

FOOD
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POLICY PAPER

Next stop: final destination?

How education can help
tourism to achieve the
European Green
Deal goals

With a special feature on
micro-credentials in
EU education
policy



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POLICY PAPER
2023

Next stop: final destination?

How education can help tourism to achieve the Green Deal goals

**With a special feature on
micro-credentials in EU education policy**



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Editor's note

— Michael Schwaiger —

This paper is one of the main outcomes of the CREDinGREEN project, which addresses the difficult situation in which European tourism currently finds itself: On the one hand, it is an important global industry and represents the third largest socio-economic sector in the EU. It has been hit hard by the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which almost completely paralysed cross-regional travel for almost 2 years. As a result, many livelihoods were severely jeopardised, particularly among SMEs, which account for more than 90% of tourism providers. In addition to the hard economic figures, we should not underestimate the significant socio-psychological function that *travelling* and *holidays* nowadays plays within our society: not being able to or – even worse – not being allowed to undertake them leads to considerable personal frustration and generates potential for social conflict.

On the other hand, tourism - especially when it involves the masses – leads to very negative impacts in many other areas, as it is neither environmentally friendly nor sustainable. For this reason, the strong post-pandemic growth rates may bring a big smile to the faces of tourism managers and economists, but they cause deep sorrow among environmentalists, Green Deal policy makers as well as among local residents who are fed up with over-tourism threatening their culture, resources, future prospects and quality of life in general.

It will be difficult to find compromises here between economic growth and ecological survival as well as between the benefits of the present and the necessities for the future - but there are no alternatives!

In our paper, we want to address such problem areas, but also point out innovative solutions in order to raise awareness, start discussions and, above all, initiate and advance political processes. We are convinced that education and learning are the most important factors if we want to achieve the green transition at all, therefore, we focus on information and knowledge transfer as well as on the acquisition of green skills. As the CREDinGREEN project is dedicated to the education and training of SME managers, this paper deals mainly with higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET) issues. But actually, we should start teaching ecological values and sustainable behaviour in early childhood education and it must continue throughout the school journey, the VET sectors (including continuing VET), HE, and all forms of general adult education, right up to senior learning.

The question is, whether or not our education systems and policies are prepared for this. It will probably be necessary to carry out comprehensive reforms of national education programmes at all levels and adapt curricula accordingly. To inspire and support political decision makers to move this process forward, we want to provide feedback about how things are dealt with from a grassroots perspective, what approaches are being pursued, what solutions have been developed, what lessons have been learnt and what recommendations sound promising for the future.

We therefore asked experts from within and outside the project group to write key contributions concerning this topic and to present their examples of good practice. In addition,

we present 20 thematic EU projects that allow us to gain insights into their approaches, work and results.

However, apart from green tourism, our project had another focus of innovation. When we prepared for the application back in 2021, the European Commission (EC) promoted the concept of *micro-credentials*. At first there was hardly any reliable information available, but it also seemed that this was a new instrument for defining and accrediting (shorter) further education measures in the post-university and CVET sectors (a kind of *continuing education currency*, similar in many ways to the system ECTS at university level introduced successfully by the EC, but which has largely failed within vocational education and training with ECVET).

As we found this undertaking extremely interesting and useful for training offers set up for the EU-level, we were very keen to get our newly developed CREDinGREEN course accredited with *1 micro-credential* by the project end. We also wanted to have experts writing about this interesting innovation in education policy and present examples of good practice and successful EU projects. However, here we were sadly far less successful than originally thought. We were unable to find any experts at all who wanted to contribute to this topic, and there are only a few EU projects dealing with it at all; of around 10 projects, only two ultimately wanted to present themselves in an article. What the reasons for this were, what successes we ourselves have achieved – or perhaps not - in dealing with micro-credentials, what we have learnt from this and what others might have learnt from this, is also summarised in a key-note.

Enjoy reading ... and stay curious!



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The CREDinGREEN project

Responding to tourism market changes caused by Covid-19 and the EU Green Deal through micro-credential-certified upskilling of SME tourism managers

— Rulf J. Treidel —

The Covid-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact upon European tourism. The complete travel stop for such a long period during the years 2020 and 2021 proved particularly difficult for SME owners, managers and employees across Europe. Each country faced different challenges, but the general view was that SMEs need input in order to move forward towards achieving greater sustainability. Those businesses that had prepared for adapting themselves to new customer demands have been more successful in developing their portfolio after the pandemic than those without innovative ideas and management related to their sustainability. The original idea of the project was to provide SME owners and managers with greater knowledge of sustainable concepts.

Sustainability has become a top priority in relation to purchasing and customer behaviour. In addition, the political and economic consequences of the Green Deal need to be considered and the tourism industry will be increasingly affected by these developments.



As a result tourism will need to become much greener over the next few years. Over 90% of companies within the tourism sector employ less than 10 people and for them it will be very difficult to find out about the latest trends and developments in time and to implement them in their daily work – especially as they are faced with the struggle to achieve economic survival. In many cases, they will not have the knowledge and skills to respond to these changes at all, which in

turn will mean that they will not be able to meet the needs of the market, leading to financial hardship and existential threats. To provide support to them under these conditions, information and education is essential.

The CREDinGREEN project provides answers to these requirements through three main sources of information:

- a) the European Survey Report on tourism's post-Covid-19 recovery as well as further challenges to be expected due to the impact of the European Green Deal policy;
- b) the CREDinGREEN training course (post-graduate VET level 5+) for improving SME management knowledge, skills and competences in green tourism; and
- c) the Green Paper you are reading at the moment in which project results and lessons learnt are summarised, and which also provides keynotes and recommendations of experts from all over Europe and presents relevant EU projects also dealing with green and sustainable tourism.

The consortium of the project was formed by nine partner organisations from Austria, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Romania. This enabled the project to collect information at the European level in order to be able to respond to the needs of SMEs through a holistic approach. The set-up of the training course also supports the EC's intention to establish an EU-wide micro-credentials system, which should be anchored in national education markets by 2025.

Overall, the CREDinGREEN training course comprises of 60 learning hours (comparable to two credit points according to the ECTS at the HE level); target group is tourism managers, already active professionally, but who are in need of new knowledge and skills in order to adequately respond to the challenges of enormous green developments and demands within tourism. The training syllabus consists of 20 learning units concerning the following main topics:

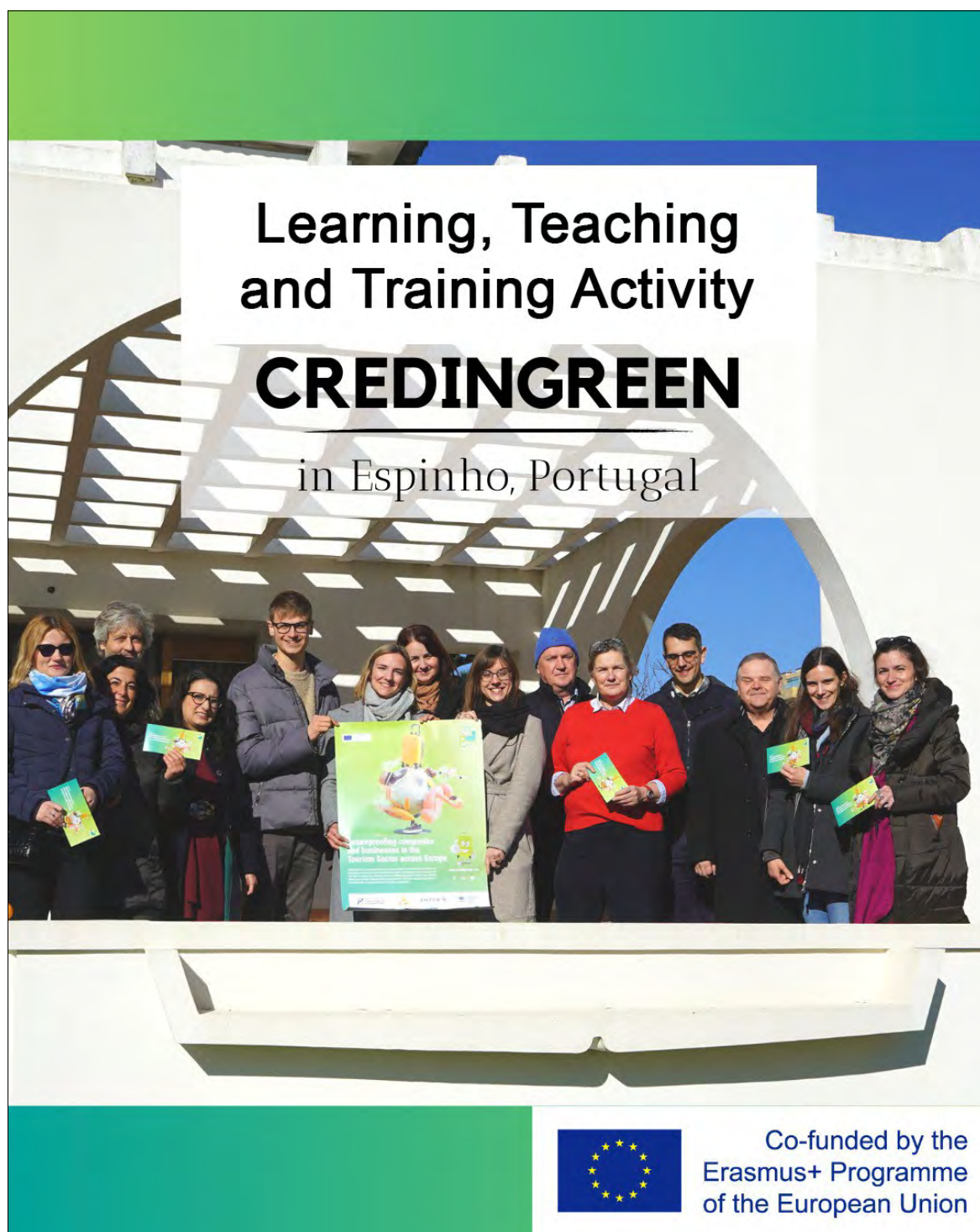
- EU Green Deal
- Marketing Green
- Food & Bio
- Energy & Efficiency
- Circular Economy

This VET course is based on the latest market development studies. In addition to comprehensive literature and data analyses, we have conducted three European wide studies ourselves in order to meet the highest research criteria. Therefore we can ensure that the most up-to-date data is used so that the demands, needs and ideas of our main target group are incorporated into customised project results.

Whether or not we will be successful with this venture will be revealed by the pilot training courses that 100 tourism managers are currently undergoing; based on their feedback and evaluation, the CREDinGREEN training course will be modified and published in English, German, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian by March 2024; all materials are accessible via the project website, and the main content of each of the 20 learning units will also be available via our YouTube channel (launch: January 2024).

A further objective of the pilot training is to spread news about the project throughout Europe's SMEs. To support these activities, dissemination events are being held in all partner countries, culminating in the presentation of the project at the world's largest tourism trade fair, ITB Berlin, in March 2024. All of these activities will provide new approaches for innovative management and the education of SME within Europe's tourism industry.

In order to fulfil the objectives of this Green Paper and to support policymakers, stakeholders and target groups with future decisions towards achieving more sustainable tourism, we would like to underline the following observations from our project work:



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Education and Information: it became obvious that an organised process for maintaining and improving professional skills within the European Tourism industry is needed. Information about general developments in terms of customer behaviour and sustainability often happens accidentally and the results are therefore

more heterogeneous. The establishment of the European tool for micro-credentials would be helpful in attracting tourism businesses and employees to participate in the process of lifelong learning, developing new skills and supporting the development of the industry.

Green Deal, sustainability and Farm to Fork Strategy: the links between the tourism industry and the European programmes needs to be strengthened. To develop SMEs in rural areas, the Green Deal policy offers many opportunities that remain yet undiscovered. The consciousness about joined-up business opportunities between agriculture and tourism provided by programmes such as Farm to Fork should be raised. Networking facilities between agriculture, tourism management, local administration and European institutions need to be established.

Business resilience and regional development: the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic

demonstrated clearly that successful and resilient SMEs invest in innovation management and the education of management and employees. This includes the business owners as well. But it is not sufficient to provide just the material and training courses. A lot of companies will need direct support to implement the necessary changes into their processes. Therefore, networking and counselling structures should be established, to achieve the resilient tourism SME structures that are needed for regional development within Europe.

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GREEN TOURISM



- Keynotes
- A glimpse into practice
- Best practice EU projects

Reducing our carbon footprint to make inbound tourism more sustainable

— Petra Hedorfer —



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With the impact of global warming becoming ever more apparent, there is particular focus on carbon emissions, of which global tourism is also a source. As with other areas of the economy there is an onus on the international travel industry to become more sustainable. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) agreed by UN member states in 2015 provide the basis for this change. In addition, the European Green Deal set a target in 2019 of reducing carbon emissions to zero by 2050.

For inbound tourism to Germany, this means systematically working to achieve climate targets while boosting competitiveness compared with other destinations. The political framework for this is in place: the aim is for the share of renewable energies to rise to 80% by 2030 and for carbon-neutrality to be achieved by 2045. The cornerstones of the national tourism strategy underline this approach.

At the German National Tourist Board, we identified these challenges early on and implemented a sustainability strategy more than ten years ago. It aims to reduce our carbon footprint based on the principle of “measure, reduce, offset”, and we have defined three strategic scopes to achieve this:

1. Emissions for which our organisation, i.e. our headquarters, our foreign representative offices and our sales and marketing agencies, is directly responsible.
2. Indirect emissions outside of our own system, such as those generated by business trips, events and elements of our marketing.
3. Emissions along the value chain generated by international travellers to Germany. In order to reduce these effectively, we are focusing our brand communications on certified sustainable products, and promoting longer stays and off-season travel with the aim of optimising capacity utilisation throughout the year. We are also encouraging travel by bus and rail and the use of local public transport.

This long-term commitment is already bearing fruit. According to a study by IPK International in September 2022 of 27 source markets for tourism to Germany, 45% of respondents generally consider sustainability measures important, with a further 34% considering them very important. Germany ranks third in this survey in terms of customer awareness of its tourism offerings.

The international travel industry also values Germany's positioning as a sustainable destination. 62% of international CEOs and key accounts on the GNTB Travel Industry Expert Panel have already identified a shift in bookings towards more sustainable products. Awareness of Germany as a sustainable travel destination rose from 66% in the second quarter of 2022 to 76% in the second quarter of 2023, with 63% of key accounts marketing Germany specifically as a sustainable destination. Two-thirds of respondents expect sustainability-oriented travel spending to rise even more sharply over the next three years.

However, we are still seeing an attitude-behaviour gap with German visitors. According to the Quality Monitor survey of the German tourism industry for the period May 2022 to April 2023, only 6% of domestic travellers chose a certified sustainable provider. The figure for international visitors is twice as high.

We are continually expanding our sustainability strategy with this in mind. A Sustainable Travel Trends data dashboard provides us and our partners in the travel industry with transparency regarding the emissions generated, thus enabling us to support the climate adaptation strategies of tourism destinations and service providers. Market-specific analysis of customers with values-based lifestyles within the context of sustainability and culture allows for targeted market reach. We are also specifically promoting responsible travel. The "Simply FEEL GOOD" sustainability campaign boosts the visibility of certified sustainable offerings, while the "Stay a little bit longer" social media campaign encourages visitors to extend their stay in Germany and so reduce the per-day carbon footprint of their trip.

Through the complex interaction of market research, marketing, networking and knowledge sharing, the German National Tourist Board is playing its part in making tourism more sustainable and future-oriented.

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Germany
The travel destination

www.germany.travel



From linear to circular tourism

Challenges and pre-requisites for a sustainable tourism industry.

— Carmen Chaşovschi —



All images: © University Stefan cel Mare

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Currently there are many debates amongst policy makers and social activists concerning shortages of resources, over-consumption and other destructive actions by humankind, and how these impact upon climate change. Following the Covid-19 crisis, the tourism industry's "back to normal" approach has slowly been replaced by a "for a better future" approach that can only be achieved by embracing a more conscious way of producing and selling tourism.

The conceptual framework for a "sustainable, resilient and future proof industry transition", described in the report "Circular economy in travel and tourism", written by Einarsson & Sorin (2020, p.3), has five underlying key principles for a thriving tourism industry in the post-Covid-19 period: (1) rethink tourism industry values, purpose, competences, potential, business models and value chains in a more holistic way; (2) global vs. local / how to operate within planetary (and local) boundaries, ensuring the wellbeing of everyone and reconciling the everyday quality of life of citizens with the needs and demands of tourists; (3) greater positive impact within the tourism ecosystem by implementing the Circular Economy principles; (4) new ways of connecting existing competences,

							
Booking the trip	Transport	Accommodation	Leisure	MICE*	Food & Beverage	Tourism in nature	Cultural objectives
<p>Connecting with customers and promoting circular tourism principles in the offers of tour operators (sustainable accommodation booking platform).</p> <p>Selection of booking platforms that contribute to the reduction of the CO2 footprint.</p>	<p>Focus: reducing energy consumption, reducing pollution.</p> <p>Replacement of fuels and motor vehicles with electric/hybrid cars.</p> <p>Use of green energy.</p> <p>Encouraging the use of public transport to the detriment of individual transport.</p> <p>Green mobility for tourists who have electric cars at their disposal in the destination.</p> <p>"Shared" vehicles in destination.</p>	<p>Focus: Reduction, Redesign/Redesign. Waste and pollution disposal.</p> <p>Reduction of plastic packaging.</p> <p>Reuse of building materials and furniture.</p> <p>Certification in sustainable tourism.</p> <p>Installations with rational use of resources (taps, lighting systems).</p> <p>Installation of rainwater collection pits.</p> <p>Selective waste sorting.</p> <p>Use of renewable energy resources.</p> <p>Educating employees and raising awareness of sources of loss.</p> <p>EMAS-compliant procurement procedures and circular economy criteria.</p> <p>Reinternalization of activities for the control of stocks and consumption (laundry, bread production).</p>	<p>Use of renewable energy for transportation.</p> <p>Introduction of collaborative consumption programs, through which residents are involved in the tourist experience.</p> <p>Use of on-site produced energy.</p>	<p>Focus: refuse.</p> <p>Replacement of plastic folders and plastic badges with recyclable materials.</p> <p>Removal of plastic straws.</p> <p>Reuse of furniture.</p> <p>Donating furniture that is no longer used.</p> <p><i>*MICE=Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events</i></p>	<p>Focus : reuse.</p> <p>Reuse of surplus food.</p> <p>Keeping products and materials in use.</p> <p>Reducing food waste, by different ways (Introducing specialised applications).</p> <p>Growing vegetables for personal consumption.</p>	<p>Regeneration of natural systems.</p> <p>Zero Waste Adventure programs (organisation of zero-waste excursions).</p> <p>Delimitation of some "zero carbon" areas within destinations.</p> <p>Nature resorts with green energy sources.</p> <p>Introducing certifications such as the Environmental Label (FR) that explain the impact of each action on the environment.</p> <p>Non-invasive constructions, with the use of materials and local architecture.</p> <p>Reintroduction of endangered species for the regeneration of natural systems.</p>	<p>Use of furniture made of non-invasive materials.</p> <p>Signposts and info panels made from recycled wood and other display systems made of recycled materials (upcycling).</p> <p>Visitor management to avoid intense consumption of resources.</p> <p>Upcycling of old cultural locations/sites and abandoned mansions for museums, info-centres or accommodation locations.</p>

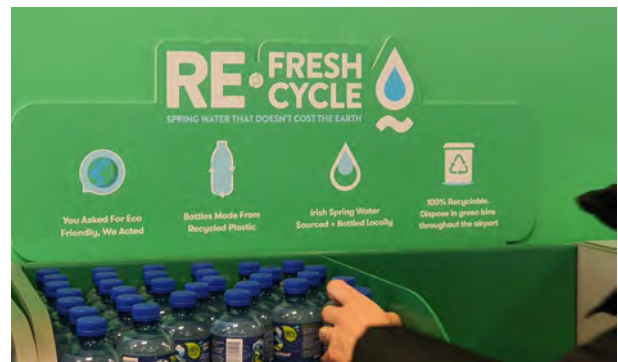
Developed by the authors. Adapted from: <https://circulartourism.eu/resources/handbooks> (accessed on 01.07.2022)

resources and assets; (5) principles of the Circular Economy as a compass for daily decision-making.

The future belongs to sustainability and both tourism destinations and tourism ecosystems should actively plan for the future in an appropriate way, to respond to these challenges.

Transitioning from linear tourism to circular tourism is a crucial step towards creating a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry. In a linear tourism model, resources are extracted, used and disposed of, often leading to negative environmental, social, and economic impacts. Circular tourism, on the other hand, aims to minimise waste and maximise the efficient use of resources throughout the entire tourism value chain.

Tourist behaviour should evolve as well during this transition to the circular economy because tourists play an active role in travel organisation, such as choosing methods of transportation or accommodation options that are environmentally friendly. However, circular sustainable options must be available at the industry level, at all levels of the travel chain. Unfortu-



nately, not all tourism actors understand the complexity of this sector. Due to the multitude of actors involved in this process, managing a destination is perhaps the most difficult activity within the tourism sector, with the only tools at their disposal being consensus, communication, participatory planning and participatory governance.

To facilitate the transition to the circular tourism model, implementation and action plans should be activated, with steps for putting the pillars of circular tourism into practice. These do already exist in several EU countries, and these good practices can serve as inspiration for several different types of organisations within the tourism sector. In the picture below, some of the actions are highlighted as examples for the implementation of circular tourism principles, at some levels of the service chain.

The shift to circular tourism should be a mission assumed by all the segments of the value chain and by all eco-system members within a destination. The journey from linear to circular tourism should be undertaken by all the actors involved in the tourism value chain, or at least by a large part of them, by rethinking the way in which resources are used to deliver the tourism experience.



REAL FOOD REVOLUTION

Importance of sustainability for companies

Catering to the changed market and requirements after Covid-19

— Anna Mohrholz —



All images: © IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH

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After the Covid-19 pandemic tourism is regaining its attractiveness. Many people want to travel, explore the world and finally get out again – something impossible during long periods between 2020 and 2023.

While many just want to leave their immediate surroundings which they have been seeing for too long, quite a few people have come to contemplate their travels. The positive effects of diminished tourism during the pandemic have left their mark on the economic, ecological and social aspects of society and thus on sustainability. Considering the at times remarkable ecological changes, the advantage of less tourism cannot be easily ignored. This becomes particularly striking when seeing dolphins making their way up the canals of Venice in the absence of tourists or the sight of Mount Everest from Nepal.

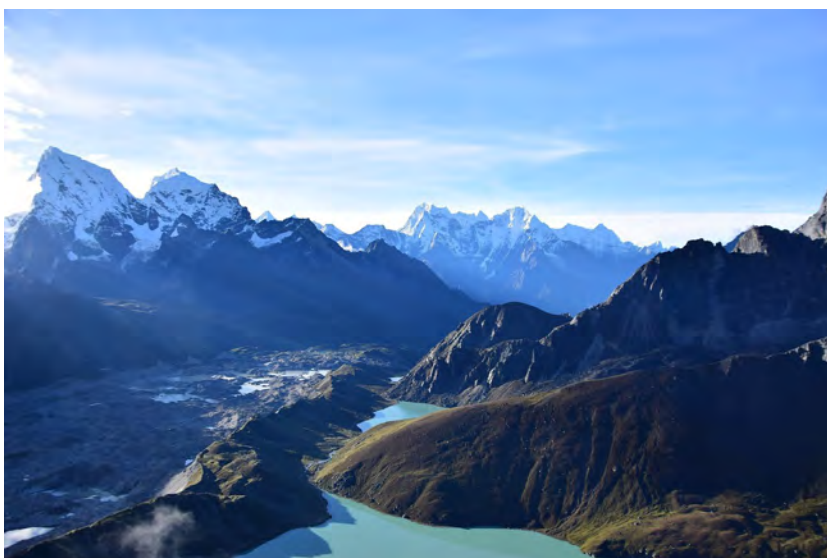
However, reduced tourism has also endangered many jobs and resulted in the loss of as much as 935 billion US Dollars in revenue worldwide during the first 10 months of 2020 alone (Forbes, Jan 14, 2021). Therefore, the sector needs to urgently recover and win back lost visitors and guests.

However, it is not so easy anymore. The global pandemic has not only changed the ecology of

some areas, but it has also altered how people think about the world, what makes them feel safe, and what impact they want to have upon where they go and with what they do. All of this results in looking for a more sustainable way of travelling and at the same time for more sustainable accommodation, restaurants and attractions at their destinations.

Tips for sustainable travel have started to flood the internet, ranging from listing companies via naming places to practical tips for being more sustainable as an individual. This goes as far as nations explaining their sustainable travel options on specific websites such as Germany with its *Feel Good* website (www.germany.travel/en/feel-good/sustainability.html). Travelling sustainably is associated with feeling good and doing something positive, not only for oneself but for the entire world.

Although sustainable travel is now on the agenda, it is not a new concept and is at the same time not so easy to execute. In 2019, shortly before the pandemic, researchers from the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development declared that sustainability in tourism began as a connection of a number of alternative



and economic processes, there can be no tourism-specific definition of sustainability. Therefore, they stick to the term 'sustainability in tourism', which describes tourism as a component of a wider sustainable development (Umweltbundesamt, Sustainability in tourism: developments, approaches and clarification of terms, 2019). This shows that sustainability within the tourism sector is a combination of influences from different, mutually influencing economic sectors and interacting approaches that subsume all principles of sustainability.

Therefore, all tourism related companies can find their angle. They need to analyse their individual factors and circumstances to find their way to greater sustainability. The travellers are asking for it. The prognosis for the market volume of ecotourism worldwide is set to rise from 181 billion US Dollars in 2019 to about 334 billion in 2027, according to Statista, the German statistical institute.

To remain attractive and be a strong tourism player in the years to come, it is thus inevitable to look seriously into sustainability – as individually as possible.



niche markets and was later applied to the entire tourism industry. However, they postulate that due to the manifold interactions of social

Sustainability as a development tool and support for the recovery of tourism

EUR 25 million over three years is the commitment of the Italian government

— Sandro Billi —



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The Italian government has adopted a series of measures to help businesses in the tourism sector, which is among the hardest hit sectors by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the EUR 150 million allocated within the PNRR, funded by Next Generation EU, the 2022 budget law created a specific Fund for Sustainable Tourism, to the tune of EUR 5M for the first year and EUR 10M for each of the two subsequent years. The fund was created for interventions to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism, aiming to minimise economic, environmental and social impacts whilst generating income, employment and the preservation of local ecosystems. The resources allocated have three objectives: to strengthen major cultural destinations through the promotion of sustainable tourism, mitigation of tourist overcrowding, the creation of innovative tourist itineraries and to de-seasonalise tourist numbers; to encourage ecological transition within tourism, with actions promoting intermodal tourism in accordance with emission reduction strategies; to support accommodation facilities and tourism enterprises in achieving sustainability certifications. For the use of the fund, the Ministry of Tourism has published three notices to a) realise interventions useful for the conception, creation, promotion, and



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valorisation of projects that encourage more sustainable tourism; b) realise interventions aimed at obtaining sustainability certifications; c) set up the list of accredited bodies for the issuing of the environmental certifications EU Eco-label. EMAS, UNI ISO 21121:2013; UNI EN ISO 14001:2015; UNI ISO 13009:2018; UNI CEI EN ISO 50001:2018; UNI ISO 21401:2019.

To achieve the purposes of points a) and b) above, interventions are considered eligible if they lead to:

1. designing, implementing and promoting innovative tourist itineraries useful for reducing tourist overcrowding in the areas with the greatest tourist levels, including UNESCO heritage sites.
2. devising and promoting itineraries that enhance a region's entire heritage, including areas and attractions that are far from the conventional tourist routes and from cities, by enhancing the services that transport tourists to areas with lower tourist densities.
3. promoting tourist accommodation in areas with lower tourist densities, through projects aimed at redeveloping and reconvertng peripheral urban areas, favouring rural tourism or the emergence of new tourist attractions.
4. creating, developing and enhancing low-emission intermodal services and routes leading to a reduction in the environmental impact of tourist activities.
5. promoting intermodal transport and intermodal exchange systems based on the use of public transport and bicycles, through the creation of bicycle parking or secure e-bike storage facilities, including near to train and bus stations, in order to boost cycling as well as the creation of a network of cycle paths.
6. encouraging rural and mountain tourism, horse tourism and holidays in contact with nature, promoting bridleways, nature trails plus open-air stays by means of eco-sustainable glamping and camping.
7. encouraging and promoting projects aimed at spreading tourism on waterways, including the exploitation of abandoned stretches of state property, offering an alternative holiday that is in contact with nature.
8. devising and implementing systems for the management and the containment and flow of tourist numbers at normally overcrowded natural and cultural sites.
9. encouraging environmentally friendly routes and itineraries as well as sports and recreational activities in maritime and coastal areas.

The first notice was published on 25th May 2023. The publication of the calls for tenders is in progress, and we will have to wait for the outcomes and results in order to make an overall assessment, but the interest and resources dedicated to this highly topical issue is already evident.



Sustainability certifications — paving the way for responsible tourism

— Julian Reingraber —



All images: © GreenSign Institut GmbH

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In an era where sustainability and responsible practices are paramount, the importance of sophisticated sustainability certifications cannot be overstated. Across various industries, including tourism, certifications can serve as a powerful tool for ensuring quality assurance, minimising environmental impact, promoting transparency, and building trust. As the public becomes increasingly conscious of the environmental and social consequences of their choices, trustworthy certifications have emerged as a beacon of hope, guiding both consumers and businesses towards a more sustainable future.

In order to steer clear of falling prey to greenwashing, it is crucial to educate oneself regarding the array of certifications available on the market. Key characteristics for the credibility and reliability of a sustainability certification are: accessible, robust and well-defined scientifically sound criteria; a well thought out system for compliance monitoring; valuable accreditation by a reputable organisation; as well as a continuous ambition for improvement.

Sustainability certifications are meant to provide consumers with a tangible way of assessing the environmental impact of their activities. By aligning with certified providers within the tourism industry, tourists can be confident that their

choices contribute to responsible and sustainable practices.

Tourism, when done responsibly, can furthermore have a positive social and economic impact. Sustainability certifications can act as catalysts for responsible tourism practices that prioritise the welfare of local populations. By ensuring fair employment opportunities, supporting community engagement, and safeguarding cultural heritage, these certifications contribute to the economic development and empowerment of local communities. Moreover, they foster a sense of pride and ownership among residents, as tourism becomes a vehicle for preserving and celebrating their unique cultural identity.

One of the most significant advantages of sustainability certifications is the transparency they bring to the tourism industry. By undergoing rigorous evaluation processes, businesses showcase their commitment to sustainability and responsible practices. These certifications provide a clear signal to consumers that a particular tourism service or destination meets established criteria for environmental, social and economic responsibility. Through this transparency, sustainability certifications help build trust between tourists and providers, allowing consumers to make informed decisions and forge long-term relationships based on shared values.

Sustainability certifications are not just symbols of compliance; they are catalysts for change. By incentivising businesses to adopt sustainable practices, these certifications drive innovation and push for continuous improvement within the tourism industry. They create a ripple effect, inspiring other businesses to follow suit and contributing to a more sustainable and responsible tourism ecosystem.

In an era of heightened awareness and concern for the environment and society, sustainability certifications have become essential for the tourism industry. They serve as beacons of responsibility, guiding tourists towards sustainable options and empowering businesses to prioritise environmentally friendly and socially conscious practices. With

their focus on quality assurance, environmental impact, social welfare, transparency and trust, sophisticated sustainability certifications are driving a transformative shift towards a more sustainable future for tourism. Let us use them as a key measure to collectively work towards a better and more responsible tourism industry.



The “dark side” of cruise tourism

— Miriam Souza —



All images: © eFuturo

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The cruise tourism industry is important for Europe, contributing to its economic activity and generating jobs. Although it represents a small fraction, approximately 2%, of total global tourism, Europe is the second largest cruise market behind North America, both in terms of as a source of passengers and as a cruise destination. It is a EUR 2 billion industry when solely considering the economic impact of the cruise lines, their passengers and crews.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry is still economically resilient and is expected to bounce back to its 2019 level of business when cruising had enjoyed an average growth of 7% per year during the previous thirty years. Consequently, it can be expected to continue to grow strongly, bringing with it, however, downsides in terms of pressure on destinations from both pollution and tourist numbers.

Not only are cruise ships large with large numbers of passengers on crew on board, but they also tend to operate in sensitive marine environments. And where does all the waste end up? In the ocean of course, such as wastewater discharge coming from sewage, laundry, showers, kitchens, oil, grease and solid waste. Cruise ships are also notorious for their emissions, particularly sulphur dioxide and carbon dioxide. These floating cities rely on heavy fuel oil,



one of the dirtiest fossil fuels, leading to significant air pollution. Collisions and the physical disturbance of marine life can also be added to the list. Last but not least, noise pollution can take the form of underwater noise or from port construction and activities representing a further significant and pervasive pollutant, affecting marine ecosystems on a global scale.

Since 2004 eFuturo has been a Portuguese certified and specialised private organisation providing vocational and professional training with a specific focus on adult skills development. With more than 6500 students and professionals, eFuturo works with migrants, people with disabilities and people who need to upgrade their employability levels or those with low literacy skills who need to be integrated into the labour market. With an eye on



the rise of the cruise industry, it became an expert in cruise ship training, but also with concerns for sustainable tourism and defining partnerships with companies that also have the same concerns.

eFuturo's main partners are some of the largest companies in the cruise industry who have announced that they are aiming to achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Royal Caribbean Group is committed to developing more efficient ship hulls, improving energy efficiency on board, investing in a wind farm in Kansas, developing alternative fuels and reviewing their supply chain. The group also works with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to reduce its environmental impact, increase sustainable tourism, respect coastal communities and to support ocean conservation work. Carnival Corporation has ships powered by liquefied natural gas (LNG), a cleaner fuel. However, being able to offer a sustainable cruise also depends on the ports as well as on the shipping lines themselves.

One important point of impact is jurisdictional ambiguity. Cruise ships often sail in international waters and visit multiple countries during a single trip, which makes it challenging to enforce environmental regulations, and cruise lines often take advantage of legal loopholes.

Finally the challenge for the ecosystem is to keep abreast of evolving regulatory requirements and non-regulatory options, and advances in technology. Clarity on regulation can take time to emerge; there is often no certainty as to which technology is best until they reach maturity. In addition, cruise lines and ports must act in concert, with the cruise lines needing to be sure that the ports, and all cruise tourism industry stakeholders, will make the necessary investments and collaborate closely.

Coastal erosion mitigation in Tuscany

— Stefano Gazzoli —



Images: © Confesercenti Toscana FIBA

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Coastal erosion is one of the most widespread negative environmental phenomena, a multiplicative combination of natural causes and unfortunate human interventions. According to reports by EuroSION, human-induced coastal erosion in Europe has exceeded coastal erosion due to natural factors.

Coastal erosion results mainly from direct and indirect impacts due to:

- construction of harbours, tourist and recreational facilities and hard coastal defence structures
- land reclamation
- regulation of river water
- dredging
- deforestation
- water extraction
- ship-induced waves

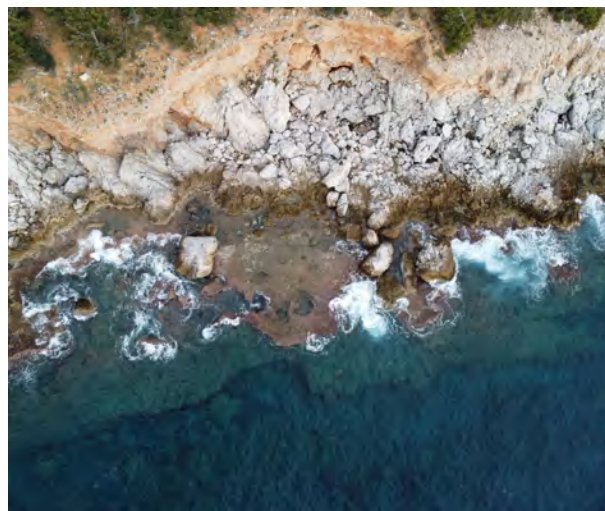
Coastal erosion causes impact on many phenomena: the ecosystem, groundwater pollution with brackish water, fishing and, of course, coastal tourism. The Region of Tuscany must address the problem to adequately support seaside tourism. The region has 270 km of accessible coastline, 97% of which is suitable for bathing. There are 914 bathing establishments along the coast, representing 12.5% of the entire Ital-



ian total. Tuscan seaside tourism generates 41% of the region's total tourism, and 4% more than that of the renowned cities of art and culture such as Florence, Pisa and Siena. The average value of the 'beach capital', i.e. the wealth generated for each square metre of sandy shore, was estimated in 2022 to be about 2,000 Euros.

It is easy to see how erosion represents an environmental emergency and causes economic damage, considering that more than 50% of Tuscan beaches suffer from beach retreat. In the last 50 years, despite the defences put in place, about 2 million square metres of sand have been lost, with more than 300,000 in the last 15 years alone. In order to tackle this challenge ecologically and effectively, the Region of Tuscany set up a Task Force in 2020 with the task of preparing a master plan. Actions to be implemented over the next 15 to 20 years were identified and the investment to be made in the first phase was estimated at 95 million Euros, also counting the PNRR investments financed by the Next Generation EU programme. The discussions about the methods to be adopted for definitive remedies have not yet been fully concluded, so the interventions carried out so far have been mainly aimed at local, urgent and temporary initiatives.

At the same time, the anthropisation of the coastline has not stopped, and interventions continue, particularly in relation to port infrastructure. The problem continues to be serious and costly. Employer associations representing companies operating in seaside tourism are beginning to express their discontent about non-



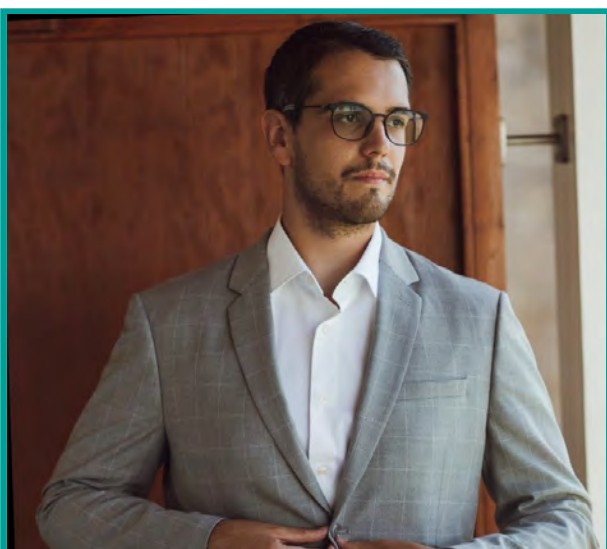
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structural and definitive interventions. During a recent conference, Confesercenti, the most important representative of businesses in the region, denounced interventions that are too general, without a global vision, a prior study or the sharing of experiences. Instead of simply "plugging holes" without effective results, experimental structural interventions of new techniques are required instead, with medium-term and not last-minute planning being needed to reduce the impact of the cost and pollution of transport, as well as more attention and in-depth study dedicated to the possible consequences of building infrastructures at sea.

There are other problems too for instance at the regulatory and bureaucratic level, such as the quality of sand collected from nearby coastal areas. So it happens that what is suitable for Regione Liguria, is not necessarily good for the nearby Regione Toscana, leading to implementation of costs and pollution caused by necessity of sourcing from more distant areas. We are therefore facing a problem of conservation and respect for the region that is already having serious effects upon environmental and economic sustainability, which must be addressed quickly even if we cannot return to the once beautiful and long beaches.

Empowering the workforce for a sustainable future — the role of vocational education and training (VET) in European Green Deal

— João Gonçalves —



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In alignment with the vision of cultivating a modern and resource-efficient economy, the European Green Deal aspires to foster a just and prosperous society within the EU. This monumental transition towards sustainability will profoundly influence every facet of labour, necessitating the acquisition of new green competencies and perspectives. Therefore, the pivotal role of vocational education and training (VET) systems in preparing the workforce for this paradigm shift cannot be overstated.

VET plays a pivotal role in preparing students for entry-level positions in specialised occupations. Given the pervasive importance of sustainability across all industries, VET providers must imbue their technical curricula with environmental and climate change principles. This endeavour encompasses the preparation of workers for careers in the deployment of renewable energy, the construction of energy-efficient infrastructure, the management of zero-waste supply chains, and various other related spheres.

In addition to specialised green courses, the infusion of sustainability concepts into VET programmes within traditional sectors like manufacturing and agriculture is imperative. Achieving Europe's ambitious decarbonisation goals hinges on comprehensive education about circular systems, energy conservation, waste minimisation, and the



reduction of ecological footprints, even within established roles.

The practice-based learning methodologies employed in VET serve as a crucible for inculcating enduring environmentally conscious behaviours. Through work-based learning opportunities, students are afforded the chance to directly apply green skills in professional environments. Partnerships forged between environmentally conscientious enterprises and training institutions furnish students with invaluable real-world exposure.

With nearly half of all European students enrolling in upper secondary or post-secondary VET programmes, the scope of influence wielded by VET in instilling sustainable ideals, coupled with fundamental vocational proficiencies, is vast and profound. The integration of environmental ethics into the educational continuum fosters a culture where sustainability becomes an intrinsic professional norm.

Policy endeavours such as the European Green Deal explicitly acknowledge the pivotal role of VET in imparting both green and digital skills. Targeted public investments in the modernisation of VET infrastructure, curriculum refinement, and instructor training are identified as key enablers. The in-

volvement of the private sector further ensures that training materials are rooted in actual business needs.

As Europe propels itself towards a position of competitive sustainability, its VET system must remain agile and adaptive, continuously equipping workers with the requisite mindsets, technical proficiencies and hands-on experience vital for thriving in green jobs. The empowered workforce forged through forward-looking VET programmes will undeniably assume a vanguard role in realising the transformative potential of the European Green Deal.

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How the European Green Deal can be integrated into vocational education and training (VET) courses

— Pedro Casal —



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In pursuit of the ambitious European Green Deal, which sets the target of achieving climate neutrality in Europe by 2050, the integration of sustainability principles and green skills into vocational education and training (VET) has emerged as being critically imperative. This transformation demands not only a shift in economic paradigms but also significant societal changes.

To seamlessly infuse the ethos of the Green Deal into VET curricula, various approaches can be considered. Firstly, there is a need to place a distinct emphasis on proficiency in sustainability and the green economy. This involves offering specialised training in crucial areas such as green finance, waste and water management, circular economy concepts, sustainable construction, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Furthermore, sustainability should permeate the entirety of the curriculum. This means integrating modules on sustainable practices within general education courses, even if they do not exclusively focus on green matters. For instance, an automotive course might incorporate coverage of electric vehicles, while a construction skills course could include principles of green building practices.

Real-world instances can serve as powerful educational tools. Case studies, site visits, guest lectures, and projects can effectively underscore the significance of green professions and technologies already embraced by for-

ward-thinking enterprises. This approach renders the content more relevant and practical..

It is imperative to ensure that training programmes align with evolving environmental standards, such as those pertaining to sustainability reporting and energy performance criteria for buildings. This equips trainees to meet elevated benchmarks and contribute meaningfully to the green economy.

A holistic, systems-based mindset is indispensable. Assisting students in comprehending the intricate interplay between economic, social and ecological systems is paramount. It is crucial to recognise that every domain is affected by this transition, and an integrated understanding is essential for effective navigation.

Preparedness for the future must be accentuated. Programmes should be positioned as a means of equipping individuals for the jobs of tomorrow, as a green economy demands novel skills. Sustainability is no longer an optional skill set, but a prerequisite for meaningful participation in the workforce.

Promoting resource conservation is not only a statement of intent but an active endeavour. Minimising waste, water consumption and energy usage during routine course operations demonstrates leadership in the green sphere and sets an example for sustainable practices.

Green-centric learning environments should be established through partnerships with industry leaders in sustainability. These partnerships provide trainees with placements that afford them genuine exposure to real-world scenarios. This experience not only augments their networks but also builds their confidence in their preparedness for green careers.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration should be actively encouraged. Students from diverse programmes should collaborate on multi-faceted green projects, mirroring the complexity and ingenuity demanded in authentic professional settings. This not only enhances their skills but also promotes a holistic understanding of the green economy.

Sustainable campuses serve as living models of the principles being taught. Implementing sustainable practices in the management of campus facilities, procurement, transportation, and energy utilization transforms the campus into an educational tool in itself.



Lastly, the competencies of educators should be enhanced. Instructors should receive training in sustainability subjects pertinent to their respective domains of expertise, enabling them to seamlessly integrate this content into their instruction. This not only empowers them as educators but also reinforces the importance of sustainability within the educational ecosystem.

Given the pressing nature of climate change and the imperatives of the EU Green Deal, it is of paramount importance that the future workforce possesses a keen awareness of sustainability and is primed for green occupations. The aforementioned recommendations serve as effective means of seamlessly integrating this proficiency across all tiers of occupational education and training

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Rural event management — local sourcing

Benefits and challenges

— Magda Grădinariu —

In Bucovina, the northeastern region of Romania, the preservation of traditions, the revival of handicrafts and the celebration of authentic gastronomy converge in two projects by the Association "iaBucovina": "Bucovina Brunch" and "Clacă in Bucovina." (Clacă = Romanian word for community-driven effort or gathering with a common purpose such as building a house, cooking for a wedding or field work).

Our rural events aim to offer a cultural and culinary experience and also to promote sustainability and cultural heritage preservation. "Bucovina Brunch" is a series of rural gastronomic events that unfold in lesser known villages in Bucovina. These events blend local and cultural experiences with gastronomy, while "Clacă in Bucovina" is a series of workshops dedicated to preserving traditional houses, often on the brink of demolition,





and reviving traditional craftsmanship, breathing new life into both the buildings and the communities that create them. Both projects stand as a testament to the preservation of cultural heritage and the authenticity of the tourist experience.

At the heart of our projects is the practice of local sourcing. Whether we set the table in the courtyard of an ancient church or within the warmth of a local household, we emphasise sourcing goods

and services locally. This approach supports the community, promotes authenticity, and reduces carbon footprint, aligning with the ideals of the Green Deal.

During our experience in organising and managing these events, we have learned some valuable lessons:

- While local sourcing is essential, striking the right balance between authenticity and practicality is crucial. Some items, such as specialised

equipment for repairing old houses, may not be available locally. The challenge is in finding a balance.

- Local sourcing necessitates building resilient supply chains. Seasonal variations, the increasingly common trend of urbanisation in villages that leads to some products being no longer produced in households, or various unex-





pected events can affect sourcing. It is crucial to always build closer relationships with local suppliers and understand their challenges.

- Raising awareness and educating our team and event attendees about the significance of local sourcing is an ongoing effort. It is very important to communicate and/or remind of the importance of supporting local businesses and preserving cultural heritage.

Looking ahead, we see great potential in aligning our projects with the principles of Green Deal Tourism, so our future plans include these three main aspects:

1. Digital Integration: we aim to integrate digital solutions for ticketing and marketing while preserving the core local experience. This digital integration will help us reach more people in search of local experiences.
2. Global Outreach: we aspire to promote our events beyond our borders, attracting interna-

tional visitors and expanding our reach, thus promoting sustainable tourism in line with the Green Deal's objectives.

3. Skill Development: investing in local talent and encouraging traditional craftsmanship will ensure a steady supply of authentic products and empower our community economically while preserving our cultural heritage.

In conclusion, our journey in rural event management and local sourcing in Bucovina has been both enlightening and transformative. We have witnessed the power of supporting local communities, celebrating cultural heritage and embracing sustainability. By incorporating the lessons learned and making continuous improvements, we aim to create events that not only highlight Bucovina but also which inspire others to join us in our commitment to authenticity, sustainability and the principles of the Green Deal.



All images: © iaBucovina

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Sustainability developments for restaurant businesses to remain attractive to guests from near and far

— Lara Mohrholz —

Within a restaurant business the efficient use of products and materials is always an issue. Making most of what is available has always been important to us. Nevertheless, due to the recent Corona pandemic, the topic of sustainability has come even more into focus at our restaurant. The realisation that everything is interconnected all over the world and that supply chains are an incomprehensible construct with hundreds of positions does not pass unnoticed by a restaurant business.

But how can I become more sustainable without complicating the daily routine or giving guests the feeling of missing out on something? Our routines are so tightly constructed, that there is no room for any major experiments and also guests expect a certain standard from us as a semi-fine dining restaurant.

I think it is the little things that each individual and business can implement well and integrate into their everyday lives, including in a restaurant.

Straws are an excellent example of this. The most basic question to ask oneself here is, do I really need them? Or do I just use them because they are already in the drink I have been given?

Most drinks simply do not need a straw. So we do without them as much as possible. And if one is required, it is simply not made of plastic. Whether

it is made of metal, glass or a natural fibre - there are plenty of alternatives. The guest does not have to go without anything and at the same time I am not producing unnecessary waste.

As a sommelier (wine expert), an exclusive and constantly changing wine list is very important to me. This requires a lot of wine tasting and therefore a lot of travel. Due to the pandemic and with its lockdowns and travel restrictions, this was not possible and an alternative had to be found.

Thanks to digital technology such as Zoom conferences, this worked out wonderfully. I received a sample package sent to me personally and could do wine tasting from my desk at home. Nevertheless, I could also receive direct feedback from other participants and/or winemakers online.

Even if you do not see each other in person, it is immensely advantageous to meet online - and not having long and time-consuming journeys is immensely cost-saving. I could even do several tastings remotely within a couple of days.

Another possibility is trade fairs, which can finally take place again after Corona. Even if the logistical effort is of course immense, you have the advantage that the entire industry comes together. You meet in one place, network and most importantly you can taste a lot of different wines



without having to travel halfway around the world.

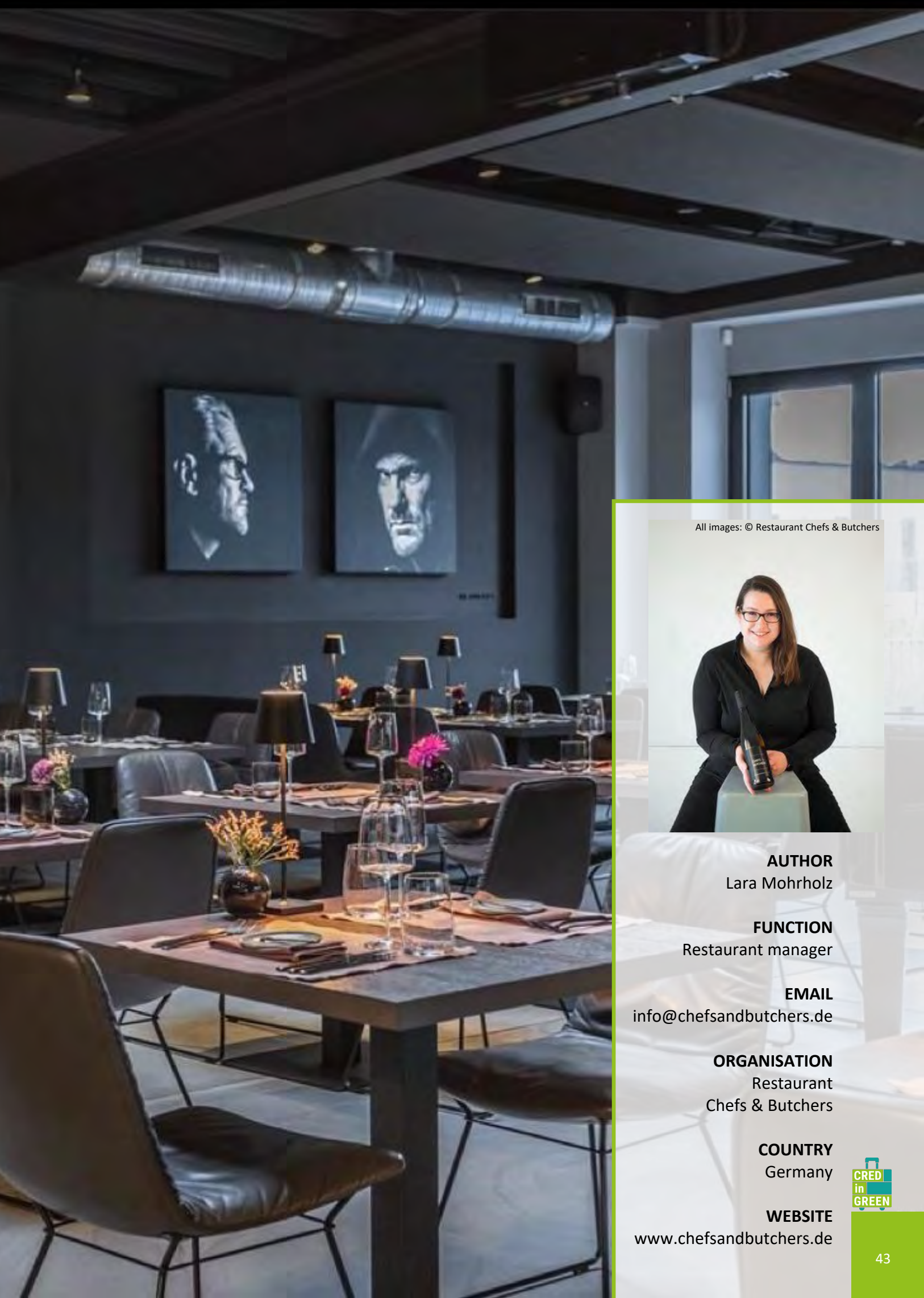
Even in the ongoing restaurant business, I encounter the topic of sustainability on a daily basis almost everywhere.

One such example is the simple question: where does my water come from? And furthermore: is there a regional provider? Is it possible to purchase food from nearby farmers? Not everything needs a long supply chain but can be received from regional or even local sources.

We have a small vegetable field not far from the restaurant. Two colleagues take care of it in their spare time. So we always have fresh seasonal vegetables directly from the field straight to the plate.

Sustainability works - you just have to start. At best right in your immediate area.





All images: © Restaurant Chefs & Butchers



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Local excellence for sustainability

A virtuous experience of Regione Toscana that can be reproduced

— Zsafia Jobbagy —

When dealing with sustainability and tourism, we must not forget the impact that any initiative can have on the attraction and the satisfaction of visitors. The issues of wind turbines and solar panels have already been widely publicly debated. However, there are strategies that could strengthen the link with local characteristics and resources. This is the case with agriculture, a sector through which regions express most of their diversity, as it impacts upon the local production of food and wine. The European agricultural and food system, referred to as the Common Agricultural Policy, has high, common standards for quality, consumer health, constancy of supply and nutritional values. The Green Deal too has an agriculture element aimed at the acceleration towards sustainability, which will bring environmental, social and health-related benefits, whilst also paying attention to a fairer distribution revenue. The programme has four objectives linked to environmental protec-



tion, climate change and the maintenance of biodiversity: a) ensuring food security; b) reducing the environmental footprint of cultivation and production; c) strengthening the resilience of the system; d) driving the system towards competitive sustainability from producer to consumer.

The focus on zero kilometres and typicality of the elements is a factor that has already attracted attention at the local level. Since 2000, Regione Toscana has promoted the “Vetrina Toscana a Tavola” programme, designed to enhance local production, consumption and distribution at zero km. Although the document does not explicitly refer to environmental protection, the path followed - based mainly on the preservation of typical products - already anticipates its principles, and pursues even aims related to cultural, social and economic sustainability. Sustainability is one of the cornerstones and entails the use of local products, the use of organic and short supply



chains, respect for the seasonality and identity of the region, as well as circular cooking up to plastic free, a modern approach that has ancient origins.

In practice, the programme has worked to support the network of neighbourhood businesses; support producers with a local distribution network; foster the knowledge of the region and its products; develop cooperation between agriculture, catering, trade and tourism; and promote adherence to quality protocols. It has overseen the setting up of networks of businesses that adhere to specific quality protocols, created a brand, and coordinated communication lines, providing information and disseminating the image of the products and the network created around them. The objectives are pursued through specific projects.

Over time, the tourism value of “Vetrina Toscana a Tavola” has grown, taking on the commitment to “promote responsible tourism, combining a short supply chain for food and wine, quality production, and unique regions. The blend can create new economies, conscious consumption models and innovative ways of promoting Tuscan traditions,” as reported on the website www.vetrina.toscana.it. The field of operation was then extended to cultural events and handicraft production, which can obtain a gold, silver or bronze award depending on the number of initiatives organised during the year. To date, members include 1000 restaurants, 300 food outlets and 150 producers. The regional departments involved are those concerned with production activities,

finance, tourism, trade and agriculture. The programme is coordinated by the Department of Economic Development/Commerce and Cooperation Service in cooperation with the Department of Health, ARSIA, ARTEX and Toscana Promozione and is co-financed by the Tuscany Region and Unioncamere Toscana. The project implementation is carried out by Unioncamere Toscana in cooperation with the CAT - Regional Technical Assistance Centres of the employers' associations Concommercio, Confeserecenti, FIEPET and FIPE.



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REVE heritage — revitalisation of the vernacular heritage

Network of heritage centres for the interpretation of material and immaterial patrimony, using displaced wooden houses

— Violeta Enea —

REVE heritage (REvitalisation of the VERnacular heritage) is an initiative aiming to create a network of heritage interpretation centres, using up-cycled traditional houses, retrieved from demolition actions. The cultural landscape of rural Bukovina (NE Romania) is undergoing continuous change, with many traditional houses being demolished and replaced by modern houses. Old houses, built from wood and clay, are a valuable resource for Bukovina's image as a destination that is always associated with authenticity. The REVE initiative has identified a new use for old houses, with them being relocated and reconstructed with the assistance of volunteer tourists. The houses will later on be used as training and interpretation centres for heritage interpretation. The construction techniques of these old houses were very sustainable, using the local workforce and local materials with low impact on the environment. Moreover, the construction system used is also promoted for the building of new energy efficient housing.

REVE heritage is engaging resources for the re-circulation of old traditional houses that, through relocation, will become new and valuable assets to the community. Local people can thus rediscover the value of wooden houses, and the community will relearn how to respect their traditional and vernacular heritage. The

role of tourists will be changed from CONSUMER to VALUE-PRODUCER. Tourists will contribute to cultural activities and interact with the community. The interpretation activities will be developed with the support of young people: they will act as community supporters and storytellers. Also gastronomy workshops will promote local food and consumption, whilst respecting the wise use of all resources.

There are already two such houses that have been relocated and rebuilt, in Putna (2019-2023) and in Cacica (2020-2023), and the workshops have served as training events for local people concerning traditional construction techniques. The upcycling of old houses will lead



to the reduction of resources used (new wood and building materials), with a deep impact upon the entire production chain. The initiative is contributing to the preservation of the cultural landscape, part of the touristic product. The REVE Heritage centres will serve as workshop and training centres for heritage, offering tourists the chance to “test” and “experience” old construction techniques, associated with the vernacular architecture within the rural communities located near to UNESCO protected sites. Through the support of storytelling and with members of rural communities, they will discover handicrafts and will reconnect with nature and heritage. This action is mainly related to Putna, where a Heritage Interpretation Centre was established with the support of the local community. Within a 2-year timeframe, another centre will be functional in Cacica and another in Bilca. The circular economy principles are being respected, with all the buildings being constructed using retrieved / upcycled wood, and old houses are being relocated and refunctioned to serve as heritage centres. Reve Heritage is respecting diversity in terms



of gender and age, and will involve elderly workers as specialists in traditional construction techniques. They will act as mentors for the tourists. In addition, the centres will host and accommodate tourists working as volunteers, who will be involved in the work of the centre and in its cultural activities.

The principles and main values of REVE Heritage are re-circulation, re-location, re-invention, re-discovering, re-connection. (1) Circular Economy Aspects: REVE will reintroduce into circulation stories, houses and traditions. From a circular economy point of view, the REVE activities will reuse old buildings and old materials; (2) Human-centred, fair and responsible tourism aspects: all the activities will involve local communities, that will become co-authors of the activities (tours, workshops etc.); the workshops will edu-

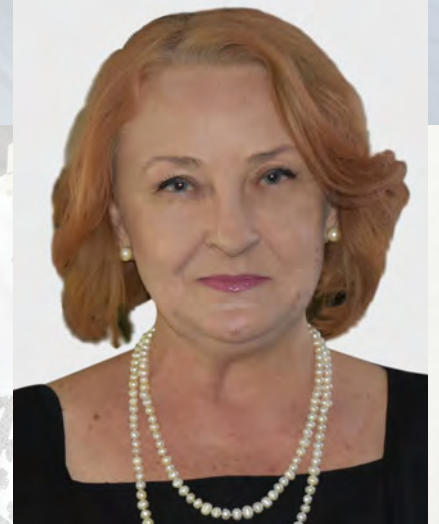
cate members of the local communities in old and forgotten construction techniques; the resources and materials will be nature-friendly and non-polluting (clay, straw, local food etc.).

The actions are related to the European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century 2017 (Council of Europe), the New European Agenda for Culture 2018, the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage 2019 (European Commission), European Union Urban Agenda: Cluster Culture and Cultural Heritage (orientation paper), Territorial Agenda 2030.





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Sustainable tourism in Germany's nature parks

— Kathrin Risthaus, Martina Leicher —

Germany's nature parks are important actors in facilitating and developing sustainable and climate-friendly tourism in the regions. As model areas for sustainable development, their aim is to steer developments, processes and products in the nature park regions in terms of sustainability - in the economic, ecological and social senses. Protecting nature and landscapes as well as preserving habitats are priorities for nature parks. By preserving natural and cultural landscapes, with their diversity of species, nature parks simultaneously also secure the basis for tourism.

Tourism infrastructures developed by the protected areas enable visitors to experience nature at first hand. These infrastructures include, for example, signage systems for hiking or cycling routes, nature discovery trails, information boards, visitor centres and guided tours. This means nature parks can be relied upon to provide high-quality experiences in relation to nature and sustainable nature-based tourism.

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The involvement of nature parks goes beyond just infrastructure measures, as it leads to the joint development of offers with regional and/or national tourism partners. When it comes to developing innovative offers, nature parks play an important role as an interface and moderator between different interest groups, such as tourism, mobility, education, regional development and conservation.

To guarantee that leisure offers are sustainable for nature and the landscape, nature parks show guests how to enjoy their activities in a sustainable way. To prevent critical levels from being exceeded in sensitive, natural landscapes and habitats, flows of visitors are managed in terms of both time and space. Digital visitor management can help visitors to make the most of their time in the protected areas by providing them with important information about the attractions, hiking trails and activities. This can also help to reduce crowding effects and improve the overall visitor experience.

Along with nature compatibility, the issue of sustainable tourism in nature parks is often associated with other areas of work. For example, certified nature and landscape guides also offer fascinating tours related to environmental education issues. As part of education for sustainable development, nature parks and their partners give visitors valuable inspiration to achieve greater sustainability in their everyday lives once their holiday is over and they are back home again.

Cooperation with local businesses involves companies that support regional added value chains in shaping the tourism offer. Nature parks often work closely within networks with partners such as hotels, restaurants, farmers, foresters and other actors and businesses. Appropriate businesses that meet certain sustainability and climate protection criteria can be designated as *Nature Park Partners*. These partner stakeholders offer sustainable, climate-friendly products and services and moreover act as ambassadors for the nature park to both residents and visitors. For their part,



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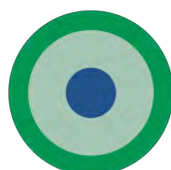
the participating businesses benefit from swapping ideas with other partner businesses in the network.

Nature parks are also committed to climate-friendly mobility. Some are part of German Railways' *Fahrtziel Natur* (can be translated as *Destination Nature*) network or work with partners to offer sustainable mobility services such as hiking and cycling buses or car-sharing schemes.

Nature parks use initiatives and projects to position current socially relevant issues within their tourist networks. For example, this includes issues such as inclusion, and ensuring that nature can be experienced by all groups of visitors, or the topic of climate-friendly tourism.

In summary, nature parks are important actors in regional networks and together with their partners can positively influence sustainable tourism development through their holistic approach.

**Naturparke
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Soy Ecoturista - authentic ecotourism experiences in Spain

— Amanda Guzmán —

Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). Spain is a major tourism destination, worldwide in third place in terms of visitors and the number one in Europe. But tourism development in Spain - especially in coastal areas - has not been characterised by sustainability and is mainly focused on *Sun and Beach tourism*.

However, Spain is also the European country with the most relevant biodiversity and the largest protected areas. It has very different climates which make it possible to practice ecotourism throughout the year, enjoying different experiences which

target all interests, sensibilities, age groups and physical conditions. Furthermore, there is a good offer of tourism services in rural areas where tourism is a major economic motor.

Spain offers visitors 16 national parks, 52 biosphere reserves, 16 geoparks and more than 150 natural parks. There are many other protected areas plus the Natura 2000 Network. All together they account for almost 30% of the total surface area of Spain and 20% of the Natura 2000 Network in Europe.

Soy Ecoturista is a pioneering initiative - supported by the Ministry of Tourism of Spain - that offers authentic ecotourism experiences, ensuring travellers of their contribution to the local develop-





ment and to the biodiversity conservation in the protected areas they visit.

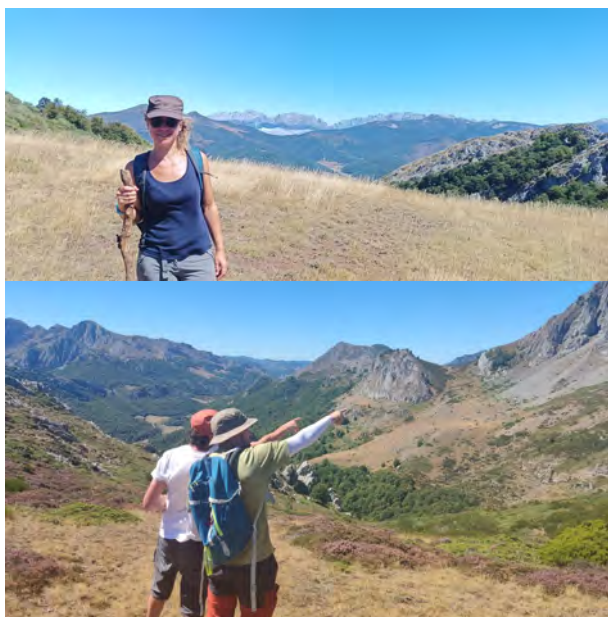
Tourist destinations and companies belonging to Soy Ecoturista comply with the environmental and social requirements, established by the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in the Protected Areas (EUROPARC Federation) and similar tourism sustainability schemes applied in the biosphere reserves, geoparks and Natura 2000 Network, offering authentic and memorable experiences linked to natural and cultural heritage. Nowadays,

41 destinations and more than 800 tourism businesses are members of Soy Ecoturista.

These schemes are all based on:

- active management for the conservation of the protected area;
- sustainable tourism plans based on participation and two main objectives: conservation and local development;
- effective communication and cooperation between the different local stakeholders;
- training businesses on the values of the protected area, conservation activities and environmental management;
- complying with minimum requirements of quality and sustainability (destination and businesses);
- formal partnerships between the tourism businesses and the protected areas based on mutual commitments to improve tourism sustainability;
- designing authentic ecotourism products based on discovering natural and cultural values, including interpretation, developed by local businesses, offering local products, etc.

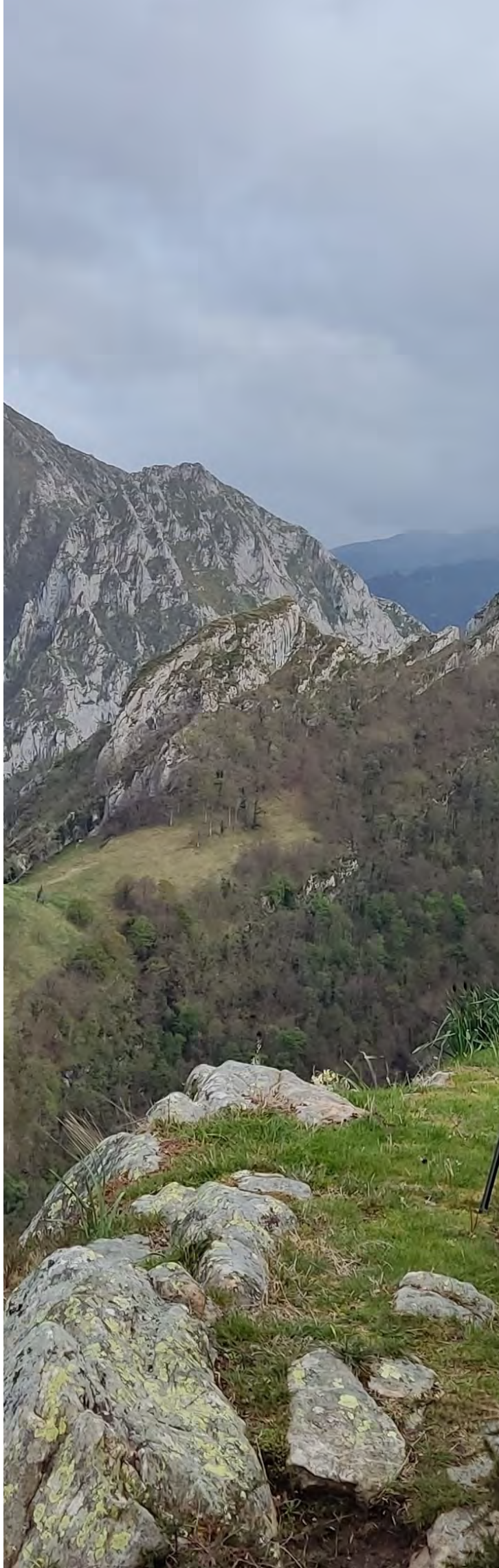




Soy Ecoturista is managed by Asociación de Ecoturismo en España (Association of Ecotourism in Spain), a non-profit association established in 2010 that welcomes ecotourism destinations and entrepreneurs located in protected areas. The association collaborates with public authorities for tourism, environment and rural development to encourage and promote the product *Ecotourism in Spain* by applying sustainability criteria.

The brand and the web portal www.soyecoturista.com promote and enhance the commercialisation of:

- protected areas throughout Spain which stand out for their landscapes and for implementing sustainable tourism plans;
- professional and high-quality accommodation and tourist service companies, which collaborate with the protected areas, supporting conservation and local development;
- experiences and various activities suitable for all ages and interests, to enjoy while discovering the natural areas (birdwatching, wildlife watching, hiking, cycling, cultural activities, local gastronomy, etc.).





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GustDelași platform as a hub for the development of responsible food consumption communities

— Ioan Sebastian Brumă, Codrin Dinu Vasiliu, Lucian Tanasă —

Within the context of current challenges faced by food systems, local food producers in the North-East Development Region of Romania (RDNE) play multifaceted societal roles, encompassing social, economic, cultural, symbolic and biopolitical dimensions.



In their role as social actors, local producers in RDNE serve as a unifying force in the formation of sustainable food consumption communities. These communities contribute to an improved quality of life and foster consumer accountability towards bio-integrated nutrition. This approach respects the environment, food safety and security, emphasising participation, ethical responsibility and ethological awareness.

Economically, local producers represent a pivotal link in short production and supply chains, significantly bolstering regional economic stability.

From a cultural perspective, local producers safeguard and promote local gastronomic values, integrating them into ecotourism and eco-cultural projects. In this sense, local producers illustrate that food consumption carries symbolic significance. Through symbolic consumption, both producers and consumers actively contribute to the strengthening of regional brands and identities.

A crucial aspect of the role of local producers in RDNE is their biopolitical impact. The socio-economic values embedded in local products provide the knowledge resources needed to develop regional policies and strategies aligned with sustainability, durability, social responsibility, participatory culture and local identity.

Within the realm of food's socio-economy, food consumption communities, nurtured by the rela-

tionships between local producers and consumers, serve as drivers for intelligent regional development. An important catalyst for these bio-integrated food consumption communities in the region is the GustDelași platform, initiated through funding from the Municipality of Iași and implemented by the Rural Development Research Platform Association.

The GustDelași platform promotes high-value local food producers in the region, facilitating their integration into food consumption communities. This fosters responsible food consumption behaviour, supports the environment and enhances food safety and security. The platform also encourages participation, ethical responsibility and ethological awareness.

Through the platform, over 100 local producers maintain ongoing communication with food consumers in the region. This engagement contributes to building trust in high-quality local food products, spreading awareness about the benefits of short supply chains, certified or accredited local products and efforts to reduce food waste. At a strategic level, the GustDelași platform contributes to the development of intelligent, responsible, bio-integrated food production and consumption practices in the medium and long term.

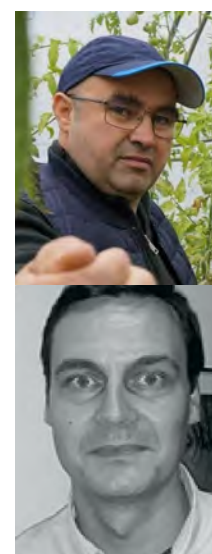
Additionally, the GustDelași platform supports:

1. local and regional producers in improving their access to food markets;
2. the digital transformation of short supply chains, enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness.

A significant outcome of the platform was its contribution to food security during the pandemic. It achieved this through actions that facilitated communication and collaboration between local producers and consumers. The GustDelași platform has also demonstrated innovation through online tast-

ing events conducted during pandemic-related lockdowns.

It is important to note that the GustDelași platform is a civil society initiative. It does not function as an online sales platform and operates with a non-patrimonial, apolitical and non-governmental character.



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Destinations and business together to develop innovative smart mobility solutions: the Strade di Siena case

— Vincenzo Asero —

Transport is the basis of tourism and one of the main issues of the Green Deal. The sharp increase in travel makes the joint problem of tourism and transportation highly topical. Professionals working in the field are already beginning to notice the involvement of the younger generation, which tends to opt more and more for train travel over flying. Tourism-related travel is not only about reaching a destination and returning, but also about the possibility of undertaking activities in the area being visited.

One of the most popular modes of transport at present is the bicycle. Cycling tourism has become a product and destinations have equipped themselves to become an attraction. The link between the habit of using a bicycle regularly and making it a tourism tool is remarkable. Bicycles are the most common means of transport for about 19% of Europeans. The Municipality of Siena, in Tuscany, together with other municipalities in the area, wanted to push the bicycle as a tourism product.

Public administrations and businesses agree on the importance of this activity, which brings together the economy and the environment. As highlighted by numerous studies, cycling tourism is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and generates benefits for local commu-

nities. Both holiday destinations and rural areas are investing in bike trails as low cost, soft infrastructure that benefit both locals and tourists.

Cycling tourism has grown exponentially over the past decade and today represents a strategic priority in Europe. The number of cycling tourists in Germany, the world's strongest market, grew by 37.5 % during the period 2014 to 2018, increasing from 4 to 5.2 million.

Tuscany offers an ideal scenario for bicycle lovers and a rich variety of itineraries with the most accessible scenic routes being those between Florence and Siena. As a result, in 2020 the Lonely Planet guide rated Siena first on its list of the top 10 places for a cycling holiday.

In the wake of this success the Municipality of Siena developed the *Strade di Siena* project aimed at developing cycling tourism. To create immediate and direct economic benefits the municipality decided to build up a business network to support companies involved in cycling tourism. The idea was based on the consideration that the tourist industry is predominantly characterised by a system of micro enterprises which require cooperative solutions to become more competitive on the market. The proposed business network has four guiding principles: 1) Strengthen presence on the market; 2) Facilitate the business and



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tourist connection; 3) Concentrate interests and lobbying; 4) Act as an agent to stimulate and compose the interests of the region. The process of building a business network started with the drawing up of a marketing plan to evaluate economic sustainability. The process was accompanied by activities aimed at communicating with interested businesses: website, information events, meeting with trade associations, collective and individual meetings; collecting expressions of interest. At the end of the participative activities 52 expressions of interest from various business categories were collected.

The network was created but some considerations needed to be taken on board. Effective tourism cooperation needs efficient management structures, flexibility and explicit guidelines and requires decisions to promote the goals of the partnership.

The outcomes of the project at the moment are: creation of cycle routes, a regulation for bicycle-friendly accommodation, a website and a formal business network. These results support the argument of cycling as a tool for the development of sustainable tourism.



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Tourism as a leverage for mainstreaming new mobility services

— Julia Kammer, Florian Supe, Samantha Eigner —

The European Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy recognises the uptake of collaborative mobility as a key contribution to green the transport system. Embedded in a seamless, low-threshold network of mobility options that include traditional public transport, new services like on-demand minibuses, bike- or car-sharing can make sustainable travel alternatives widely available and enable a more targeted modal choice.

However, experience with new mobility services is still limited to a very distinct group of users, with a disproportionately high share of young, male, and formally educated persons¹. One promising use case that can help to bring them into the mainstream by widening the user spectrum is mobility in tourism. With 56 percent of EU residents making at least one personal tourism trip in 2021² and a notable trend towards shorter but more frequent holiday trips, influencing the travel behaviour of tourists poses a major environmental leverage by itself. While the decline in car ownership within urban areas illustrates the ongoing shift in mobility patterns, still 75 percent of holidaymakers in Austria arrive at their desired destination by car³.

Depending on the duration of the holiday trip and the season (e.g. winter tourists are typically more stationary, yet bring more equipment), the main criterion for the choice of travel modes include the possibility of carrying luggage and the level of

(un)certainly concerning on-site mobility options.⁴ Thus, the availability of (as well as easily accessible information about) new mobility services at the holiday destination is an important aspect for individuals in choosing to travel to and from their destination by train or bus instead of using their private car. Hence, attractive collaborative mobility services on-site foster multimodal travel behaviour on the whole.

In addition to the immediate environmental benefit of substituting private car trips, gathering first experience with new mobility services whilst on holiday can be a door opener for using them in everyday life. Studies show that routine and habit are powerful psychological features that pose an obstacle to adopting new practices in general. The change of location and living circumstances inherent to a holiday offers the possibility of overcoming habitual mobility patterns and trying out new services.⁵

Since sustainability is an increasingly important booking criterion for tourists, an investment in new mobility solutions can constitute a competitive advantage for destinations and contribute to the overall customer – and employee – experience. For example, the installation of e-car charging infrastructure can be used to run collaborative mobility options and at the same time support the transformation towards e-mobility in general.

E-car-sharing can also help to make fast chargers in sparsely populated tourism regions economically more viable by balancing the seasonally fluctuating charging demand. If designed non-proprietary, in the high season, the charging infrastructure serves those guests who still arrive with their own cars, while in the low season, sharing, on-demand vehicles and vehicles operated by the municipality can use the charging points.

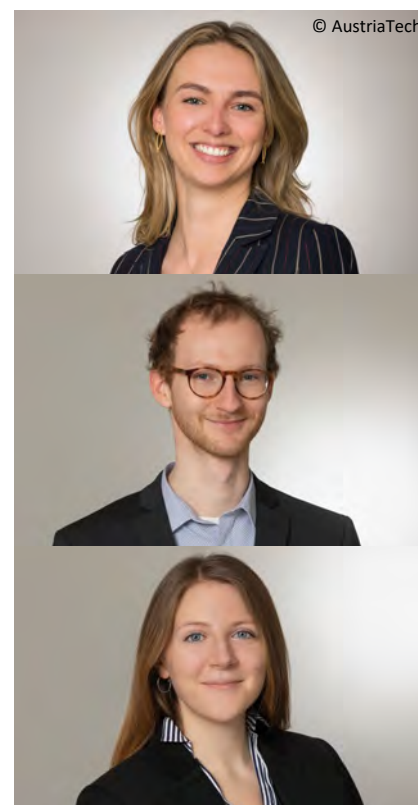
The local population can benefit from tourism-induced sharing usage, especially when population density and corresponding low local usage of shared services cannot cover the requested minimum capacity so that these mobility options would not be economically viable in the long term and might exit the market.⁶

To summarise, after introducing traditional car rental services or the temporary rental of private living spaces via digital booking platforms, with shared and on-demand mobility the tourism sector is once more destined to play a leading role in the development of the sharing economy.

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BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM



NEMOS

A new educational model for the acquisition of sustainability competences through service-learning

The NEMOS projects seeks to define:

- a food sustainability profile (FSP) through a community building methodology;
- a methodological handbook (MH) for food sustainability through self-learning;
- assessment tools for FSP and MH by co-creating practices for self-learning;
- a new educational model suitable for the acquisition of sustainability competences through green pedagogies and self-learning.

We live in a global, interconnected world in which resources are not endless. Within this context, different sustainability measures come into play. Here, the NEMOS project is marked by the Agenda 2030, in which sustainability is one of the values governing society and a key competency for graduate students. Food science graduates particularly need to address challenges such as climate change, food waste and food losses as well as providing support to food producers seeking to meet global economic, social and environmental sustainability targets. They will receive the necessary knowledge and competences to share their knowledge.

NEMOS is an international project co-funded by the EU Erasmus+ programme. It is managed by the Public University of Navarra (Spain), together with five partners: Università di Pisa (Italy), Technische Universität Graz (Austria), Institut Supérieur d'Agriculture Rhone Alpes I.S.A.R.A (France), Technological University Dublin (Ireland), and IG-CAT (International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tour-

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PROJECT NAME

NEMOS

COUNTRY

Spain

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

01/02/2022 — 31/01/2024

WEBSITE

www.nemosproject.com

ism). It creates a new educational model for the acquisition of sustainability competences, especially for higher education learners, through service learning.

The NEMOS project aims at linking sustainability, service learning and food to demonstrate how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) can be achieved. Higher education is crucial to achieving the SDGs: in order to create a more sustainable world, a collective effort is required by all.

NEMOS acknowledges that sustainability is a crucial skill for graduate and post-graduate students in order to tackle important global challenges such as climate change, food waste and the loss of biodiversity in their professional careers.

Therefore, the project plans to define a new educational model to integrate sustainability competences into the curricula of food-related degrees.

This is done through the achievement of four project results: First, by developing a food sustainability profile for students through a community building methodology. It is followed by a methodological handbook detailing food sustainability via the means of service learning. To ensure that the materials serve their purpose, the third result will be assessment tools. This is to be developed through co-creation service learning practices. Lastly, a new educational model for acquiring sustainability competences through green pedagogy and service learning is to be created. This will contain guidelines and a toolbox for a pedagogical strategy within higher education. During the project's two year duration, NEMOS will create a guidance framework, toolkits and educational practices patterns for the acquisition of sustainability competences.

Designing a new educational model based on how to effectively acquire sustainability competences,



© NEMOS

through service learning is one of the objectives of the project. The graduates will be better prepared to face the challenges of our global world and act accordingly to support the more sustainable use of resources. Students will increase their awareness of sustainability and service learning, the global challenges of humanity and the importance of integrating all of this into their professional careers.

The ultimate aim will be to contribute to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals: In particular goals 2 (*Zero hunger*) and 12 (*Responsible consumption and production*) are of interest.

NEMOS will be focused on defining a new educational model integrating sustainability competences in an effective way through service learning for food-related degrees. This will then serve as a basis for the further application of the results in other degree programmes in the future.

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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PROJECT NAME

Vocational education meets
sustainability — INEBB

COUNTRY

Germany

FUNDING PROGRAMME

INEBB Programme of the
Federal Ministry for Educa-
tion and Research & Federal
Institute for Vocational Edu-
cation and Training

DURATION

01/11/2020 — 31/10/2022

WEBSITE

www.ihk-projekt.de/inebb

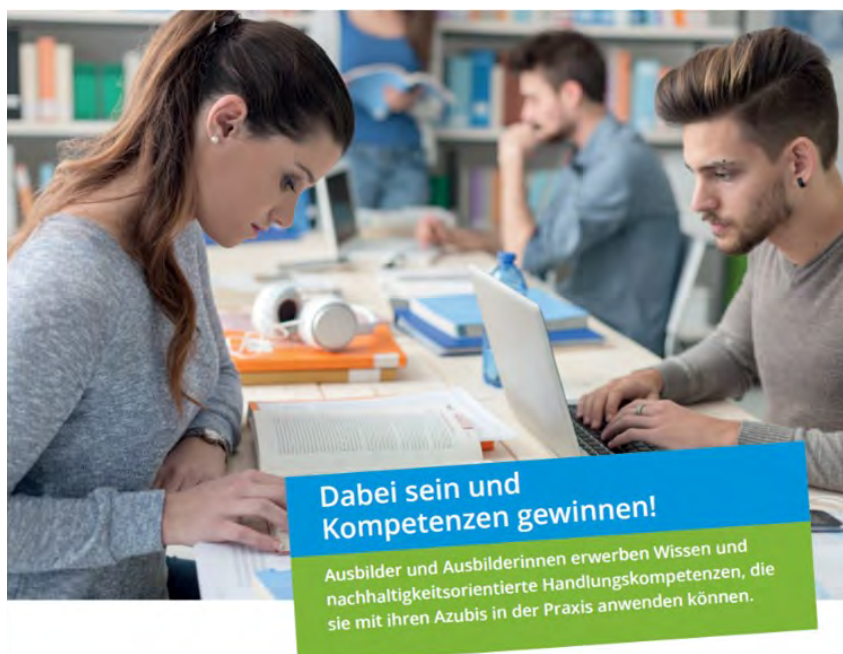
Vocational education meets sustainability — INEBB

**Ausbildung trifft Nachhaltigkeit
(Integration von nachhaltiger Entwicklung
in die Berufsbildung — INEBB)**

The project seeks to:

- transfer the previous INEBB project to more branches and VET professions;
- establish a certificate course;
- include the course in further long-term educational offers.

During the funded period from November 2020 to October 2022, an online IHK certificate course for commercial professions was created. It helped the learners acquire comprehensive sustainability competences through six workshops. An important component was the concept de-



velopment for a sustainability project with the trainees, for which the necessary knowledge and skills to plan and execute such a project were provided.

Together with the trainees, the trainers could thus bring about change in an experimental context and contribute to the achievement of sustainability goals set in the company of the trainees. The modular workshops dealt with all essential topics for a sustainable economy. Furthermore, competencies of new German job profiles, especially *Sustainability and Environmental Protection* and *Digitised World of Work*, were promoted. The learning tasks established the connection between the three dimensions of sustainability – economy, ecology and social affairs. Various methods such as change of perspective, role plays, best practice and interactive digital tools made the workshops lively, vivid and practical. After successful completion of the course, participants received the IHK certificate *Specialist Training for Sustainable Development*.

The target group were trainers and pedagogical specialists in commercial professions. The continuing education was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) under the title *Integration for Sustainable Development in Vocational Education and Training INEBB* and was a joint initiative by the IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH Ostbrandenburg, the IHK-Bildungsakademie GmbH Magdeburg and the Weiterbildungsgesellschaft der IHK Bonn/Rhein-Sieg gGmbH.

The INEBB project was a transfer project, based on the findings and developments achieved by the INEBB project from the BBNE 2015-2019 pilot projects of the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training. On this basis, the targeted involvement of company stakeholders, large corporate networks and high communicative reach, the Bundesvereinigung Nachhaltigkeit e.V. (Berlin) as



overall coordinator, together with business, academic and chamber partners from all over Germany, created a viable business model for the sustainability and digital competence development of in-company training staff.

The main objective was consistent practice- and application-oriented, marketable and successful dissemination as well as the long-term perpetuation of INEBB continuing education.

To achieve this, the original face-to-face concept was converted into blended learning and extended to other commercial professions to reach a wider target group. Additionally, the sustainability-oriented competencies of sales professionals were expanded through digital competencies by learning tasks via a blended learning format.

The partners had identified provision as a blended learning format, its integration into private-sector training platforms, inclusion in the continuing education programme of chambers, the selection and training of a lecturer base and its long-term, attractively priced establishment as a permanent offer for in-company practice as essential building blocks. Central to this was ensuring broad scaling through strong networks and associated partners.

After its implementation, the offer is set to be applied nationwide with a differentiated curriculum for blended learning and additional lecturers as multipliers. After all, sustainability as learning content in the VET sector still needs further support.



BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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LIFE NGO

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Since 2001— ongoing

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Instagram: [europarc_federation](#)

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Twitter/X: [europarc](#)

Facebook: [EUROPARC](#)

ECST

European charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas

The ECST is a practical management tool that enables Protected Areas, their communities and businesses, to work together to develop tourism sustainably in the area, thus becoming Sustainable Destinations. At present, the ECST Network comprises 94 Sustainable Destinations from 15 European countries.

People love Parks! Iconic landscapes and time in nature are often the most cited reasons for tourist trips. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this nature tourism trend received a boost that continues to prevail.

Although tourism can be very positive for the socioeconomic development of a region and can bring wealth to its inhabitants, it can take its toll not only on the natural environment, but also on the local communities and visitors' own experience. Park managers are confronted with the challenging decision of how to best protect nature, whilst not compromising the visitor experience.

That is why, in 1995, the EUROPARC Federation established the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in Protected Areas in order to help Parks manage tourism in the best way possible. This is a practical management tool addressing the following actors - (1) protected areas and their communities, (2) tourism businesses, and (3) travel agencies. The goal is to work together to develop tourism in a more sustainable way.

The ECST is recognised internationally as a model for sustainable tourism management. It is based on five principles that should govern how tourism is developed and managed in protected areas:

1. Giving priority to the protection of the area's natural and cultural heritage and increasing awareness, understanding and appreciation of it.
2. Contributing to sustainable development which means addressing all aspects of its environmental, social, and economic impact in the short and long term.
3. Engaging all stakeholders to participate in decisions about tourism development and management. Partnership working should be encouraged.

THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS IN NUMBERS

2022 Awardees

15 Protected Areas awarded in 2022.
The data provided below pertains solely to these 15 protected areas*

1.5 M ha of land cover that has been certified with the ECST for sustainable tourism

1.5 M people live inside areas awarded the ECST where tourism is managed sustainably

600 K ha N2000 sites protected under European law by Protected Areas with the ECST

877 organisations across EUROPE working in partnership to deliver sustainable tourism and nature conservation

K = thousand, M = million

20 M € total investment executed in the previous 5-year action plan

215 K participants on educational visits inside areas awarded the ECST



VISITORS TO THE 15 ECST AWARDED AREAS IN 2022

9.6 M
DAY VISITORS

11 M
OVERNIGHT STAYS

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BUSINESS PARTNERS

5 Protected Areas awarded in 2022 have tourism businesses committed to the ECST principles.

SUSTAINABLE TOUR OPERATORS

2 Protected Areas awarded in 2022 have implemented Part 3 of the ECST. Tour operators contribute to bringing visitors to the ECST sustainable destinations.



EU QUALITY LABELS

1509 of EU products quality schemes related to agricultural products and foodstuffs, wines, spirits and aromatised wines, and organic farming products in the 15 ECST Sustainable Destinations

Organic farming products 1370	TSG 69
PDO 44	PGI 26

*This data is from the Magic Numbers form sent to evaluated Protected Areas (PAs) in 2022. Each year PAs applying for the ECST Award must fill out this form. Over the course of five years, we will gather data on the entire network.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECSTPA) is a practical management tool, which helps protected areas to continuously improve sustainable development and management of tourism by taking into account the needs of the environment, local population and local tourism businesses. The ECST Network now counts 92 Sustainable Destinations from 15 countries.

Protected Areas awarded the ECST in 2022

Delta de l'Ebre Nature Park
Galician Atlantic Islands Maritime-Terrestrial National Park
Sierra Espuña Regional Park
Gargano National Park
Cilento National Park
Colli Euganei Regional Park
Chelmos-Vouraikos National Park
Terras do Lince
Kullaberg Nature Reserve



Kefalonia-Ithaka Geopark / Mt. Aenos National Park
Gran Paradiso National Park
Migliarino San Rossore Massaciuccoli Regional Park
Els Ports Nature Park
Sirente Velino Nature Regional Park
Sierra de Santo Domingo Protected Landscape



EUROPARC
FEDERATION



EUROPARC
Sustainable Tourism
in Protected Areas

After over 20 years of experience, the ECST has proven to be a useful and important tool that delivers social, environmental, and economic benefits and indeed can be described as a model of governance that delivers protected areas as sustainable tourism destinations. At present, 94 protected areas and more than 800 tourism businesses from 15 European countries have been (re)awarded the ECST.

As stated by the Sooma national park, awarded in 2020: "The ECST award is like a quality mark for the area, as well as an obligation and a strong motivation to justify this award, to get better every day and to focus on ensuring that sustainable tourism provides better quality of tourism services and the increased preservation and enhancement of protected areas. It also encourages entrepreneurs in the region to work more closely together and to develop. The whole process of preparing and evaluating the application itself has already caused a development leap in cooperation as well as in understanding of what sustainable tourism and the exposition of a protected area should be."

Or in the words of the Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna National Park, awarded in 2015 and 2021: "The ECST is for us a challenge and a path of growth, together with all the other players in the area and also with tourists, in search of that precious balance that is called sustainability. It is a great opportunity to "network", to really work together, with a common goal."

A recommendation to political decision-makers to improve Green Tourism is to bring together tourism and environmental authorities.

Cooperation between these two agencies is key at regional, national and European levels. Experience shows - like in Catalonia where there is a cooperation agreement between the two departments - that collaboration is crucial to achieving a common goal. The ECST can help with that.



BEYOND CULTURAL TOURISM

Co-creation of human-centred and sustainable solutions for a circular cultural tourism

Insights on how to co-create solutions rooted in local cultural heritage for tourism that goes beyond solely “sun and sea” and explores innovative areas of circularity, human-centricity, cultural Europeanisation and smart destination management.

Be.CULTOUR involves the six pilot territories of Cyprus, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, Spain and the cross-border region of Romania and Moldova. The overall aim is to co-create innovative solutions rooted in local cultural heritage for tourism that goes beyond solely the “sun and sea” experience. The unique connection associated with the natural and cultural heritage reflects the innovation areas identified by the project team:

- circular tourism
- human-centred, fair and responsible tourism
- cultural Europeanisation
- smart destination management

The core of the activities is based upon strong partnerships between the project pilots, their stakeholders, sixteen mirror regions, and three advisors as one learning community. The main focus during the first half of the project was on the pilots, working together with the local stakeholders to co-create six action plans, each tailored to respond to the particular local needs and characteristics of each pilot region, while still remaining in line with the overall project objectives.

The local communities developed diverse action plans showing the variety of needs and understandings of circular cultural tourism. Some goals were shared between pilots. For instance, the certification of food, souvenirs and other goods produced locally was targeted in Basilicata (Italy), in Larnaca (Cyprus) and in Aragon (Spain). The innovators and the communities were also interested in offering sustainable alternatives to conventional types of accommodation and promoting a holistic under-

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ICLEI Europe

PROJECT NAME

Be.CULTOUR

COUNTRY

Germany

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Horizon 2020

DURATION

01/02/2021 — 31/01/2024
(extended to mid-2024)

WEBSITE

<https://becultour.eu>

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: Be.CULTOUR
Instagram: becultour
LinkedIn: Be.CULTOUR
Twitter/X: @BeCultour

standing of culture and nature. This could be achieved, for example, through establishing eco glamping in rural areas which are not affected by light pollution. Once this action has been implemented, stargazing enthusiasts will be able to enjoy their holidays near the Rio Martín Cultural Park in Spain, where culture and nature enjoy a special bond. Another common objective is the digitisation of heritage assets. In Romania and Moldova it was considered as the first step to attract physical visitors along the historic route of the Moldovan voivode Stephan the Great. Partners from Cyprus developed the *Interactive Map of Larnaca* to answer tourism needs for access to reliable information via digital means. Finally, the social aspects were addressed in many pilots, such as in Vojvodina (Serbia) for instance, tackling the vital role of cultural diversity and in Västra Götaland (Sweden) which plans to attract new residents whilst also fostering social cohesion in post-industrial areas.

There are also actions that are typical for one particular region only, such as a sensory experience of local herbs in Cyprus or an immersive gaming

experience near the famous Via Appia Antica in Italy. Every pilot area has indeed its own hidden gems, often a reflection of their unique features and authentic regional values.

From the experience gained during the co-creative process, the project can suggest some recommendations for positive outcomes:

- regular monitoring of stakeholder engagement and inclusive communication;
- the promotion of a bottom-up approach for the co-development of the action plans to ensure better results;
- synergies between the action plans and ongoing local events, festivals, and initiatives to activate stakeholders and to constantly onboard new ones;
- the iterative mapping of further funding opportunities, at the local, regional, and European levels.

The lessons learnt throughout this journey serve as educational material for achieving innovative cultural tourism that encompasses social, environmental and economic sustainability, and which can encourage policymakers, project owners and

stakeholders to promote collaboration across European destinations to enrich cultural exchange and experiences.



All images: © Be.CULTOUR



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PROJECT NAME

DGI Tourism

COUNTRY

Italy

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

15/02/2022 — 14/06/2024

WEBSITE

<https://dgi-tourism.eu>

SOCIAL MEDIA

LinkedIn: dgi-tourism
Facebook: DGI-Tourism
Instagram: dgitourism
Twitter/X: DgiTourism



DGI Tourism

Digital, green, innovative approaches for VET training in tourism

DGI TOURISM aims to create a holistic training framework for VETs focusing on tourism professions to inspire responsible travel and sustainable growth through evaluation activities with trainers' feedback and development of guidelines for VET centres.

The aim of the DGI Tourism project is to create a holistic training framework for VETs focusing on tourism professions that will inspire responsible travel and secure sustainable growth for the industry in the post-COVID era. Within the European landscape, a plethora of actors are now able to influence educational methodologies, especially now as part of European projects; standards and methodologies are prone to constant negotiation and evolution (Lawn, 2011). Moreover, traditional education systems can face several challenges hindering the incorporation of new methodologies. These challenges are often structural and cultural; indeed successful changes within educational systems are often linked to structure and culture (Fullan, 2001). The DGI Tourism project is being implemented in Greece (Atlantis Engineering, Travel2Fit), Italy (X23, ENAIP Lombardia), Austria (Vocational School for Trade and Travel) and the Netherlands (Green Destinations) and aims to:

- develop interactive, participatory and lean teaching approaches that boost sustainable thinking on tourism.
- develop an ECVET profile and accompanying training plan to boost flexible learning.
- develop training material by tourism experts, fostering eco-friendly best practices in easily adaptable, reconfigurable and transferable ways. The training content and modules are being adapted to the local needs and can thus be considered as transferable for use in other countries, as well as to disciplines with an

interest in sustainable service delivery.

- create a path for tourism professionals to adapt to post-COVID needs, improving their digital and green skills and competencies, to prepare tourism professionals to adapt to market needs and economic challenges, propose an intelligent skills mix and boost employability.

The project aims to provide a novel training methodological framework for the VET sector to contribute to social-environmental challenges, like travel sustainability and fight climate change, whilst also from a different perspective, allowing travel professionals (both entry-level and experienced) to adapt to new market trends and requirements, and therefore boosting their employability.

In the current phase of the project, all the achieved results can be found on the official webpage section.

Result 1: Lean Methodological Framework, which aims to develop interactive, participatory and lean teaching approaches by selecting methodologies with digital, green or innovative components; and developing a Lean Methodological Framework, with an assessment of several methodologies by various countries:

- a) The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET), the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the Total Quality Management (TQM) in Greece
- b) The implementation of the EQF, the National Framework for Qualifications (QNQ), the Regional Framework for Professional Standards (QRSP) and the Atlas of Jobs and Qualifications in Italy
- c) The National Qualification Framework (NQF) and NQF-Act in Austria
- d) The National Coordination Point EQAVET (NCP EQAVET), Plan-Do-Check-Act/Review Cycle (PDCA-Cycle), and the JOB monitor and the BPV monitor in the Netherlands.

Result 2: The DGI Tourism Professional and Train-

ing Plan will train VET professionals to be adaptable to the evolving needs of the tourism sector and is based on the principles of sustainability. This has been done by conducting a Technical Report on the ECVET Profile of the DGI Tourism Professional and creating a proposed training plan.

Result 3: DGI Tourism Training Courses are currently in their development phases, and the Ontology Schema and its technical report have already been developed.



All images: © DGI Tourism

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PROJECT NAME

PORT Cultural

COUNTRY

Romania

FUNDING PROGRAMME

UEFISCDI Romania

DURATION

10/2019 — 10/2023

WEBSITE

www.portcultural.usv.ro

PORT Cultural:

PORTfolio of innovative tools for sustainable development of rural communities with tourism potential, through capitalization of cultural patrimony and cultural identity

The project will investigate the societal and historical context of changes in the present cultural landscape, through historic, ethno-demographic and anthropological studies and will develop a portfolio of innovative tools, consisting of research methodologies, databases with models of traditional constructions posted on interactive platforms, architectural projects for adapting vernacular buildings to modern ones and contemporary functionality.

The PORT project contributes to the “Patrimony and cultural identity” of the Romanian National Strategy for Research and Development 2020.

The project aim was to improve the institutional performance of six research institutions, all members of the consortium, through the development of diversified research competences, according to the specific nature of each project partner institution, focussing on the broad field of cultural landscape protection and cultural patrimony in two pilot areas: Bucovina and Southern Transylvania.

The project’s central area of focus was aligned to the EU objective “to promote the cultural and linguistic patrimony of each member state, (...) contributing to the reinforcement of group identities in the coordinates of multiculturalism” (CDI Strategy 2020, p. 23).

From a wider research perspective, the project investigated the societal and historical context of changes in the present cultural landscape, through historic, ethno-demographic and anthropological studies and developed a portfolio of innovative tools, consisting of research methodologies, databases with models of traditional constructions posted on interactive platforms, architectural projects for adapting vernacular buildings to modern one and contemporary functionality.

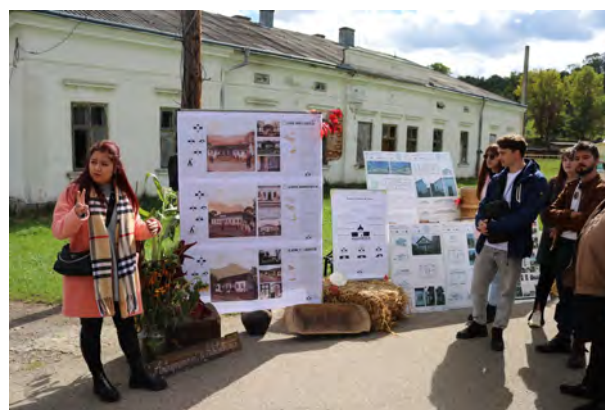
The developed solutions, as technological and non-technological innovations, were delivered as “ready-to-use” tools, completed to be patented, for use by public administration bodies in the target areas, by private and

non-profit organisations, by professional associations and by owners of built patrimony, delivering precise solutions for the preservation of relevant elements. They also presented studies for the sustainable development of tourism destinations, in order for them to be capable of using cultural patrimony as a tourism resource, as well as studies for the development of entrepreneurship within rural communities, plus complex models highlighting the impact of modernisation/development of regional identity and the impact of integration on (inter)national consumption chains.

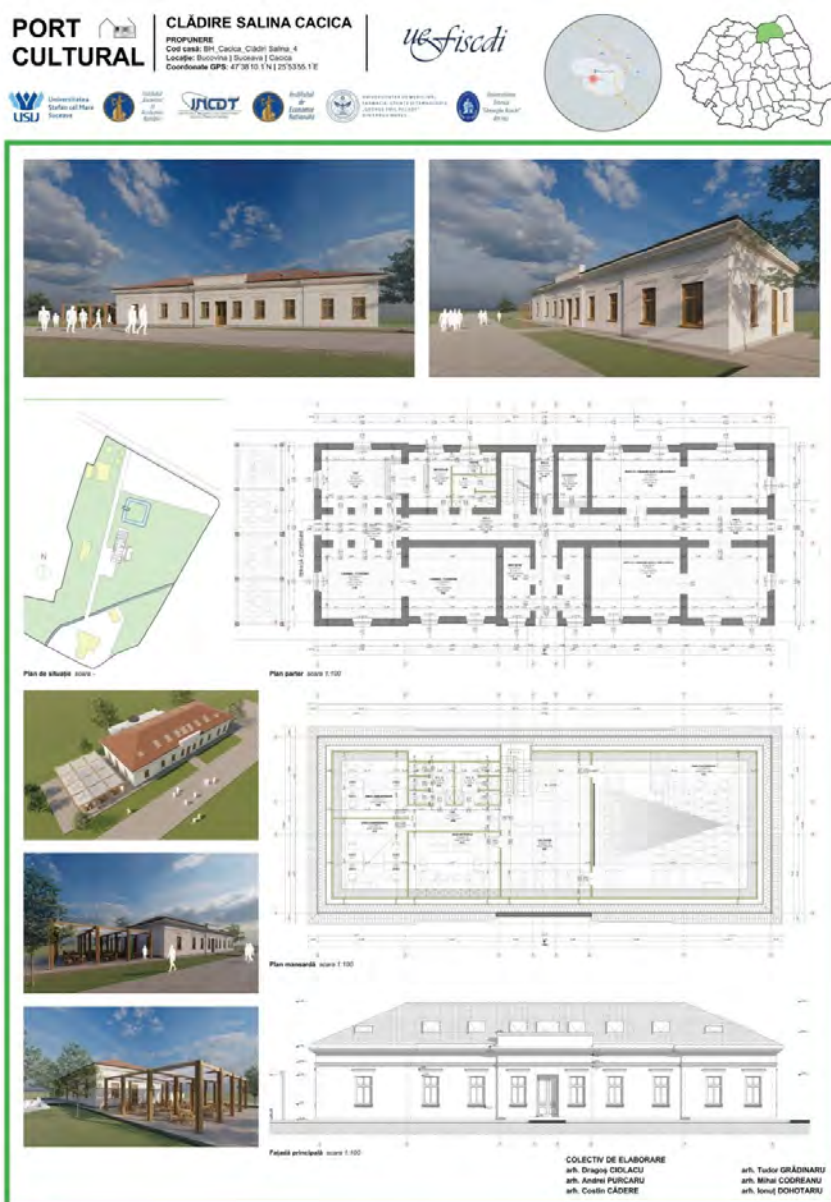
One of the objectives was to create a toolkit harmonised to the specifics of built heritage in the two target areas (Bucovina and Southern Transylvania) by developing architectural projects (20 projects) as well as facilitating the access of regional stakeholders to sustainable tools for developing tourism offers, through capitalising on the existing heritage, by transforming traditional farms into small tourist accommodation locations or some other economic function. The project also aimed to develop a catalogue of renovation solutions for traditional houses, to prolong their life cycle, to preserve the existing built heritage and to encourage its valorisation.

On the website www.portcultural.usv.ro useful guidebooks and resources are available for tourism entrepreneurs and for inhabitants in the rural areas, showing how the built heritage can be reused, mainly how traditional houses that can be reused as tourism cottages, souvenir shops, community centers etc. An important tool was the guidebook for sustainable tourism development for rural destinations, that offered compatible solutions between the valorisation of natural and cultural heritage, in relation to the environment (the use of ecological materials, unconventional energy sources, energy efficient / low water consumption equipment, increasing areas of green spaces, promoting a more rational lifestyle in relation to the environment, as well as the restoration and conservation of historic sites with materials as close as possible to the original ones). At the rural

level, sustainable development addresses both political issues and the administrative organisation of the region. The challenge in the future lies with the ability to involve all identified actors in strengthening their support and commitment to achieving results that contribute to economic and cultural progress towards sustainable development.



All images: © PORT Cultural



**BEST PRACTICE
EU PROJECTS —
TOURISM**

PACT for Heritage / PACT pentru Patrimoniu

Bukovina: rural regeneration through community involvement / Bucovina: regenerare rurala cu implicarea comunitatii

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ADER – Association for Regional
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PROJECT NAME

PACT for Heritage / PACT pentru
patrimoniu

COUNTRY

Romania

FUNDING PROGRAMME

POCA

DURATION

08/2022 — 12/2023

WEBSITE

www.asociatia-ader.ro
www.satele-bucovinei.ro

SOCIAL MEDIA

[www.facebook.com/
PACTpentruPatrimoniu](https://www.facebook.com/PACTpentruPatrimoniu)

The project will increase the knowledge of social partners in rural areas about green and cultural tourism, about the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of cultural trails, that can promote and valorise the assets of traditional villages in Bukovina, Romania.

The project "Bukovina: Rural regeneration through community involvement", is funded by the POCA – Operational Program for Administrative Capacity 2014-2020, Priority Axis - Accessible and transparent public administration and judiciary, code MySMIS2014+ 151477. The project focuses on optimising processes oriented towards the beneficiaries of sustainable development in rural spaces, by adapting the structure and mandate of the administration to the needs of protecting and valorising local heritage through sustainable tourism. Local heritage, although rich and with potential to support local development, can only be sustained by protecting valuable heritage resources and developing sustainable tourism.

The project aims to: increase the capacity of NGOs and local public authorities to formulate measures in the field of sustainable development of rural spaces, with the involvement of the community and social partners, by organising public debate, developing and proposing methodologies for research and inventory/interpretation of valuable resources of built heritage and natural heritage, and by creating a permanent online communication platform for the main actors in the heritage field. The project will support the creation of a network of NGOs / social partners and local authorities and setting up a PACT advisory council (Heritage - Community animation - Tourism).

In addition capacity building activities will be implemented for participants from NGOs, social partners and staff from local public authorities.

ties and institutions, to act as community facilitators and to coordinate the development of strategic development projects for rural regeneration, by organising training programmes in the fields of community project management with participatory approach, community training and organisation and destination management in rural areas. Increasing the level of information and awareness within civil society concerning community involvement in public life and participation in decision-making processes, will be an additional goal, through the extensive dissemination of identified practices and tools developed by the programme.

One of the key activities is the development of thematic trails, including green tourism elements from the rural area, natural and cultural resources as well as local small producers. Further project aims are contributing to the development of community-based local strategies, creating a community of good practice and the strengthening of administrative capacity, objectives that contribute to greater understanding by local authorities of the current situation and the tools at their disposal. This guide aims to identify good practices in green tourism and protecting traditional architecture. These good practices will come from both public authorities and civil society. They will describe the experience of those communities, the processes they went through, the administrative, financial and organisational challenges and limitations they faced and the results achieved. This will provide greater clarity to social actors concerned with the sustainable development of rural areas. There will also be analysis of the existing legal framework and legal instruments available to non-governmental organisations and, in particular, to local public authorities.

The project will contribute through three training programmes to the creation of a task-force for all pilot communities that can later support the development of green and eco tourism. The subjects to be covered are destination management in rural communities, project management with participatory approach and community animators.



BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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PROJECT NAME

iHERITAGE

COUNTRY

Italy

FUNDING PROGRAMME

ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea
Basin Programme of the
European Union

DURATION

15/09/2020 — 14/10/2023

WEBSITE

[www.enicbmed.eu/
projects/inheritage](http://www.enicbmed.eu/projects/inheritage)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: [inheritageproject](#)

Instagram: [inheritageproject](#)

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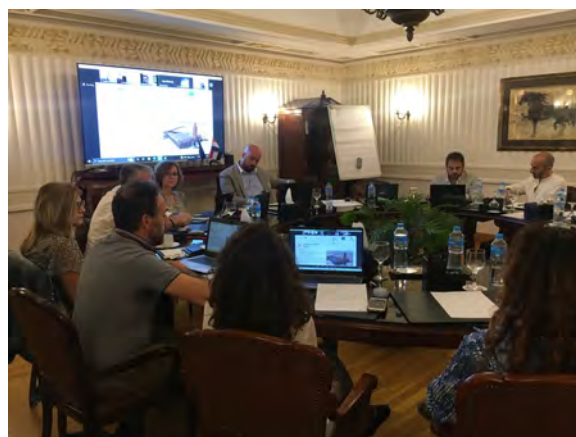
YouTube: [@iheritageictmed9671](#)

iHERITAGE

ICT Mediterranean platform for UNESCO cultural heritage

iHERITAGE supports technological transfer and commercialisation of new AR/VR tools to enhance the access to Mediterranean UNESCO cultural heritage through augmented and immersive experiences, by creating cross-border living labs for research and innovation.

The improvement of new technologies fosters sustainable transition through the limitation of traditional paper-based communication tools and the regulation of visitor flows, thus



reducing the impact of overtourism. The development of AR/AV/MR can enhance knowledge of heritage and also develop culture in situations such as the need for social distancing during pandemics.

The iHERITAGE project, co-financed by the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme of the European Union, addresses socio-economic challenges at the cross-border level through the active involvement of young people, women and NEETs taking part in Living Labs, training courses, and the creation of spin-offs, thus contributing to increased employment opportunities and fostering innovation. The project supports collaboration activities between universities, SMEs, start-ups and spin-offs devoted to the creation of AR/VR/MR products.

Eventually, iHERITAGE will improve access to UNESCO cultural heritage, both on and off site, and will contribute to the establishment of the Regional Centre for Safeguarding and Valorisation of Mediterranean Intangible Cultural Heritage (CRESPIEM), to be recognised under UNESCO Category 2.

Mediterranean UNESCO cultural heritage needs new techniques to improve its level of interpretation, taking advantage of new technolo-

gies and commercialising the latest research results. Thus, iHERITAGE provides new solutions through an innovation- driven growth process to promote cross-border technological transfer, Living Labs, industry-academia collaboration and the creation of spin-offs and new products, using the latest Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and Mixed Reality (MR). The total project budget is € 3.68 million, of which the EU contributes € 3.31 million. The main project objective is to support technological transfer and the commercialisation of new AR/VR tools aimed at enhancing access to Mediterranean UNESCO cultural heritage through augmented and immersive experiences, by creating cross-border living labs for research and innovation.

iHERITAGE's activities, such as the creation of the first ICT Cluster of Mediterranean UNESCO cultural

heritage and the “CRESPIEM”, will contribute to the partners' national and regional strategies. Italy, Spain and Portugal are among the 25 European countries that signed a declaration of cooperation to advance the digitalisation of cultural heritage. As far as Mediterranean Partner Countries are concerned, it is in Egypt that the national strategy for culture is more developed with a Centre for the Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage treating cultural heritage holistically and marking a unique experience in the application of the latest ICT innovation on heritage issues. In Jordan, the development of a national strategy has begun thanks to the Med Culture programme and to the active involvement of private and public institutions. In Lebanon “Lebanon 2020” aims to review the current state of Lebanese culture by fostering the use of ICT. On the Intangible Cultural Heritage side, partner territories have national and regional registers adopted in line with the UNESCO 2003 Convention, but they are scarcely populated with text information and audio-visual materials on intangible assets and lack a standard ICT system. iHERITAGE fosters the creation of innovative AR/VR/MR content related to some of the world's most outstanding tangible and intangible cultural heritage, namely 9 UNESCO World Heritage List sites: one each in Italy, Spain, Egypt and Jordan; three in Lebanon.



All pictures: © iHeritage





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PROJECT NAME

TOURISME

COUNTRY

Spain

FUNDING PROGRAMME

COSME — EU programme for
the Competitiveness of Enter-
prises and Small and Medium-
sized Enterprises

DURATION

01/09/2020 — 15/06/2023

WEBSITE

<https://tourisme-project.eu>

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: [tour4sme](https://www.facebook.com/tour4sme)

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TOURISME

Improving sustainable tourism development and capacity of tourism SMEs through transnational cooperation and knowledge transfer

The TOURISME project, funded by the European COSME programme, aims at enhancing SMEs' capacities and skills for assessing their environmental performance and implementing solutions which would allow them to align their businesses with certain circular economic principles.

Tourism is an important economic sector in the European Union and has the potential to further boost the economic development of the EU and to create greater employment opportunities. However, in general tourism results in many unwanted consequences such as pressure on natural resources, waste generation and increased carbon footprints of certain tourism destinations. On the other hand, if managed and practiced in a responsible and sustainable way, tourism can contribute to the preservation and sustainable development of the natural environment and the entire “ecosystem” of the local destination.

Within this context, TOURISME aims to promote the adaptation of European tourism SMEs towards more sustainable, low-carbon and resource-efficient business models and practices. To face these challenges, the project sought to foster SMEs' capacities and skills to explore solutions through a reinforced transnational and cross-sectoral collaboration among tourism SMEs and business operators from different sectors.



Specifically, the project had the following objectives:

- design and implement transnational and cross-sectoral support schemes including capacity building knowledge transfer and scaling-up activities to enable the sustainable growth of SMEs in the tourism sector through knowledge transfer, exchanges and collaboration with other SMEs and tourism industry stakeholders across sectors and countries;
- support the uptake of innovative solutions that boost sustainable practices and circular business models, addressing the growing consumer demand for an eco-friendlier tourism experience and understanding the financial implications and cost saving opportunities;
- support the participation of SMEs in environmental certification schemes and other EC initiatives such as EU Ecolabel, EMAS, GreenKey, etc. which promote sustainable tourism and lead to competitive advantages.

In doing so, TOURISME selected and financed 65 SMEs from France, Italy, Spain and Cyprus to benefit from training programmes, matchmaking events and individual support for environmental certifications. Through these activities, SMEs could acquire new knowledge about sustainable tourism, adopt and share sustainable practices, as well as forge new business connections. While support scheme activities for SMEs were being implemented, the project carried out monitoring and assessment of the improvement in beneficiaries' uptake of sustainable solutions.



All images: © TOURISME

Besides capacity building activities for SMEs, TOURISME also performed an extensive literature review of sustainable tourism and environmental certifications where the key drivers for sustainable growth and associated environmental, economic, and social benefits were identified. A study of SMEs' perceptions towards the adoption of circular economy principles and certifications was carried out through the launch and promotion of a survey. The best practices identified were analysed in depth and compiled into a compendium available on the project website. Finally, guidelines for enhanced sustainability in tourism were developed for SMEs, policy makers, and other practitioners based on the TOURISME project experience.

To sum up, the ultimate impact the project sought has been to contribute to the adoption of sustainable and circular principles by tourism SMEs around Europe. The main results have been an increased awareness of the importance of sustainability within tourism business activities, new sustainable practices adopted by the beneficiaries, and improved access to environmental certifications with 26 out of 65 SMEs managing to achieve a certification thanks to the project's funding.



S.T.R.E.E.T.

Sustainable transport education for environment and tourism

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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ENGIM Piemonte

PROJECT NAME

S.T.R.E.E.T.

COUNTRIES

Italy, Austria, Slovenia, UK

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

01/09/2015 — 31/08/2018

WEBSITE

www.streetproject.eu

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: ErasmusSTREET
YouTube: @streetproject6284

Main objectives of the S.T.R.E.E.T. project:

- training new managers for sustainable mobility and tourism;
- meeting the needs of an expanding sector with a new and innovative professional profile able to combine local development with sustainability;
- providing entrepreneurial competencies and know-how for the European market.

S.T.R.E.E.T. was a three years project involving organisations from Italy, Austria, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, connecting a mix of competencies from public and private sectors and dealing with vocational training, consultancy, transport and infrastructures as well as sustainable tourism. ENGIM Piemonte, a VET organisation from Italy, was the coordinator.

The project aimed to define a new professional profile, Expert for Sustainable Mobility and Tourism focussing on two main fields: alternative mobility and sustainable tourism, seen as opportunities for economic growth, local development and employment.

With a view to promoting the use of digital training, the partners created a platform with open educational resources via the project website, offering two online courses.

A basic course with 11 video lessons, provided a general overview of mobility management within the different national contexts starting from the legislative framework and continuing to training for the mobility managers and their interdisciplinary competencies. The course examined the drafting of urban plans for sustainable mobility, integrated transport systems, communication and territorial marketing strategies.

More than 100 students subscribed to the basic course, 46 of which completed it and passed the test and, among these, 24 from several EU countries were selected to participate in the specialised course and the learning activities abroad.

The team participated in a detailed programme about managing sustainable mobility. The study visits or “learning activities” were a fundamental part of the specialised course and an opportunity to experiment in the areas covered by the basic course. The study visits were carried out in areas with different contexts and backgrounds and with different approaches to mobility and sustainable tourism.

Each study visit (London/UK, Werfenweng/Austria, Bled/Slovenia, Turin/Italy) lasted five days alternating between classroom and outdoor activities and involving the same group of participants each time. All the lessons learned in both the basic and specialised courses, together with the most interesting case studies, were gathered into a *Toolbox* an e-book manual for the European mobility and sustainable tourism managers of the future.

A final event in Turin gathered all the EU participants together and was an opportunity to showcase the project to stakeholders who participated in workshops and a conference.

The website has an extensive *Lesson Learnt* section which includes all the materials (keynotes, presentations, lectures, case studies) for each study visit and a toolbox of 200 pages in pdf form with the project materials.

We can summarise the findings as follows:

- The need for cooperation between the public sector/policymakers and the private sector that can implement decisions.
- The private sector must organise networks and collaboration to offer tourists sustainable “holidays” without the use of cars so that they can experience territories in a different and slower way.
- The decisions of policymakers can be unpopular at first – no fear!
- There is no formal recognised training on offer for young people concerning these topics, although more and more pilot projects are working on it.

COVID proved we were right as the demand for sustainability in the tourism sector is increasing and lots of regions are trying to promote themselves as “sustainable destinations”.

After the end of the project most of the participants worked in the field of sustainable mobility and tourism, employed by public or private organisations and that is the impact we most hoped for. It was very difficult to sustain the other project ideas and activities after the end of the project due to the lack of resources.





HyPro4ST

Sustainable tourism innovation through hybrid project management

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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ORGANISATION

Sustainable City Network (SCN)

PROJECT NAME

HyPro4ST

COUNTRY

Greece

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

01/07/2022 — 30/06/2025

WEBSITE

<https://hypro4st-project.eu>

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: HyPro4STproject

LinkedIn: hypro4st-project

Objectives of the HyPro4ST project:

- sustainable innovation for the tourism sector
- labour market needs analysis
- new job profile *Sustainable Hybrid Project Manager*
- certification scheme
- vocational open online courses and practical guide
- virtual learning hub

The HyPro4ST partnership (16 partners from six EU countries — Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia) promotes a holistic approach to educating existing and prospective project managers, other professionals, and students active in sustainable tourism, aimed at increasing their skills, sense of initiative and entrepreneurial mindset, as well as boosting innovation through cooperation and knowledge exchange among higher education, vocational education and training and enterprises, through a three year effort.



The HyPro4ST project's main objectives are to:

1. identify specificities and challenges in each country regarding sustainable tourism, as well as the learning and development (L&D) needs relating to performance gaps of the project managers working in the tourism industry;
2. develop a new Job Profile of the Sustainable Hybrid Project Manager in the Tourism Sector, that will match skills and labour market needs;
3. develop an online learning hub, hosting the HyPro4ST VOOC and Practical Guide, for providing open and continuous vocational education and training to professionals and students, vocational and higher education trainers and educators, including vulnerable groups;
4. upskill and tackle skills mismatches in the tourism sector by training at least 600 existing and prospective project managers and students through the HyPro4St VOOC and at least 30 professionals through two work-based learning activities;
5. issue at least 600 Certificates of Attendance and develop a certification scheme framework for the new job profile, that deploys the globally accepted requirements of ISO 17024 certification process for persons.

The development of the new job profile is based on key EU "tools": Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, Green Deal, Europe Recovery Plan, EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, New Skills Agenda for Europe 2030, the EU Pact for Skills -Skills Partnership for the Tourism Ecosystem, Commission's Digital Education Action Plan, Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, Micro-credentials approach, Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, EntreComp, GreenComp, DigComp, European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO), European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).



All images: © HyPro4ST

Based on the findings of the needs analysis report, this job profile aims to effectively combine different knowledge and skills from the field of general project management (agile, lean, green methods), environmental and social responsibility, in order to enhance the sustainability of tourism initiatives and products.

The HyPro4ST training envisages six modules, i.e.: Sustainability and Tourism Sector, Digital Skills for the Sustainable Tourism Sector, The Hybrid Project Management for Sustainable Tourism, the Resilient Sustainable Hybrid Project Manager, Creativity and Entrepreneurship in the Sustainable Tourism Sector and the Projectised Tourism Business. Learning outcomes will be defined on three levels, corresponding to basic division by knowledge, skills, and competences (including attitudes), in line with EQF levels.

The HyPro4ST training course is planned to be a Vocational Open Online Course (VOOC), combining asynchronous and synchronous activities. Modules will be separately assessed and accredited (each having 1 ECTS of workload), addressing each of the mandatory elements to acquire micro-credentials. Additionally, the course as well as each module will have clearly identified content, type of participation, delivery and assessment methods, quality assurance and EQF level. The Virtual Learning Hub and the Certification Scheme Framework will be fundamental for knowledge transfer across the sector and for future sustainability.



GREENTOUR

Circular economy and sustainable tourism in destinations of the SUDOE space

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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ORGANISATION

Escuela Superior de Comercio
Internacional de la
Universidad Pompeu Fabra

PROJECT NAME GREENTOUR

COUNTRIES

Spain, Portugal, France

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Interreg Sudoe

DURATION

01/11/2020 — 30/04/2023

WEBSITE

<https://greentour-project.eu>

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: Greentourproject

Twitter/X: GreentourP

LinkedIn: greentour-project-
770996213

Instagram: greentourproject

The GREENTOUR project has developed an environmental assessment tool for establishments (accommodation, catering and leisure activities), transport and waste. Five tourism destinations have been assessed where transport is the category with the largest carbon footprint, followed by catering.

The GREENTOUR project has developed an environmental assessment tool for various types of establishments including accommodation and catering providers plus leisure activities. This tool enables these establishments to measure their environmental impact and acquire an ecolabel, which is linked to a QR code. This QR code provides access to a concise overview of the establishment's environmental impact across nine distinct environmental categories.

Any interested establishment can use this tool by visiting the project's official website: <https://greentour-project.eu>

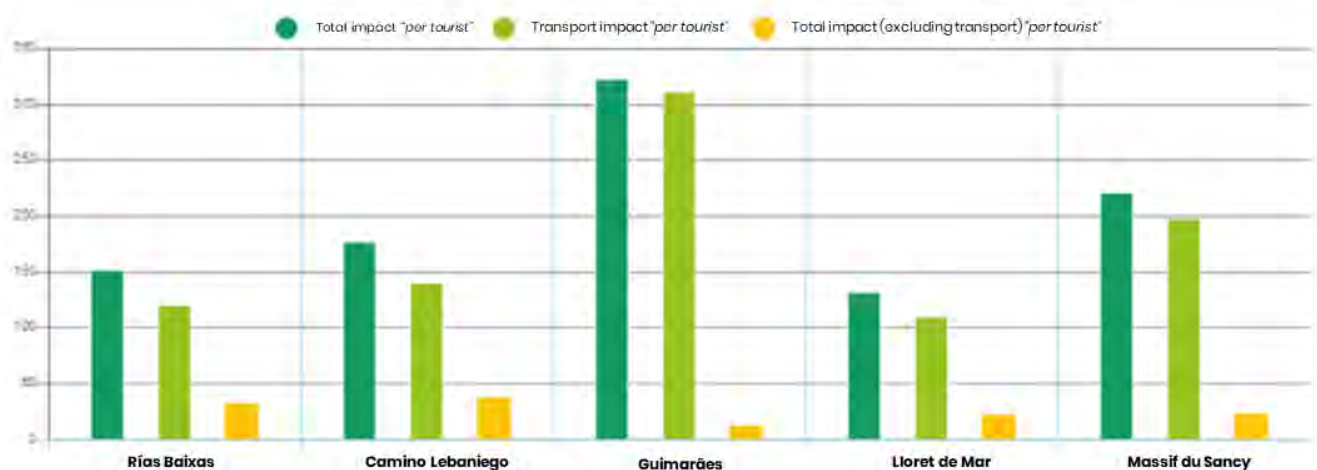
Furthermore, in addition to these valuable tools, the GREENTOUR project has achieved a significant milestone by calculating, for the first time, the comprehensive environmental impact of an entire tourist destination. This was accomplished by extrapolating data input by participating establishments from several tourist destinations including Rias Baixas, Guimaraes, Camino Lebaniego, Massif du Sancy, and Lloret de Mar. Additionally, the impact stemming from tourists traveling to these destinations, as well as the management of waste generated during their stays, were incorporated into the calculations.

The environmental impact of these destinations in terms of carbon footprint per tourist ranges from 132 kg CO₂ eq. in Massif du Sancy (France) to 323 kg CO₂ eq. in Guimarães (Portugal). In the case of Lloret de Mar, this value is 221 kg CO₂ eq. per tourist. Transport contributes most to the environmental impact of the carbon footprint of these destinations, representing between 60% and 96% of the total impact, depending on the particular case of each destination. Destinations whose tourists mainly use air travel as a means of transport have a much higher overall carbon footprint impact. After transport, the activity with the greatest impact in all destina-

TOTAL destinations – Climate change

MEASUREMENTS IN: kg CO₂ eq./ tourist

Overall results of the 5 destinations for the **climate change** category



All images: © GREENTOUR

tions is catering (food and drink), which varies from 26% of the destination's total impact in the case of Lloret de Mar, to 14% in the case of Massif du Sancy. The third most important source of environmental impact in terms of carbon footprint is accommodation, whose contribution ranges from 14% of the impact in the case of Lloret de Mar to 1% in the case of Guimarães. The activities carried out in the destinations contribute less than 7% of the total impact of each destination analysed, while the management of waste generated by tourists accounts for less than 2%.

If only the impact of accommodation, food and leisure activities of tourists is considered, without taking transport into account, the GREENTOUR project has obtained an average value of 25.2 kg of CO₂ eq. per tourist. In the particular case of Lloret de Mar, this value is 23 kg of CO₂ eq. per tourist.

The results and tools developed by the GREENTOUR project represent an important step towards a more sustainable tourism model at tourist destinations. In addition, they provide valuable information to tourism establishments to focus their environmental impact reduction strategies in an efficient way. Although the project has ended, its legacy continues, and the consortium partners are working on the dissemination of the tools and results obtained for implementa-

tion in the tourism sector. GREENTOUR demonstrates that, through collaboration between different entities and countries, it is possible to develop ambitious and effective projects to address the environmental challenges of the tourism sector and encourage its transformation towards more sustainable practices.



BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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ORGANISATION

NIT - Institut für Tourismus-
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europa GmbH, (in cooperati-
on with MemEx SRL)

PROJECT NAME

SMARTA-NET

COUNTRIES

Italy (coordinator), Germany,
Hungary, Netherlands,
Portugal

FUNDING PROGRAMME

DG-MOVE

DURATION

01/12/2022 — 31/12/2024

WEBSITE

www.smartha-net.eu

SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter/X: SmartaNet23

Facebook: SMARTA-
NET/100092132510174/

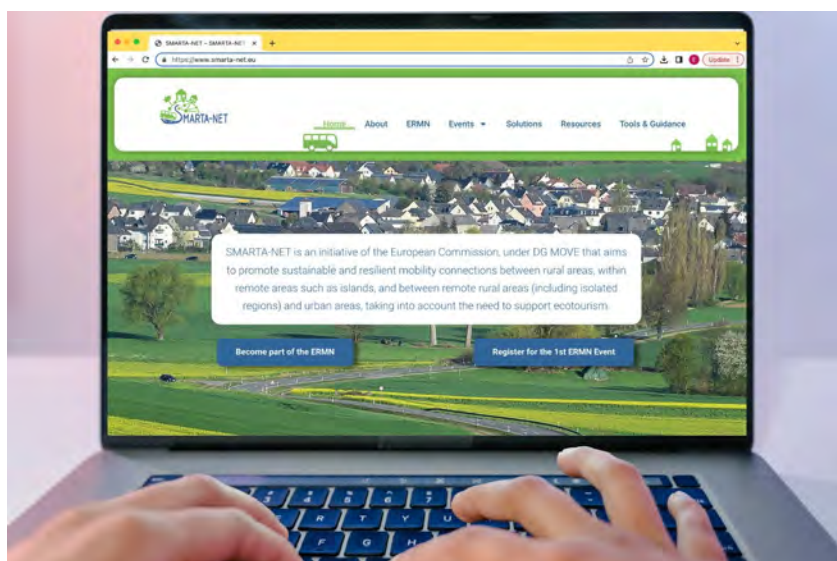
LinkedIn: company/smartha-net

SMARTA-NET

Sustainable rural mobility in support of ecotourism

SMARTA-NET aims to promote sustainable and resilient mobility connections between rural areas, within remote areas such as islands, and between remote rural areas and urban areas, taking into account the need to support ecotourism.

SMARTA-NET is led by MemEx of Italy, supported by TIS (Portugal), E40 (Hungary), NIT (Germany) and Panteia (Netherlands). The outcome of the project is the establishment of a European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN) to link European actors in the field of rural mobility and to engage rural municipalities and other rural areas across Europe in capacity-building and exchanging knowledge and experience. This will give ERMN members the opportunity to meet face-to-face, share practices and discuss topics of common interest. Additionally, the project team develops guidelines for the integration of tourist regions into sustainable mobility networks, the integration of rural mobility aspects into SUMP (Sustainable Urban Transport Plans) as well as funding opportunities for making rural mobility more sustainable. In order to make the knowledge gathered within SMARTA-NET accessible to a wide range of stakeholders, training on rural tourism mobility will be



Rural tourism regions and their mobility offer



Manual: Find the right field in the table and colour the star, circle and square green, yellow or orange.

		Landscape								
		Island			Coastline			Inland		
Topography	Lowland or hilly	☆	○	□	☆	○	□	☆	○	□
	Low mountain range	☆	○	□	☆	○	□	☆	○	□
	Alpine	☆	○	□	☆	○	□	☆	○	□

Tourism intensity:

- ★ High (overnights/inhabitants = 8 and more)
- ★ Medium (overnights/inhabitants = 2 to 8)
- ★ Low (overnights/inhabitants = Lower than 2)

Car-free accessibility of tourism accommodations:

- (Very) Good
- Medium
- (Very) Poor

Car-free accessibility of tourism places:

- (Very) Good
- Medium
- (Very) Poor

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provided in the countries. A set of lighthouse sites – municipalities and regional entities – has been identified. SMARTA-NET is working closely with these sites to test out key activities and outcomes of the SMARTA-NET project and to roll these out further to other rural municipalities.

In rural places, transport connections are a key aspect in developing the most dispersed areas. In such locations, tourism also acts as a driving force for stimulating economic development and for creating the critical mass to provide improved services to both residents and tourists. The transport connections to such areas is mostly by car, considering the poor alternative transport options and the lack of mobility infrastructures to support an extended transport offer.

In SMARTA-NET, we appreciate the immense diversity of Europe, its rural areas, and the various forms of tourism. “One size fits all” will not work, nor will attempting to transplant urban solutions. Neither will a simplistic toolbox of standard measures. Each community needs a package of measures that responds to its mobility needs, harnesses the available resources, and builds on the organisational structure of the community. Within the framework of the project mobility, patterns within rural tourist communities were identified and a *self-check* for regions was developed, helping rural areas to gain knowledge and a realistic overview of the characteristics and the tourist mobility in their own region. Furthermore, a clas-

sification of rural tourist environments was developed according to the topography, landscape, tourism intensity, accessibility and the mobility on offer to a municipality or region.

One of several examples of good practice that was identified is the *Texelhopper*, a mobility solution that is implemented on the Isle of Texel, in The Netherlands. The *Texelhopper* is a combination of the regular bus line and the flexible use of smaller buses that offers cheap stop-to-stop flexible transport on the entire island. Another mobility solution worth mentioning is the *Alpine bus* service in Switzerland that offers public transport where there is no public offer and which is subsidised by national regulation on the basis of the number of inhabitants. This strengthens nature-oriented tourism in mountain areas and creates alternatives for visitors to do without their own car.

The SMARTA-NET project builds on the findings of the previous SMARTA and SMARTA 2 projects and goes one step further with the practical implementation by establishing the ERMN network. For the future, the project team intends that the ERMN network will continue to exist after the end of the project, offering a good opportunity for exchange and helping rural communities to further develop their tourism mobility. It is also aimed that political decision-makers at the European and national levels will in the future focus not only on mobility in urban areas, but also in rural areas.

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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EcoMuseum Zagori Social
Cooperative Enterprise

PROJECT NAME

TEXTOUR

COUNTRY

Greece

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Horizon Europe

DURATION

19/05/2023 — 30/09/2024

WEBSITE

<https://ecomuseumzagori.gr>

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: [ecomuseumzagori](#)
Instagram: [ecomuseum_zagori](#)

TEXTOUR

Social innovation and technologies for sustainable growth through participative cultural tourism: educational activities regarding the traditional transhumance routes in the region of Zagori

The goal is the promotion of the traditional pastoral model of transhumance in Zagori, and the creation of a sustainable touristic experience out of it. The outcome is for the benefit of livestock breeders, as well as for the synergy of farming and tourism.

The primary sector of Greece is being given up in favour of the tertiary sector. While this is not inherently negative, careless “touristification” does leave rural areas underpopulated and neglected. The region of Zagori (Epirus, Greece) has been in a bit of both worlds, but during recent decades agriculture and livestock breeding have been suffering. A direct consequence of the decrease of livestock breeders is a drop in the demographic and economic aspects, as well as the decrease of the region’s biodiversity, tightly connected to farming. The type of farming that is especially affected by urbanisation and the abandonment of the countryside is that of transhumance. The support for this endangered pastoral practice, listed in UNESCO’s intangible heritage catalogue, is a means to restoring both the economic and ecological wealth of the region (biodiversity: flora and fauna, such as the wolf, the Egyptian vulture, and species of plants and fungi dispersed through herds). While some livestock breeding does still exist, it is mainly stabled and usually not free range. Our efforts are focused on drawing attention to transhumance and making a tourist experience for visitors out of it, thus making the primary and tertiary sectors work together instead of against each other. We propose a type of tourism that considers natural and cultural preservation and sustainability. With this type of tourism, visitors have organic connection and interaction with locals and their lifestyle. In addition, the visibility that comes with tourism might convince the state to support and aid livestock breeders and farmers



© TEXTOUR

more. As Greece is a tourism-heavy economy, the emphasis is mainly on seaside places, but this leaves the mountain regions underdeveloped and neglected, and also steals from visitors the chance to see and experience this unique side of the country.

The main actions of the project include the recording, mapping and promotion of transhumance routes in Zagori as a sustainable tourism product, in collaboration with local pastoralists, who will act as guides and facilitators. The actions for the visitors include hands-on experience of guided tours on the routes of Zagori's transhumance breeders. Also, there will be interpreted guided walks in the broader area through soundscapes (echo-walks), which, embedded in a mobile device app, will enhance the tourist experience of the routes. The routes are of varying levels of difficulty so that there is something for everyone. The echo-walk feature provides depth to a regular trekking activity, as visitors are able to listen to auditory elements (natural and human) from their surroundings that they would not otherwise notice. The project can be disseminated to a wider audience, in the form of a documentary about transhumance, as a part of a broader campaign aiming

to bring awareness of the importance of transhumance and rural lifestyle in general, and as an element of intangible cultural heritage.

The project integrates elements of social innovation and sustainability, as it includes local actors and rural values to provide solutions to existing social problems in the area (e.g. population, deforestation, devaluation of the agricultural-livestock profession, low quality of life in rural areas etc.). The proposed actions strengthen the capacity of citizens to act, deploying a systemic approach to solving problems. Finally, it adopts the co-creation of actions "with" citizens. The action plan directly benefits the marginalised community of pastoral breeders and their families including the local agrifood and agrotourism sectors as a whole. Special focus will be given to women pastoralists and younger generations who want to get involved with transhumance as a tourism product.





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ORGANISATION

University of Lodz

PROJECT NAME

SPOT

COUNTRY

Poland

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

01/11/2019 — 31/12/2022

WEBSITE

<https://spot-erasmus.eu>

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: spoterasmus
Twitter/X: spoterasmus

SPOT

Sustainable spatial planning of tourism destinations

The aim of the project was to develop an innovative method for teaching sustainable spatial planning of tourism destinations within the European higher education system. This goal was influenced by the wider context of development of the idea of innovative, sustainable and inclusive tourism spatial planning.

The aim of the project SPOT – Sustainable Spatial Planning of Tourism Destinations – was to develop an innovative teaching method for sustainable spatial planning with particular focus on tourism destinations. The goal of the SPOT project was to implement this educa-

tional method within master programmes at five educational organisations involved. The method was developed by linking tourism and spatial planning education with research and innovation, fostering entrepreneurship, and promoting learning and teaching partnerships between the commercial and non-commercial sectors.

The SPOT project was implemented by a consortium of six educational and scientific institutions:

- University of Lodz (Poland, consortium leader)
- Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (Norway)
- Institute of Geography and Spatial Organisation Polish Academy of Science (Poland)



- Mersin University (Turkey)
- Polytechnic of Leiria (Portugal)
- Politecnico di Torino (Italy)

This goal of the SPOT project was influenced by the wider context of developing the European idea of the innovative, sustainable and inclusive spatial planning of tourism destinations. Thus, the following specific objectives were defined:

- seminars and conferences – disseminating results of joint initiatives for developing tourism spatial planning and its teaching methods;
- publications – exchanging European best practice in the field of tourism spatial planning through scientific publications and an educational manual;
- outdoor activities – facing the challenges of tourism spatial planning through research and learning by doing on the spot;
- theoretical studies – understanding the main trends and challenges related to tourism spatial planning in Europe.

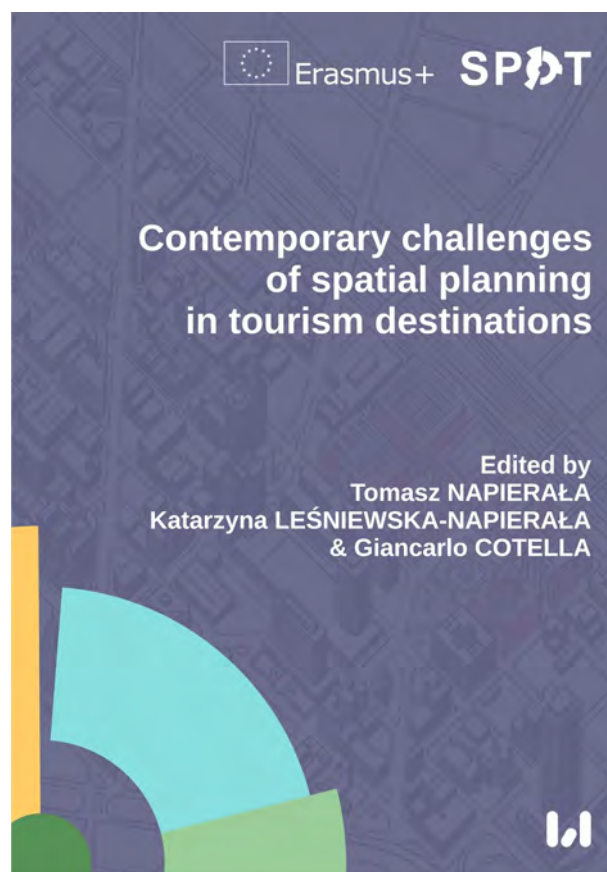
The SPOT project targeted the following groups and stakeholders over both the long and short term:

- students of both spatial planning and tourism programmes;
- practitioners involved in the spatial planning of tourism destinations;
- academic teachers and researchers interested in the problems of sustainable tourism and sustainable spatial planning.

However, the students were the most important group targeted by the SPOT project. They were involved in various types of activities:

- study visits to Turkey, Portugal, and Italy;
- the research process;
- International Tourism Congress ITC2022 - the final event disseminating the achievements of the SPOT project (17th to 19th November 2022, in the city of Lodz, Poland).

The SPOT project started with theoretical studies looking at the main trends and challenges related to spatial planning and tourism development in Europe and resulted in a book entitled “Contemporary challenges of



All images: © SPOT

spatial planning in tourism destinations”. The priority of our educational activities was to make students aware of the challenges that the spatial planning of tourism destinations present and to prioritise sustainable development goals. Academic teachers prepared for students’ initial analysis of case studies. Thanks to the SPOT project’s study visits, students elaborated policy recommendations for investigated cases. The results of their work enriched the report “Case study analysis and policy recommendations” to be shared with local and regional stakeholders of tourism development and spatial planning. Scientific discussion continued and resulted in the publication of a special issue of the journal “European Spatial Research and Policy”. Moreover, the organisation of the SPOT project’s study visits directly enabled the development of an innovative method of sustainable spatial planning of tourism destinations. Details were presented in the publication entitled “Sustainable spatial planning of tourism destinations: Manual for teachers”. An additional SPOT project output is the self-administered mass online open course on sustainable tourism spatial planning delivered by the Baltic University Programme (BUP).

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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ORGANISATION

Legambiente APS

PROJECT NAME

COMMON

COUNTRY

Italy

FUNDING PROGRAMME

ENI CBC Med

DURATION

03/09/2019 — 02/03/2023

WEBSITE

[www.enicbcmmed.eu/
projects/common](http://www.enicbcmmed.eu/projects/common)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: Common.eu

Instagram: common.eu

YouTube: @commonmedproject



COMMON

Coastal management and monitoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean Sea

COMMON, a project funded by the ENI CBC MED Programme, aims to build a collaboration network between Italy, Tunisia and Lebanon, to support the correct management of marine litter, using the principles of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM).

Marine litter is quickly becoming one of the main pollution sources of the Mediterranean Sea, with negative consequences for living marine organisms, marine ecosystems, human health and coastal activities, including tourism. The “COastal Management and MONitoring Network for tackling marine litter in the Mediterranean Sea” project is funded by the ENI CBC MED Programme, under the Thematic objective B.4 “Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation”. The 2014-2020 ENI CBC “Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme” is the largest Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative implemented by the EU under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) funded by the EU with 209 million Euros. The Programme brings together the coastal territories of 14 countries with the aim of fostering fair, equitable development on both sides of the Mediterranean. The territories involved are 112 and nearly 198 million people live in the cooperation area. The ENI CBCMED Programme has four branches: SMEs and Business Development; Technology Transfer and Innovation; Social Inclusion and the Fight Against Poverty, and Environment and Climate Changes. Within the Environment and Climate Change action three projects have been developed: *MENAWARA*, aiming to increase the re-use of treated non-conventional water as an alternative source in irrigated agriculture; *CEOMED*, pursuing the reduction of waste generation and promoting source-separated collection on the Mediterranean local open markets and *COMMON* aiming to increase the capacities of local authorities and coastal communities to monitor and address the issue of marine litter.

Although all initiatives have a potential impact on tourism, in this short article we will only deal with *COMMON*, considering its direct effect on

beach and coastal tourism in general. Combating the issue of marine litter requires a global effort at basin level through a multi-institutional and multi-stakeholder approach that tackles the different and competing environmental, economic, social, cultural and recreational drivers that can affect marine ecosystems.

The *COMMON project* applied the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) principles to the challenge of marine litter, improving knowledge of the phenomenon, enhancing the environmental performance of five pilot coastal areas in Italy, Tunisia and Lebanon, and engaging local stakeholders in marine litter management. The COMMON project worked on detecting the causes and effects of waste and its mitigation. It operated along five axes on which initiatives, activities and cooperation were developed: scientific (beach, seawater and marine species) monitoring, capacity building, raising awareness, stakeholder involvement, networking (coastal cities, turtle rescue centres).

Tourism too has a role in creating but also reducing littering: during the summer season, seaside tourism increases the marine litter issue by more than 40%, so much so that the poor management of urban waste is confirmed as one of the main causes of the waste found on the monitored beaches, together with the lack of purification systems and the bad habit of throwing urban waste into the toilet. The Clean up the Med campaign that was held in May 2022 – the 29th edition – involved 17 Mediterranean countries, with the participation of more than 600 volunteers. By the end more than 1 tonne of waste had been collected. Another important axis is the exchange of good practices and networking between cities and coastal areas. The project monitored activities in the field of waste reduction and waste management. The project monitored 34 reduction projects and 5 waste management projects.

The COMMON project has been capitalised upon by others in the Plastic Busters CAP project, and the ENI CBCMED programme.





TARA
DORNELOR

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

AUTHOR

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ROLE

PR specialist

ORGANISATION

Asociația de Ecoturism Țara
Dornelor (AETD) / Tara Dornelor
Ecotourism Association

PROJECT NAME

Tara Dornelor, a flourishing
ecotourism destination

COUNTRY

Romania

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Green Entrepreneurship Pro-
gram 3.0 – Sustainable Local
Economic Development
through Ecotourism, funded
by the Romanian-American
Foundation and the Partner-
ship Foundation

DURATION

01/08/2019 — 31/07/2023

WEBSITE

www.taradornelor.ro

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: TaraDornelor

Instagram: taradornelor.eco

Tara Dornelor, a flourishing ecotourism destination

Transforming the Land of Dornelor into a sustainable ecotourism destination with diverse tourist programs and ongoing development of ecotourism infrastructure for the sustainable conservation and well-being of local communities.

The Land of Dornelor is one of the five officially certified ecotourism destinations in Romania, a small natural and cultural gem that preserves its original charm.

This project is part of the Green Entrepreneurship Program, the longest and most substantial program of the Romanian-American Foundation and the Partnership Foundation, which supports the development of ecotourism in our country. Over the past seven years, the program has contributed to the development of seven ecotourism-focused destinations, each with its own management team, the establishment of the Discover Eco-Romania brand, national and international promotion, and much more.

Learning from challenges: The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges but also stimulated innovation and community spirit. Despite the difficulties, we achieved beautiful results:

- Expansion of the local ecotourism network to 56 members, bringing together guesthouse owners, guides, custodians of protected natural areas, artisans, and local producers. This diversified the tourist offerings and engaged the community with the region's development.
- The first local gastronomic events we organized, after the easing of restrictions, attracted dozens and hundreds of curious tourists eager to discover the natural charm of the area and its unique cuisine. Eco-brunches also strengthened the bonds between the local community and public authorities, promoting collaboration.
- The development of easy hiking and cycling trails, suitable for families and those with average physical fitness. These trails wind through the picturesque villages of the area, offering opportunities for authentic exploration.

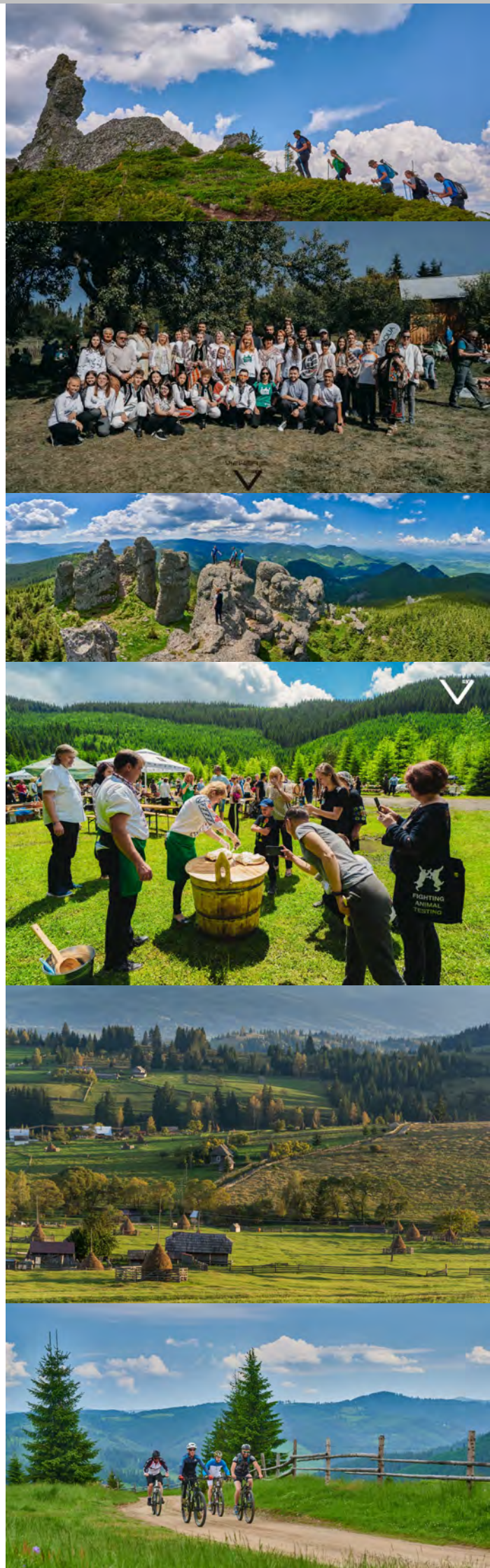
- Improvement of visitor infrastructure through the installation of informative panels and proper signage, including in the Călimani National Park. This increased safety and accessibility for tourists.
- Local development was promoted by supporting local services and products, integrating them into the offers developed by the association's first tourism agency.
- Promotion and strengthening of the local ecotourism brand through information publication on www.taradornelor.ro, participation in tourism events, and support for the Via Transilvanica project. This support included marking the milestones along the so-called El Camino de România with the number of kilometers covered and highlighting the Țara Dornelor logo on the route that traverses the destination.

Prospects for a greener future: The experience we have gained teaches us that through collaboration, dedication and support, we can continue to grow and contribute to a greener future. The Land of Dornelor is already an example of ecotourism development, with tangible benefits for local communities and nature conservation, and our projects continue in the same direction.

A project from the heart with real impact: From a personal perspective, the project I have been involved in represents not only an effort but also a personal and collective journey. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to find innovative solutions and come together. Local gastronomic events were proof of the community's boundless creativity, especially in difficult situations.

We have learned that ecotourism can bring prosperity to communities and strengthen connections between people. We recommend that those interested follow our example and get involved in ecotourism development.

We conclude with an appeal to political decision-makers, both nationally and in Europe, to support ecotourism development through appropriate policies and funding. By combining the efforts of local communities, non-governmental organizations and funders, we can create a more sustainable future.





PROGRAMUL DE COOPERARE ELVEȚIANO-ROMÂN
SWISS-ROMANIAN COOPERATION PROGRAMME

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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PROJECT NAME

Electromobility – electric
vehicles for a green municipality

COUNTRY

Romania

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Framework Agreement
concerning the
implementation of the
Swiss-Romanian Cooperation
Programme

DURATION

30/07/2015 — 07/09/2019

WEBSITE

www.primariasv.ro

Electromobility – electric vehicles for a green municipality

Reduce carbon emissions, enhance local transport options and promote green tourism.

In an era where environmental consciousness is more important than everything else, Suceava, a picturesque municipality in Romania, embarked on a transformative journey towards sustainable tourism. The ambitious project, titled "Electromobility – Electric Vehicles for a Green Municipality", aimed to reduce carbon emissions, enhance local transport options and promote green tourism.

The project's core activities included:

- charging infrastructure – the installation of 14 standard charging stations and 14 fast charging stations, accompanied by 56 electric vehicle parking spaces at these stations. A central dispatcher system was set up to manage power consumption efficiently.
- electric vehicle procurement – Suceava Municipality acquired 11 electric vehicles, two electric vans, an electric road sweeper and an electric tanker.
- electric bikes – the project also included the purchase of ten electric bikes and the installation of a charging system equipped with photovoltaic panels.

One of the project's major achievements was the substantial reduction of carbon emissions. Comparing a conventional petrol car to the electric Peugeot iON, the project demonstrated a significant reduction of 4,143 tons of CO2 emissions annually.

Moreover, the economic benefits were impressive. The estimated cost of electricity for the Peugeot iON was approximately 36.2 RON (7.3 EUR) per 100 kilometres, while a classic petrol car cost 42 RON (8.4 EUR) for the same distance. This translated into an annual savings of 16,901 RON (3397 EUR) per vehicle, contributing to both environmental and economic sustainability.

An essential aspect of the project was ensuring accessibility to the charging stations. To obtain a charging card, electric vehicle owners



needed to present their identification and car registration documents at the Suceava City Hall. They were provided with a list of charging station locations, charging instructions and a parking card for electric vehicle parking spaces. This initiative has already issued 14 charging cards, making electric mobility accessible to the public. This encouraged several local businesses (restaurants, courier firms etc.) to change their fleet to electric vehicles.

Implementing this project, we have learned several valuable lessons.

- Active engagement with the community is crucial for the success of such initiatives. Public awareness campaigns can encourage greater adoption of electric vehicles.
- Providing maintenance and support for electric vehicles and charging stations is essential to ensure their longevity and efficiency.
- The success of the project has highlighted the need for further expansion of the charging infrastructure to meet increasing demand.



All pictures: © Electromobility – electric vehicles for a green municipality



To further promote green tourism and sustainable transportation, we have some recommendations for policymakers at both national and European levels.

1. Implement incentive programmes, such as tax breaks and subsidies, to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles.
2. Invest in the expansion of the charging infrastructure, ensuring widespread access to charging stations.
3. Launch campaigns to educate the public about the environmental and economic benefits of electric vehicles.
4. Support research and innovation in electric vehicle technology to make them more affordable and efficient.

In conclusion, Suceava's Electromobility project stands as a shining example of how sustainable tourism can be achieved through the adoption of electric vehicles and green infrastructure. The project not only reduced carbon emissions but also brought economic savings to both the municipality and private vehicle owners. As we look to the future, let Suceava's initiative serve as a blueprint for others, inspiring more communities to embrace green tourism and contribute to a cleaner and greener world.



BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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PROJECT NAME

MIENAT

COUNTRY

Germany

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

01/09/2020 — 31/08/2023

WEBSITE

[www.fh-mittelstand.de/
forschung/forschungsprojekte/
viral-skills-4](http://www.fh-mittelstand.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/viral-skills-4)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram: mienatproject

MIENAT

Methodology of interpretation of European nature heritage in tourism

The project puts the focus on the development of an innovative learning module for HE students for the reinterpretation and experiential teaching of natural heritage. Central elements are the development of digital learning approaches and the acquisition of credit points.

In the MIENAT project, eight universities across Europe developed a joint module for a bachelor's or master's degree programme. The study module revolves around the topic of natural heritage and its reinterpretation within the context of tourism. At its core are didactic methods for the experiential communication of natural heritage. In concrete terms, a module was developed that can be implemented at all participating higher education institutions and be studied by their students. The designed learning materials are accompanied by digital approaches (e.g. the creation of digital presentations and podcasts) and credit points can be earned. The module covers topics such as coastal landscapes, caves, volcanic island landscape, regional and national parks as well as geoparks and explains practical implementation and application through case studies.

The project group has decided to focus on cultural landscapes, botanical gardens and castle gardens. Methods were also highlighted, such as how the interpretation of botanical gardens can promote sustainable behaviour. Through the multi-method approach, multi-dimensional knowledge representation is stimulated amongst the students and central action competences are encouraged by the following main project results:

- A handbook presents concrete methods of interpreting natural heritage and case studies motivating students to critically reflect



All images: © MIENAT

on their own interpretation methods or to transfer them to other target groups or contexts. In addition to the introduction of central terms and the reference to the SDGs, the handbook also addresses topics such as over-tourism and economic consequences.

- Guidelines focus on best practice approaches from the field and thus offer numerous points of reference for adapting interpretation methods to other contexts. The basics of the interpretation methods are also presented according to subject area (i.e. regional parks, cliffs, etc.).
- In podcasts, experts from the field are interviewed concerning interpretation methods, but also other topics within the context of natural heritage are explored in depth.
- In the digital presentations, for example, students present research conducted with the aim of promoting sustainable behaviour through natural heritage interpretation methods. One study received international attention and was presented at the ATLAS Conference in Cork in 2022.

Key outputs were evaluated using student samples (e.g. the podcasts). The whole project was characterised by the active involvement of students in its early stages. In terms of the exchange of expertise, field trips were implemented during the individual project meetings, in which each partner acquired experts in relation to their own thematic focus, thus enabling partners to also acquire corresponding lecturing expertise in the thematic fields from the others. Amongst other events, key project results were presented at both ITB 2021 and the ATLAS Conference 2022.

If we are to evaluate our experiences and the lessons learnt in order to formulate educational policy recommendations, then we would like to put forward the following first: the incredibly high level of interest shown by young learners in this topic and their high level of motivation to acquire knowledge and skills in order to behave sustainably in their private, professional and social lives. Education policymakers should capitalise on this momentum and



include the teaching of sustainability and support for the European Green Deal goals as key transversal objectives in curricula at all levels - (pre-)school, VET, HE, adult education, etc.

In our training course, this became very obvious because improvements are urgently needed for the traditionally climate-impacting tourism industry. For tourism, but also for other study programmes and professional fields, the curricula must be updated according to the latest quality standards in sustainability and their teaching must be linked to modern learning methods (such as immersive technologies or the use of AI).

In terms of content, we have to move away from imparting theoretical factual knowledge. We need to inspire learners with practical application examples with which they should develop and test sustainable solutions. In this way, knowledge and skills are consolidated over the long term and learners develop genuine ownership of sustainable developments that they themselves have helped to initiate.

It would be helpful for educational policy makers to recognise the crossroads we are at and the importance of providing all educational institutions with sufficient resources and expertise to embed sustainable thinking and behaviour at all levels of education. Only if we can succeed in generating awareness and agreement amongst learners across a broad spectrum, whilst equipping them with the necessary knowledge, tools and skills to act sustainably, can the Green Deal goals become achievable at all.



GoBeEco

Gamification of eco-friendly habits in adult education

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — TOURISM

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Fachhochschule des Mittelstands

PROJECT NAME

GoBeEco

COUNTRY

Germany

FUNDING PROGRAMME

Erasmus+

DURATION

01/11/2020 — 30/04/2023

WEBSITE

www.gobeeco.eu

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: gobeeco

Instagram: Go.Be.Eco.First

Project goals: change the behaviour of adult learners and educators in relation to ecology by changing individual habits and lifestyles.

Outputs: the project partners jointly developed a web-based application for promoting environmentally friendly behaviour in relation to lifelong learning. In addition, a handbook was developed to support educators in the design and implementation of proecological training. The focus here is on promoting work with digital resources, especially gamification.

Climate change continues to progress, with most people being aware of its effects, and in many cases are willing to take sustainable action. This observation is also true for many different stakeholders, such as employees, customers, business owners and managers, related to the tourism industry. So what is missing for the real and continuous implementation of sustainability measures in everyday life? This is exactly where the GoBeEco project comes in.



All images: © GoBeEco

It aims to tailor educational solutions to the preferences of adults in such a way that they are actually encouraged to actively seek out learning opportunities, immerse themselves in them, apply what they have learned, and then incorporate this learning into their everyday habits. They expect dynamic, self-directed and continuous learning opportunities in which online learning plays an important role.

Additionally, educators are looking for guiding solutions that deal with the design of a teaching process for non-vocational learning involving digital technologies, with a view to developing environmentally friendly behaviour.

By integrating sustainability into learning and daily life, it can contribute to a more environmentally aware and resilient future.

With its two outputs, the GoBeEco Gamification and the Digital Edu Skills Handbook, the project addressed precisely these needs, with both the playful integration of sustainability actions into everyone's life including knowledge transfer and the creation of a basis for educators in the field of sustainable education in order to promote the topics in a structured way.

Project Outputs

The GoBeEco web app was developed as a fun way to learn focussing on one's personal impact on the environment and to change everyday habits toward sustainability in the long term.

Every small step matters - whether at home, at work, in public spaces, whilst travelling, when driving or shopping.

There are 21 challenges in five different missions that address our daily habits and behaviours. By completing the tasks, players can, for example, earn badges to become a "secret climate hero" or "ecomobility leader" and move up the leaderboard. Playfully and subconsciously, they learn interesting facts about sustainability and get to know the big connection between their own actions and global developments. Saving the world is also in your hands — <https://game.gobeeco.eu/>

The GoBeEco Digital Edu Skills Handbook enables teachers and trainers to integrate digital and environmental skills into their curricula.

The sample curricula presented are not only about developing knowledge, but more importantly about encouraging adult learners to actively seek knowledge.

The handbook includes clear libraries of examples, ideas and best practices concerning digital tools and pro-ecology activities. In addition, the handbook includes tests of educators' knowledge of innovative methods and digital tools for teaching and methods for skills and knowledge assessment.

By working with the handbook, educators can:

- enhance their skills in designing sustainability education activities with digital tools;
- access tailor-made methods with digital resource-based curricula;
- improve the eco skills of their learners and themselves;
- enhance their digital competences;
- inspire their learners to live more sustainably.

The handbook is available at:

<https://fh-mittelstand.afliip.in/>

[GoBeEco_Handbook_German.html](https://fh-mittelstand.afliip.in/GoBeEco_Handbook_German.html)

Both project results are available in English, German, Polish and Portuguese.

The project has been very well received. The project team has often been told that the wide range of the target group is well covered. Both the gamification and the handbook appeal to beginners in the field of sustainability, but also give new input to more experienced sustainability experts.

Currently, parts of the project team are working on a new Erasmus+ project, Shift2Green (<https://shift2green.eu>), which will bring the topic of sustainability into the context of employees within companies in a playful way.

The background of the image shows a series of wide, shallow stone steps leading up to a wall made of large, rectangular stone blocks. The scene is brightly lit, casting soft shadows. Overlaid on this background are four large, diamond-shaped geometric shapes. One is white with a teal border and contains the text 'MICRO-CREDENTIALS'. The other three are solid colors: two are lime green and one is teal, all with white borders. They are arranged in a cluster, with the white diamond at the top left, a green one to its right, another green one below the white one, and a teal one at the bottom left.

MICRO- CREDENTIALS



- Keynote
- Best practice EU projects

Micro-credentials: A prince waiting to be kissed alive ... or just another frog in lake VET?

A grassroots report about hope and frustration when dealing with micro-credentials in EU projects

— Michael Schwaiger —



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When we were preparing for the ERASMUS+ 2021 call¹ and carefully going through the corresponding Programme Guide, it was a great surprise to read about a complete novelty that will quite clearly play a central role in future EU education policy: the *micro-credential*! And simultaneously, we all asked ourselves the same question: the *micro-what*?

Of course, it often happens that one is not always up to date or has missed important developments in a certain area or that one is simply not sufficiently expert in it — fair enough! But in this case, "we" consisted of around 50 professional EU project managers within the E.N.T.E.R. network, all highly experienced in dealing with national and European educational issues.² Many of us have been developing innovative education strategies and training programmes at various levels for more than 20 years — but, obviously, *the* micro-credential issue had passed us by without a trace. What is it supposed to

¹ To this call, CREDinGREEN was submitted.

² E.N.T.E.R. was founded in 2005 and currently consists of 282 organisations from 37 countries; our main aim is to promote EU projects and disseminate their results; 466 projects are registered with us, almost all of them come from the education sector. For each of the major calls, the most active EU project managers in our network exchange views amongst themselves on how to assess topics and priorities and what relevance they could have for possible applications.

be? We have never heard of it, let alone seen a micro-credential in real life!

In any case, it seemed to be something very important as the 2021 Erasmus+ programme priorities made us understand: for the HE sector, the stimulation of “innovative learning and teaching practices [...] by facilitating the take-up, validation and recognition of short learning courses leading to micro-credentials” was to be promoted (EC, 2021b, 169); at the same time, “quality assurance in vocational education and training” was requested to be improved by “setting-up and testing graduate tracking arrangements in line with the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates, and the Recommendation on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), as well as exploring EU vocational core profiles and micro-credentials.” (ibidem, 172) The guide’s annex also provided some lines with a very basic definition of a micro-credential (ibidem, 319), but this did not really help us to understand what a micro-credential really is.

In any case, since we intended to align the planned training programme to be developed by our CREDinGREEN project with the latest EU standards, we definitely had to find out what micro-credentials are and whether and how we could integrate them into our project before the submission deadline. For help, we went to where we always go in such cases: to the EC server. There, we found the first clues: Micro-credentials were mentioned in the recently published *European Skills Agenda* (EC, 2020b) and were supposed to play a role in the *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, which was under development at the time and would be published in the following year (EC/DG EMPL 2021). But even that was formulated quite vaguely; in the end we found two sources that were a little clearer:

- The *Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025* postulated the aim of the “automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods

abroad for the purpose of further learning, quality assurance of joint transnational activities and the recognition and portability of short courses leading to micro-credentials. This would allow Member States to go deeper and faster in their cooperation, as compared to what they are able to do now in the context of the Bologna process.” (EC, 2020a, 12). It further announced that “the Commission will work towards the development of a **European Approach to micro-credentials, to [sic!] helping to widen learning opportunities and to strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning by providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities.**” (ibidem, 15)

- The second was the outcome of a consultation group set up on this topic by the *European Education and Culture Executive Agency*. Their concluding vision of the future role of micro-credentials reads very promisingly:

In 2030, European citizens will be able to start their learning pathways into and through higher education at any stage during their lifetime. On top of the qualifications already achieved, micro-credentials will provide learners with rich opportunities to diversify their learning and improve their education by taking shorter courses. These micro-credentials can be linked thematically and be based on the expertise gained. Their alignment to standardised descriptors (e.g. for professional profiles, skills taxonomies, education level, type of evidence, etc.) will ensure that they are equally understood and recognised by employers, educational establishments across sectors, geographic areas and the wider society. Through this, micro-credentials will play a major role in encouraging and realising lifelong learning and a society of learning, which – through critical reflection of societal and business processes – will create better lives and better opportunities for all. (EC/GD EAC, 2020, 9)

We were not sure whether or not we had understood this correctly, however, it appeared to us that the EC was in the process of defining and introducing a new accreditation standard that

would allow learning experiences and achievements to be described and compared in a standardised way at the European level. Based on the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System* (ECTS), a comparable model applicable for the post-university and VET education sector should be developed.³ Could it be that we would be present at the birth of a *new currency for the European education sector*? What the *credit* has become in higher education, would the *micro-credential* become likewise but for the post-graduate and also the VET levels?⁴

We were absolutely thrilled! Anyone dealing with European VET issues knows about the incredible fragmentation of national markets and what problems this causes for a modern Europe. The confusing number of different definitions, structures and terminologies for one and the same profession which all manifest themselves in rather closed national education systems with their own training contents, quality and certification standards as well as recognition bodies creates a monstrous and anachronistic drawback to the needs and realities of EU citizens as well as the economy. The lack of an information overview and transparency as well as the lack of willingness to quickly recognise each other's educational qualifications limits the freedom of professional mobility.⁵ These are major obstacles in providing labour markets with urgently needed skilled workers and exposes Europe to the risk of falling behind modern global developments with its education systems. (CEDEFOP, 2020)

We are aware that many attempts have already been made to somehow homogenise the European VET landscape but that there has been to date no real success of any note – so, we were even more delighted that the EC was about to

develop a new description and accreditation system to untie this *Gordian Knot*. Of course, we wanted to be part of this innovative undertaking and have proudly included the concept of micro-credentials in our CREDinGREEN project proposal: with great enthusiasm we have weighted our training course with *1 micro-credential*; in addition, we have set ourselves the goal of acting as *national micro-credential pioneers*, promoting the concept in our institutions and countries and setting up national accreditation groups. All we needed now was to get our project approved - and to receive instructions about what a micro-credential really is, what it weighs and how the whole system should work.

Firstly, things progressed in our favour and fortune was on our side: the CREDinGREEN project was approved and we were able to start operative work in January 2022; shortly before, a first brochure has been published providing the following idea for a helpful definition:

*A **micro-credential** is the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a **small volume of learning**. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined **standards**.*

Courses leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.

*Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be **standalone or combined** into larger credentials. They are underpinned by **quality assurance** following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.*

(EC, 2021; bold characters taken from brochure)

³ ECTS has developed into a real success story for the higher education sector. However, ECVET, a similar concept the EC has planned to introduce for vocational education and training, unfortunately failed to gain acceptance.

⁴ Micro-credentials are actually aimed more at CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training), but because there is no clear differentiation in public communication, we will continue to use the VET hypernym.

⁵ There are certainly differences between the individual Member States and also positive developments to be reported; however, as I mainly deal with the rather restrictive Austrian and German education sectors, I ask for understanding that I represent a rather critical and pessimistic point of view.

What EU standard elements should it include?

The basis for trust in micro-credentials is transparency. Micro-credentials should be clearly identified as such with elements that make it possible for learners, education and training institutions, quality assurance agencies, and

employers to understand the value and content of micro-credentials and to compare them.

The European approach to micro-credentials suggests a list of critical information elements that any micro-credential should provide:

Mandatory elements

- Identification of the learner
- Title of the micro-credential
- Country/Region of the issuer
- Awarding body
- Date of issuing
- Learning outcomes
- Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS credits, wherever possible)
- Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF-EHEA), if applicable
- Type of assessment
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

Optional elements, where relevant (non-exhaustive list)

- Prerequisites needed to enrol in the learning activity
- Supervision and identity verification during assessment (unsupervised with no identity verification, supervised with no identity verification, supervised online or onsite with identity verification)
- Grade achieved
- Integration/stackability options (standalone, independent micro-credential / integrated, stackable towards another credential)
- Further information

(EC, 2021)

Along came some - partly mandatory, partly optional - standard elements which were requested or recommended to be used when issuing micro-credentials.

So that was the definition of the new European currency post-graduate HE in VET? At first sight, it reads well and nobody would deny these nicely formulated and sensible frameworks. But after a second glance, these appear as being very general formulations which do not help greatly when you want to set up a reliable and accepted micro-credential system from scratch for a project group from five different countries. The *identification of the learner*, the *title of the micro-credential*, the *country of issue*, the *awarding body* etc. is information that can be found on every other diploma too - so what is new then? We wanted to know what the scope of a micro-credential is! Does it contain 30 learning units, 60, 100, 1000? Who is defining this and where are the limits? Generally, who is authorised to act as the awarding body - and who is not? How

can we ensure that the micro-credential is recognised in all partner countries and beyond? *Confusion* was probably the word that came up most in our project group at this point!

However, we were pleased to learn that we were not the only ones left unsettled by the whole situation, and that others had also recognised the inadequacies of the concept and called for swift clarification. The most remarkable demand came from the *Council of the EU* in its *Recommendation on the European approach to micro-credentials for life-long learning and employability*. It confirmed that micro-credentials are increasingly in use in the EU, but criticised that this is precisely why it is difficult to understand that “there is no common definition of, or standards for, micro-credentials in Europe. This limits the understanding and uptake of micro-credentials, and therefore undermines the potential of micro-credentials to facilitate flexible learning and career pathways. This recommendation aims to support the building of trust in micro-credentials across Europe among all those

involved, whether providers or beneficiaries.” (Council of the EU, 2022, 4)

Therefore, the Council recommends:

Member States are encouraged to promote and support, where appropriate, effective experimentation, cooperation, governance and partnerships between:

- i) education and training institutions;*
 - ii) social partners;*
 - iii) employers and industry;*
 - iv) research and innovation organisations;*
 - v) civil society organisations;*
 - vi) employment and social inclusion services and;*
 - vii) local, regional and national authorities*
- (ibidem, 22)

To be honest, that was when the first alarm bells started to ring! Was that really such a good idea? If your aim is to establish more comparable and EU-wide recognised standards for the recognition of learning outcomes, can this be achieved best when you encourage, simultaneously, 27 Member States and their different national, regional and institutional policy makers and stakeholders to develop their own frameworks for this? Isn't there an enormous threat of ending up with the same patchwork of quantitative and qualitative frameworks and confusing terminology and responsibilities that we wanted to overcome by introducing micro-credentials in the first place? Of course, getting everyone on board and creating ownership within the main target groups and stakeholders is a very democratic approach and increases the chances that each country, each region, each institution can adopt the micro-credential regulations in a way most suitable to their frameworks. But will the outcome of such a bottom-up approach ultimately correspond with the idea of an *European education currency*, trusted and valued the same within each country, each region and each institution? Would people trust and value the Euro, if you could buy a litre of milk with it in one Euro-country, but a whole cow in another?

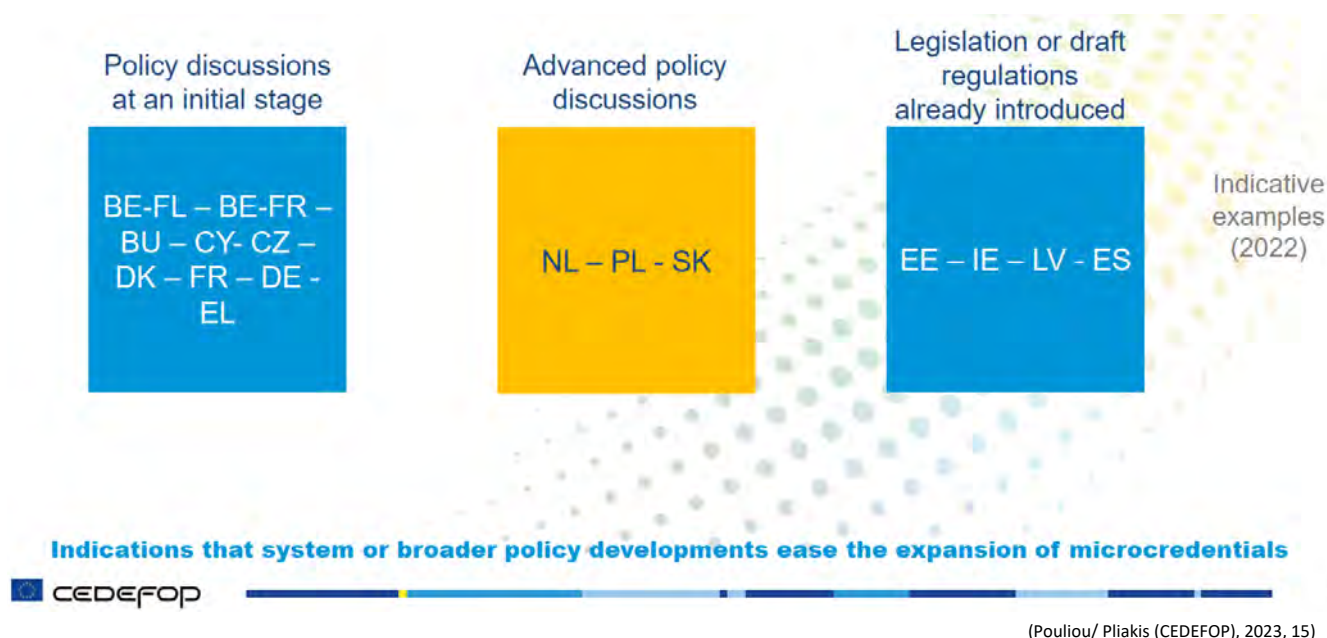
And there is another question: are the Member States even interested in dealing with micro-

credentials, in developing their standards and defining their frameworks? In order to ascertain how the concept of micro-credentials has already become established in official education policy in the countries of the CREDinGREEN partnership (AT, DE, IT, PT, RO), we undertook a survey in 2021. We analysed primary and secondary literature and conducted interviews with those responsible for education policy, funding bodies (e.g. the responsible national agencies for Erasmus+) and large educational institutions. The results were frustrating: in none of the five countries could we identify any significant national efforts to introduce the concept of micro-credentials! There were hardly any helpful publications, public communications or relevant contact persons who we knew or could approach. We were unable to find any satisfactory answers on the education policy, funding or education provider fronts - in fact, we had more questions than before! It seemed completely unpredictable whether, when and which of the five countries would be the first to develop its own guidelines for micro-credentials and what they might look like. (CREDinGREEN, 2022, 69ff.)

The only comfort was that this unsatisfactory result was not due to poor research or because we coincidentally had looked at those countries performing worst in the contest of implementing micro-credentials the best. Other EU projects have carried out similar studies and have come to almost the same conclusions: there is very little knowledge and awareness of micro-credentials within the European educational landscape - what there is, is confusion, uncertainty and distrust.⁶

The currently most up to date and holistic report on the introduction of micro-credentials into national education systems published by CEDEFOP in 2023, draws a slightly better picture but it also confesses that there is still a long way to go and there is a realistic threat of not even reaching the finish line! The chart below gives an overview of the different stages of development in selected EU countries:

⁶ MicroQuest (2022) has implemented such surveys for AT, DE, ES, IT and SI, MicroVET (2022) for BG, GR, IT, LU, NL and PT.



Although there are some improvements, at least at national levels, the following barriers to the wider uptake of micro-credentials in VET policies are – more or less – evident in all country reports and publications that take a critical look at this topic:

- lack of adequate and transparent QA standards
- uncertainties about nature of micro-credentials
- the way learning outcomes are assessed and documented
- lack of formal recognition by national authorities
- incompatibility of some micro-credentials with NQ systems
- limited opportunities for the accumulation and combination of micro-credentials

All in all, CEDEFOP's review of all country reports came up with the same results as the surveys conducted by the three previously mentioned EU projects: it looks like there are more questions and opportunities than ever before. The future of the micro-credential is wide open and the most diverse scenarios are possible, ranging "from a European MC [Micro-Credential] registry and opening up NQFs [National Qualification Frameworks] to more incremental approaches based on metadata and

easing comparability. Both from a user and system perspective each of these scenarios has advantages but also challenges given the diversity of the provision system" (ibidem, 36).

After two years of research and investigation, we now know the answer to our original questions about what the Europe-wide accepted nature of a micro-credential is and what its weight and value are: there are no answers! For once at least, this has the positive effect that we can stop looking for clear standards and guidelines provided by others. But this does not really help with our project work, because we do not see much point in ourselves defining a new micro-credential system just for our CREDinGREEN course, if it will not be trusted outside our partnership. Nevertheless, we will have to give it a try - as our proposal says!

But are there no success stories to be reported? Of course, there are. At the CEDEFOP virtual event *Microcredentials – a labour market megatrend* (22-23 June 2023), there was a very interesting presentation by Jørgen Prosper Sørensen, educational policy adviser at TEKNIQ Areidsiverne, Denmark's third largest employer and business organisation. In order to counter

labour shortages and quickly changing skills demands by employers, they offer easily implementable follow-up training in which core structural elements are small scale as well as modular training courses, in which prior learning experience is taken into account, and which are certified by micro-credentials. Extensive conceptual and operational preparatory work was carried in cooperation with the economy and companies leading to precisely predefined tailored learning content, other relevant stakeholders such as trade unions (for employment-related clarifications) or employment offices (for access to trainees) were brought on board and involved in setting up structures and frameworks, and finally, the qualifications obtained were recognised or supported by official Danish authorities, which creates further trust in the certificates. Overall, there was a lot of preparation work needed but in the end of the day it paid off by creating a win-win situation for all parties involved.⁷ (Sørensen, 2023)

This sounds fantastic and reads very promisingly! But still, it must not be forgotten that it is not yet even fully implemented at the national level, but only at the institutional level! It is a VET concept self-developed by the third largest employer representative of a country that accounts for 1.3% of all EU inhabitants. This is not meant to sound disrespectful towards the Danish initiative, but it shows the dilemma we are in: this micro-credential concept is certainly very successful and efficient – for TEKNIQ A in Denmark! And it would very likely be equally successful and efficient if traditional national certificates would have been used instead of micro-credentials. However, it is not yet clear whether and in what form TEKNIQ A's training courses will be recognised by other EU VET systems.⁸

And there is another question that we have not yet asked: can the EU even afford to fail in establishing a well-functioning and widely accepted micro-credential system applied across all Member States - thus meaning the homogenisation of its education systems and the equal recognition of educational qualifications, especially in the VET sector? Not really!

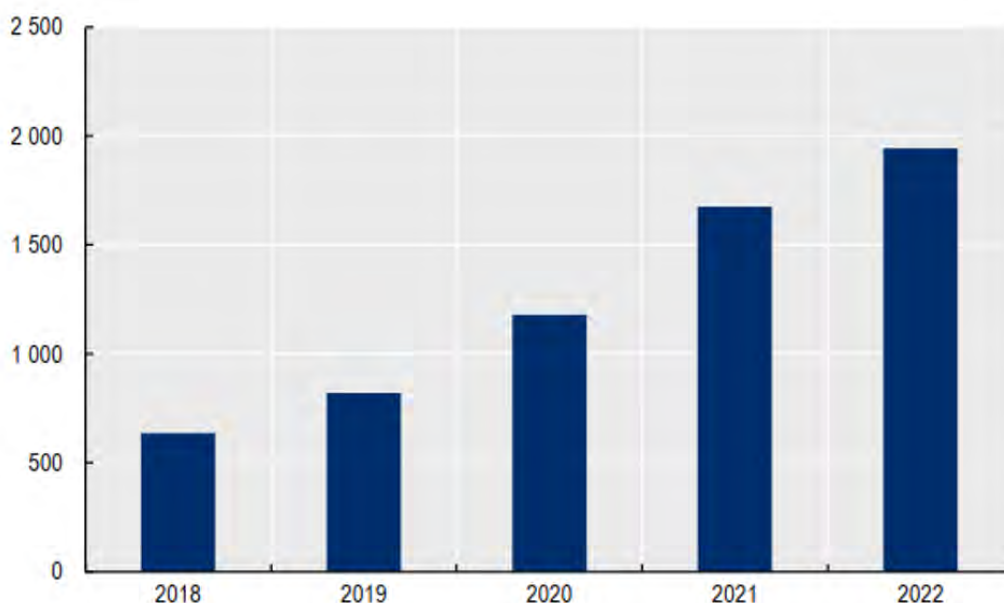
Europe's education systems have the reputation of being too cumbersome, complex and heterogeneous, and sometimes outdated, and that they are too expensive and far too slow in reacting rapidly to the changing world. Many experts expect that these traditional education systems will be put under pressure from several sides: they may no longer be financially viable in the future, especially if Europe's economy continues to lose international importance due to shortages of skilled labour, or they may not be maintainable due to a lack of teaching staff. Most of all, traditional education systems will face enormous competition from smaller, cheaper, more flexible, more dynamic, more digital and – viewed globally - more widely recognised education providers.

And the currency of many of these education systems is micro-credentials! E.g., the higher education learning platform *Alison*, established in 2007 in Ireland, alone graduates 7,000 people world-wide per day! The company's medium-term aim is to graduate annually 50 million(!) learners with Alison micro-credentials by 2026, as stated by CEO Feerick (Feerick, 2023)

How successful the concept of micro-credentials is at the global level demonstrates their uptake by major learning platforms during the last five years:

⁷ For a detailed insight into how a comparable pilot model was set-up and implemented in Sweden, please see Flintberg (2023).

⁸ Such developments at institutional level can be found all over Europe, such as the *4EU+ University Alliance*, in which eight HEIs take up "the opportunities as well as the challenges presented by the concept of a standardized approach to micro-credentials across Europe. We are confident that publishing our Alliance's position on micro-credentials will further advance discourse and debate, necessary steps to reaching a commonly accepted understanding." (4EU+, 2022, 7) To me, it reads a little bit like *whistling in the dark with the expect result to receive yet another individual micro-credential concept of little generic acceptance*.



Note: The figure shows the number of micro-credentials offered on Coursera (MasterTracks, Professional Certificates, Specializations and University Certificates), edX (MicroBachelors, MicroMasters, Professional Certificates, Professional Education and XSeries), FutureLearn (Academic Certificates, ExpertTracks, Micro-credentials and Programs), Kadenze (Programs) and Udacity (Nanodegrees).

OECD (2023, 2)

Due to their small-scale design, their easy access via learning platforms, many digitised processes and the associated low costs, it is not surprising that micro-credentials are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in poorer and more populous countries. Many official education initiatives are now based on them, such as the one recently initiated by UNESCO in South-east Asia (Teter, 2023).

So where does this all leave the EU's ambitions of introducing micro-credentials at the European and national levels? The situation seems clear in all of its ambiguities: micro-credentials seem to be a success story provided it is dealt with cleverly and if a more or less homogenous concept is widely accepted. As a result of lagging behind global developments, Europe now has to catch up and do its homework! CEDEFOP (2022) has summarised the strengths and weaknesses of the current state of development quite well:

It remains to be seen whether education authorities within EU will succeed in eliminating these weaknesses. As things stand, there is little

STRENGTHS

Microcredentials respond to the changing needs of the labour market

promote lifelong learning,

assist in upskilling and reskilling,

enable learners to build and validate professional skills (non-formal and informal learning),

offer opportunities for better understanding and cooperation between education providers and employers,

have the potential to provide access to education to a greater variety of learners.

provide flexible learning pathways

WEAKNESSES

Microcredentials cause uncertainty among stakeholders as to their benefits,

proliferate in unregulated ways,

confuse users owing to their complexity and variety,

lack transparency as to who ensures their quality,

present challenges concerning their recognition,

are often unable to reach the most vulnerable or disadvantaged learner groups.

hope that a countless number of national and institutional working groups will succeed in formulating generally accepted standards and recognition structures. As many times before, all the parties involved seem to prove once again that they are too deeply entrenched in their own systems, standards, frameworks, dependencies and mindsets to see the bigger European picture. However, it would be most helpful to change this attitude. National education policymakers, experts, employer and employee representatives and education providers could take a step back from their own position and open themselves and their systems up a little. Instead of trying to force micro-credentials into their own narrow national system, it would be beneficial to open up their system to the more flexible global concept of micro-credentials. They should finally start to focus on what unites the various national education systems and not what divides them. It also helps to recognise the strengths of other countries' education systems and to critically question the weaknesses of one's own. However, should not only point the finger at others, but also see what each of us can contribute to move things forward. We all have to prove that we apply ourselves what we so readily demand from our students: to be a lifelong learner and to adapt openly and constructively to change.

From EC's side it would be desirable if it would show more initiative and courage to take the lead and provide more clearly formulated guidelines, standards and definitions for the use and application of micro-credentials on an European level.

Perhaps this is too naïve an idea because it does not take sufficient account of political and legal frameworks, responsibilities and objectives, and perhaps it is too late anyway! But from the grassroots perspective of implementing an hands-on EU project, it seems to make sense - and it would have the advantage that those responsible for developing innovative

training programmes would have a clearer idea what standards they should be aiming at when bringing learning programmes to the transnational level.

And who knows, maybe a frog will one day become a prince after all ...

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BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — MICRO-CREDENTIALS

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MICRO QUEST

Innovative quality evaluation strategy for micro-credentials in non-formal VET in Europe

The overall project aim of the MICRO QUEST project is the investigation and research as well as the development of an approach for identification and quality assurance of micro-credentials in VET in Europe.

The MICRO QUEST project focuses on an explorative approach to find out how micro-credentials are defined in (non-)formal VET, and how units of micro-credentials are collected, extracted and offered by non-formal VET providers in Europe within their training programmes. Since 2021, the partnership has been exploring the possibilities and tools that are available for quality assurance and which can ensure mutual trust and the recognition of micro-credentials provided by different VET institutions. A special emphasis has also been placed on the investigation of how digital learning content can lead to micro-credentials (e.g., MOOCs, online and distance learning) and on the concrete benefit for both learners and VET providers.



All images: © MICRO QUEST

To tackle these questions, the project partnership has defined four main activity streams, which are form the basis for the project results.

1. Implementation of investigative re- search to identify the concrete needs and requirements of the target group (VET providers) in relation to the use



of micro-credentials within their training offers as well as to identify suitable quality assurance approaches which meet the requirements of micro-credentials and which can be used for quality assurance during the definition and awarding of micro-credentials by VET providers (e.g., EQAVET, ISO, TQM etc).

2. Development of a guideline for VET providers: if micro-credentials are to be used across a broad and comparable spectrum within Europe, then



VET providers need easy and clear guidelines about how they can deduct and define micro-credentials within their learning offers (with a special focus also on online learning offers such as MOOCs, webinars, online coaching).

3. Development of a training workshop concept for (non)- formal VET providers: in addition to the written guidelines we also find it important that rep-



representatives of VET providers, external VET experts etc. receive practical training on e.g. how to deduct and define micro-credentials for the training programme on offer, requirements for awarding micro-credentials, quality

assurance approaches for micro-credentials, mutual recognition of micro-credentials.

4. Development of a network of (non)- formal VET providers for micro-credentials in Europe: for its success we believe in the need to immediate-



ly establish a broad network of potential VET providers who are on one hand providing micro-credentials in different sectors and learning topics and on the other hand are also willing to accept and trust other VET providers who award micro-credentials. The members of this network will be non-formal VET providers who have all committed to the same forms of quality assurance and mutual trust. Their offer of micro-credentials will be displayed in an online platform, ready to be used by potential VET learners.

The MICRO QUEST project is now in its final months of implementation and the partnership has met for a transnational learning, teaching and training activity in Graz, Austria, to pre-test the training workshop internally and to plan the pilot testing phases in all partner countries: Austria, Germany, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain. The investigative research study is already available as a free download on the project website, and the guideline for VET providers as well as the training workshop concept and materials will soon follow.

The final months of the project are also dedicated to building up and extending the MICRO QUEST network, which invites VET providers to showcase their micro-credential offers and engage in active peer discussions with each other. The partnership is confident that this project is contributing added value to the current discourse about micro-credentials in the VET sector and that the project results are relevant resources for the key actors across Europe.



BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — MICRO-CREDENTIALS

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Motiv-Action

Motivating low-skilled adults in accessing upskilling pathways to increase job opportunities

Develop didactic materials to improve the resources of European adult education agencies to foster professional inclusion of low-skilled adults.

In today's rapidly evolving world, online guidance has become indispensable. It not only provides access to valuable information but also empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their learning, work and career paths. Within the framework of the Motiv-Action project, a partnership of 11 organisations, we embarked upon a journey to create new career opportunities for unemployed adults and enhance the provision of



All images: © Motiv-Action



digital guidance services. In this article, we will explore Sweden's pivotal role in the Motiv-Action project and how it has been instrumental in unlocking digital competences for its citizens.

Sweden's digital transformation landscape

Sweden, renowned for its prowess in digital technologies, has been at the forefront of digital transformation. The country boasts widespread internet use among both individuals and institutions, blurring the lines of digital divides based on age, education and income. This digital revolution has also had a profound impact on adult learning.

As digitalisation opens new doors, it simultaneously ushers in new forms of competition within job markets. Those with advanced digital skills in Sweden have witnessed increased inclusion rates in the job market and higher wage scales. Recent surveys by the Swedish Public Employment Service indicate that over 80% of all jobs in Sweden now require some level of digital competence. Thus, it has become imperative for both new generations of adult learners and educators to master digitally-based skills and competencies in order to remain competitive within society.

Sweden's government initiatives for digital competences

Recognising the changing landscape of adult learning, the Swedish government has taken significant measures to promote digital competences among its adult learners. The Swedish National Agency for Education, for instance, has developed a comprehensive framework for digital competences, seamlessly integrated into the national curriculum. This framework identifies five key digital competence areas: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and security, and problem-solving.

Furthermore, the government has made substantial investments in digital learning resources and training programmes, ensuring that adult learners have the necessary tools to develop their digital skills. Notably, all Swedish communes now offer digital training platforms that are regularly updated with new courses tailored to the needs of the local job market.

Motiv-Action's influence in Sweden

Sweden's participation in the Motiv-Action project has been instrumental in fostering digital competences

BEST PRACTICE EU PROJECTS — MICRO-CREDENTIALS



amongst its citizens. Through Motiv-Action, Sweden has amplified its commitment to providing high-quality career guidance and digital skills development opportunities.

Micro-credentials, a concept central to Motiv-Action's methodology, have been a cornerstone of Sweden's approach to upskilling its workforce. These qualifications attest to learning outcomes achieved through short, transparently assessed courses, offered in various formats, including online. Micro-credentials have opened doors for all citizens to acquire skills and competences effectively.

Sweden's engagement in Motiv-Action has resulted in intellectual outputs such as courses, MOOCs, and eBooks, designed to prepare adult learners for the digital world's opportunities and challenges by 2025. These outputs serve as invaluable resources for those seeking to enhance their digital competences.

Reflections, lessons, and recommendations

Sweden's journey within the Motiv-Action project has been transformative, offering valuable insights into the potential of micro-credentials. Together with our partners, we have developed comprehensive didactic materials for adult learners, educators and policymakers. These materials serve as guides to unlock the full potential of digital competences.

As we reflect on our experiences in Sweden, we can offer the following recommendations:

For learners:

1. actively participate in diverse learning opportunities;
2. regularly use digital tools relevant to your needs;
3. Seek guidance from younger generations;
4. embrace open-source materials for learning.

Assess your digital proficiency regularly.

For policy makers:

1. prioritise digital upskilling for the unemployed;
2. develop comprehensive strategies for digital skills development;
3. allocate resources to support digital learning initiatives;
4. promote digital skills development and evaluate programme effectiveness.

In conclusion, Sweden's active involvement in the Motiv-Action project has been a catalyst for unlocking digital competences among its adult population. As we move forward, the lessons learned from this partnership will continue to shape our approach to digital skills development, ensuring that all citizens are equipped for success in the digital age.

Micro-Credentials in the context of Motiv-Action Project and its implementation in Sweden

The MOTIV-ACTION project is strategically positioned to leverage the increasing need for digital integration within career guidance. Here's an improved response incorporating relevant statistical insights and database information:

The initiative addresses a crucial gap highlighted by statistical data revealing that while 89% of career guidance services across Europe use digital tools to some extent, only 43% have fully integrated these tools into their regular practices. Furthermore, according to our database, 70% of career counselors express the need to enhance their ICT competencies to meet the demands of the digital era.

Within this context, micro-credentials play a crucial role. Studies and surveys from our database show that 78% of counselors and adult educators express a keen interest in adopting micro-credentials to improve their digital skills. However, only 30% currently have access to recognized, structured training modules in this area. The MOTIV-ACTION project aims to fill this gap by offering structured learning paths and micro-credentials, responding directly to this pressing demand.

Empowering adult users in their job search process is also a key focus. Statistics indicate that 60% of adult job seekers express a lack of confidence in using digital

tools effectively in their job search. Our data also highlights that individuals who possess validated digital skills through certifications are 40% more likely to secure employment within six months compared to those without such certifications.

The MOTIV-ACTION project will aim to bridge this gap by providing certified pathways for users, which aligns with our findings that 82% of job seekers believe validated micro-credentials in digital skills could significantly enhance their employability.

The project's core objective resonates with the broader trends in the field. A comprehensive analysis in our database revealed that 91% of career guidance professionals believe that a fusion of digital tools with traditional practices could significantly improve their effectiveness. Moreover, 75% of these professionals agree that structured, certified learning materials tailored to digital integration in career guidance would be beneficial.

Therefore, within the MOTIV-ACTION project, the creation of recognized micro-credentials is poised to fill the existing gap between digital tools and traditional guidance. By directly addressing the demands of counselors and users for validated, structured learning materials, this initiative aligns with statistical insights, paving the way for a more digitally competent and successful workforce.



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