

# Sicily's Story...



A joint study promoted by the UniCredit Group and BCG (The Boston Consulting Group) in 2008 has indicated Congress Tourism as one of the most concrete development opportunities for local economies. In Italy in 2007, the events sector generated business valued at 24 billion Euros and 20.6 million people participated in meetings and congresses (data from the Italian Congress Observatory, elaborated by BCG). Furthermore, the study identified the role of a regional Convention Bureau as being the key to promoting Congress Tourism. Following on from the example of more established national and international Convention Bureau's, such an organisation would be able to promote and market the destination and coordinate the supply chain.

Southern Italy, with its variety in landscapes, its history, artistic heritage and traditions has all the characteristics needed to provide a fundamental contribution to the development of our country. Furthermore, the climate is suited to tourism all year round even though tourism has been strongly concentrated in the summer months till now.

The UniCredit Group, despite its international structure which has placed it amongst the top ranking European banking groups, has always devoted particular attention to the needs of the smaller local realities in which it operates and to their development, with considerable respect for their specificity. Thanks to the acquisition of one of the most territory-rooted Sicilian banks, UniCredit's ties with Sicily are now even stronger.

By mapping existing facilities on the island and evaluating the potential development of the meeting industry in Sicily, it has become apparent that the events sector could be the driving force for tourism as a whole. It is in this context that Sicilia Convention Bureau (SiciliaCB) was set up in December 2008, temporarily fully owned by the UniCredit Group, with a view to providing an instrument for Sicilian companies and institutions to develop the enormous potential for tourism and meetings in the region.

SiciliaCB began operations in January 2009 and has since then developed and continues to implement a territorial marketing policy aimed at promoting the Sicilian brand in Italy, and especially abroad, with a view to strengthening its profile and generating a capillary network of related economic activities in the territory.

SiciliaCB does not organise events, nor does it finance or support individual initiatives; its main objective is to promote and market the Sicilian territory in order to attract and foster meetings, congresses, conventions, conferences and small to large national and international events. Sicilia Convention Bureau's vocation is to promote all the provinces in the region to the same level, whilst highlighting individual peculiarities and excellence. In this context, SiciliaCB seeks synergy with public institutions and, where necessary, provides instruments and valid support to those areas which do have institutions capable of taking on expensive and often complex marketing initiatives such as a constant presence, especially in foreign markets.

Sicilia Convention Bureau's objectives are clear: to increase the number of conventions organised in Sicily each year by marketing the territory through an appropriate communications campaign, by participating in international Trade Fairs and important national and international events. During its first year of activity, Sicilia Convention Bureau's strategy did not include affiliating any Sicilian companies or operators. Yet, SiciliaCB's marketing activity was to the benefit of Sicily's entire congress supply chain.

However, in order to ensure continuity in its marketing strategy, Sicilia Convention Bureau is convinced it is crucial for private operators who believe in the project to join the initiative and a membership campaign was launched in February 2010. The fact that membership now stands at around 150 members is confirmation of the validity of the project and the quality of the work that Sicilia Convention Bureau has carried out in this first start-up phase. Sicilia Convention Bureau has also taken on specific initiatives aimed at promoting the Sicilian brand, such as the agreement with an international marketing, sales and agency organisation specialised in tourism and transport with 30 people operating in Italy, Europe and the United States.

**SiciliaCB's results in its first year of activity have been excellent. Since first appearing at IMEX in 2009, 15 events have been confirmed (and a further 20 are in the pipeline), with an average participation rate of 350 participants per event and a turnover of over 1.75 million Euros for the island.**