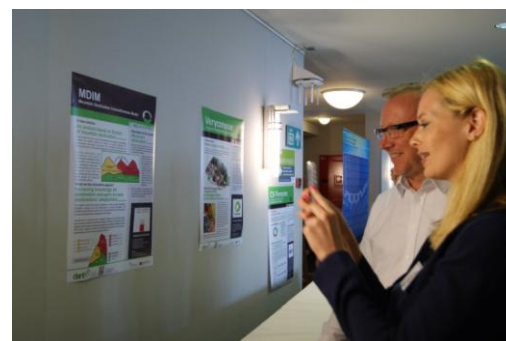


DANTE Final conference: How to reinforce ICT and tourism strategies in rural & mountain areas? Tools and strategies

DANTE project has organised its **final conference on 25th June 2014 at the Committee of the Regions** in Brussels. Seventy persons attended the event to learn more about the **project results** (collection of good practices, implementation of a pilot web platform for tourism operators in rural and mountain areas); to see how some regions (Province of Turin – Crete – Extremadura – Cantons du Valais - Kainuun Etu) have developed **a tourism and ICT strategy** and finally to learn more about other **European initiatives** (ICT and tourism strategy / TourismLink) and interesting **EU funding schemes** for the future (Interreg Europe / Structural and Investment Funds).



Tourism and ICT: a key issue for rural and mountain areas

Mountain areas cover **29% of the EU territory** and each year, **95 million long-stay tourists, and 60 million day-trip visitors** visit the Alps. 56% of the EU territory is considered as predominantly rural areas, according to OECD, and **32.2% of the total bed places** are located in these predominantly rural areas. Tourism in rural and mountain areas thus largely contributes to EU growth.

The entire process of developing, managing and marketing tourism products and destinations are under transformation due to the Internet, which empowers the interactivity between tourism enterprises and consumers to unprecedented levels.

ICT are more and more used by customers to **prepare their travel and book accommodation ahead of their stay, to get practical information through their mobile phone during their stay and to share their impressions on the visited destinations during and after their stay**, thanks to social networks.

ICT have a great potential to help rural and mountain destinations promote their specific assets, as explained Jon-Andreas Kolderup, vice-president of Euromontana.



European initiatives encourage the combination of ICT and tourism

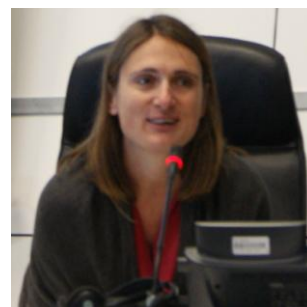
The European Commission has taken into account the importance of ICT for tourism. **A new ICT and tourism initiative** has been launched in 2013, as explained Lubomira Hromkova from DG enterprise. It aims to support employment and growth in the tourism sector, based on:

- a **policy dimension**: with high level working groups
- a **Tourism Business Portal**: launched during the spring 2014, this web portal



helps tourism businesses to have all the necessary tools to better run their businesses. It provides examples of business plans, tutorials, explanations on the current legislation... [Discover here the presentation video of the Tourism Business Portal.](#)

- a **technological component: Tourismlink**. To date still 42% of SMEs are not using ICT, Tourismlink aims to improve ICT adoption by tourism SMEs. This online platform connects small travel businesses (such as providers of accommodation, transport and complementary services) with travel agents and tour operators. It offers three main elements: a central reservation system that centralises all products and destinations into one database; a property management system; and channel management, allowing immediate and automatic integration and adaptation of all data, as detailed Paolina Marone, project coordinator of Tourismlink. [Discover their explanation video here.](#)



Interreg IV C is the European funding scheme, which co-financed DANTE project. This programme has launched a capitalisation exercise to analyse, benchmark and capitalise on the wealth of knowledge generated by projects working on similar regional issues. In the rural development group, (in which DANTE participated), **ICT were recognised as one precondition for growth in rural areas.**

In the coming 2014-2020 period, the **Interreg Europe programme** will continue to finance tourism projects, eventually with an ICT dimension, as explained Verena Priem from the Joint Technical Secretariat of Interreg IV C. The final aim of this programme will be to improve the implementation of European structural and investment funds (ESIF) in the regions. Thus, there will be a major implication of the managing authorities of regions. It gives some food for thought for DANTE follow-up.



How to strengthen the practical uptake of interesting practices? DANTE findings on tools

Constantine Manasakis from the University of Crete presented into more details DANTE. This project aims at promoting a **new (knowledge- and ICT-based) regional policy approach for the tourism economy of rural and mountain territories;** and at **unlocking the ICT potential for entrepreneurship** in rural and mountain territories.

To achieve to do so, project partners have identified and analysed good practices. Then they have learnt and exchanged knowledge through workshops and study visits: this gave the opportunity to present the good practices into details. Then, they have disseminated the knowledge gained, interconnecting the DANTE network with the EU policy initiatives running in relevant fields.



DANTE light pilot

The Light Pilot (available [here](#)) collects the selected good practices and applies them to the territory of the Mountain Communities of the Province of Turin, as explained Andrea Muraca and Paolo Bruna from CSI Piemonte. The final result is a **portal software platform** that includes several functionalities and components: **CMS with multi language contents, accommodation facilities management, maps displaying system, newsletter, net sentiment, community for tourists and operators.**

This DANTE Light Pilot platform was tested in the Province of Turin; the other project partners replicate the installation and test it in their own territories as well. **All tourism actors can now upload this DANTE light pilot and are invited to implement it in their own territories.**



Roundtable: How to implement a digital strategy integrating rural tourism at regional level?

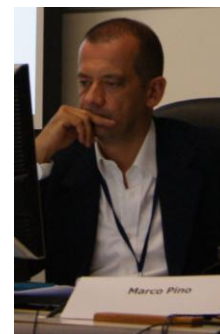
Implementation plans for DANTE partner regions...

Each partner region has defined an **implementation plan**: listing actions and a strategy to develop in its own rural and mountain areas to increase tourism and ICT. All partners have integrated some common recommendations in these implementation plans to **make an easier access to ICT in rural and mountain areas and to create “smart and inclusive territories” for ICT open use.**

...written in the European framework of Smart Specialisation Strategies

Generally, these implementation plans are part of a larger tourism and /or ICT strategy in the region, like the **Smart Specialisations Strategies**.

At EU level, Marco Pino from DG Regio gave an overview of the measures already selected by the different regions in their future Operational Programmes, for the implementation of European Structural and Investment funds. Among them were Development and promotion of tourism assets in SMEs (74 quotes), Development and promotion of public tourism services (93 quotes), ICT High-speed broadband network (>30Mps) (46 quotes), Access to public sector information (79 quotes), ICT services and applications for SMEs(82 quotes). All these measures could represent up to **€10 billion of investments in the following seven years.**



Concrete examples from regions



Marco Balagna, elected representative of Province of Torino, **Maria Kassotaki** from Interim Managing Authority of the Crete Region, **Victor Piriz**, Deputy Director of Fundecyt-PCTEX for Extremadura explained their tourism and ICT strategies in these DANTE regions. In addition, **Sarah Hubber**, FDDM for Canton de Valais from Necstour network (Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism) and **Tuomo Tahvanainen**, Director, Tourism, Creative Industry and Food Sector for Kainuun Etu from ERRIN network (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) gave other European examples of rural and mountain regions.

In almost every region, there are two tourism and ICT strategies: one includes the regional level, sometimes existing since a few years and a new one with the Smart Specialisation Strategies. These strategies were generally developed at regional level, to better take into account the local specificities of the tourism operators. In rural and mountain areas, one weakness is the **lack of ICT training for tourism operators**. Thus, Province of Turin, Canton du Valais and Kainuue Etu have particularly insisted on that aspect. Others have insisted on the development of **ICT tools for tourism** to help both clients to find the adequate information and to help tourism operators to better attract tourists: these are the cases of Extremadura and Crete regions.

After 3 years, DANTE project will finish at the end of the year with new tools and strategies to better address tourism and ICT issues in rural and mountain regions. We hope that other regions will use these tools and adapt them to their own specificities.

You have missed the event? Please find [here all the presentations](#).

Discover [here](#) all DANTE results!