already a practice in many tourism destinations, sustainability of the sector in context of overall and long-term community development remains an innovative phenomenon considered in only few of our tourist cities. In

these cases, partnerships appear key to linking urban tourism with long-term sustainability of the local communities in context of broad-based governance and stakeholder participation. As advanced by a large number of respondents, 'partnerships should be much more considered in the future of European urban tourism and the role of 'Best Practices' and Implementation Guidance is critical for the success.

The SUT Governance Survey also reaffirmed a key project notion that stakeholder participation is critical to sustainable urban tourism. Leading in collaborative partnerships remains the public sector followed by the hotel industry and key tourism professionals. Regrettably, the local communities and the residents, however, remain largely uninvolved in the process. In the few cases where the community as a social organism participated in partnerships activities, its role was limited to support of industry or government and not the interests of the society in general. Urban communities are yet to engage in action for sustainable tourism in Europe. Furthermore, Local Agenda 21 for Tourism is also a new practice. This raises the issue of further promoting the principles of the Agenda, which can provide a solid framework for tourism in regard to sustainable urban development and governance.

5.2. Advancing urban tourism benchmarking

Benchmarking generally requires significant financial and human resources. It also is time consuming and a challenge for the new in the area. Considering its widely acknowledged significance, however, it becomes necessary to convince the potential participants that the benefits gained will repay the effort as well as the expenditures put into the process. The more one puts into benchmarking, the more he will get out of it. Finally, there is a clear management imperative for benchmarking: the user needs to know what is happening in his activity or business, otherwise he cannot expect to manage it as well as others.

In urban tourism, in view of the lead role of the city authorities and the growing pressures to constantly improve their performance, benchmarking should become an imperative tool for improving future practices. This will allow them to promote innovate policy and decision-making, strategic planning, administration, maintenance, operational processes or any other tourism related tasks the city is responsible for. Benchmarking will offer urban authorities in Europe a valuable opportunity to gain insights of the lead practices of others, give them an accurate and objective understanding of their performance and equally important, will encourage their open-mindedness to new ideas and ways of developing tourism in their communities. It can help them set strategic targets and standards, increase the involvement and commitment of the stakeholders concerned, and enable building networks and partnerships, which often result in sustained collaborative relationships in the long run. Finally, benchmarking will allow cities promote the success of their local administrations, the community and the adjacent territories.

5.3. Promoting European-wide system of tourism benchmarking

The current study revealed that benchmarking in tourism, let alone in SUT partnerships, is largely a new phenomenon. The unfamiliarity of the respondents and, yet their willingness to participate, deserve a special recognition. The results are indeed encouraging for the future strives. With more experience, benchmarking in tourism will ultimately improve and the results will become more accurate.

The SUT Governance Benchmarking Survey reinforced the need of a **European-wide Tourism Benchmarking System**, considering the growing importance of tourism in the Europe, the diversity of the sector activities and their interactions with other sectors and functions of the local economies and the communities. With the more importance given to sustainable development in the future of Europe, the need of a European Tourism Benchmarking System becomes ever more apparent. This call becomes even stronger considering the complexity, inconsistency and the diversity of the benchmark indicators used in tourism to-date. The later has made data collection, comparisons, and evaluations difficult and results have often been inaccurate. Establishing a **Unified Indicator System in Tourism** where data is consistent in all countries and sectoral branches while also allowing for adjustments to the specific conditions

and actions, would make benchmarking of European tourism feasible and beneficial (Burhin *et al* 2003).¹⁹

In this regard, the SUT-Governance Project initiative of Benchmarking Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Tourism can be considered an important step towards achieving a European-wide Benchmarking Model for Sustainable Tourism, which will further assist the promotion of European Governance by Sustainable Urban Tourism, the main focus of the current Project.

5.4. Policy implications: Enhancing the role of the City

City authorities have a central role to play in promoting and sustaining tourism partnerships. In view of the growing complexity of urban development today, it is becoming increasingly necessary to make all active participants in the urban environment, i.e. the urban decision makers, face up to their responsibilities and allow the citizens they represent have a say in the running of cities. Furthermore, in the cities, where local governments have usually strong influence and power, tourism industry is less fragmented and disunited, and community groups are more influential, the role of public administrations in uniting the stakeholders for the establishment of a long-term local development framework in which collaboration is a cornerstone to success, appears an ultimate necessity (Paskaleva-Shapira 2001).

The results of the Benchmarking Survey reinforced the leading role of the public sector in achieving the goals of sustainable tourism and governance by promoting and engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships in the urban communities.

Private-public partnerships for sustainable tourism can help the establishment of sustainable tourist facilities in urban areas, develop attractions and activities related to cultural heritage of the built environment, historic districts, promote environmentally friendly modes of transportation and reduce tourism-related traffic, develop projects to mitigate damage to destroyed environment, provide information to tourist on appropriate behaviour and risks, integrate sustainable development education in local universities and schools and tourism into curriculum, promote networks for information, and research on sustainable tourism. To accomplish this, however, requires policy institutions, the tourist industry, and the civil society as whole to work together so the desired solutions are reached.

The SUT-Governance project raises several points of advocacy here. Most importantly, partnerships should become a substantial element of urban management of sustainable tourism. In tourist cities they should become a key driver in sustaining the local economy, the social fabric, and the urban environment. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, which in tourism are much more in embryonic stage than in other sectors of the economy, deserve greater recognition by the urban authorities and the other stakeholders, despite the difficulties of sustaining effective and successful collaborations. They employ the potential to embrace a wide range of complex problems and provide opportunities for reaching long-term community solutions. Public-private partnership in particular can be effective policy vehicles for urban sustainable tourism and more convergence of local authority interests with the other stakeholders'. Moreover, as this study suggests, partnerships are neither logistically complex nor as worthless as feared, providing they are comprehensively embraced, well managed and reasonably resourced.

The study identified some of the key motivations of the public sector to participate in the partnerships: sustaining long-term community development; bringing external resources (funding, expertise, links to other development schemes); avoiding overlapping of efforts; replication of good practices; or, ultimately, more effective and efficient policy development and implementation.

In terms of policy development, the study promoted these main reasons why urban authorities should involve in tourism partnerships: (a) Economic benefits (aid local economies, diversify the economy, increase employment and local revenues form taxes); (b) Social and cultural

¹⁹ Burhin, F., K. Paskaleva -Shapira and S. Santamaria 2003. European Governance for sustainable urban tourism: Benchmarking Report', SUT-Governance Project Deliverable 11, <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>.

enhancement (ensure well being and health of individuals; promote cultural awareness of the area and its people; preserve local traditions, moral, and value of place); (c) Environmental preservation and improvement (undertake a stewardship of the environment and tourism resources so the agents of development do not destroy the future basis for sustainable tourism development); (d) Political stability and legitimacy (sustained political objectives and broader political acceptance of the local administration). In this complex process, urban authorities must transcend beyond present rhetoric of urban development and introduce sustainable tourism planning in both policy and implementation of local initiatives.

Partnership implementation at the local level faces many challenges. For governments, the challenge is to find ways to fulfil their responsibility for ensuring that tourism development benefits all citizens and the community in the long run while meeting the needs of the private investors and entrepreneurs. This implies a new and often difficult transition for many urban governments, from provider and manager of basic services, to enabler, regulator, and collaborator. Self-examination of the present legal, structural, financial, and political underpinnings of those policy areas of domestic urban government appear most critical. It is also important to review and alter current and emerging agendas of state and local governments to embrace sustainability and governance principles. Involving the growing number of private profit and not-for-profit organisations that are assuming increasing responsibility for leadership and performance in state and local tourism affairs is also key to the success.

Government offices must too facilitate an effective co-ordination and collaboration with other bilateral and multilateral actors to ensure harmonisation of policies and actions so resources can be pooled together through joint programming and cost, responsibility, and benefits sharing. Public-private partnerships must not only be used solely as a policy implementation tool, rather they have to assume an important role in the design of policy initiatives, i.e. partnerships must drive tourism policy enhancement. At the end, partnerships must impact the policy-making process towards participatory urban governance.

For private tourist firms, the challenge is to recognise that investing in any particular partnership project offers more attractive returns than other available investment opportunities. Most importantly, entrepreneurs must be encouraged by the long-term benefits that sustainability considerations will bring into their businesses and the community. Drawing that conclusion depends on the firm's competent comparison of the potential returns against the potential risks, considering not just the economic but also social, cultural, and environmental outcomes.

Overcoming these challenges could be complicated, however, by a range of gaps in the capacity of both public and private actors. Major gaps may include: (i) the reciprocal mistrust and lack of understanding of each other's interests and needs across the public and private sectors; (ii) the absence of locally available information on, and experience with arranging sustainable partnerships; and (iii) the underlying legal, political, and institutional obstacles to forming effective public-private relationships. Lack of trust, motivations, and capacities can also jeopardise partnering. These gaps may lead to lengthy negotiations and increased costs making such partnership projects less attractive to potential interest parties.

The challenge for solutions is to tackle these bottlenecks and lay the groundwork for more effective collaboration at the local level. Local governments must implement the necessary sector reforms and develop integrated strategies for multi-stakeholder participation. We can specify four sets of strategic dilemmas to be addressed: (i) Trust building (ii) Effective structure building (iii) Policy development and (iv) Capacity building for local governments, local business and community organisations aimed at overcoming misunderstanding and mistrust between the public and private actors, and building the minimum capacities to design and negotiate effectively sustainable partnerships.

6. Concluding Notes: Urban Tourism Governance Platform and Forum are needed to step up research, policy and action in the new Century

To further assist the process of developing European policies that have positive impact on our cities and the urban municipalities, a European Urban Tourism Governance Platform and Forum must be established in which the city authorities should play a driving role. The participants of the SUT-Governance Final Conference in Heidelberg, Germany, June 23-24 2003 endorsed a working document that sets out the key principles, which can guide the relations among the tourism stakeholders in the urban environments towards sustainability and participatory decision-making and defines the scope of their dialogue²⁰.

To fulfil the agenda, stepping up in Europe's tourism research and innovation capacity is necessary. The attention must be drawn on the need to build on the results of the SUT-Governance project and further study tourism governance and other relevant community development issues. Future research needs should be tailored to help better structure the European research to cope with the strategic objectives set out by the European heads of states and governments in Lisbon 2002. The advancement of research should enable tourism to become a more responsible industry inclusive of urban community development and aspirations in the years to come.

To accomplish this goal, a new Forum on Urban Tourism Governance is necessary to engage all parties concerned and develop and further promote the Agenda of Sustainable Tourism in the European cities. The focus has to be placed on the need to enable innovation and collaborative work in the spirit of local governance and prosperity. The establishment of such Forum will ensure the consolidation of all stakeholder interests in view of achieving integrated urban development in the far reaching future.

²⁰ See the full Participants Statement on the project web site at: <http://sut.itas.fzk.de>

Annex 1: SUT Partnership ‘Best Practice’ Cases

	SUT Partnership ‘Best Practices’	Country	Key Objectives
1.	Strategy Forum Tourism	Austria	Tourism marketing and sustainable development of tourism
2.	OeKOPROFIT for Tourist Companies		Sustainable management of tourism enterprises
3.	Beautiful Veliko Turnovo	Bulgaria	Social progress and improving the overall community value
4.	V. Turnovo Tourism Council		Destination and community marketing
5.	Healthy Food in Heidelberg’s Restaurants	Germany	Sustainable provision of healthy foods and regional integration
6.	Heidelberg City Card		Sustainable long-term tourism marketing
7.	Pilot Project for the Renewal and Development of the Historical and Commercial Centre of Thessaloniki	Greece	Urban renewal, City-centre regeneration
8.	Inter-Municipal Co-operation: Linking Places of Natural Beauty		Recreational development in suburban areas

Annex 2: EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN TOURISM: Unified Framework Model

Dimensions and Components	Factors of SUT Partnership Success	Indicators of SUT Partnership Success
<p>1. Framework Conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National and supra-national: important tourism sector; policies for sustainability, governance and partnerships ▪ Locally (urban and regional) significant tourism sector; public commitment to stakeholder involvement; policies for sustainability and partnerships; actor networking 	1.1. Funding availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start up money for partnership formation
	1.2. Tourism potentials and strategic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism's importance in national and urban economy ▪ Growing tourism sector ▪ Favourable location factors and resources; ▪ Sufficient tourist infrastructure ▪ Variety of tourist attractions ▪ National and local tourism development plans and far reaching strategies
	1.3. Policy and commitment to sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long-term strategic planning for integrated sustainable development ▪ Consideration of sustainability in tourism development
	1.4. New forms of governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adoption of bottom-up approaches to urban management and stakeholder involvement in decision-making and policy ▪ Political and stakeholder recognition of partnerships' advantages towards sustainable tourism sector and prosperous community
	1.5. Culture and tradition of partnering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tradition of multi-stakeholder collaboration in the urban affairs ▪ Effective leadership towards partnership co-operation ▪ Established mechanisms for partnership promotion and safeguarding
<p>2. Partnership Process and Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Setting the objectives ▪ Building the foundation of agreement and consensus ▪ Maintaining an effective partnership process 	2.1. Commitment and experience in co-operative action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognition of mutual benefits from partnership participation ▪ Ambitious partners and personal commitment of participating actors ▪ Previous experience in co-operative projects and partnerships
	2.2. Effective division of roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fair share of benefits ▪ Clear, reasonable and efficient division of partner roles ▪ Actors with individual excellence in own core area of activity ▪ Productive personal relations among partners

Dimensions and Components	Factors of SUT Partnership Success	Indicators of SUT Partnership Success
<p>Partnership Process and Activity (continuation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Robust tourism activity ▪ Successful implementation of tourism activity 	2.3. Contractual agreements: Shared strategy for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Synergy of definition of roles and responsibilities ▪ Contractual agreements regulating responsibilities and liabilities
	2.4. Competence to plan the co-operation process and the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear objectives, adjustable to changes of conditions ▪ Well planned strategies to achieve the objectives inclusive of flexibility for adjustments ▪ Adequate and feasible implementation mechanism
	2.5. Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activity and co-operation process transparent to partners and the local community ▪ Constructive teamwork based on mutual trust and consensus
	2.6. Management efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutionalised and competent management team and mechanism ▪ Robust marketing and public outreach activities ▪ Co-ordination and networking between the partners ▪ Competent leadership ▪ Flexible organisational structures ▪ Monitoring and evaluation of management efficiency
	2.7. Target areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding the complexity and nature of the target area ▪ Partnership activities responsive to local needs and expectations
	2.8. Implementation of the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well defined plans or programmes defining the specific steps and actions and open to adjustments and improvements ▪ Use of adequate and working implementation mechanisms
	2.9. Monitoring and evaluation of the process and the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-going monitoring of goal achievement ▪ Impact assessment of the partnership and the activity and provision of continuous feed-back ▪ Professional support by experts and experienced personnel ▪ External evaluation for quality assurance and benchmarking

Dimensions and Components	Factors of SUT Partnership Success	Indicators of SUT Partnership Success
	2.10. Public participation and outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public awareness and support of the activity ▪ Citizens' involvement and public participation in the activity ▪ Public outreach activities and broad dissemination
3. Implications for Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ecological sustainability ▪ Economic viability ▪ Social progress ▪ Long-term community prosperity 	3.1. Sustainability background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explicit consideration of sustainability in partnership's objectives ▪ Contribution to Local Agenda 21 pursuits ▪ Ecological awareness
	3.2. Ecological sustainability: Urban ecosystem; environmental management; built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced urban ecology ▪ Improvements in townscape and protection of the historic heritage ▪ Preservation or improvement of the built environment
	3.3. Economic viability (urban economy level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Viable and sustainable tourism sector ▪ Enhanced urban economy and potentials through tourism development ▪ New business and job creation
	3.4. Economic viability (individual business level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ecological management ▪ Fostered and sustained business reorganisation and innovation ▪ Cost-effective tourism businesses via eco-management systems
	3.5. Social progress: Social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Job creation for marginalised groups ▪ Greater equity in distribution of social wealth and opportunities
	3.6. Long-term community benefits and quality of urban life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased quality of life for the urban residents ▪ Positive level of resident's attitudes ▪ Social paradigm relevant to sustainable living ▪ Sustainable consumption and attitude ▪ Locality safeguarding, appreciation and endearment of place

Dimensions and Components	Factors of SUT Partnership Success	Indicators of SUT Partnership Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urban governance 	3.7. New form of urban governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership activities and stakeholder collaboration ▪ Decentralisation of public policy and management ▪ Enhanced public policy for sustainability involving multiple urban actors ▪ Facilitation of LA21 principles ▪ Community self organisation and networking
	3.8. Impact assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Systematic assessment of target achievement and impact of outcomes ▪ Exposure to outside evaluation ▪ 'Best Practice' benchmarking