

The BIC of the Lazio Region and the European Business Innovation Centers Network visited the Dominican Republic



January 2009



From 19 to 23 January 2009 Luigi Campitelli, Director of the Business Innovation Centre (BIC) Lazio and President of EBN (European Business Innovation Centers Network) and Giordano Dichter, expert of BIC Lazio realized a mission in the Dominican Republic. The mission has been organised within the framework of the ART Initiative and IDEASS Programme as the methodologies of the *Albergo diffuso* was awarded for the first price in the EBN-UNDP AWARD "Innovation for Human Development and Cooperation".

The objective of the mission was to verify the possibility of transferring the *Albergo Diffuso* methodologies in the Dominican Republic as a means to boost local economic development through the enhancement of the sustainable tourist sector in the Provinces of El Seibo and of Monteplata, within the framework of the UNDP ART GOLD and IDEASS Programmes.

During the mission, the representatives of BIC Lazio and of the European BICs Network undertook many activities constantly followed and supported by the UNDP Country Office, the UNDP ART GOLD Coordinator, Marina Lo Giudice, and the UNDP ART GOLD Expert in local economic Development Mr. Franco Jimmy Torres. The UNDP representatives stated their support to the mission highlighting how the objectives are in line with the development goals of the country.

Results in the Monteplata Province



During the visit to the Province of Monteplata it was possible to understand that the first conditions to realize an *Albergo Diffuso* were met, since it immediately appeared how the local community was lively and outgoing with strangers (tourists). The delegation met the director of the Local Economic Development Agency ADELMOPLA, Mr. Pablo Payero.

A meeting was realized in Bayaguana, with the group of stakeholders of the Local Economic Development Agency of Monte Plata. The meeting took place in the premises of *Cooperativa Progreso* a cooperative local bank which is actively promoting local development initiatives in the area.

The participants were: Mr. Miguel Polanco, President of ADELMOPA; Mr. Pablo Payero, Managing Director of ADELMOPLA; several local tourist operator, some of them active in “eco-tourist” projects; entrepreneurs active in handicrafts businesses; further social and economic actors.

After the presentation of both sides the discussion was focused on the main attractiveness of the area and on the conditions to develop a new tourist supply in accordance with the *Albergo diffuso* methodologies or – however – with the concept of sustainable tourism as experienced in rural areas in Centre Italy.

During the meeting the local actors demonstrated high interest in the innovation *Albergo Diffuso* and expressed their will to take part to a project that would establish a new form of “community” within the village of Bayaguana, which appeared to be a proper place for a start-up for:

- the existence of a lively village, with the presence of all the necessary facilities
- the existence of a committed Local Economic Development Agency
- the presence of a organized tourist supply
- the presence of entrepreneurial spirit within the community

Successively the local actors accompanied the delegation to visit existing eco-tourist resorts and natural resources which enabled the delegation to strengthen its initial convincement. Namely: Balneario Comate (Mr. Rogelio Mejia); Campo Aventura (Mr. Luis Baez); Salto Alto (Mr. Ramon Mejia); Ecoclub (Ms. Merfry Then); Terraqua (Ms. Mercedes Dario).

In a meeting in the Senate with Charles Mariotti, Senator for the Province of Montepalata, a feedback was provided about the visit to the territory of Montepalata, hence further support for the implementation of a pilot project was committed by the Senator. The Senator Mariotti confirmed his interest in the innovation and in the possibilities of adapting it to the context of Montepalata. The delegation was also invited to witness a local traditional feast known as “la cabalcata”.



Results in the El Seibo Province

A meeting in the townhall of EL Seibo was realized with the group of promoters of the Local Economic Development Agency of El Seibo.

The meeting took place in the local townhall and gave the opportunity to share information on both sides. After a presentation of the resources of the Province of El Seibo Mr. Campitelli presented BIC Lazio and EBN and, successively, Mr. Giordano Dichter presented the innovation *Albergo Diffuso* which arouse much interest as demonstrated by the long “question and answer” session that took place immediately after the presentations.



A visit was realized to the Chocolate Itinerary, a very interesting tourist site that can be promoted in tourist packages associated with the *Alberghi Diffusi*. Mainly this unique itinerary provides technical insights on the production of chocolate and offers the possibility of enjoying a warm and unique experience with the local residents of the area. The delegation has been accompanied by the director of the Bloque de Cacao, Mr. Bernardo Jimenez.

A meeting took place with CIELO - *Comité de Iniciativas Econturisticas Locales* - in Pedro Sanchez. The CIELO organization demonstrated much interest on themes of sustainable and community tourism presented by the delegation. It is opinion of the expert that the village could be a proper place for an experimentation of community tourism for:

- the surroundings of the area and the conformation of the village which respect the conditions needed to experience “community tourism”
- the existence of the organization CIELO which is highly committed in developing sustainable tourism

- the existence of a community which is ready to open their homes to host tourists
- the existence of uncontaminated natural resources



Another meeting took place in the town hall of Miches with Mr. Cesar Hernandez, Mayor of Miches and other representatives of the local government. Although the Mayor of Miches demonstrated high interest in the innovation, the same cannot be stated by the other actors that were present in the meeting, notwithstanding the enormous amount of natural resources that are present in the area and that are an attraction for the type of tourists the model is directed to. An uncontaminated coastline of 47 km is the main one, adjoined with the presence of remarkable lagoons, but there is a feeling that the territory is shifting towards non-sustainable tourism, and the people are hoping to sell their lands to external investors which would adopt the “all-inclusive resort” tourist formula.

Conclusions

The innovation *Albergo Diffuso* cannot be transferred “as is” for various reasons, the most important one is that all the homes are actually inhabited. Therefore it has been necessary to re-think the concept trying to adapt it to the reality of the Dominican Republic, making it more appropriate to develop the concepts of “community hospitality” or of “community tourism” rather than the rigid one of *Albergo Diffuso*. By “community hospitality” we intend a structure, which is always entrenched in the community and within the homes of the local residents (which will share the living space with the tourists) and capable anyway of providing all the services that a regular hotel provides (daily cleaning, breakfast and food services, common spaces and reception services, booking services). Such a structure will operate and have success if the local community is willing to commence new start-ups in correlated activities which would provide services to the “hotel” and to the tourists (bicycle rental, tour guides, ball classes, cooking classes, transportation, etc.).



This new concept which sells to the tourists not only the local natural beauties, but also the knowledge of the different life style of the local residents, can be initially experimented in both provinces and specifically in the villages of Pedro Sanchez in El Seibo and in Bayaguana in Monteplata.

In order to realize the pilot initiatives a project must be elaborated and therefore funded with the following aims:

- Support the Local Economic Development Agency and the organization CIELO in addressing topics relative to sustainable tourism (community hospitality) and project management
- Create two community hotels with 8 – 10 rooms each for a total occupancy of 8 – 16 tourists
- Support the creation of the local management unit (training and investments) which in an initial phase can be personified by the Local Economic Development Agency and the organization CIELO
- Establish a fund for microcredit managed by the LEDAs for the creation of new enterprises in the tourist sector related to the accommodation structure
- Support the structure in its promotional activities, especially in the first 2 years
- Support the area and the local actors in elaborating a Tourist Marketing Plan which conceives sustainable tourism as the path to development.

In order to reach the aforementioned objectives it is necessary to support the acquisition of the necessary know-how to the local actors and the ART GOLD expert in local economic development. To this aim the following has been agreed:

- Organize an internship within BIC Lazio that will be attended by Mr. Franco Jimmy Torres, ART GOLD local economic development expert, possibly within the month of March 2009.
- Organize a mission of representatives of the LEDA of Monteplata and the organization CIELO, headed by Sen. Charles Mariotti, within the month of June to analyze the innovation *Albergo Diffuso* in the region Lazio and in Central Italy.

In order to facilitate the promotion of the project and its fund-raising, and to support the marketing of the “community accommodation structures” the project’s kick-off will be the launch of initiatives called “Become a Chocolate Producer” which will provide to interested persons the possibility of supporting sustainable development in the provinces of El Seibo and of Montepata. In particular the initiative foresees the creation of a specific package to be promoted and sold containing the temporary ownership of 10 chocolate plants. The client will receive then a plate containing his name placed under his trees, a package of chocolate products shipped directly at his home once a year for ten years and the possibility of receiving rebates in the accommodation structures and for the use of tourist services if he/she ever decides to come and visit the provinces. On the other hand the generated income will be used partially to pay the producer, partially to pay the services to the client and partially to the Local Economic Development Agency of the province for co-funding the project.

