

SUSTOUR-MED

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KA210-VET - Small-scale partnerships in vocational education and training



GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes a Guide for tourism professionals, small hotel owners and relevant destination management stakeholders on how to integrate sustainability principles in the operation of their tourism related businesses. The Guide focuses on the context of Mediterranean countries exploring similarities and opportunities that are relevant for the promotion and uptake of sustainable practices among small enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector.

The Guide has been developed under the framework of the SUSTOUR-MED project (2021-2-EL01-KA210-VET-000048093) and will be used as the main training material during the organisation of two workshops in summer 2023, one in Greece and one in Italy, with 15 participants each. The Guide also intends to be a useful resource for all interested tourism stakeholders and SME representatives around the Mediterranean, providing them with some basic knowledge on sustainability related concepts as well practical examples on how those can be integrated in a tourism business operational context.

The aim of this document is to provide the theoretical knowledge behind sustainable tourism aspects in a straightforward way. It will focus on the EU and especially the Mediterranean context.

Also it will outline the particularities of the two SUSTOUR-MED targeted regions (Messina in Sicily and Korinthia in Greece) which share many similarities in terms of their touristic product and their environmental context. The regions' background outline is the result of the needs analysis research that the two SUSTOUR-MED partners (Green Village - Greece and Education in Progress - Italy) undertook in the framework of the project.

Finally, the Guide's chapter are in line with the defined SUSTOUR-MED themes. Each chapter includes an introduction and explanation of the respective theme, as well as a relevant best practice and case study which constitutes a practical example of how a tourism business can address the respective sustainability aspect.

The full list of the identified best practices is available on the SUSTOUR-MED website.

1. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism is one of the EU's major economic sectors. Especially among countries in the Mediterranean region, tourism accounts for a large percentage of their GDP, larger than the EU average. This sector has been challenged during the recent years, mainly because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent protective measures. The sector experienced a sudden 60% decrease, which in turn impacted heavily the societies in the Mediterranean countries, which are relying heavily on it for their development.

On the other hand, most Mediterranean countries, and especially specific regions inside the countries, are also suffering from the impact (both environmental and societal) of mass tourism. Some Mediterranean regions are very popular holiday destinations globally and they attract large numbers of foreign and local tourists, while often lacking the preparation, organisation and infrastructure to accommodate them in a sustainable way.

Sustainability is a holistic concept, that is based on three pillars: environment, society and economy. The most credible definition for sustainability came from the United Nations

World Commission of Development and Environment: “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

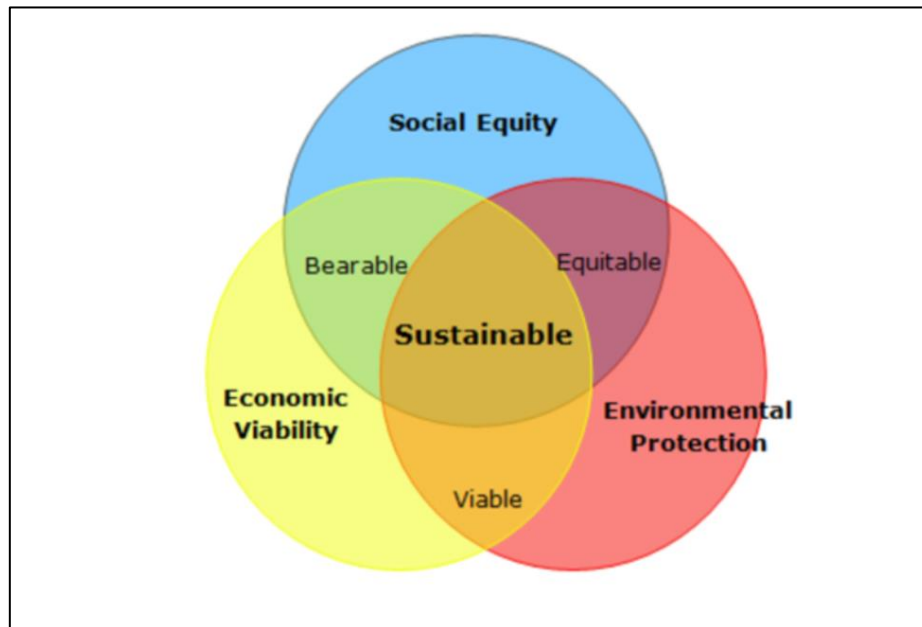


Figure 1 The Three Pillars of Sustainability

It is evident that tourism, as a general human activity, does encompass all three pillars of sustainability in a direct way. It has a direct impact on the natural environment (pollution, mass tourism, waste etc), it influences societal aspects (such as employability, inequalities, cultural contexts etc) and it is directly linked to the economy. This is the reason why much effort has been put especially on the tourism sector, for accommodating its transition to a more sustainable model.

Following the above, the concept of **sustainable tourism** was introduced in the last years and encompasses all aspects of tourism operation that can integrate sustainability related practices. The transition process towards a more sustainable tourism model has been accelerated due to the pandemic and its aftermath.

Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organization as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

1.1 EU Context

The UN offers an action plan to transform tourism with five priority areas including addressing the climate crisis and mitigate its socio-economic consequences on populations’ livelihoods, (such as women’s employment and economic security). The UN also recommends boosting competitiveness and enhancing resilience, promoting innovation and sustainability of the tourism industry as well as the creation of partnerships to transform tourism and achieve the SDGs.

As part of the **Transition Pathway for Tourism** published in early 2022, the **European Commission** establishes several priorities for the future of tourism and they all take environmental sustainability and climate neutrality (referred to as the green transition) into account.

To achieve its ambitions linked to the above mentioned priorities the European Union needs to follow the objectives announced as part of the **Green Deal**, aspiring to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The European Green Deal calls for a standard method to substantiate green claims through economic adaptation to the digital age and by promoting equality and social inclusion. Tourism, as one of the major industries in Europe, is in the place to act as the forefront model of the sustainable transition.

In order to do so, investment on education and capacity building for professionals is needed, The recently published **GreenComp framework** (2022) by the EU offers a basis for the development of educational programmes promoting sustainability related skills for various target groups. SUSTOUR-MED has taken into account its structure and contents to develop the present guide.

The Covid-19 crisis and its consequences on tourism accelerated already trending changes in the industry, As outlined by several studies and reports (including global surveys by actors such as Booking.com) there is a growing percentage of travellers and tourists that take sustainability into account for their choices. For instance, latest studies show that 82% of Europeans are willing to change their travel habits for more sustainable options. Moreover, a third of Europeans would even be ready to pay more to support local nature and local communities.

The above evolving market reality means that tourism businesses need to evolve as well to address the market shifts and customer preferences as well as to invest on their resilience in order to be able to overcome potential future crises.

One of the main challenges for this transition comes from the nature of the tourism industry. Across the EU more than 85% of tourism related businesses are SMEs or micro-enterprises. Especially in Italy and Greece this percentage is even higher than the EU average. Since micro-enterprises and SMEs constitute the majority of the industry as a whole they are at the forefront of the transition need. However due to their nature, scale and scope, they often lack resources and more importantly, the basic knowledge of sustainability principles and existing good practices. They also often lack access to relevant tools and potential learning opportunities. Tools, approaches and technologies are necessary to foster the green transition for SMEs in a straightforward way.

In addition to a lack of knowledge, tourism SMEs also need more opportunities to exchange practical knowledge with peers and as a result face an important obstacle in adopting new practices.

Another priority for tourism needs to be to make local communities key players for tourism development. Within local communities, tourism can be used for local renewable inputs in the energy mix. Tourist areas experiencing high seasonal demand can increase circularity, energy security and generate secondary income year-round with projects based on local renewable energy. Through social economy approaches, local communities would be at the centre of the transition towards sustainable tourism

Data in tourism is equally important for the European Commission. Indeed, tourism operators generate data continuously, creating a great amount of data that could be used to better match tourism supply and demand and creating new types of services. Interoperable technical specifications for tourism data sharing could also facilitate sharing data with other ecosystems and help develop a common language and governance framework for using data which is a priority area for the digital transition for tourism. The European data economy should integrate tourism but in order to do so all operators, users and providers need to work together and the data space for tourism should provide interoperability between every stakeholder.

1.2 SUSTOUR-MED Themes

The SUSTOUR-MED consortium has identified six broad theme areas that small hotels and tourism businesses can focus on for integrating sustainability principles in their operation. Based on the specific theme identification, good practices from Greece, Italy and beyond have been identified and will act a supplementary material to this Guide. The SUSTOUR-MED themes are:

1. **Waste Management**
2. **Energy Efficiency**
3. **Locality**
4. **Digital tools**
5. **Accessibility & Social Inclusion**
6. **Marketing, Communication, Awareness**

The above themes are loosely based on the **Global Sustainable Tourism Council's industry criteria for hotels** ([link](#)) and are linked with the multifaceted aspects of sustainability.

This document intends to act as a simple to use step by step guide for tourism SMEs and microenterprises on how to address the identified themes in a sustainable way.

Each theme has its dedicated chapter in this Guide. The structure of the theme chapters are based on a short introduction to the respective theme, then an outline of the most important reasons why this theme is crucial for small tourism businesses in the Peloponnese and Sicily and finally some practical measures that each tourism business can undertake for addressing the theme. Finally, a best practice (drawn from the pool of SUSTOUR-MED Good Practices) corresponding to each theme is presented as an example.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT: GREECE

Statistics and General Information

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in the economic and social life of Greece. It has been a key element of the country's economic growth and social development since the 1970s. Greece has always been a major tourist destination and for its rich culture and

history (18 UNESCO World Heritage sites – among the most in the EU and the world), as well as for its natural beauty, nice weather, its long coastline, many islands, and beaches.

In 2019 Greece attracted as many as 31.3 million visitors making it one of the most visited countries in Europe and the world, thus contributing to approximately 24% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (16), a higher percentage than the EU average (17). The sector directly employed 381.800 people in 2018, accounting for 10.0% of total employment in the country. (18) A substantial percentage when considering that it does not include the jobs that are indirectly linked to tourism. It is also interesting to note that more than 99% of tourism related businesses in the country are SMEs, in line with the EU average. This fact poses specific challenges towards the transition to a more sustainable and digital tourism operation model.

Tourists from other EU countries account for almost two-thirds of total visits. The markets of Germany and France grew significantly in 2018, recording a total of 4.4 million and 1.5 million visits respectively, as did arrivals from the United States which reached 1.1 million visits. (19) Domestic tourists made 5.7 million trips in 2018, and only 4.7% of those were for business purposes. However, the majority of domestic visitors stayed in non-rented accommodation, with only 34.2% of visits using paid accommodation. This poses a challenge for destinations that target mainly domestic visitors and are not as popular to international tourists (20).

The above numbers fell by approximately 80% in 2020 due to the covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent protective measures imposed. Since Greece has been traditionally relying heavily on revenues from tourism and tourism-related sectors, the impact of the pandemic and the travel restrictions was severe and many tourism SMEs relied solely on governmental support for their survival during 2020 and 2021.

Tourism Governance in Greece

Highlighting the importance of the tourism industry in Greece, the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for related policy making and development. It introduces legislation on tourism, agrees the strategic marketing plan, stimulates investment, and works to improve the quality and competitiveness of Greek tourism. The Ministry co-operates closely with other interested ministries and tourism bodies, such as the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises and the Research Institute for Tourism.

The implementation of the Marketing Strategy is carried out by the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNT0), which operates a network of 16 offices overseas. The Hellenic Chamber of Hotels is the Government's statutory advisor on tourism, as well as the authority responsible for the official classification of hotels, rooms and apartments.

At the regional and local level, regions and municipalities plan and implement programmes and activities for tourism development and promotion. All promotional activities require the approval of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, to ensure that these campaigns align with the national strategy.

Green Transition of Tourism in Greece

Following the unprecedented crisis due to the pandemic, Greece's recovery and resilience plan responds to the urgent need of fostering a strong recovery and making Greece ready for the future. It was developed throughout 2021 and was finally approved by the European Commission on 17 June 2021. The comprehensive plan named Greece 2.0, targeting various economic sectors, includes €17.77 billion in grants and €12.73 billion in loans with the aim to support Greece to become more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

The tourism sector plays an important role as part of the Plan and several key projects have received the go-ahead. Among these are (21):

- the upgrade of tourist port infrastructure (161.05 million euros)
- the further development of mountain and winter tourism products and facilities (such as ski resorts) and the revision and simplification of legislation covering construction, licensing and operation of relevant infrastructure (56.57 million euros)
- the introduction of educational and upskilling programs for 18,000 tourism industry employees (43.97 million euros)
- the development of health and wellness tourism and the utilisation of the country's thermal springs (28.46 million euros)
- the development of diving and underwater tourism (22.05 million euros).
- improving the management of destinations through the establishment and operation of local or regional DMOs and of observatories for sustainable tourist development (18.45 million euros)
- making beaches accessible to people with mobility problems or disabilities with the construction of some 250 semi-permanent structures (17.21 million euros)
- developing a network that will link the agri-food, gastronomy and tourism sectors (dubbed Agri-Food, Gastronomy and Tourism Interconnection System – AGTIS), which will serve as the country's management organisation / (DMO) for gastronomy and agriculture (17.18 million euros)

In December 2021 the Ministry of Tourism passed a bill setting out the new priorities for the sector which include setting out the terms of operation for destination management and promotion organisations (DMOs) and developing wellness and sustainable tourism (22).

2.1 Regional Context: Korinthia, Peloponnese

In the region of Korinthia in the Peloponnese, and more specifically around the town of Xylokastro where the partner Green Village is based, there are specific challenges and opportunities for the tourism sector. The region is not specifically marketed to international tourists; it is heavily relying on domestic tourism and mostly on people with second residence in the area. Moreover, there is an evident seasonality (during the summer months) of tourism in the region, and in the last few years the tourist season has been shrinking for various reasons mostly related to the impact of the economic crisis linked to the decrease in disposable income of domestic tourists. All the above pose severe challenges for the sustainability of tourism businesses.

However, the proximity to the metropolitan area of Athens and the potential access to capacitated human capital together with the fact that the somewhat underdeveloped in terms of tourism region has a large variety of beauties to offer to tourists such as beaches, mountains, forests, lakes, and cultural sights, as well as various local products, increases the potential for the development of novel, alternative tourism offers.

Moreover, following the newly passed legislation, a dedicated DMO was set up in 2021 named Moreas, in order to promote the Peloponnese as a tourist destination, and Xylokastro – Evrostini municipality is part of this initiative (23).

So, the engagement of relevant stakeholders and the involvement of capacitated and skilled tourism and destination management professionals who in turn will be able to drive the integration of digital tools for a more efficient, modern, and sustainable tourism offer will indeed unfold the region's potential as a sustainable and alternative tourism destination.

3. NATIONAL CONTEXT: ITALY

Statistics and General Information

Tourism is one of Italy's fastest growing and most profitable industrial sectors, Italy ranks in top place among the countries most aspired to by travelers, but drops in the rankings when it comes to actual numbers.

Prior to the pandemic, Italy ranked as the 5th most visited international tourism destination, attracting around 65 million tourists in 2019. From 2000 to 2019, Italy's tourism demand grew by an average of 2.5% per year.

However, in 2020, Italy experienced a sharp decline in tourism due to the pandemic, with a reduction of 57.6% in arrivals and 52.3% in stays. The pandemic had a greater impact on inbound tourism, which saw a significant decrease compared to the EU average. Domestic tourism also experienced a decline but to a lesser extent.

In 2021, there were signs of recovery as restrictions eased. Italy saw an increase in arrivals by 32.6% and stays by 34.4% compared to 2020. International demand showed a stronger rebound with arrivals up by 51.7% and stays increasing by 57.5%. However, the recovery is still ongoing, and tourism demand in 2021 remained below pre-pandemic levels.

It's important to note that the data provided covers a specific period, and the situation may have evolved since then. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact global tourism, and the recovery process can vary based on changing circumstances and measures implemented by authorities.

In 2022, the latest data from Istat reveals positive trends in tourism recovery for the month of January. Compared to 2020, there was a significant increase of 271% in the number of tourists and a 267% increase in the number of days of stay. This recovery accounted for

approximately 65% of the arrivals and 70.3% of the nights spent in January 2019. The recovery was more pronounced for international tourists, with a notable increase of 980.7% in arrivals and 784.8% in stays, compared to domestic tourists' increase of 185.6% in arrivals and 176.3% in stays.

Despite the global spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, the expenditure of both foreign travelers in Italy (€1.5 billion) and Italian travelers abroad (€1.1 billion) in January 2022 exceeded the figures recorded in January 2021 (which were 0.4 and 0.5 billion, respectively). However, spending by international travelers in Italy remained 33.2% lower compared to the same month in 2019. Italy's tourism balance of payments recorded a surplus of €0.4 billion in January 2022, slightly higher than the levels observed in January 2019 and 2020, prior to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Source:Italian Bank)

Tourism Governance in Italy

In Italy, tourism governance and funding involve various entities. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Activities and Tourism plays a central role, along with the Permanent Conference for Relations between the State, Regions, and Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, as well as the Joint Conference of Regions and Municipalities.

The Ministry's Directorate-General for Tourism sets the strategic policy agenda, while regions have responsibilities such as regulating tourism businesses, implementing marketing activities, and managing European Structural Funds. Provinces and municipalities also have the authority to establish local regulations for the tourism sector.

Additionally, the Directorate-General for Tourism oversees the National Italian Tourism Agency (ENIT) and the Italian Alpine Club. ENIT's main function is to market and promote Italy as a tourist destination. ENIT transformed from a public body to a public economic entity in 2015, and it collaborates with regions, autonomous provinces, local authorities, and other public bodies.

Tourism in Italy receives support from the Culture and Innovation 2014-20 program, funded by European Union Structural Funds. A significant portion of the budget is allocated to developing cultural centers in five southern regions: Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily.

Furthermore, the government operates the Tourism Investment Fund, managed by the National Investment Bank Cassa Depositi e Prestiti. Launched in 2014, the fund has a ceiling of EUR 250 million, with a substantial amount already invested by 2016. Its purpose is to facilitate development between public assets and the private real estate market.

Italian Government invest 135 million Euro To encourage the emergence and growth of 30 Green Communities, that is, local communities coordinated and associated with each other that want to implement joint plans for sustainable development from the point of view of energy and the environment, as well as economic and social.

Green Transition of Tourism in Italy

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, green tourism has gained even more momentum in Italy.

For 74% of Italians, sustainable tourism is the safest post-pandemic option, both in terms of environmental preservation and health considerations, as it favors open spaces.

According to 84% of respondents, sustainability is both a necessity and an opportunity for economic growth and development.

An increasing number of Italians are willing to pay higher rates to stay in environmentally friendly accommodations equipped with solar panels and energy-efficient practices. Consequently, Italy is evolving into a prime destination for sustainable tourism.

Monitoring by ENIT (Italian National Tourist Board) reveals the presence of over 20 smoke-free and plastic-free beaches in Italy, as well as green paths and itineraries suitable for electric vehicle travel. Numerous accommodations possess international eco-sustainability certifications.

The Ministry of Tourism, emphasizes the importance of sustainable tourism in Italy. Italians are willing to pay a premium for environmentally friendly practices and are increasingly choosing accommodation facilities with environmental sustainability certification. Italy is leading in adopting measures to reduce CO2 production in the hospitality sector, with an abatement potential of 61% compared to Europe's 47%.

To promote sustainable tourism and address issues like overcrowding, the Ministry of Tourism has issued three Public Notices. These notices target accommodation facilities and tourist businesses. The measures include funding for projects that encourage sustainable tourism, obtaining sustainability certification, and creating a list of accredited bodies to issue certifications. The overall budget for the three-year period from 2023 to 2025 is 25 million euros.

Italy's vast landscapes and natural areas provide a unique advantage. With the commitment of tourism operators to sustainability and the promotion of eco-friendly structures and transportation, Italy is becoming one of the leading countries in green tourism.

In summary, Green Tourism in Italy encourages responsible and sustainable travel, respecting the environment and contributing to its protection.

Supporting the engagement of the tourism sector in adaptation to climate change and carbon removal, through both natural and technological methods is necessary. The use of natural systems for carbon removal through the restoration of high carbon density ecosystems as well as engaging with carbon removal technologies would be necessary if the sector is to cut emissions by 50% by 2030 to remain in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's most recent recommendations¹⁴, and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

3.1 Regional Context: Messina, Sicily

Sicily is the largest island in Italy and the Mediterranean, surrounded by the Tyrrhenian, Ionian, and Sea of Sicily. It has a diverse coastline with rocky inlets in the north, pebble beaches in the east, and sandy shores in the south. The island is hilly and mountainous, offering beautiful landscapes, but the sea is a major attraction. Sicily also includes various archipelagos and smaller islands. The northern coasts feature prominent gulfs, while the eastern coast has pebble beaches and cliffs. The southern coast is mainly sandy, with the Gulf of Gela being the largest in the region. The Ragusa, Agrigento, and Trapani areas exhibit more varied coastal features. The region has taken a lot of actions to improve tourist flow to Sicily. One of the initiatives is SeeSicily.

The See Sicily initiative is a program introduced by the Sicily Region to promote tourism and attract visitors to the region. It offers various benefits to tourists and Sicilians alike. To participate, tourists must book a minimum of two nights and receive a third night for free at an affiliated facility. They can also choose a free tourist service such as an excursion, immersion, or guided tour, and enjoy free entry to a cultural venue like a museum or monument. Additionally, there is a 50% discount on air, ship, or ferry tickets, with maximum discounts of 100 euros for domestic flights and 200 euros for international flights. The initiative was initially launched in 2021 due to the COVID-19 crisis and has been extended for 2022 and 2023, covering winter, spring, and summer holidays.

Ecotourism in Sicily

Sicily is experiencing a renaissance in responsible and sustainable tourism, with landowners and locals embracing eco-friendly practices. Traditional farming methods are being showcased to visitors, highlighting their minimal environmental impact. The island is also at the forefront of protecting marine life, designating specific areas for conservation and prohibiting fishing and construction. This sustainable approach extends to ethical tourism, which focuses on socially conscious travel. Former Mafia-owned farms now serve as ethical tourism destinations, attracting volunteers from across Italy. The proceeds from

products harvested on these farms contribute to their maintenance. Responsible Travel is an excellent resource for understanding the principles of ecotourism and offers suggestions for planning a socially and environmentally conscious trip to Sicily.

Tourism in Messina

Messina is a beautiful city located on the northeastern coast of Sicily, Italy. It is known for its rich history, stunning architecture, and picturesque landscapes. As a popular tourist destination, Messina offers visitors a wide range of attractions and activities to enjoy.

Messina also boasts beautiful beaches and coastal areas, such as Capo Peloro and Mortelle Beach. These pristine stretches of sand and crystal-clear waters offer visitors a chance to relax, swim, and soak up the Mediterranean sun.

Additionally, Messina is a gateway to the enchanting Aeolian Islands, a volcanic archipelago located just off the coast. Visitors can take a ferry from Messina to explore these stunning islands, including the popular destinations of Stromboli, Lipari, and Vulcano.

Messina ranked 32nd in a list of holiday destinations chosen by Italians for July/2023, as per a ranking by Jetcost. This is a positive result, surpassing popular destinations such as Sorrento and Ischia, and believes it can provide momentum to further develop the Messina brand and expand the range of services offered.

According to the mayor of Messina and its Metropolitan City Federico Basile, the municipality is working hard to improve and enhance the competitiveness of Messina and its province as a tourist destination. Messina is beautiful, and the commitment is to bring Messina back to its former glory and restore its role as the center of gravity in the Mediterranean from a socio-economic perspective. The starting point has been the involvement of all the stakeholders and attractions in the tourism industry to launch the Messina Brand, positioning Messina as a destination for proximity tourism.

Therefore, a series of strategies have been implemented to enhance the ancient crafts and popular traditions, with particular emphasis on the preservation and promotion of our fortified heritage as cultural, tourist, and environmental assets. Additionally, the PalaCultura Antonello da Messina has become a new cultural and tourist attraction. It now houses the permanent exhibition of the Vara and the Giants, as well as features such as the Immersive Theater, the multimedia room, and the Digital Art Gallery of the Staircases of Art Project.

Furthermore, a three-year project called Messina City of Music and Major Events has been initiated, with a budget of approximately 7 million euros. This project aims to support small businesses and revitalize the city's image through music and major events, including concerts at the San Filippo stadium, Piazza Cathedral, and the arena of Villa Dante. The

Messenion Foundation has also been established to be at the forefront of cultural events, promoting and showcasing our territory's artistic, musical, cultural, and theatrical excellence.

In addition, the creation of the Messina brand, known as the city of Antonello, has been launched. This new symbol aims to promote the image of Messina globally and stimulate tourism-related industries. The brand will establish a territorial connection with the renowned artist of Messina origin. Together with the VisitMe tourism web portal, it serves as a new business card to attract tourists. The Municipality of Messina has developed a showcase of the territory's excellence, featuring over 300 multimedia contents, itineraries, maps, and videos highlighting the city's artistic and natural beauty. Furthermore, a dedicated page has been created for travel agencies that have partnered with the initiative, as well as authorized regional tourist guides. These resources offer operators the opportunity to showcase their offerings and services effectively.

In Messina, Sicily, there are several initiatives and features that contribute to green tourism, also known as sustainable or eco-tourism. These include:

1. **Capo Peloro Lagoon Natural Reserve:** Established in 2001, this reserve covers about 70 hectares and is home to over 400 aquatic species. It holds international importance and has been included in the UNESCO Water Project since 1972.
2. **Villa Giuseppe Mazzini:** Originally known as "la Flora," this villa was designed by the Swiss engineer Enrico Fehr. It boasts Mediterranean and exotic vegetation and is a popular leisure spot in Messina. The villa houses an aquarium and an aviary that showcases exotic birds.
3. **Villa Dante:** Built in the 1970s, Villa Dante is Messina's green lung. It covers a few hectares and includes an outdoor arena, a swimming pool, a center for the elderly, soccer fields, and various play areas for children.
4. **Villa Albert Sabin:** This large green space overlooks the Strait of Messina and offers beautiful views and recreational opportunities.
5. **Colli San Rizzo (or Colli Sarrizzo):** This vast green area in the city is equipped with facilities for outdoor activities and provides ample space for leisure and relaxation.
6. **Pietro Castelli Botanical Garden of the University of Messina:** Located in Piazza XX Settembre, this botanical garden showcases plants from different parts of the world and serves as a hub for botanical research and education.

These initiatives and attractions in Messina promote sustainable practices and allow visitors to enjoy nature while minimizing the negative impact on the environment.

Blue Flag Beaches in Messina

The Blue Flag is an internationally recognized eco-label awarded to beaches and marinas that meet strict criteria for water quality, environmental management, safety, and services. It signifies a clean, safe, and sustainable coastal destination.

In 2023, Sicily was confirmed to have 11 "Blue Flags" awarded to its beaches. The ranking is prepared annually by the Foundation for Environmental Education, a Danish NGO that assesses quality parameters such as water cleanliness and the quality of services provided.

Six beaches in Messina have received this recognition, namely Roccalumera, Alì Terme, Furci Siculo, Lungomare Santa Teresa di Riva, Lampare beach in Tusa, and Acquacalda in Lipari.

Moving to the province of Ragusa, the recognized beaches are Marina di Modica, Raganzino in Pozzallo, the initial stretch of Ciriga in Ispica, and Marina di Ragusa.

In addition, the beach of Menfi in the province of Agrigento has also been awarded.

Out of the 82 recognized tourist ports in Italy, Capo d'Orlando Marina and Marina del Nettuno in Messina stand out as notable docking stations in Sicily.

4. WASTE MANAGEMENT

Hotels must properly manage waste if they want to maintain their competitiveness and adhere to legal regulations. Hotels can lessen their environmental impact and enjoy financial savings by concentrating on the wise management of resources.

Main components of hotel waste:

1. Hotel single-use plastic waste

Hotels need to consider a proactive approach for addressing the environmental challenge of single-use plastic waste. Every day, hotel visitors produce tons of single-use plastic waste, including food wrappers, drink bottles, and other items. Even though the majority of this garbage may be recycled or composted, due to incorrect disposal methods, it frequently ends up in landfills or the ocean. To lessen their impact on the environment, hotels must strongly address their single-use plastic waste problem.

There are several steps that hotels can take to manage their single-use plastic waste. They should start by implementing policies that discourage guests from using disposable items, such as banning bottled water and plastic straws, and offering reusable amenities instead of disposables in bathrooms. Hotels also need to ensure they have adequate **recycling collection bins** throughout the property, so guests know where to deposit their recyclable items.

2. Hotel food waste

Many hotels have their own restaurants. As with any restaurant, this can result in massive amounts of food waste, which, if not appropriately managed, can have a significant environmental impact.

In the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food waste (131 kg/inhabitant) are generated annually with an associated market value estimated at 132 billion euros (Eurostat, 2022). Eurostat roughly estimates that around 10% of food made available to EU consumers (at retail, food services and households) may be wasted. At the same time, some 32.6 million people cannot afford a quality meal every second day (Eurostat, 2021).

According to some estimates in tourism and hospitality, food accounts for over half of the total waste created by enterprises. This is especially common at hotels that serve buffets, where plate waste (food left on guests' plates) is a major issue.

3. Guest waste

Organic guest waste includes food scraps, food containers, napkins, tea bags, coffee grounds, fruits, and vegetables. Non-organic guest waste includes plastic bottles and containers, paper towels, tissues, and other paper products, as well as shampoo bottles and other personal hygiene items. The best way for hotels to manage these different types of guest waste is by implementing proper **recycling systems** that are easily accessible to guests in all areas of the hotel.

Importance of waste management in hotels

Understanding the significance of waste management is crucial while managing a hotel. In order to lessen the environmental impact of hotel operations, waste management entails correctly discarding and reusing things. By lowering disposal costs and enhancing customer happiness, proper waste management can also help hotels save money.

The first step in effective waste management is determining which materials must be recycled or safely disposed of. This comprises materials like paper, glass, plastic, metal, and food that, if improperly managed, would otherwise occupy space in landfills or cause pollution.

Hotels should provide specific trash cans for workers and visitors to use when disposing of rubbish so that recyclables and non-recyclables can be separated. By carefully sorting recyclable items such as cardboard and paper products, hotels can significantly reduce their impact on the environment while saving costs at the same time.

Some practical methods that can help to reduce food waste:

1. Conducting waste audits

Waste audits are crucial to lowering restaurant food waste. A food waste audit is keeping track of how much edible food is wasted over time and determining what led to the needless losses so that changes may be done to stop further wasting. Restaurant

operators can make adjustments based on this information to cut down on food waste and save money.

The first step in managing waste data analysis is waste audits. The technique of garbage auditing is used to assess how well hotels manage their waste. Industrial balers and garbage compactors may considerably reduce the volume of waste, making it easier to handle and cutting the cost of waste disposal.

The tracking, analysis, and reporting of data can be done manually or with the aid of specialist software solutions. Additionally, holding staff feedback sessions where they can share their ideas for improvement can assist come up with original ways to reduce future food waste.

2. Creating a plan for leftovers

By partnering with food banks, relevant mobile apps and actors working on combating food waste, hotels can create an effective plan for leftovers and ensure they are donated to people in need instead of going to waste. Hotels should also work on proper portion control when preparing meals; this will help avoid excess amounts of new ingredients and save money at the same time. Utilizing take-out containers for unfinished meals and offering discounts on dishes made from leftover items will help encourage customers to reduce their food waste and benefit from lower prices simultaneously.

3. Composting food waste

Composting can be an effective method for reducing the amount of food waste produced by restaurants. Composting reduces the number of edible leftovers sent to landfills by converting these into nutrient-rich soil for use as fertilizer or soil amendment. It also significantly cuts back on methane gas emissions from landfills since compostable materials are broken down aerobically through natural decomposition processes instead of anaerobically when deposited in landfills.

4.1 Good Practice

Practice number	1.1
Name of the Practice	Too Good To Go: End Food Waste
Theme	1. Waste Management
Type	4. Online Platform/Mobile App

Developer initiator /	<i>Too Good To Go</i>
Short description	A mobile application (available on Android and IOS) with more than 10 mil downloads with the goal to minimise food waste by connecting businesses and consumers
Goal	<i>Its main aim is to contribute to sustainability by eliminating food waste. Hotels that offer services related to food such as breakfast, lunch and/or dinner can join the network of enterprises and sell their food surpluses through the app. The app is a free to download and user friendly.</i>
Detailed description	<p><i>How it works for the end user:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Search the map to find a restaurant, cafe, or shop near you that has unsold food</i> • <i>Buy the food through the app</i> • <i>Collect your food at the pre-set time, and enjoy it knowing you've done something good for the planet</i> <p><i>There are many popular restaurants and hospitality companies enrolled in the app: users can choose from stores such as Costa Coffee, Greggs, Caffè Nero, Morrisons, Planet Organic, LEON, YO!, and your favourite local independents - more than 90,000 stores fight food waste with us across Europe and North America, with more joining every day.</i></p>
Innovativeness	<i>It is an innovative mobile app that uses user friendliness and digital accessibility in order to promote circular economy and contribute to the reduction of food waste. Annually more than 1/3 of the food that businesses produce is wasted and this app tries to contribute to its minimisation. The app is also innovative when it comes to the project's target group (small hotels), as it initially targets specifically food serving businesses. Small hotels can save food waste and also add a small amount of income from an otherwise wasted source.</i>
Financial aspect	€ = Minimum Investment
Country	<i>global</i>

Target Group	<i>small hotels</i>
Transferability	Accommodation managers or owners of hotels that serve food and/or breakfast can add their business to the app as a partner alongside other hospitality businesses such as restaurants and cafes so they can sell their food surplus to interested customers at a very low price
Website and/or relevant links	https://toogoodtogo.org/

5. ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Energy efficiency measures are key in all aspects of social and business life. More particularly, for tourism SMEs energy efficiency considerations are crucial for several reasons:

Cost savings: Small hotels often operate on tight budgets, and energy expenses can be a significant portion of their operating costs. Implementing energy-efficient measures can lead to substantial savings on utility bills, which directly impacts the bottom line and enhances profitability.

Environmental impact: Energy consumption in hotels contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation. By prioritizing energy efficiency, small hotel owners can reduce their carbon footprint and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and responsible business practices, appealing to environmentally conscious guests.

Competitive advantage: In today's market, eco-conscious travelers actively seek out hotels that demonstrate environmental responsibility. Small hotel owners can use energy efficiency as a unique selling point, attracting more guests who prefer to stay in environmentally friendly accommodations.

Long-term investment: Many energy-efficient upgrades, such as LED lighting, energy-efficient HVAC systems, and better insulation, provide long-term financial benefits. While the initial investment may be higher, the cost savings over time and the increased property value can make it a worthwhile long-term investment.

Government incentives: Some regions and countries offer financial incentives, tax credits, or grants to businesses that adopt energy-efficient practices. Small hotel owners can take advantage of these incentives to offset the initial costs of energy-efficient upgrades.

Future-proofing against rising energy costs and potential government regulations: Energy prices are subject to fluctuations, and costs may increase over time. By investing

in energy efficiency, small hotel owners can protect themselves against potential future spikes in energy prices and stabilize their operating expenses. Also, many jurisdictions have energy efficiency regulations and building codes that businesses must adhere to. By incorporating energy-efficient practices from the outset, small hotel owners can avoid costly retrofits or penalties for non-compliance in the future.

Enhanced guest experience: Energy-efficient upgrades can improve guest comfort and satisfaction. For instance, energy-efficient HVAC systems can provide more consistent temperature control and quieter operation, resulting in a more pleasant stay for guests.

Below are some practical measures that tourism SMEs need to consider and potentially integrate in their operation for addressing energy efficiency:

Solar PV system: A small scale PV system can store electricity during the day and use it during the night for common area lighting.

Biomass boilers (wood chip and wood pellet).

Solar panels on the ground (when the site offers sufficient space) or on the roof, for hot water production.

Small wind turbines (portable also available), for electricity production.

Geothermal or normal heat pumps (hot/cold air and hot water).

Sea water air conditioning in coastal resorts, or those close to a lake or river bank, taking advantage of the water's low temperature.

Set hot water boiler at 50 °C (instead of 60°C) and the air conditioning at 26 °C in the summer and 20 °C in the winter.

Connect dishwashers and washing machines to warm water supply.

Economizers on A/C units which increase fresh air circulation and use cooler outdoor air when available.

Use natural ventilation when possible.

Install ceiling fans.

Install shading devices.

use trees and landscaping, to reduce heating load during the warm months.

upgrade Window glazing (double glazing).

External thermal insulation (incl. roof).

Pool covers to reduce evaporation and heat loss.

Hotel zoning according to guest occupancy (turn off heating/cooling in unoccupied spaces or floors).

Important not to allow heating and cooling to be operated simultaneously in a room. When windows and doors are opened, heating/cooling systems should instantaneously shut down.

use programmable thermostats, and limit thermostat controls by guests (maximum 2 change from set temperature).

Keycards (link energy use With room occupancy). During checkout, all the equipment in a room (TV, HVAC, alarm clock etc) should be completely shut down, except for the minibar.

Door sweep installed on exterior doors. Window sealing to avoid heat loss.

Main entrance door kept closed or install automated doors.

Restriction of smoking in the building to reduce the need for increased ventilation.

Timers installed in the heating system of the jacuzzi and sauna.

High energy efficiency appliances (catering equipment, refrigerators and freezers, dishwashers, laundry and office equipment, etc.)

Dishwashers, washing machines and dryers should run only when full. Refrigerators kept away from high temperature cooking areas.

Regular maintenance of all systems and insulation of boilers, pipes and air ducts. Regularly clean air filters of A/C system and fan coil units. Remove dust from air ducts.

BEMS (Building Energy Management System) to systematically check all systems' operation in order to ensure the best possible output.

5.1 Good Practices

Name of the Practice	<i>Verdant EI™</i>
Theme	<i>2. Energy Efficiency</i>
Type	<i>2. Service 4. Mobile App</i>
Developer / initiator	<i>Verdant</i>
Short description	<i>Verdant EITM is a 'do it for me' energy management optimization service that delivers consistent savings without compromising guest comfort.</i>

<p>Goal</p>	<p>1) <i>Maximized Energy Savings all Year Round: Verdant's EITM experts continuously finetune your room settings to optimize your system's performance and maximize savings.</i></p> <p>2) <i>No Staff Involvement: Leave your Verdant system operations in the hands of our energy experts so that your staff can focus on other operational tasks;</i></p> <p>3) <i>Lifetime Warranty: Verdant EITM includes a lifetime hardware warranty, software updates, and rolling attic stock, so you'll never need to buy another thermostat again.</i></p>
<p>Detailed description</p>	<p><i>Verdant EI™ is a 'do it for me' energy management service that ensures your Verdant energy management thermostat settings are continuously optimised to bring you the maximum energy savings possible without any involvement needed from your property staff. When you subscribe to Verdant EI™, a dedicated energy management expert is assigned to your property with a very simple goal in mind: monitor your Verdant system 24/7 and maximize energy savings without compromising on guest comfort, all without requiring on-site staff.</i></p> <p><i>Our experts use proprietary machine learning algorithms to optimize system settings based on historical performance data, generating the best energy savings possible at your property, year-round. Verdant EI™ includes a suite of mobile and web apps to help you monitor energy savings in real-time, change settings on the fly, or even monitor room occupancy.</i></p>
<p>Innovativeness</p>	<p><i>You can manage and monitor your hotel rooms from anywhere, on any device. Verdant EITM includes a cloud-based dashboard and smartphone app to help you monitor your property in real-time and change unoccupied settings on the fly (DASHBOARD, OPERATIONS, ROOM OCCUPANCY, USER MANAGEMENT).</i></p> <p><i>Price Starter Kit: \$995 - 970,97 euro</i></p>
<p>Financial aspect</p>	<p><i>€€ = Moderate investment</i></p>
<p>Country</p>	<p><i>Canada</i></p>
<p>Target Group</p>	<p><i>Small and big hotels,</i></p>
<p>Transferability</p>	<p><i>The kit is ordered, so it is easily applicable to any structure.</i></p>
<p>Website and/or relevant links</p>	<p><i>https://www.verdant.co/</i></p>

Contact information	https://www.verdant.co/contact-us/
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Name of the Practice	CIRTOINNO - Circular economy tools to support innovation in green and blue tourism SMEs
Theme	2. Energy Efficiency
Type	1. Installation/Equipment 2. Service
Developer / initiator	EU project: CIRTOINNO
Short description	The CIRTOINNO project published "A Handbook for transitioning toward a circular economy within the tourism and hospitality sectors in the South Baltic Region". It analyzes the specific implications of the circular economy for tourism SMEs with a focus on accommodation services, food services, and spas.
Goal	To provide a HANDBOOK with concrete practices and interventions for tourism SMEs in order to promote circular economy and sustainable energy efficiency
Detailed description	<p>Within the accommodation services sector the authors provide internal/external and short/long-term opportunities for five areas: building and construction, energy, materials inside the building, materials used in accommodation services, practices among staff and guests.</p> <p>Internal short scope innovation opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing monitoring systems for energy and water use, waste treatment systems, and staff managing systems concerning use of amenities and waste handling. <p>External short scope innovation opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building relationships with upstream suppliers of products that are re-usable and remanufactured and downstream buyers that redistribute the hotels' discarded products. Implementation of renewable and circular energy sources.

	<p>Internal long scope innovation opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building new and refurbishing hotel buildings using existing circular technologies. • Expanding supply chain management for accessing all materials used in the hotel from furniture to soaps and accessing leasing rather than ownership based business models. • Investing in or leasing various smart energy and water monitoring systems connected to booking systems. • Investing in greywater systems. <p>External long scope innovation opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding on all of the above opportunities in collaboration with up- and downstream suppliers and buyers.
Innovativeness	It is a handbook providing concrete examples, practices and procedures for hotel SMEs to promote circular economy and sustainable energy efficiency
Financial aspect	<p>€€ = Moderate investment</p> <p>€€€ = considerable investment</p>
Country	<i>South Baltic region</i>
Target Group	<i>small hotels</i>
Transferability	Since the handbook was developed for the South Baltic region, some of its practices and procedures need to be adapted to the realities of the Mediterranean context. However since waste management is a common challenge for all hotels regardless of the local environment, it can still act as a concrete guide for hotel SMEs in the Mediteranean region
Website and/or relevant links	<p>https://southbaltic.eu/-/cirtoinno-circular-economy-tools-to-support-innovation-in-green-and-blue-tourism-smes</p> <p>https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/cirtoinno-handbook_eng-rev.-4.pdf</p>

6. LOCALITY

Promotion of local products, services, culture and heritage is one of the key aspects of sustainable tourism. Efforts to preserve local traditions as well as promoting domestic tourism as opposed to mass tourism are one of the measures that small tourism businesses can undertake in order to integrate sustainability principles in their operation.

It is true that mass tourism and the services that accommodate for it, can endanger local cultures and products. Large tourism resorts, offering all-inclusive services, funded by multinational corporations, are often designed in a generic way without taking into account local culture or traditions and can have negative impact on the local ecosystems in which they are located.

In contrast, promoting local culture, tradition, products, and services is a win-win situation for small tourism businesses. It benefits the hotels by enhancing their appeal, guest experience, and brand image while positively impacting the local community and contributing to sustainable tourism practices. More specifically, some of the benefits of locality promotion are outlined below:

Authentic guest experience: Travelers often seek authentic and unique experiences that allow them to immerse themselves in the local culture. By promoting local elements, small hotels can offer guests a more genuine and memorable experience, setting themselves apart from generic chain hotels.

Cultural preservation: Supporting and showcasing local culture and traditions helps preserve the unique identity of the community. Small hotels can play a role in safeguarding traditional practices, arts, crafts, and customs by incorporating them into their services and activities.

Strengthening community ties: Collaborating with local artisans, businesses, and service providers creates a network of support within the community. Small hotels become more integrated into the local ecosystem and contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of the area.

Economic impact: When small hotels source products and services locally, they contribute to the local economy, providing a livelihood for artisans, farmers, and small businesses. This can lead to a positive ripple effect, stimulating other sectors and encouraging sustainable development.

Sustainability and reduced carbon footprint: Emphasizing local products reduces the need for long-distance transportation, which, in turn, lowers the carbon footprint of the hotel. By supporting local farmers and producers, small hotels can also contribute to sustainable agricultural practices.

Differentiation and branding: Incorporating local elements into the hotel's branding and marketing can create a unique selling point. Travelers looking for an authentic experience are more likely to choose a hotel that celebrates and promotes local culture.

Positive perception by guests: Guests are often appreciative of hotels that actively support and promote the local community. This can lead to positive reviews, word-of-mouth recommendations, and increased loyalty among guests.

Collaboration with the community: Engaging with the local community helps small hotels gain valuable insights into local trends, events, and preferences. It allows them to tailor their offerings to better meet the needs of their guests and the community.

Cultural understanding and appreciation: Small hotels have an opportunity to educate guests about local customs, traditions, and heritage through the services they offer and information they provide. By doing so, they can contribute to fostering intercultural understanding and appreciation among both guests and locals.

Crisis resilience: In times of crises, such as global pandemics or economic downturns, hotels that have strong ties to the local community may find greater support and collaboration, helping them navigate challenging times more effectively.

By undertaking (some of) the following easy-to-implement practical measures, small hotels can authentically promote local culture, products, traditions, and services while creating a unique and memorable experience for guests and fostering positive relationships with the local community:

Local Art and Decor: Incorporate local art, crafts, and traditional decor in the hotel's interior design. Display paintings, sculptures, or handicrafts made by local artists in guest rooms and common areas.

Local Cuisine: Offer locally sourced and traditional dishes in the hotel's restaurant or as part of the breakfast menu. Highlighting regional specialties and flavors can enhance the guest experience.

Cultural Events: Organize cultural events and activities that showcase local traditions, music, dance, or performances. It could include live music nights, folk dance performances, or workshops on local crafts.

Local Tours and Activities: Collaborate with local tour operators to offer guided tours to nearby cultural landmarks, historical sites, or off-the-beaten-path locations. Encourage guests to explore and engage with the local community.

Local Partnerships: Build partnerships with local artisans, farmers, and producers. Source amenities, such as toiletries, from local suppliers, and offer guests the option to purchase locally made souvenirs.

Local Workshops: Organize workshops and demonstrations for guests to learn traditional crafts or cooking techniques from local experts. This hands-on experience can be memorable for guests.

Educational Material: Provide guests with informative materials about the local culture, traditions, and heritage. Include details about local festivals, events, and significant historical facts.

Support Local Events: Sponsor or support local events, festivals, or community initiatives. Participating in community activities fosters a sense of belonging and demonstrates the hotel's commitment to the local area.

Community Engagement: Involve the local community in the hotel's operations. Hire staff from the local area and involve them in decision-making processes. Engage with local schools or organizations to support educational initiatives.

Local Guidebooks: Create guidebooks or digital resources that highlight nearby attractions, restaurants, and businesses. Include recommendations for locally owned shops and services.

Local Language and Traditions: Encourage staff to use and teach guests some local language greetings and phrases. Respect local customs and traditions and inform guests about local cultural norms.

Guest Feedback: Seek feedback from guests on their experiences with local culture and services. Use their input to continuously improve and refine the hotel's approach to promoting local elements.

6.1 Good Practice

Name of the Practice	Culture App
Theme	<i>5. Awareness raising</i>
Type	<i>2. Service 4. Online Platform/Mobile App</i>
Developer / initiator	Culture App
Short description	Culture App is a virtual tour-guiding platform that creates stories and 3D content for archaeological locations and distributes it through a web platform and an augmented reality mobile app.
Goal	To accelerate destination’s digital transition and promote/conserv e local heritage by creating 3D content for archaeological locations and distributing it through a web platform and an augmented reality mobile app.
Detailed description	<p>Culture App is an augmented reality mobile application for use inside the archeological site. Individual visitors are using their mobile devices and the augmented reality technology (A.R.) to gain access to 3D representations of the monuments, with written and audio historical information. Tour guides can also enhance their narrative by using the application’s digital material.</p> <p>It contributes to sustainable tourism by promoting cultural heritage in an innovative way.</p>

	A web platform called Culture VR that offers a reservation system, digital material (3D models, photos, videos, audio and text) and interactive features for an easy remote virtual tour of the archeological sites. This allows cultural visitors who cannot visit an archeological site and be physically present, to take either remote live-guided tours by tour guides or self-guided tours. At the same time, tour guides benefit from creating a new source of income all throughout the year. The app is user friendly and available on the Google play store.
Innovativeness	The use of an augmented reality technology through an accessible mobile app and online platform to promote local culture and heritage
Financial aspect	€€ = Considerable investment
Country	Greece
Target Group	small hotels, tourism offices, tourism agencies, destination managers VET providers
Transferability	It can be applied to different contexts if destination managers and tour operators register and contribute to the development of additional guided tours in the augmented reality context.
Website and/or relevant links	https://cultureapp.eu/ info@cultureapp.eu

7. DIGITAL TOOLS

When used wisely, digital technologies and the digitalization of the tourist industry may significantly advance the sustainability of the industry. The industry offers a wide range of options for the use of digital tools and technology, and it should be highlighted that these developments happen quickly, with many start-ups competing to meet the need of the expanding market. Not all concepts or methods endure; some vanish as fast as they emerged. Many other tools, platforms, and applications, however, can prove to be highly

effective and may offer significant advantages to the business or private user, local communities, and the environment; as a result, they can play a significant part in improving the sustainability of tourism.

The term "digitalization" is used to describe how society and the economy are changing to become increasingly digital. It is the use of digital technology to alter a company model and offer new alternatives for generating income and adding value. Today, the use of digital technologies in the tourist industry tends to assist enterprises become more sustainable. The key to making the global tourist business more sustainable is to enable digitalization in the sector. The travel experience is anticipated to continue developing in a direction that makes it easier, more seamless, and of a high quality while also making a contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Nowadays and especially in the aftermath of covid19, visitor experience has become the focus of tourism providers with customised products and personalised experiences. Developments of digital technologies such as cloud computing, mobile apps, augmented and virtual reality, GPS have increased the interconnectedness between digital and physical worlds. With the emergence of social media platforms and changes in how the internet has grown to support user-generated content, travel service providers' reach has expanded internationally. These developments have given the tourist sector new and creative product development options and paved the road for the modernization and sustainability of tourism. The three biggest issues for governments were first a lack of awareness, implementation, and enforcement, second a lack of skills, training, and education, and third multi-actor, multi-stakeholder, and multi-level governance coordination, according to an OECD survey of the top 10 challenges to digitalization across 31 countries.

Consumers today use digital tools for every aspect of their holiday, from planning to booking. A more appealing, effective, inclusive, and economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable tourism offer has been produced as a result of the use of digital technologies, such as the Internet, location-based services, artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality, and blockchain technology. Therefore, tourism-related enterprises must establish themselves online. In comparison to conventional micro and SME tourist enterprises, large tourism organizations are more tech-driven. Because of the distance between them, there are few chances for global adoption of sustainable digital company practices. One of the trends in recent years has been sharing accommodation and digital tools helped spread the trend around the world with popular apps.

The emergence of "smart travel facilitation," which involves using a smartphone for every facet of travel, from smart visas to boarding tickets, has had significant effects on the industry as a whole. Smart destinations, which include a plan for technology, innovation, sustainability, accessibility, and inclusion along the full tourist cycle: before, during, and after the trip, are another development in sustainable tourism. A wise destination also considers locals as well as visitors, incorporating seasonality, cultural quirks, and multilingualism into tourism planning. Jobs in the tourist industry will need both technical and highly developed soft skills in order to manage and implement smart projects successfully. The greatest societal impact of digital transformation in tourism may be the effect on the sector's workforce with the need to develop the skills needed for the jobs of the future.

By digitalizing their services and operations, small hotels can optimize their efficiency, reduce their environmental impact, engage guests in sustainable practices, and position themselves as leaders in sustainable tourism. It is a forward-looking approach that aligns with the growing demand for eco-friendly and responsible travel options.

Below are some of the benefits that the utilisation of digital tools both for services provision and for operational purposes can have on small tourism businesses:

Reduced Paper Usage: Digitalizing processes like booking, check-in, and guest communications significantly reduce the need for paper usage, leading to less waste and a smaller environmental footprint.

Energy Efficiency: Adopting digital solutions allows hotels to streamline operations, leading to better energy efficiency. For instance, using cloud-based systems reduces the need for on-site servers, saving energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Resource Conservation: Digital tools can help monitor and optimize resource consumption, such as water and electricity usage, leading to more efficient operations and reduced resource wastage.

Remote & Sustainable Management: Digitalization enables hotel managers to monitor and manage operations remotely. This reduces the need for frequent on-site visits, cutting down on travel-related emissions and costs.

Guest Engagement: Digital platforms facilitate direct and efficient communication with guests, allowing hotels to provide personalized experiences and tailor services to their preferences. Engaged guests are more likely to support and appreciate the hotel's sustainability initiatives.

Data-Driven Decision Making: Digital tools collect valuable data on guest behavior, preferences, and consumption patterns. By analyzing this data, hotels can make informed decisions on resource allocation, service improvements, and sustainability initiatives.

Online Marketing and Booking: Embracing digital marketing strategies and online booking platforms expands the hotel's reach and attracts eco-conscious travelers looking for sustainable accommodations.

Eco-Friendly Amenities: By digitizing in-room services, such as guest directories and room service menus, hotels can reduce the use of printed materials and provide guests with eco-friendly amenities.

Smart Building Solutions: Implementing smart building technologies, such as energy-efficient lighting and automated climate control, helps optimize energy usage and minimizes waste.

Digital Payment Solutions: Adopting digital payment methods reduces the need for physical cash handling and minimizes the environmental impact associated with producing and transporting currency.

Online Training and Education: Digital platforms can be used for staff training on sustainability practices and promoting a culture of environmental responsibility within the hotel.

Monitoring and Reporting: Digital solutions enable hotels to track and report their sustainability metrics accurately, helping them meet certification requirements and showcase their commitment to sustainable tourism.

Adaptability and Resilience: Digitalization enhances a hotel's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, such as unforeseen events (e.g., pandemics), by offering contactless services and enabling swift communication with guests.

In the framework of SUSTOUR-MED project, a variety of good practices regarding digital tools targeted at small hotels has been identified and published on the project website. These tools and apps are to be used by hotel owners and staff in order to achieve a more sustainable and resilient business operation.

7.1 Good Practice

Name of the Practice	Tourmie
Theme	<i>4. Digital tools for smart tourism operation</i>
Type	<i>2. Service 4. Online Platform/Mobile App</i>
Developer / initiator	Tourmie
Short description	Tourmie is an online concierge application which helps accommodation providers offer personalized services to their guests.
Goal	To support hotels by accelerating the digitalisation, automation and personalisation of the accommodation offer
Detailed description	In order to improve visitor experience, Tourmie is constantly developing its network of partners from trusted service providers throughout Greece, so that every visitor can learn more about the place they are visiting, through various authentic local experiences. Instantly after booking a stay, Tourmie becomes the guest's personal digital assistant, offering a personalised page with personalised suggestions. From that point, the guest can book services provided by the hotel in-

	<p>house or outsourced (e.g car rental, taxi, activities and breakfast), check useful information about his / her stay (e.g check-in, arrival instructions and WiFi code) and finally, to solve any issues via live chat with the front desk or the host.</p> <p>The practice contributes to sustainability by accelerating the digitalisation of the accommodation offer. Tourmie is a simple but yet powerful tool, which facilitates the collaboration between accommodation and service providers. Using Tourmie, accommodation providers have the opportunity to increase their income from travel service sales, while service providers can promote their services to new sales channels. The service helps accommodation providers manage visitor inquiries for travel services efficiently and with ease as well as payments and partnerships through detailed reports. Last but not least, both service and accommodation providers receive their agreed payments electronically and with transparency within 24h once a service is completed. The platform is user friendly and accessible online.</p>
Innovativeness	Tourmie is innovative because it uses a state of the art digital and automated solution to support small hotels in their digital transition by automating processes and providing personalised guest experiences.
Financial aspect	€€ = <i>Moderate investment</i>
Country	<i>Greece</i>
Target Group	<i>small hotels,</i>
Transferability	Tourmie can be adapted to every hotel, BnB owner, property manager and every travel business, such as car rental companies, transportation companies, and many others, who are interested in offering a unique experience to each of their guests, while expanding their business opportunities and getting more customers through outsourcing collaborations.
Website and/or relevant links	https://tourmie.com/

8. ACCESSIBILITY

As explained in the introduction, the notion of sustainability does not only refer to the environment; it is a holistic concept based on three pillars: environment, society and economy. Thusly sustainable tourism and the small businesses that are to follow its principles need to take into account the social aspects of sustainability as well.

So, accessibility considerations are vital for small hotels to achieve sustainable tourism. By making their facilities and services accessible to all guests, small hotels contribute to inclusivity, social responsibility, and positive guest experiences. Additionally, they position themselves to meet the needs of a diverse and evolving travel market, ultimately benefiting their business and the wider community.

Below are some of the reasons why accessibility considerations and measures are vital for tourism SMEs in the Peloponese and Sicily:

Inclusivity: Ensuring accessibility means that individuals with disabilities, seniors, and people with mobility challenges can also enjoy and participate in the hotel's services and facilities. By being inclusive, small hotels broaden their customer base and create a welcoming environment for all guests.

Meeting Legal Requirements: Many countries have laws and regulations that mandate accessibility standards for public accommodations, including hotels. By meeting these requirements, small hotels avoid legal issues and potential fines while demonstrating their commitment to compliance and social responsibility.

Positive Reputation: Hotels that prioritize accessibility and inclusivity gain a positive reputation among guests and the wider community. Word-of-mouth recommendations and positive reviews from guests who appreciate these efforts can attract more visitors and build brand loyalty.

Long-term Investment: Making accessibility improvements can be viewed as a long-term investment. As awareness of accessibility increases, the demand for accessible accommodations is likely to grow. Small hotels that proactively address accessibility needs can position themselves for future success.

Sustainable Tourism for All: Sustainable tourism aims to have a positive impact on both the environment and local communities. By being accessible, hotels contribute to sustainable tourism by ensuring that all visitors can fully experience and engage with the local culture, attractions, and services.

Reduced Discrimination: Prioritizing accessibility helps reduce discrimination against people with disabilities or mobility challenges. By offering equal opportunities to all guests, small hotels promote inclusivity and a sense of equality within their premises.

Economic Benefits: Accessible hotels attract not only guests with disabilities but also their friends, family members, and caregivers. This diverse customer base can lead to increased bookings and revenue.

Social Responsibility: Including accessibility as a core consideration aligns with the principles of corporate social responsibility. It demonstrates that the hotel values diversity, equality, and inclusion, not only as a legal requirement but as a fundamental aspect of their business ethos.

Adapting to Changing Demographics: As the world's population ages, the number of seniors and individuals with age-related disabilities will increase. By being accessible, small hotels can cater to this evolving demographic and stay relevant in the market.

Collaboration with Local Communities: By embracing accessibility, small hotels can foster closer ties with local disability organizations and advocacy groups. This collaboration can lead to valuable partnerships and community support.

Awareness and Education: Small hotels that prioritize accessibility contribute to raising awareness about the challenges faced by people with disabilities. This can lead to a more informed and compassionate society overall.

Below are some practical considerations that small hotels owners and staff need to take into account for addressing accessibility issues:

Accessible Rooms: Designate and equip specific rooms to be fully accessible for guests with disabilities. Ensure features like wider doorways, lower beds, and accessible bathrooms with grab bars and roll-in showers.

Accessible Parking: Reserve parking spots close to the hotel entrance for guests with disabilities. Clearly mark these spots with accessibility signage.

Ramps and Elevators: Install ramps at entrances and elevators to ensure that guests can easily access all floors and areas of the hotel.

Clear Signage: Use clear and easy-to-read signage with contrasting colors throughout the hotel, including room numbers, directions to amenities, and accessible facilities.

Training and Sensitization: Provide training to staff on disability awareness, etiquette, and how to assist guests with disabilities in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.

Assistive Devices: Offer assistive devices like wheelchairs, walking aids, or hearing aids upon request to guests who may need them during their stay.

Website Accessibility: Ensure that the hotel's website is accessible to users with disabilities. This includes providing alternative text for images, keyboard navigation options, and compatibility with screen readers.

Reservation Options: Offer accessible room reservations through the hotel's website and reservation systems. Provide clear information about the accessible features of each room.

Accessible Amenities: Ensure that all hotel amenities, such as the pool, gym, and dining areas, are accessible to guests with disabilities.

Emergency Preparedness: Have a clear and accessible emergency plan that includes procedures for assisting guests with disabilities during evacuations.

Feedback Mechanism: Encourage guests to provide feedback on accessibility and act upon their suggestions to continually improve services.

Collaboration with Local Organizations: Partner with local disability organizations to gain insights, receive feedback, and improve accessibility initiatives.

Regular Audits: Conduct regular accessibility audits to identify any barriers and address them promptly.

Inclusive Policies: Adopt inclusive policies that prioritize the needs and rights of guests with disabilities, ensuring equal treatment and opportunities.

Use of relevant digital tools: During the last few years, awareness on accessibility issues for people with disabilities has been increased throughout the EU and in particular in Italy and Greece, So, there have been initiatives and relevant apps and tools developed that help address accessibility issues. Those apps and/or digital tools can be utilized by small hotels in order to provide more accessible services to all guests.

8.1 Good Practice

Name of the Practice	Access Earth
Theme	3. Social Responsibility
Type	4. Online Platform/Mobile App
Developer / initiator	Access Earth
Short description	A user-friendly mobile app that aims to create the world's largest accessibility database.
Goal	<i>To promote places, businesses and routes accessible to persons with disabilities through a user-friendly online platform and mobile app.</i>
Detailed description	<i>Following the model of Google maps, the Wheelmap app and website showcases accessible locations in the map for people on wheelchairs This free and easy to use app promotes accessible tourism and social inclusion with a focus on people with disabilities.</i>
Innovativeness	<i>Its innovation lies on the fact that there is a global database based on google maps model, presented in an easy-to-use mobile app. Through its use persons with disabilities and their</i>

	<i>carers can identify accessible places and routes, as well as businesses.</i>
Financial aspect	<i>free</i>
Country	<i>Global</i>
Target Group	<i>small hotels, tourism offices, tourism agencies, destination managers Local authorities VET providers</i>
Transferability	Tourism businesses can be part of the database and promote their accessibility through the website.
Website and/or relevant links	<i>https://www.accessearth.com/</i>

9. MARKETING, COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS

Marketing, communication, and awareness raising play an important role in driving sustainable tourism for small hotels. By effectively promoting their sustainability initiatives and engaging with guests and the local community, small hotels can contribute to a more responsible and environmentally conscious tourism industry while benefiting their business in the long run. In order for small hotels in the Peloponese and Sicily to achieve sustainable tourism, they need to take into account marketing, communication and awareness raising strategies for several reasons:

Promoting Sustainable Practices: Effective marketing and communication allow small hotels to highlight their sustainable initiatives, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and community engagement. By showcasing their efforts, hotels can attract eco-conscious travelers who actively seek environmentally responsible accommodations.

Educating Guests: Through communication and awareness-raising efforts, small hotels can educate guests about the importance of sustainable tourism and how their choices as travelers can make a positive impact. This helps create more environmentally conscious travelers who will support sustainable practices in their future travels.

Building Brand Reputation: Marketing sustainability initiatives can enhance the hotel's reputation and differentiate it from competitors. A strong sustainability brand image

attracts guests who prioritize responsible and ethical travel, leading to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing.

Community Engagement: Effective communication helps small hotels engage with the local community, promoting collaboration and support for sustainable practices. This can lead to partnerships with local businesses and organizations, fostering a more sustainable and inclusive tourism ecosystem.

Attracting Responsible Investors: Sustainable practices are increasingly attractive to socially responsible investors. Small hotels that can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability are more likely to attract funding and financial support from these investors.

Adapting to Changing Trends: Sustainable tourism is a growing trend in the travel industry. By being proactive in their marketing and communication efforts, small hotels can adapt to changing traveler preferences and stay ahead of the competition.

Guest Experience: Communicating about sustainable practices and initiatives enhances the guest experience. Many travelers feel a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment when they know their stay is contributing to positive social and environmental impacts.

Networking and Collaboration: Raising awareness about sustainable tourism can lead to connections with other like-minded businesses and organizations. Collaborative efforts within the tourism industry can amplify the impact of sustainability initiatives.

Policy Influence: Small hotels can use their marketing and communication platforms to advocate for sustainable tourism policies at the local, regional, and national levels. Their voice can influence policymakers and foster a more supportive regulatory environment for sustainable practices.

Measuring Impact: By promoting sustainability efforts and tracking the results, small hotels can measure the impact of their initiatives. This data can be used to set future goals, improve practices, and report progress to stakeholders and guests.

Empowering Guests to Make a Difference: Effective communication empowers guests to make informed choices that align with their values. Providing information about local culture, responsible tourism practices, and eco-friendly activities allows guests to actively participate in sustainable tourism.

Addressing marketing, communication, and awareness-raising considerations towards achieving sustainable tourism requires a strategic approach. Below are some practical measures that small hotels can implement:

Sustainability Website Section: Create a dedicated section on the hotel's website to showcase sustainability initiatives, green practices, and community engagement efforts. Provide clear and concise information about the hotel's commitment to sustainable tourism.

Social Media Campaigns: Use social media platforms to raise awareness about sustainable tourism practices, share updates on sustainability projects, and engage with eco-conscious travelers.

Eco-Friendly Packaging and Collateral: Use eco-friendly and recyclable materials for marketing collateral such as brochures, business cards, and promotional materials.

Green Certifications and Labels: Obtain recognized sustainability certifications or eco-labels and display them prominently on the hotel's website and marketing materials to build credibility.

Collaboration with Local Partners: Partner with local businesses, environmental organizations, and community groups to jointly promote sustainable tourism initiatives. This can include co-hosting events, supporting local projects, or creating package deals that include sustainable activities.

Guest Communication: Include information on sustainable practices and local culture in pre-arrival emails, guest directories, and room information packets to educate guests about their role in supporting sustainable tourism.

Sustainable Offers and Packages: Develop eco-friendly packages or special offers that appeal to sustainability-minded travelers, incorporating green activities, local experiences, or contributions to community projects.

Guest Surveys and Feedback: Gather guest feedback on sustainability practices and use the input to continuously improve and refine sustainable initiatives.

Storytelling and Impact Stories: Share inspiring stories and case studies about the positive impact of the hotel's sustainability efforts. Use storytelling to connect with guests emotionally and foster a sense of purpose in their travel choices.

Local Community Engagement: Involve the local community in sustainability initiatives and share the collaborative efforts through marketing channels. Highlight any positive contributions made to the community as a result of sustainable tourism practices.

Influencer Partnerships: Collaborate with influencers who are passionate about sustainability to amplify the hotel's message and reach a broader audience.

Green Events and Workshops: Host sustainability-focused events, workshops, or seminars to educate guests, staff, and the local community about sustainable tourism practices.

Email Newsletters: Send regular newsletters to guests and subscribers, highlighting the hotel's sustainable achievements, upcoming initiatives, and ways guests can contribute to sustainability efforts during their stay.

Engage Staff: Ensure that hotel staff are well-informed about sustainability practices and can effectively communicate these values to guests.

Track and Report Progress: Monitor the impact of sustainability initiatives and regularly report progress to guests, stakeholders, and the wider community.

9.1 Good Practice

Name of the Practice	Travel2Fit
Theme	6. Digital Marketing and communication

Type	2. Service 4. Online Platform/Mobile App
Developer / initiator	Travel2Fit
Short description	Travel2Fit is a travel proposal management and automation platform designed to streamline the sales process of modern travel advisors.
Goal	To leverage on new-generation digital tools to support small hotels better organize, automate and upgrade critical processes in the travel package sales process
Detailed description	<p>Travel2Fit is a proposal and quoting platform that was developed to address the needs of modern travel advisors (meaning mostly hoteliers, property and villa managers, travel agents). The proposals are built within minutes and are actually interactive site urls, which inspire the travelers and contain all the essential information of the trip in one place. Travel advisors are able to instantly build, manage, share and track beautiful online travel proposals providing different options for accommodation, services, activities, and transportation. In parallel, rich destination content is automatically filled by Travel2Fit. This way, Travel2Fit can be leveraged both as a sales and as a marketing tool. We envision to automate the process of creating tailor-made travel proposals within a single management system, enabling travel advisors to become more competitive in terms of both the level of services and the overall provided experience to the prospective traveller.</p> <p>More specifically, the management environment of the Travel2Fit platform is based on the use of CRM features for easier registration of customers, accommodation, services, and activities, while its digital nature allows the export of useful statistics (analytics).</p> <p>Travel proposals are created in just a few minutes, have the form of a website and incorporating personalized and rich travel content for the destination of interest that is automatically ingested in the proposal. In this way, prospective travellers can interact with the proposal, but also use it as a digital guide that gathers all the information of their trip</p>

Innovativeness	The innovative character is the automated process for the development of offers and the personalised approach that each offer has. It is an important toll for every small hotel that wants to foster a meaningful connection with the customer and at the same time promote offers and options that are related to sustainable tourism
Financial aspect	€€ = Moderate investment
Country	Greece
Target Group	small hotels, destination managers
Transferability	At the core of the offers generated by Travel2Fit is personalisation and addressing the tailored needs of each individual traveller and of each participating business. So, the amount of adaptability of the offers is immense, with the hotel owners having the final say over what kind of offers they can provide to the different target groups and to each individual tourist
Website and/or relevant links	https://travel2fit.com/

10. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM

The table below has been developed based on information from the official **Guide on EU funding for tourism**, published by the EU. For more detailed information you can visit the [official EU website here](#).

EU programme	Description	Relevance to Tourism	Tourism funding criteria
Creative Europe	Creative Europe is the EU's programme for support to the cultural and creative sectors, including the audiovisual sector.	Creative Europe is the European Union's programme for support to the cultural and creative sectors, including the audiovisual sector. The general objectives of the Creative Europe programme are to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage 	The ECOC scheme is particularly relevant for regional development. It can help finance tourism and cooperation projects or platforms under the horizontal actions of the CULTURE strand. Cultural events like music or performing arts festivals are also eligible for funding. In the MEDIA strand, film festivals and markets may play a role in national and international tourism. In addition, city branding through

		<p>- increase the competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors, particularly the audiovisual sector.</p> <p>The programme supports projects that promote contemporary European creative works and heritage (covering intangible, tangible and industrial outputs). This includes architecture, music, literature, the performing arts, films, festivals, cultural tourism, and flagship initiatives such as the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) or European Heritage Days.</p>	<p>culture contributes to the value of urban areas, thereby attracting more visitors.</p> <p>Furthermore, the programme's CULTURE strand provides for sectoral actions, including developing the creative aspects of the design and fashion sectors, along with sustainable cultural tourism. These sectors are also promoted and represented outside the EU.</p>
Erasmus+	Erasmus+ is the EU programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. These are key areas that support citizens in their personal and professional development.	Tourism organisations, education and training providers can receive funding for development and networking activities. These include academic and vocational training, adult/lifelong learning, youth and European sport events. Projects can cover mobility, developing the competences and employability of young people in tourism, digital skills in cultural heritage, hospitality, and research innovation.	he programme has no specific tourism components. However, tourism enterprises and their (future) staff can benefit from developing and training young people. In addition, some Erasmus+ project calls are specific to certain sectors, and often aim to have 1 project financed per sector, per call.
European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD or so-called Second Pillar) supports the vibrancy and economic viability of rural communities through rural development measures.	Many rural areas in the European Union suffer from structural problems such as a lack of attractive employment opportunities, skill shortages, under-investment in connectivity, infrastructure and essential services, as well as youth brain drain. It is fundamental to strengthen the socio-economic fabric in these areas, particularly through creating jobs and generational renewal. Bringing jobs and growth to rural areas will promote social inclusion, and help develop smart villages across the European countryside. New rural value chains such as renewable energy, the emerging bioeconomy, the circular economy, and various types of tourism activities can offer good growth and job creation for rural areas.	EU countries had the possibility to include tourism-related investments in their CAP Strategic Plans which are being implemented from January 2023 onwards. Such support could, for instance, include initiatives for territorial economic development and rural infrastructure, the renewal of villages and/or actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conserve small-scale built heritage (e.g. chapels, bridges, public amenities) - build and renovate tourist offices - update visitor information - other leisure, recreational and/or sports activities.
European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Displaced Workers (EGF)	The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) helps people find new jobs through further education or training or helps them start their own business.	The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), launched in 2007, helps people find new jobs through further education or training or helps them start their own business. Originally created to support workers who lost their jobs because of large-scale restructuring triggered by systemic globalisation changes, its scope was broadened over the years. <p>The EGF now helps workers let go during larger scale restructuring events, no matter the cause. At the request of the EU country concerned, the EGF co-</p>	The EGF has no tourism specific component. However, it is open to various sectors and can support workers dismissed by tourism businesses or self-employed individuals (previously) active in the tourism industry. It does so through supporting measures that help train displaced workers, upgrade their skills, or help them start businesses. <p>Moreover, it can support measures in tourism, such as vocational training courses for displaced workers according to their needs, apprenticeships to learn new professional skills and practical</p>

		<p>finances job search support, career advice, further training, retraining, coaching and entrepreneurship, and to a certain extent, allowances that enable participants to take part in the measures.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has put tourism-dependent businesses across the EU in an unprecedented situation. The EGF can help workers and self-employed people in European countries who lost their job.</p>	<p>knowledge directly on-the-job, and business start-up subsidies with follow-up support.</p>
<p>European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)</p>	<p>The fund supports actions and investments that contribute to the protection of aquatic biodiversity and to sustainable and low-impact fishing and aquaculture activities. It also promotes the supply of quality and healthy seafood products to European consumers.</p>	<p>The fund supports actions and investments that contribute to the protection of aquatic biodiversity and to sustainable and low-impact fishing and aquaculture activities. It also promotes the supply of quality and healthy seafood products to European consumers, supports the development of a sustainable blue economy in coastal communities, and contributes to maritime surveillance and international cooperation on ocean governance.</p> <p>The European Maritime and Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund co-finances projects alongside national funding streams, with each EU country receiving a share of the total budget in relation to the size of its fishing industry. In accordance with the rules of the fund, EU countries draw up their national programmes, specifying how they intend to spend the money depending on their needs. Therefore, the relevance to the tourism ecosystem might differ from one EU country to the other.</p>	<p>One of the fund’s priorities focuses on enabling a sustainable blue economy in coastal, island and inland areas, and fostering the development of fishing and aquaculture communities. This priority is the most relevant for the tourism ecosystem, as it supports community-led local development and could cover tourism-related projects such as eco-tourism, pesca-tourism, local gastronomy (fish and seafood restaurants), accommodation, tourist trails, diving, as well as supporting local partnerships in coastal tourism.</p>
<p>European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund</p>	<p>In order to strengthen the environmental, socioeconomic sustainability and resilience of tourism in the long term, regions and countries are encouraged to help transform the sector by learning from innovative solutions.</p>	<p>To strengthen the environmental, socioeconomic sustainability and resilience of tourism in the long term, regions and countries are encouraged to help transform the sector by learning from innovative solutions. Investments in tourism are possible through all 5 policy objectives supported by the ERDF (see below), provided that they comply with the relevant objectives, enabling conditions, or minimum requirements established for the concerned policy objectives.</p> <p>A specific objective under policy objective 4 (A more social and inclusive Europe) is dedicated to exploiting the full potential of culture and tourism for an economic recovery coupled with social inclusion and environmental and financial sustainability, without prejudice to the possibilities for support</p>	<p>The Cohesion Fund targets the reduction of economic and social disparities through investment in environment and Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T). It covers EU countries whose Gross National Income (GNI) per inhabitant over the period 2015-2017 was less than 90% of the EU average. In 2021-2027 these are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.</p>

		<p>provided from the ERDF to those sectors under other specific objectives.</p> <p>The Cohesion Fund can support tourism-related investments in environment and in the trans-European transport networks (TEN-T), in particular in regions with an economy heavily dependent on tourism.</p> <p>Regarding European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) programmes, tourism is expected to still be among the most popular topics. It can be addressed by a two-fold approach</p> <p>through the Interreg programmes (European Territorial Cooperation regulation)</p> <p>through the mainstream programmes 'embedding cooperation'</p>	
<p>European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)</p>	<p>The ESF+ has a total budget of over €99 billion. It invests in people, creating and protecting job opportunities, promoting social inclusion, fighting poverty and developing the skills needed for the digital and green transition</p>	<p>The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is a key financial programme for investing in people. It provides much-needed resources to EU countries to help societies and economies recover after the coronavirus crisis. The ESF+ finances the implementation of the principles from the European Pillar of Social Rights</p> <p>With a budget of almost €99.3 billion for the 2021-2027 period, the ESF+ will continue to provide an important contribution to the EU's employment, social, education and skills policies. It will also fund structural reforms in these areas.</p> <p>The ESF+ supports EU policy implementation and national structural reforms in these fields. This contributes to EU countries' efforts to reduce unemployment, enhance quality and equal opportunities in education and training. It also helps with actions to improve social inclusion and integration.</p> <p>The ESF+ promotes the horizontal principles of gender equality, respect for fundamental rights, equal opportunities and non-discrimination in all its investments.</p>	<p>1) Further support youth employment: The tourism ecosystem employs a higher share of young people compared to the overall economy. Young people in or entering the labour market have been disproportionately hit by the crisis. EU countries with a large number of people aged 15 – 29 that are not in employment, education or training should invest at least 12.5% of their ESF+ resources in this key area. All other EU countries must allocate an appropriate amount of their ESF+ resources to targeted actions to support youth employment measures.</p> <p>2) Accompany the green and digital transitions: The ESF+ makes a strong contribution to the green and digital transitions by driving investment in jobs and skilling opportunities so that workers can thrive in a climate-neutral, more digital and inclusive society.</p>
<p>Horizon Europe</p>	<p>Research and innovation framework programme, running from 2021-27. It has a budget of around €95.5</p>	<p>Horizon Europe is a research and innovation framework programme, running from 2021-27.</p> <p>It has a budget of around €95.5 billion for 2021-27 (in current prices). This includes €5.4 billion from NextGenerationEU to boost the</p>	<p>Within cluster 2 - Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society - research and innovation activities are offered to meet the EU's goals and priorities for enhancing democratic governance and citizen participation. Safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage, and responding to and</p>

	<p>billion for 2021-27 (in current prices), including €5.4 billion from NextGenEU to boost the economic recovery and make the EU more resilient for the future, and €4 billion reinforcement</p>	<p>economic recovery and make the EU more resilient for the future, as well as an additional reinforcement of €4 billion.</p> <p>Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe - Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness - supports research on societal challenges and reinforces technological and industrial capacities through clusters. It sets EU missions with ambitious goals tackling some of our biggest problems. Pillar 2 also includes activities pursued by the Joint Research Centre, which supports EU and national policymakers with independent scientific evidence and technical support.</p> <p>The Digital, Industry and Space work programme has been available since March 2023.</p>	<p>shaping social, economic, technological and cultural transformations are also conducted.</p> <p>Developing new approaches, concepts and practices for sustainable, accessible and inclusive cultural tourism are among the research activities planned for this cluster. These opportunities will continue. Those already provided through the previous framework programme Horizon 2020 will be further developed.</p>
InvestEU	<p>InvestEU programme will promote investments to strengthen tourism's competitiveness, sustainability, and value chains. It will facilitate sustainable, innovative and digital measures, which could help reduce the sector's climate and environmental footprint.</p>	<p>The tourism sector came under unprecedented pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact was especially challenging for SMEs and family businesses. The InvestEU programme promotes investments to strengthen tourism's competitiveness, sustainability, and value chains. It facilitates sustainable, innovative and digital measures which could help reduce the sector's climate and environmental footprint.</p>	<p>InvestEU brings several EU financial instruments together under one roof. The programme aims to support viable investments to help the EU in its economic recovery from COVID-19.</p> <p>The guarantee under InvestEU amounts to €26.2 billion and aims to raise more than €372 billion in additional investments before 2027 through private funding. InvestEU is managed indirectly, which means that the Commission will negotiate mandates with financial partners to deploy the available EU guarantees. The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the main financial partner and is expected to deliver on 75% of the EU guarantee.</p>
LIFE Programme	<p>Funds projects in environment and climate action. Tourism activities related to green transition can benefit from the programme. Particularly tourism projects supporting the circular economy, energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, as well as climate-neutrality may be eligible.</p>	<p>The LIFE programme funds projects in environmental and climate action. Tourism activities related to the green transition can benefit from this scheme. In particular, projects supporting the circular economy, energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, as well as climate neutrality may be eligible for funding.</p>	<p>The LIFE programme has no specific tourism theme. However, environmentally sustainable projects - especially those mitigating CO2 emissions through energy efficiency or renewable energy - may benefit from funding. Similarly, projects that marry climate adaptation measures with tourism may also be eligible.</p> <p>In general terms, funding would be provided via 'standard action projects' following an annual call for proposals. LIFE does not finance big infrastructure projects. However, it may support investment in green infrastructure by providing services which can include recreational and tourism activities.</p>
Single Market Programme (SMP)	<p>Aims to provide EU countries the tools to recover and repair from the Covid-19 crisis. The final objective is to</p>	<p>The SMP Work Programme 2023 aims to make the Single Market stronger and more resilient. Among its objectives is to improve the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs and their access to markets. The 2023 work</p>	<p>The SMP aims to boost the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs, including in the tourism sector. One important pillar of the SMP aims to foster</p>

	<p>make the Single Market stronger and more resilient. Annex 2 focuses on improving the competitiveness of enterprises, particularly SMEs, and supporting their access to markets.</p>	<p>programme is composed of 5 annexes, which are aligned with the overall objectives of the SMP. Annex 2 details the SME pillar in this programme.</p>	<p>the competitiveness, capacity building and sustainability of these enterprises.</p> <p>Here are some examples of relevant calls for tourism under Annex 2 of the 2022 and 2023 Work Programmes:</p> <p>Sustainable growth and building resilience in tourism: empowering SMEs to carry out the twin transition</p> <p>The initiative aims to help the tourism ecosystem recover by supporting companies in their digital and green transformations. This included working through groups of tourism organisations as intermediaries.</p> <p>European Capital and Green Pioneers of smart tourism</p> <p>This project promotes smart and sustainable tourism in the EU, increases the visibility of destinations, and facilitates the exchange of best practices through networks.</p> <p>The European Capital of Smart Tourism recognises outstanding achievements by European cities as tourism destinations in 4 categories: sustainability, accessibility, digitalisation and cultural heritage and creativity.</p> <p>The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism - successor of the European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) competition - rewards smaller destinations that have implemented successful strategies to boost sustainable tourism through green transition practices.</p> <p>Promoting trans-European products in third countries</p> <p>The overall objective of the grant to the European Travel Commission is to rebuild the image of Europe as a safe and secure tourist destination</p> <p>support the recovery of EU tourism and maintain its share of the world market better disperse and diversify tourism flows in terms of geography and seasons, while taking into account the needs and aspirations of local residents.</p>

11. FURTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Programme Name	Provider	Language	Website	Cost
Sustainable Tourism Training Program	GSTC	Multilingual	https://www.gstccouncil.org/sustainable-tourism-training/	Not Free
Regenerative Tourism by Design	The Tourism CoLab	EN	https://www.thetourismcolab.com.au/regenerative-tourism	Not Free
Tourism by Design	The Tourism CoLab	EN	https://www.thetourismcolab.com.au/design	Not Free
Hosting Community Conversations	The Tourism CoLab	EN	https://www.thetourismcolab.com.au/hosting-conversations	Not Free
Sustainable Hotel Course	GSTC	Multilingual (EN, SP)	https://www.gstccouncil.org/sustainable-tourism-training/	Not Free
Sustainable Business Management	Cambridge	EN	https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/education/learn-online/business-sustainability-management-online-short-course	Not Free
Sustainable Tourism – promoting environmental public health	Coursera/University of Copenhagen	EN	https://www.coursera.org/learn/sustainable-tourism	Free
Sustainable Tourism: Society & Environmental Aspects	edX/Wageningen University and Research	EN	https://www.edx.org/course/sustainable-tourism-society-environmental-aspects	Free
Sustainable Tourism: Rethinking the future	edX/Wageningen University and Research	EN	https://www.edx.org/course/sustainable-tourism-rethinking-the-future	Free
Tourism and Climate Change	edX/Wageningen University and Research	EN	https://www.edx.org/course/tourism-and-climate-change	Free
Certificate in Sustainable Tourism Management	The International Ecotourism Society	EN	https://ecotourism.org/certificate-in-sustainable-tourism-management/	Not Free
Various Courses	UNWTO Tourism Online Academy	EN	https://www.unwto-tourismacademy.ie.edu/	Free

Competence in Sustainable & Responsible Travel & Tourism Certification - online course	Triangle Knowledge Alliance	EN	https://destinet.eu/resources/courses/triangle-knowledge-alliance-courses	Free
Sustainable Development of Tourism - online graduate level course	Triangle Knowledge Alliance	EN	https://destinet.eu/resources/courses/triangle-knowledge-alliance-courses	Free
Sustainability Management for Tourism Businesses	Trainingaid	EN	https://www.trainingaid.org/sustainability-management-for-tourism-businesses	Not Free
Rewilding Training Tourism	Rewilding Europe	EN	https://rewildingeurope.com/rewilding-training-tourism/	Not Free
Sustainable Tourism: Training for Tomorrow	Erasmus + Project	Multilingual	https://sustainabletourismtraining.eu/login/index.php	Free