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The interactive guide of the European route of cooperatives launched today

An approach based on passive touristic consumption and the unsustainable exploitation of many destinations has showed its limits and negative effects. As a consequence, a growing range of more responsible and sustainable experiences are being offered to tourists including, for instance, the promotion of local industrial and cultural heritage. Several cooperatives all around Europe are offering a sustainable and innovative tourism experience, while spreading their values and business model based on democracy and solidarity. To compile and spread all those realities, the new interactive guide of Cooproute, the European route of cooperative culture, has been launched today.

This interactive itinerary has just been unveiled in an event hosted by the Emilia- Romagna region in Bologna (Italy) where the tourism potential of cooperatives which contribute to promoting cooperative culture and values have been discussed among different stakeholders. This already includes, for example, a worker cooperative in Spain recycling and organising bike tours, another in Malta running the Rural Heritage Trail, a social cooperative in Italy managing tourist areas that integrate disadvantaged groups, not to forget the museums dedicated to the cooperative legacy. The guide is a dynamic tool allowing people to discover and visit destinations which provide a learning cooperative experience.

"The density of cooperatives and of local wealth are directly co-related and there are several studies and empirical proof showing that. Tourism is intrinsically central to CECOP even more if we think about the potential for youth employment. The itinerary provides another strong opportunity as a learning experience for students", says the President of CECOP, Luca Dal Pozzo.

To date, 82 destinations have already been selected. There are mainly from Italy where the idea of the project emerged, but also Spain, the United Kingdom and other countries such as France, Malta, Portugal, and Ireland. Starting from today, all sites that want to strengthen their tourism potential, while promoting the history, culture and values of the cooperative movement, will be able to apply through the Cooproute online guide at www.cooproute.coop

CECOP, in partnership with other cooperative organisations, local authorities and entities from all around Europe, has designed this innovative transnational itinerary in the field of cultural and industrial tourism, in a framework of an 18 month project co-financed by the European Commission. This route gathers cooperative enterprises preserving traditional local skills and products and developing material and immaterial cultural heritage in Europe. Other sites and destinations that illustrate cooperative culture and values will be part of the itinerary, such as the Rochdale Pioneers Museum in the UK, which is considered to be the birthplace of the modern cooperative movement. The Cooproute itinerary aims to be recognized as a European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe.

"This first step co-financed by the European Commission ends in February 2015. By then, we need to show more destinations on the website. We hope that more countries and more cooperatives will join. On the top of that, we will present the project to the Council of Europe to be known as the European Cultural Route. It's really important to show that cooperative culture is indeed an important part of European culture", declared Bruno Roelants, Secretary General of CECOP.

In this crisis landscape, this idea contributes to unify European people through cooperatives and their commitment to sustainable tourism", concluded Luca Dal Pozzo.

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CECOP – CICOPA Europe (European Confederation of Worker Cooperatives, Social Cooperatives and Social and Participative Enterprises) groups national organisations in 16 countries which in turn affiliate over 50.000 cooperative and participative enterprises in industry and services, the vast majority being SMEs, and employing 1.4 million workers across Europe. Most of them are characterised by the fact that the employees in their majority are members-owners, while some of them are second-degree enterprises for SMEs. More than a thousand worker cooperatives in the CECOP network were created as business transfers to employees of conventional enterprises in crisis or without heirs. Furthermore, around 4.000 of the enterprises of our network are specialised in the reintegration of disadvantaged and marginalised workers (disabled, long-term unemployed, ex prisoners, addicts, etc).