

## CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM IN CATALONIA

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The issue of Knowledge Management (KM) and the improvement of the competitiveness of tourism destinations is, since the more recent years, one of the most innovative research topics at the global level (Gretzel and Fesenmaier, 2003; Clark, 2006 and Heath, 2006). As Racherla, Xiang and Fesenmaier (2006) point out, the characteristics of the tourism industry –with many SME firms- and the extensive and growing use of Information Technologies (IT) give to the KM a central role in the new challenges that destinations have to manage (Cooper and Macneil, 2005). In this sense, some academic research is finding that KM contributes in a relevant manner to establish competitive advantages among destinations (Grant, 1996 and Cooper, 2006). Creating a KM framework is a way to develop new processes for tourism policies and destination management matters at the local and regional level. A KM framework can allow to share tacit and explicit knowledge flows between academics and the industry and specially to transform tacit knowledge into explicit (Cooper, 2004; Moscardo, 2006 and Ayala, 2000). From this point of view, knowledge is becoming a significant issue within the destination business environment and, as a result, a key factor for their competitiveness (Kahle, 2002).

After some decades of a strong tourism growth, local tourism destinations in Catalonia, and Catalonia as a whole destination, are currently in a phase of deep changes caused both by the transformation of the expectations of the demand and by the new challenges that destinations have to manage from the supply side. In this context, tourism and leisure in Catalonia has to find new answers to maintain and enhance their competitiveness in a global context. To respond to this, the University Rovira i Virgili has developed a strategy to promote, in a partnership with the private entrepreneurs and other public agencies, a framework for tourism KM under the name of Science Park for Tourism and Leisure of Costa Daurada (SPT-CD) founded in May 2006.

The SPT-CD project, now in process of development, includes a research-development-innovation (R+D+I) unit that will host the Catalan Institute for Tourism Research, currently being set up in close collaboration with the Catalan Government and the partner University of Girona; a tourism analysis and training unit, that is hosting the already existing Tourism Statistical Observatory of Costa Daurada, and a business creation unit, that will host, among others, the Association of Tourist Entrepreneurs of Costa Daurada. R+D+I and training activities use scientific personnel from various URV departments and research groups, and employ their own staff in specific projects. Though the main mission of the SPT-CD is to produce strategic knowledge for the development of a competitive tourism sector in Catalonia, research is carried out at global level and with international standards. Key R+D+I areas of the SPT-CD are principles, methods and planning processes for sustainable tourism; tourism and leisure product development; quality control in tourism products and destinations; web tools for tourism marketing and distribution; IT for the tourism industry; innovations in tourism marketing, tourism and global changes issues