**PRESS RELEASE**

**Europe comes together over the role of ecotourism in nature conservation and sustainable local development**

**Brasov, October 30th, 2013:** For the first time some of the most important actors in ecotourism and sustainable development in Europe came to a common understanding regarding the role of ecotourism for sustainable local development and nature conservation in Europe. This was achieved during the 2nd European Ecotourism Conference held in Poiana Brasov, Romania during October 23rd-25th, 2013. More than 80 experts in ecotourism, nature conservation and sustainable development from 22 European countries attended this event.

As a result of the conference we came to the common conclusion of all participants that ecotourism destinations in Europe should have: a protected area associated with the destination, a critical mass of local ecotourism businesses, a sustainability plan under implementation, in developing ecotourism, nature and local culture as the main ingredients in product development and marketing. Also, an ecotourism destination includes the active participation of local communities based on shared values, empowered through education and increasing awareness.

The full text of the declaration can be read on the next page.

Andrei Blumer, the president of the Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER) stated: “We are actually stepping into a new conservation and development paradigm where the protected areas start looking beyond their borders not only from public awareness perspective but from the economic and social development perspective, too. In other words, ecotourism succeeds to bring real economic and social value for nature conservation, integrating it into regional development”.

The Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER) has achieved a partnership for nature conservation and tourism development among tourism associations, non-governmental associations acting in local development and nature conservation, nature conservation projects and travel agencies.

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The *2nd European Ecotourism Conference* was held on October 23-25th 2013, in Poiana Brasov, Romania, and it was organised by the [Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER)](http://eco-romania.ro/) within the framework of the [*European Ecotourism Knowledge Network (ECOLNET*](http://www.ecotourism-network.eu)*)*, supported by the European Commission and [Naturefriends International](http://www.nfi.at/).

*ECOLNET is a 3-year Project co-financed by the European Commission, Lifelong Learning Programme, Transveral Programmes, Key Activity 3 – ICT Networks. The Conference is organised in cooperation with ECOLNET partners (*[PRISMA Centre for Development Studies](http://www.prismanet.gr/) (Greece), [ECOTRANS](http://www.ecotrans.org/) (Germany), [Estonian Ecotourism Association](http://www.ecotourism.ee) (Estonia), [Estonian University of Life Sciences](https://www.emu.ee/en/) (Estonia), [ECOTONO](http://www.ecotono.es) (Spain), [Silvacultura](http://www.silvacultura.com) (Finland), [Centro Turistico Studentesco e Giovanile](http://www.cts.it) (Italy), [Imaginary](http://www.i-maginary.it/en/) (Italy), [PAN Parks](http://www.panparks.org) (European network), ECEAT Projects (the Netherlands), [Edinburgh Napier University](http://www.napier.ac.uk) (U.K) and [Association of Ecotourism in Romania](http://www.eco-romania.ro/)*.*

**Declaration of the 2nd European Ecotourism Conference**

**Following the deliberations and discussion of the participants of the 2nd European Ecotourism Conference…..**

***We, the participants, recognise these common needs:***

* To bring sustainability and nature conservation to the destination region;
* To develop a common understanding of ecotourism in Europe as a conservation and development tool;
* To co-ordinate communications for ecotourism destinations in order to attract guests;
* And to communicate the benefits of ecotourism to policy and decision makers.

and,

***We agree with the following ecotourism destination concept***

Ecotourism destinations in Europe should have:

* A protected area associated with the destination;
* A critical mass of local ecotourism businesses;
* A sustainability plan under implementation, in developing ecotourism;
* Nature and local culture as the main ingredients in product development and marketing;
* Active participation of local communities, empowered through education and awareness raising, based on shared values.

***We the participants, including ecotourism and sustainable tourism associations and networks, ecotourism businesses, education institutions, experts and consultants on ecotourism,***

***endorse the declaration and commit to use it as guidance for future actions.***

***We urge organisations involved in awarding ecotourism destinations and businesses to collaborate and establish a road map in order to meet the needs expressed in this declaration.***