

CASE STUDY

GENOA (IT) – MAR DEL PLATA (AR)

IURC - LA



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Thematic Networks: Innovative, Sustainable & Carbon Neutral Ecosystems & Strategic Sectors

Thematic Cluster: Tourism & Culture

Cross-cutting challenge: Digital Transition & Smart City

Topic keywords: sustainable tourism, digitalisation, local economic development, culture.

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GENOA – MAR DEL PLATA

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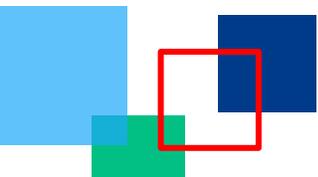
Action plan and tourism diversification strategies to promote sustainable, balanced, and diversified tourism, while meeting the needs of local communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Genoa and Mar del Plata are exchanging knowledge and best practices on Tourism and Culture, to develop an action plan to promote sustainable, balanced, and diversified tourism, while meeting the needs of local communities. In this regard, the pairing designed tourism diversification strategies to reach this objective. Mar del Plata's strategy is mainly focused on attracting tourism during the whole year and not only during the summer season, while Genoa seeks to diversify tourists' profiles. As a result, the pairing built a series of guidelines to share their learnings with other cities facing similar challenges.

Genoa is a city of almost 600,000 inhabitants with a millenary history. Its port, overseeing the Mediterranean Sea, is one of the main ports in Italy. In the last few decades, port-related economy and industry have been the focus for the city, overlooking its historical and cultural heritage and the economic potential of tourism. To tackle the post-industrial crisis, Genoa developed a new identity as cultural and touristic city, culminating with its recognition as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006. Furthermore, the city began to attract research and industrial innovation, thus turning into a more differentiated service-based economy, particularly in logistics and port-related activities. Genoa has successfully completed a complex transition from an industrial to a knowledge-driven model of development, giving particular importance to tourism, cultural heritage and the preservation of its historic centre and the "Porto Antico" waterfront. In this regard, Genoa's sustainable urban development plan seeks to promote slow and quality tourism, by controlling flows of tourism to avoid gentrification, and by promoting the city's attractiveness and competitiveness to attract talent, research, tourists, and investors.

Mar del Plata has a coastline that extends for more than 28 km and a port that is well connected to Mercosur countries, providing trade advantages by land, sea, and air to the city. Since its foundation, Mar del Plata has established itself as one of the main tourist destinations in Argentina. This is largely due to its famous beaches and seaside activities, its supply of hospitality, gastronomic and cultural services, as well as the proximity to main urban centres such as Buenos Aires, Rosario, and Cordoba, where most of its annual visitors come from. During the 2022 and 2023 season, the city received more than 3 million tourists. Furthermore, economic recession, coupled with growing inflation rates and difficulties to access US dollars, had an impact on travelling preferences of Argentina's medium and upper classes, who consequently chose national seaside destinations such as Mar del Plata instead of travelling abroad.



MAIN CHALLENGE AND SOLUTION

Genoa and Mar del Plata seek to diversify and increase their offer of touristic attractions, without neglecting sustainable development, bio-diversity preservation, and natural landscape protection. The goal is to have tourists who respect the environment, culture, heritage, and societal dynamics, while improving their travel experience. Mar del Plata and Genoa wish to become intelligent tourist destinations, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and accessibility, while meeting citizens needs and ensuring good living conditions for local communities. The main challenges are thus linked to finding the right balance between tourism promotion, sustainability, and quality of life, while also increasing local economic development and competitiveness

“COVID-19 pandemic made us become more creative in developing new touristic products, including digital tools and outdoor experiences”

– **Gianluca Saba**, Head of the International Affairs - Department, Mayor's Cabinet, Municipality of Genoa

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector had to reinvent itself. Outdoor activities underwent a rise in popularity and tourists valued less frequented and popular destinations, often in the countryside. The city of Genoa wants to take advantage of these new travel trends and the city's polycentrism by enhancing alternative tourist routes that can be visited all year round, distributing tourism flows over time and space. This type of tourism will promote alternative points of interest and more sustainable routes, reducing seasonal overcrowding of certain areas. Thus, new itineraries will be focused on the diversification of the tourism offer, by increasing outdoor activities and promoting slow and sustainable tourism. The new tourism routes created by Genoa are included in the “Genoa City Pass”, the official tourist pass of Genoa that has been developed as a strategic tool to attract new visitors and manage tourism and in the Visit Genoa dedicated portal store.



Mar del Plata has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation and resilience during the pandemic. Its focus on young people and digital nomads, reflect its proactive approach in the use of technology. The city has been able to reinvent and reposition itself as dynamic touristic centre, attracting young people and mitigating the effects of the pandemic. It allowed Mar del Plata to maintain its relevance as one of the main tourist destinations in the country.



In addition, the city wishes to position itself as a venue for major mass events, such as music festivals, large conventions, and important sporting events, that have become a trademark of the city, attracting the attention of visitors, making residents proud and generating a very positive impact on the local economy.

In this regard, Genoa and Mar del Plata are proposing more diversified experiences, translating the flexibility of the sector and its adaptation to different needs. Promoting tourism products for specific interests (i.e. sport, nature, hiking, culture, music, etc.) guarantees the creation of a common strategy and a global image as attractive destinations. The goal is to incentivize longer stays, enticing visitors to return by making their stay more enjoyable.

“Successful tourism strategies need to be supported by political decisions, and a close collaboration between the public and private sectors”

– **Santiago Bonifatti**, Municipal Government Secretary – General Pueyrredon Municipality

Both cities agree on the importance of training the tourism sector about innovative strategies and priority markets’ specificities, to win back demand with greater care in **communication, clarity of information, and improved ability to find solutions**. Capacity building and awareness raising of both residents and tourism service providers seek to ensure high standards in the tourism sector. In this regard, Mar del Plata, created different capacity building programmes, such as:

- the “**Tourist Hosts Programme**” seeks to promote awareness in the hospitality sector, learning about general concepts of tourism and the main functions of a host. It is aimed at educational institutions, trade unions, tourist associations and chambers, amongst others.
- the “**Quality in the visitor service programme**”, which is a presential course about basic concepts of tourist quality and visitor service targeting the whole sector of tourism services.
- the “**Mar del Plata Expert Programme**” which is an online platform developed by the Municipal Tourism Board to share online training and awareness-raising courses. Topics of trainings include Architectural Heritage, Religious Tourism, Accessibility, Gastronomic Tourism, among others.

In addition, the pairing shares a common **digitalisation and innovation strategy** for tourism development. Territorial digital marketing needs to be enhanced through platforms in the national and international ecosystems, to promote excellence and services. It is essential for Genoa and Mar del Plata to strengthen digital activities linked to web development, social information and communication campaigns, online ticketing, and new technologies. Digital platforms are also used for registration to large mass events and the development of QR ticketing, which allows to control the capacity and plan public-private strategies that ensure quality and security measures.

“2024 will be the “Roots Tourism” year, a great opportunity to strengthen relations between the two cities and their tourism sector”

– **Massimo Ruggero**, Tourism Department – Municipality of Genoa

This can contribute to the generation of pre-visit communication products, the updating of touristic offer for different groups and interests, as well as the improvement of overall communication with visitors. The use of technology therefore facilitates the planning and management of the tourist offer.

In Mar del Plata, the EMTUR website is positioned as a great platform for tourist information, with accessible and downloadable tourist guides PDF and Spotify audios. Besides, the Tourist Board incorporated a WhatsApp number to manage tourist information and the use of Big Data to reach different audiences with segmented communication. New tourism routes created by Genoa are included in the “Genoa City Pass”, the official tourist pass of Genoa that has been developed as a strategic tool to attract new visitors and manage tourism.

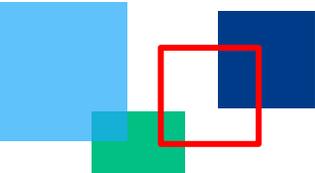


Finally, the cities agree that new and more sustainable management models for local tourism are required to share benefits amongst citizens and economic actors. In this sense, all stakeholders should be involved in decision-making processes as a strategy to achieve a balance between the economic and environmental aspects of tourism. The creation of public-private collaborations adds value to tourists’ experiences. Strong public leadership, particularly at the Municipal level, helps to ensure that wellbeing and sustainability are central to tourism planning. To reach these goals,

it is also necessary to create a greater network and technical working tables with different stakeholders to define projects and actions, create guidelines with common protocols and appropriate standards.

“The challenge is to consolidate tourism, make it more sustainable, and attract tourists all year long.”

– **Carla Ardanaz**, EMTUR (Municipal Tourism Agency) Deputy President – Municipality of General Pueyrredon



RESULTS AND IMPACT

As a result from technical sessions, bilateral study visits, and other technical activities, Mar del Plata and Genoa exchanged information about tourism diversification. Strategies developed by Mar del Plata seek to attract tourism all-year-round and not only in summer, while Genoa mainly seeks to attract alternative type of tourism.

KEY FIGURES: Tourism diversification

63%

of Mar del Plata's GDP from tourism and hospitality sectors.

2.5%

of Genoa's GDP from tourism and hospitality sectors

8 million

visitors per year in Mar del Plata

2.7 million

visitors per year in Genoa

As a result, learnings from the pairing could be gathered in 6 guidelines for diversification strategies, that can be adapted and replicated by other cities, especially in a context of transition towards sustainable, digital, and inclusive models of tourism.



You can find a summary of the guidelines below:



TOURISM DIVERSIFICATION GUIDELINES

Experiences from Genoa & Mar del Plata

1 Outdoor activities



- Renewed popularity after the pandemic. New type of tourists.
- Environmental awareness by valuing natural landscapes.
- Diverts tourism from over-crowded destinations.

4 Capacity Building



- Improve quality of tourism services.
- Sustainability trainings and cultural heritage to reduce impact of tourism.
- Digital training for web development and communication.

2 Slow & Sustainable Tourism



- Design effective communication about environmental protection.
- Promote sustainable and active mobility.
- Diversify and promote less frequented areas.

5 Intersectoral collaboration



- Create a greater network through working tables.
- Promote public-private partnerships.
- Involve citizens in initiatives related to tourism.

3 Digitalization



- Attract young people & digital nomads.
- Use technology to plan and manage tourism offer.
- Digital platforms for mass events registration and ticketing.

6 Mass events



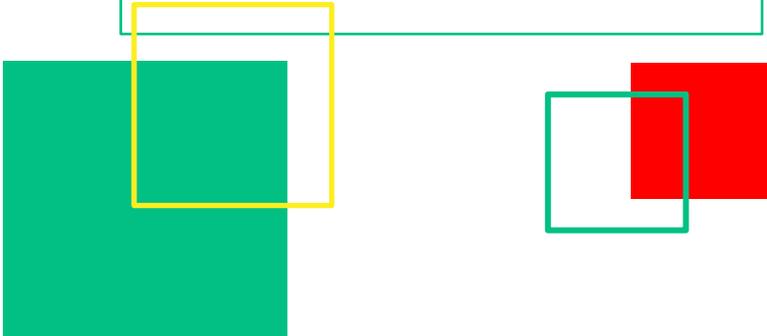
- Make citizens proud by promoting the city at international level.
- Attract tourism related to different interests (music, outdoors).
- Increase quality of services.

7 Ensuring security

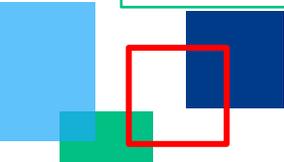


- Safe experience for visitors.
- Avoid overcrowding: monitoring flows & preparing for peak demand.
- Public-private collaboration: share information, create platforms, capacity building.

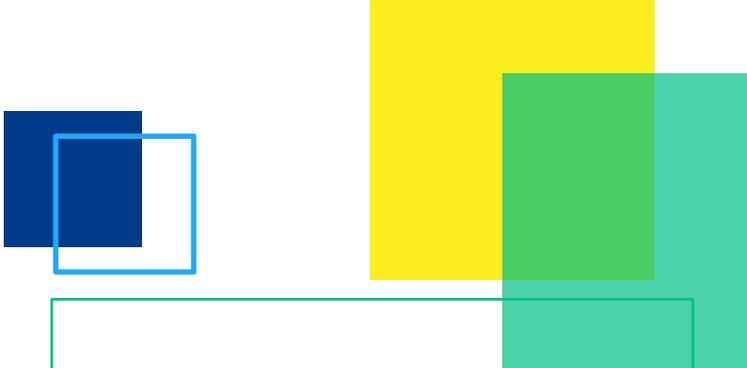
LESSONS LEARNED



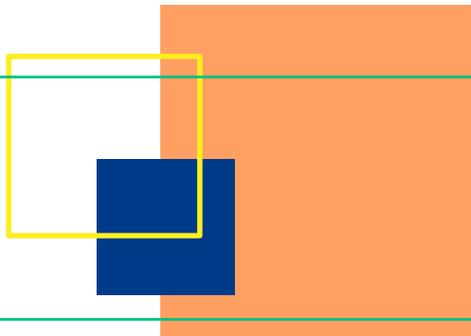
Strong collaboration amongst different stakeholders such as local departments and private companies is required, in order to improve the management of the tourism industry.



Tourism diversification requires to identify and promote alternative attractions and activities, thus redistributing tourists to new locations and during months outside the peak season. This allows to maintain tourism and economic activities all year long.



Analysis of the situation for the tourism sector: it helps to improve the implementation of strategic actions and allow to build guidelines for the creation of shared protocols and standards.



It is recommended that cities organize different kinds of events (sport, cultural, music, etc.) and to enlarge the offer of activities provided by the cities. It allows to attract new typed of tourists.

THE IURC PROGRAMME

The International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in IURC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international counterparts, building a greener, more prosperous future.

The IURC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.

Author:

Waldo Urquiza, Chile & Argentina Country Manager – IURC Latin America

Acknowledgments:

Barbara Poggio, International Affairs - Department, Mayor's Cabinet, Municipality of Genoa

Sabrina Bruzzone, International Affairs - Department, Mayor's Cabinet, Municipality of Genoa

Gianluca Saba, Head of International Affairs - Department, Mayor's Cabinet, Municipality of Genoa

Massimo Ruggero, Tourism Department - Municipality of Genoa

Lucia Bonifatti, Subsecretary of Modernization – Municipality of General Pueyrredon

Santiago Bonifatti, Municipal Government Secretary - General Pueyrredon

Tatiana Fontana, Subsecretary of Modernization Municipality of General Pueyrredon

Carla Ardanaz, Tourism Municipal Agency - EMTUR Deputy President

Links to related outputs:

Tourism Diversification Guidelines

<https://www.iurc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/guidelines-Genoa-MDP-2.pdf>

Contacts:

Genoa: bpoggio@comune.genova.it

Mar del Plata: lubonifatti@gmail.com

