

The **Cycle tourism Congress Costa Brava**, to be held in Santa Cristina d'Aro, Sant Feliu de Guixols and Platja d'Aro from October 1 to 4 is born to be a meeting point for all institutional, entrepreneurial and social stakeholders related to cycle tourism. It also wants to be a platform for the exchange of information, reflections, best practices and projects related to a very fast-growing tourism industry in which cycling, not being the leitmotiv, is paramount. A tourism industry that represents a cornerstone of a new entertainment culture based on healthy activities and respectful ways of enjoying the environment and the cultural heritage of territories.

Undoubtedly, it would be a big mistake for the Catalan tourism industry and the national public administration to underestimate a tourism trend that mainstreams non-motorized mobility. We consider it to be at the heart of deep-seated values of the XXI century's society: the preservation of the environment, respect for biological and cultural diversity, a sustainable management of natural resources, energy saving, the minimization of waste and emissions and leading a healthy life. Cycle tourism is today a fast growing tourism industry and its growing potential is notorious.

In Catalonia the tourism industry contributes very significantly to the national GDP and employs more than 400.000 people. Furthermore, Catalonia has the necessary assets to become a privileged cycle tourism destination: a mild climate, very diverse and rich landscapes (960.000 protected hectares of high ecological and visual value), a large number of museums and art collections (467); 2000 monuments and monumental compounds; a very rich and singular popular culture and an outstanding tourism industry. Catalonia has what it takes to be able to attract this new tourism trend and to satisfy the specific requirements derived from it.

It is obvious that both the tourism industry and public administrations will have to make a considerable effort to adapt their offer to the specific needs of cycle tourism. Consequently, we the institutions responsible for mobility matters will have to support the improvement and creation of the necessary infrastructures to enable non-motorized mobility. We will have to spot and signalize itineraries; improve existing inter urban paths and build new ones, boost our efforts in the implementation of bike lanes; putting in place bike racks; authorize the carrying of bicycles on public transports, etc.

It is important to underline that all these actions for the promotion of cycle tourism are perfectly coherent with national policies for the promotion of non-motorized means of transport which, together with the promotion of public transport and the improvement of vehicles' energy efficiency, are an essential part of the country's strategy for a sustainable and safe mobility. Today, one of the essential policies of the *Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques* is the promotion of cycling in certain everyday life journeys. This policy aims at putting into facts new civic priorities of contemporary Catalonia and at responding to the environmental challenges of our times. In that spirit, the Catalan Government passed the *Pla Estratègic de la Bicicleta, 2009-2012* on December 2008. This document defines strategic working areas and establishes specific commitments. Furthermore, it approved the celebration of the 1st and 2nd *Congrés Català de la Bicicleta*, held in 2006 and 2008 with the support of the *Departament* and other Catalan civic organizations. Undeniably, the 3rd *Congrés de la Bicicleta Lleida Catalunya* to be held in Lleida in April 2010 will constitute a new boost for these policies.

We are committed in going forward in the normalization of the bicycle as the best means of transport for many of everyday life's journeys. Today, the Cycle tourism Congress Costa Brava invites us all to reflect on and foster this normalization in the areas of spare time and holidays. It is a timely and essential task in Catalonia, both environmentally and economically.

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