

# Presentation

The sustainability of human activities is becoming indispensable for mankind's survival on our Planet. Natural phenomena take place according to rules that cannot be ignored, but carefully taken in account when taking decisions on how to satisfy primary and secondary needs. The ongoing climate change is one of the first consequences of an excessive use of fossil fuels, and of a market economy in which consumption is not any more the means, but has become the aim of economic activities. The progressive industrialization, that took place in the last few centuries, has in a first step satisfied the needs for affluence of huge numbers of people, creating jobs and giving origin to the welfare that has characterized the Western countries in the XX century. An acceleration of this model has led to increase consumptions in an uncontrolled way, so to increase the economic flows on which indexes such as GDP, used to evaluate countries' economic wellness, are based. The mass media society has imposed behaviour models and systems of values driven by the market, and not by people's needs, inducing consumption mechanisms that are often incompatible with a reasonable and balanced use of limited resources. Moreover, the unsustainable behaviour models have been extended in a few decades from a few hundred millions to billions people, with undeniable consequences for the planet's health.

Tourism, as well as all human activities, is part of this matter. A glance to its origins and history shows how it responds to the human curiosity, to the desire to see new countries and different ways of life; this was true for ancient times travellers, for medieval pilgrims, for the rich British tourists that in relatively huge numbers visited Italy at the turn of XIX century, and this was often linked, in the past centuries, with trade activities that required trips to remote countries, such as the case of Florentine fabrics merchants. Tourism too, in the most recent years, has become a consumable, supporting a relevant commercial network; yet, the dominance of a mere consumption scheme has led to neglect the cultural aspects of tourism, the understanding of sites' history and of different cultures, the full appreciation of the cultural content and of the quality of typical products, thus enhancing commercial aspects at the lowest level.

Politics are nowadays more and more dependent upon economy, and the short-sighted interests of involved stakeholders are often less and less used to build up strategic plans for the future, their action being usually limited to the management of everyday problems.

For tourism, as well as for other economic fields, we need to start a reflection, through research, not only to exam its role in the light of sustainability parameters, but to bring it back to its original *raison d'être*, redeeming it from the aberrations of a slobbish consumerism.

The Ente Cassa Di Risparmio di Firenze, that together with Regione Toscana supported the publication of this volume and the organization of this Conference, has initiated a reflection about sustainability, as refereed to a number of different economic fields, such as agriculture, handicraft, energy production, and has established an Observatory of Craftjobs in art, fashion, small enterprises and tourism, aiming to promote high quality productions having a close link with local history and being based on craftsman creativity, and to support the role of local minor museums.

In the above mentioned perspective, the debate of experts from all over the world, and the gathering of contributions from researches aiming to focus the links between tourism and territory, may represent a relevant step in the construction of a new millennium, in which the real values on which human action must be based will be reconsidered and used to establish local economic growth.

*Giampiero Maracchi*  
Chairman of Fondazione per il Clima e la Sostenibilità