



TOURISM AS A STRATEGIC DRIVER FOR **INCLUSIVE, RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH** IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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THE PROBLEM

Europe is currently the world's number one tourist destination with a global market share of 51%, reaching up to 671 million of international tourist arrivals and 519 billion USD of receipts (UN WTO, 2017). The tourism industry generates 10.2% of total EU-28 Gross Domestic Product (WTTC, 2017). In the European context, Mediterranean countries are clearly leading the way in arrival numbers of international tourists. With a massive increase of +12% of tourist arrivals in 2017, tourism represents a major – if not the largest – source of exports, incomes, added-value and jobs in Southern and Eastern European countries.

Those massive economic benefits fuel the construction of local infrastructures, the financing of local services and the improvement of welfare state. However, overgrown, overcrowded or mismanaged destinations are generating negative impacts such as depletion of natural ecosystems, saturation of public spaces and protests from residents who feel they are losing control over the place they live. From a market point of view, traditional business models based on low-cost “Sea, Sun and Sand” are at risk of becoming uncompetitive as cheaper and well-branded destinations are now emerging in other parts of the world.

In cities like Barcelona or Paris, the rise of informal holiday rental is inflating the price of real estate as well as the cost of living. This contributes to excluding residents from their original neighbourhoods. In Dubrovnik or Venice, public spaces can become so saturated by seasonal flows of tourists that the local populace struggles to maintain its traditional way of life; people have difficulty getting around, shopping, accessing to their homes or simply using public infrastructures and services. Climate change and environmental depletion are also damaging valuable assets such as landscapes or infrastructures reducing resilience to natural, social or political turmoil. Additionally, for many workers in the tourism industry, seasonality, poor qualification and low wages are contributing to chronic social precarity.

This particularly affects young people and women, who might be easily attracted by short-term, flexible and unskilled occupations. The economic added-values are also very often captured by large private multinationals, reducing the social returns to local businesses and communities.

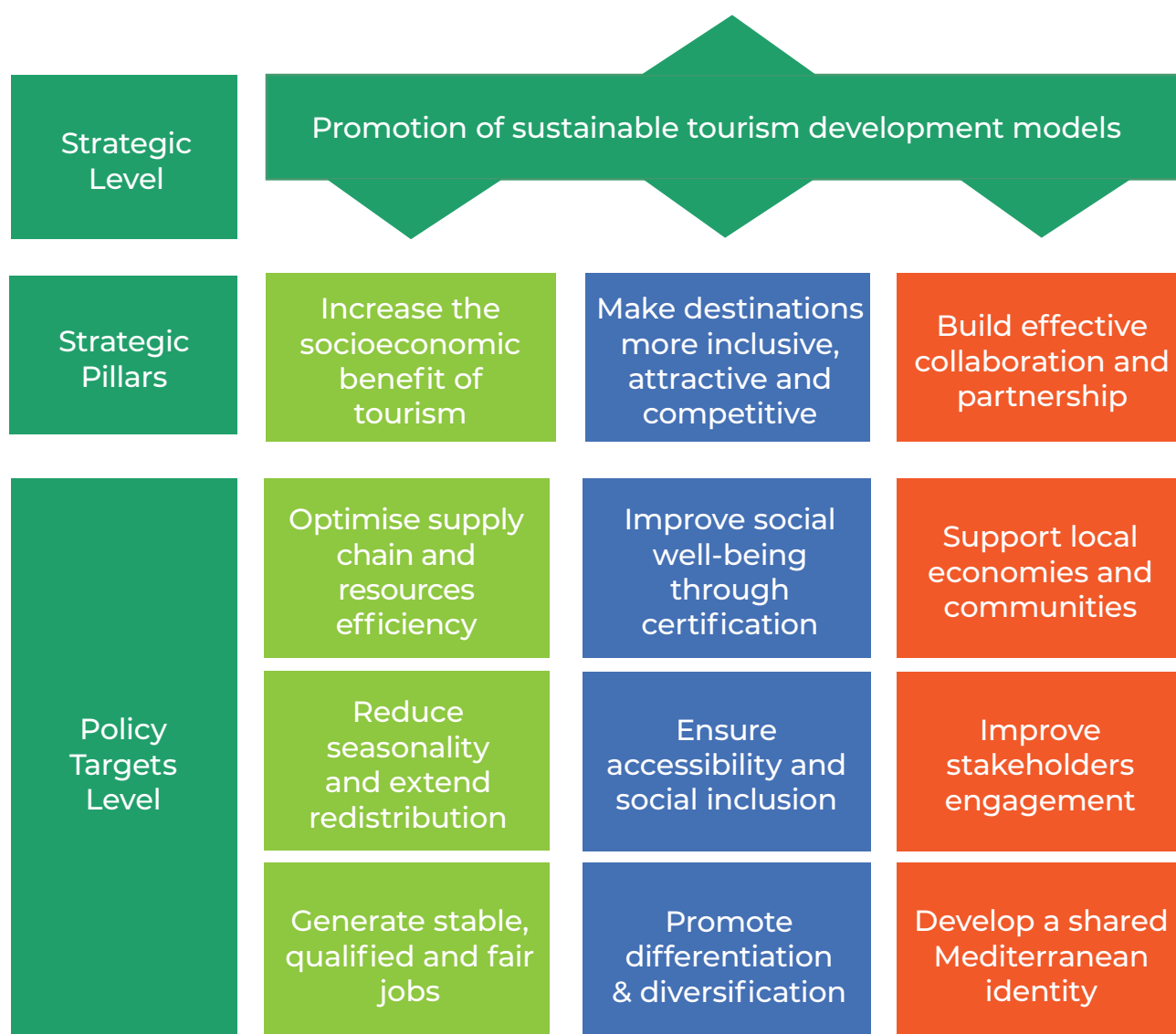
The development of tourism infrastructures that aim to facilitate the arrival and hosting of visitors, such as hotels, leisure facilities, airports, ports or highways, are also exerting a great deal of pressure on natural and urban ecosystems, which are already affected by traditional human activities, environmental pollution and climate change impacts. Finally, the accelerated globalization of tourism, with the rise of international travelers and the concentration of large private operators, combined with unbalanced bargaining powers, are accelerating the standardization of the market; this reduces the local businesses' share and alters the identity of local destinations.

This creates a vicious circle in which negative externalities that often go hand-in-hand with well-established destinations are damaging their attractiveness while endangering the economic and social returns for residents, businesses and local communities. It is therefore essential for policy makers and decision-makers to understand not only the benefits brought by tourism but also the threats and risks that come with it if it is not environmentally and socially sustainable over the long term.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The transition towards sustainable tourism development models

Tourism as a strategic driver for a sustainable and responsible economic growth and prosperity in the Mediterranean region





INCREASE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES



The benefits of Mediterranean tourism need to be enhanced for local communities. This implies an improvement of the whole tourism value chain through reduction of waste (water, energy, food, etc.) and measures for efficient use of resources. Regional actors should also manage tourism in such a way as to reduce seasonality, promote alternative offers, and redistribute visitor flows. Finally, the sector should provide stable, qualified and inclusive jobs for workers, training them on a regular basis and guaranteeing them access to social security benefits.

- **Optimize value chain, reduce waste and improve resources efficiency**

A full assessment of the tourism supply and demand chain is required in order to identify flaws, risks and opportunities at local level. The value chain can then be improved with higher productivity, better resource efficiencies and less waste in the use of energy, water, food or amenities. The reduction of losses automatically increases the productivity and the economic margin of the operators while decreasing pressures on natural and urban ecosystems.

- **Reduce seasonality, promote alternative offers and redistribute visitors flows**

Sustainable and responsible economic growth does not mean more tourists. Sometimes, it may be necessary to diversify the existing portfolio with new products and services based on alternative tourism offers, such as rural tourism, hinterland trips, slow tourism or cultural tourism. This would contribute to reducing tourism seasonality, where tourism flows are usually concentrated in crowded coastal areas during peak summer months. Regional actors should therefore establish a common strategy with local stakeholders and the tourism industry to balance peak and off seasons as well as to promote alternative destinations in the hinterlands or in the periphery.

- **Promote stable, inclusive and qualified jobs as well as social security benefits**
Jobs in the mass-tourism industry are usually unqualified, seasonal and poorly paid, attracting precarious youth and women populations. If the destinations want to consolidate or improve their competitiveness, they should guarantee proper quality of service and a good experience for visitors through well-trained – and therefore better-paid –

employees, who are given the opportunity to develop skills and a full career path. Workers should also have access to social security benefits in case of illness, maternity or unemployment. Business models ensuring that companies hire employees under fair conditions and ownership of community members on the enterprises can be part of the solution.

CASE STUDIES

Reduce the use of water in the tourism industry



CASTWATER aims to reduce the use of water in the tourism industry by providing monitoring schemes for hospitality SMEs and public authorities. An [online tool](#) allows the campsites and hotels to undertake a self-assessment of their water management through a series of simple questions to evaluate current status, identify areas of improvement and compare performance with similar facilities. It also provides public authorities with statistics on the current status of water management in the local area (NUTS 1, 2 or 3) and allows them to receive direct feedback from water user on policy and regulation.

For more info: see [CASTWATER project](#)



Promoting alternative fishing tourism

TOURISMED project promotes alternative fishing tourism that is compatible with the local marine ecosystem. It enhances collaboration among artisanal fishermen and local tourism by creating stable and responsible economic activity in the community. In particular, it aims to train over 90 fishermen in the management of a sustainable sea-based tourism business model; to develop 6 tourism itineraries based on the maritime traditional heritage and valorization of local seafood products; to create an integrated fishing-tourism business model that combines sustainable fishing, local natural resources and traditional products; and to adopt the integrated business model for 6 regional fishing tourism consortia.

For more information: see [TOURISMED project](#)



IMPROVE DESTINATIONS TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE, RESPONSIBLE, ATTRACTIVE AND COMPETITIVE



Regional actors should help destinations to become more inclusive, responsible, attractive and competitive. This entails the use of certifications, labels and ethical codes to ensure proper social, economic and environmental performance, best-in-class market value and good reputation, compared with traditional business models. The social and physical accessibility, affordability and inclusion of all kinds of visitors shall also be guaranteed, so as to extend customers bases and improve the ethical footprint. Finally, the destinations should enhance differentiation, competitiveness and diversification of their products and services through investments in innovation and R&D.

- **Increase social and environmental performance through certifications, labels and ethical codes**

In order to be accepted and supported by communities, tourism should contribute to the local well-being of residents. Thematic certifications schemes, ethical codes and eco-labels are useful tools to promote quality products, responsible services, transparent businesses or competitive destinations for the benefits of tourists, industry and local communities. Simplified standards, charters and protocols could be used to facilitate implementation to SMEs and local businesses.

- **Insure accessibility, affordability and inclusion for all**

Each destination, as a responsible and ethical actor, should be accessible to all kind of visitors, including those with physical or mental disabilities or differences. This can actually be seen as an opportunity to extend the market, as well as a tool to improve social responsibility towards local communities. The industry should also make sure there are no social or economic discriminations towards minorities, sensitive or marginalized populations, including youth, women, families or immigrants, amongst others.

- **Enhance differentiation, competitiveness & diversification of destinations**

Mediterranean tourism should evolve from standard “Sea, Sun and Sand” business models towards more added-value products and services.

Sustainable destinations should invest in top-quality infrastructures, integrating environmental and social criteria to increase differentiation, diversification and competitiveness, increasing tourists’ length of stay and expenditure and customer loyalty.

CASE STUDIES

Improving sustainability at cruise destinations



SIROCCO aims to decrease the pressures imposed by cruise tourism on local populations by improving sustainability at cruise destinations. This organization promotes a certification scheme as well as an action plan for the cruise sector, reviewing the whole industry value chain and envisaging various growth scenarios. First, the societal impact & distribution of the cruise value chain along five ports of the Mediterranean area – Civitavecchia, Rhodes, Split, Limassol and Valencia – was carefully evaluated. Then, a sustainable Cruise Tourism Joint Action Plan was developed to serve as guidance for the ports and destinations, and to federate cruise stakeholders and provide future ideas for pilot projects.

For more info see [SIROCCO project](#)



Culinary experiences in the rural coastal hinterland

MEDFEST promotes local and sustainable culinary experiences in the rural coastal hinterland. This organization has developed an online map where tourists can search for unique culinary heritage, to plan their trips in Mediterranean destinations. The catalogue of good practices provides a detailed description of 18 culinary experiences from 8 different Mediterranean countries, revealing how culinary experiences work, who is involved, and what are the “ingredients” which make them successful. Each culinary experience is described through a story and includes valuable information on local territorial anchoring; relationship to heritage; management aspects; relation to existing policies; sustainability criteria; innovative issues; monitoring and stakeholders’ views.

For more info see [MEDFEST project](#)



BUILD EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION AND COMMON VISION BETWEEN TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS



Successful tourism models can only be developed through effective collaboration and partnerships between and within tourism stakeholders. The industry should promote sustainable procurement programs and long-term investments in tourism facilities to insure socio-economic-environmental benefits for the community. The stakeholders should be engaged, educated and empowered through collaborative, participative and inclusive partnerships.

A common Mediterranean identity should also be built and disseminated to promote the shared values and collective vision uniting all tourism actors, products and destinations in the region.

- **Support local economies through sustainable procurement and long-term investments**

Successful tourism should be based on the enhancement of local economies and on advantages for residents, who also need to receive economic benefits and social returns. Local communities can, in fact, provide many products and services to be used by the tourism industry, related to food, culture, handicraft, mobility or retail. Promotion of local purchases, made with local materials, are also reducing the environmental footprint of the sector, preserving the local skillsets and increasing the acceptance of tourism by communities. Financial investments into tourist facilities should be driven by long-term benefits for economic actors, visitors and residents.

- **Enhance stakeholders' involvement, partnerships and collaboration schemes**

Local stakeholders should be brought into the design, planning and implementation of sustainable tourism models that contribute to the development of local communities as well as securing equitable social and economic returns for operators, residents and destinations. Likewise, multi-stakeholder collaborations between public, private, social or academic actors would facilitate the development of innovative products and services, leading to more attractive and competitive destinations.

- **Build a shared Mediterranean identity, values and vision**

The traditional tourism models have usually been based on promoting “Sea, Sun and Sand” assets through all-inclusive packages or low-cost offers. Mediterranean destinations should now take advantage of their unique historical, culinary or cultural heritage

to build a shared vision, common values and a collective identity that can be promoted globally and that would contribute to a more integrated, stable and prosperous Mediterranean region. This would help build unique selling points and global added-value for Mediterranean destinations facing worldwide competition from other coastal areas.

CASE STUDIES

Integrated management of human activities and natural systems



CO-EVOLVE empowers local stakeholders by promoting the co-development of human activities and natural systems in 7 touristic coastal areas in 5 different countries, based on the principles of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). A semi-quantitative evaluation of tourism sustainability in each pilot area is being conducted, through relevant metrics and tools (e.g. ETIS system). An integrated planning project for coastal and marine areas aims to improve governance and management of conflicts between uses, enhance recovery and valorization of natural areas for touristic uses, and help develop a sustainable tourism industry that favours growth and de-seasonalizes tourist flows.

For more info: see [CO-EVOLVE project](#)



Promotion of a common Mediterranean identity

ALTER ECO promotes a common Mediterranean identity for sustainable tourism in 2 regions (Valencia, South Aegean) and 4 cities (Malaga, Genoa, Dubrovnik, Venice). It tests alternative tourism strategies to reduce and better manage the impact of tourism activities on the environment through sharing Mediterranean values and common heritage. It identifies the more representative Mediterranean identity characteristics, in terms of importance and the level of threat posed by uncontrolled tourism activities. It also offers a methodological framework to estimate the extent to which Mediterranean identity has been lost in touristic urban areas and provide strategic insights towards alternative routes.

For more info see [ALTER ECO project](#)

THE VISION

Sustainable tourism models in the Mediterranean countries help increase the economic, social and environmental **benefits** for the local industry, tourism destinations and the communities over the long term. Such models allow related economic sectors – agriculture, fisheries, culture, food & beverages – to develop alongside SMEs and local communities, providing sustainable products and services to the tourism supply chain.

Through innovation, diversification and differentiation, sustainable destinations increase their attractiveness, competitiveness and authenticity, as well as improving the tourism experience and level of quality offered to visitors. Additionally, a sustainable tourism industry provides a better redistribution of incomes into the whole value chain, higher social benefits for workers, productivity increase for businesses and well-being for residents. Moreover, a broader inclusion and integration of regions and communities enhances their resilience to external shocks such as economic crisis or climate events. Finally, the promotion of a common Mediterranean identity, with common values and vision, contributes to the stability, security and integration of the region.

This vision is aligned with the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development¹ (MSSD 2016-25) that already puts emphasis on the need to promote a green and blue economy based on a sustainable use of natural, economic and social ecosystems.

The European Tourism Manifesto² launched by a large group of public and private European tourism actors, also acknowledges that growth can only be achieved through the reduction of seasonality, the integration of sustainability, the improvement of skills and qualifications, and the implementation of low-carbon transport connectivity. On a broader scale, responsible tourism clearly contributes to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 on Sustainable Consumption and Production and SDG14 on Ocean conservation.

1-<http://web.unep.org/unepmap/mediterranean-strategy-sustainable-development-mssd-2016-2025>

2 - <https://www.tourismmanifesto.eu>





SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

These policy recommendations were successfully elaborated thanks to the collaboration of external tourism experts and the commitment of 14 EU Mediterranean projects: ALTER ECO, BLUEISLANDS, BLUEMED, CASTWATER, CO-EVOLVE, CONSUME-LESS, DestiMED, EMbleMatîC, HERIT-DATA, INHERIT, MEDFEST, MITOMED+, SIROCCO, TOURISMED.

Throughout a number of knowledge-sharing events, and thanks to their strong involvement, participants built a Sustainable Tourism Community across the Mediterranean region. Benefiting from the synergies created, 43 of the 149 community members were able to disseminate the results of their projects and capitalize on them to elaborate this specific factsheet.

To promote a change on the topic "How can the tourism sector ensure a sustainable and responsible economic growth and prosperity in the Mediterranean region?", the living Community brought together, in a single working group, a comprehensive network of experts from 7 countries and no fewer than 4 research centres, 12 NGOs, 10 local authorities, 4 national authorities and 2 international organizations. Their work, enriched by the diversity of people involved and the experience learned from case studies, is paving the way to greater sustainability in coastal and maritime Mediterranean tourism.

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