



PROMOTING **ALTERNATIVE
TOURISM MODELS** TO
REDUCE PRESSURES IN
THE MEDITERRANEAN
REGION

THE PROBLEM

The tourism sector is amongst the highest income generators in the Mediterranean, contributing directly to regional economies thanks to sectoral synergies and powerful knock-on effects. However, as important as it is economically and socially, tourism also puts a great deal of strain on the natural, cultural and social environment.

It creates a high demand for space on land and sea and leads to a high concentration of activities during specific periods and in specific geographical areas. The impacts of this dramatically affect the attractiveness of the area. Such pressures take their toll on many areas, including water and waste management and energy efficiency.

Indeed, tourism worldwide is estimated to account for 5% of global CO₂ emissions, 40% of which arise from air transport and 20% from hotels and other types of accommodation. The remaining 40% is related to other types of transport (cruises, cars, railway, etc.) and to the recreational services provided by tourism¹.

The growing awareness of those impacts has led to the promotion of **sustainable tourism as a major priority** for the future of the sector; a challenge that must be taken up both for the sake of local communities, who stand to benefit economically and socially, and for the sake of raising awareness and support for environment conservation and protection.

Thus, many EU environmental sector-based policies recognise that tourism is exerting undue pressures on the natural and built environment, that this poses a threat to the quality of life of local populations and that it could potentially degrade the tourism assets.

Policy-makers emphasize that environmental sustainability is increasingly essential to the tourism sector.

In spite of this, however, tourism policy at the European level remains primarily focused on boosting the competitiveness of the sector. There is a lack of specific legislation and targets, while references to tourism-related sustainability challenges continue to be fragmented and dispersed across sector-based policies and all the accumulated legislation of the EU.

Current EU policies related to tourism only partially reflect the socio-economic and environmental realities of the tourism industry, on the whole failing to take account of complex and interconnected nature of this sector and, most importantly, of its sustainability challenges.

More sustainable tourism planning and management practices would not only mitigate and prevent those impacts, but also provide real opportunities to reverse those trends. Effective and responsible channelling of tourism activity could benefit natural, cultural and social destinations' environments as well as economic prosperity.

Finally, there is an urgent need to reduce the negative impacts of tourism in the Mediterranean region in order to comply with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025.

These challenges could be addressed by providing credible, comprehensible, diverse and replicable alternative tourism models.

Therefore, it is crucial for policy and decision makers to work with effective tools to address tourism pressures in order to advance towards the sustainable development of this important economic sector and of tourism destinations.

¹ - UNEP and UNWTO, 2007, Climate Change and Tourism: Responding to Global Challenges

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



UNDERSTANDING THE LIMITING FACTORS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Identifying and
measuring the
limits of tourism
destination

Benchmarking
approach

Recognising the
value of tourist
destinations'
ecosystems services



PLANNING AND MANAGING TOURISM SUSTAINABLY

Using planning
approaches and
tools

Sharing good
practices



DEVELOPING AWARENESS AND CAPACITIES, CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

Making the
business case

Improving collective
responsibility

Applying
economic
instruments



REDISTRIBUTING TOURISM FLOWS IN SPACE AND TIME

Promoting alternative
off-season offers

Promoting alternative
hinterland
destinations



UNDERSTANDING THE LIMITING FACTORS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT



Attempting to reduce tourism impacts without a proper understanding of the factors involved can prove futile. In order to respect the underlying principles of sustainability, it is therefore crucial to consider and assess the **limiting factors of tourism development**, such as ecological resilience, resource capacity, community concerns, visitors' satisfaction or the **maximum volume of tourist flow in a given destination**. It is essential to measure the carrying capacity limits in tourism destinations so as to assist planning and policy making and ensure those limits are respected. There are several methods and approaches for measuring tourism sustainability in terms of tourism destination, product, model and actors involved.

- Encouraging the use of methodologies to **identify and estimate the limits of tourism destinations** will guide local and regional policies towards more sustainable tourism planning and management, preventing those destinations from entering a process of degradation and loss of value and attractiveness. Methods like the Carrying Capacity concept, the Limit of Acceptable Change and the Ecological footprint enable policy makers to set **up thresholds** above which natural (including ecosystem services) or cultural features might not sustain additional amounts of visitors and activities. Those methodologies rely on: close-up observation of tourism receiving areas; consultation with stakeholders and building capacity of all stakeholders (tourism economic actors, civil society, institutional practitioners and policy makers) in cooperation with research centres.
- Encouraging and facilitating a **benchmarking approach** through existing tourist destination data and networks in the Mediterranean will enable local, regional and national governments to identify weaknesses and establish priorities, whilst promoting cooperation between destinations facing similar problems.
- Identifying the economic, environmental and social **value of tourist destinations' ecosystems services** by involving stakeholders (public and private organisations or civil society). This will help build local and regional policies and improve planning aimed at preventing the degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity that affects human livelihoods and well-being.

CASE STUDIES

Assessing tourism models to preserve the Mediterranean identity



Mediterranean identity is a powerful concept deriving from environmental and cultural features and their spatial interactions.

To assess tourism models' sustainability from a social perspective, based on the traditional characteristics of the Mediterranean identity, ALTER ECO has developed a methodology to diagnose the level of risk for a tourist destination.

The "Decision Support System" calculates the Tourism Carrying Capacity in cultural cities. A model calculates levels of tourism stress on a tourist destination's sub-systems and attributes a maximum value for an acceptable number of tourists for a destination. For an "overnight-stay" typology it analyses 3 categories: traditional accommodation, non-traditional accommodations and no stay (walkers). Modelling results are then used to suggest measures to improve the sustainability of the destinations' tourism model.

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



Characterising the sustainability of ecotourism products

The Mediterranean is a region where biodiversity thrives in a delicate balance with local communities and visitors. Ecotourism is nature-oriented and contributes to the conservation of a natural area and the well-being of local communities. However, despite the fact that there is a growing need for it and a strong interest in alternative forms of tourism, ecotourism is not strongly promoted in the Mediterranean. But the question is: how much more sustainable are the ecotourism products and how can the level of sustainability be measured? DestiMED has developed an ecotourism standard and a monitoring system based on the Ecological Footprint methodology. It is being piloted to measure the sustainability of 13 ecotourism packages in Mediterranean Protected areas, so as to find out how to improve them.

For more info see the [DestiMED project](#)



PLANNING AND MANAGING TOURISM SUSTAINABLY



The Mediterranean region attracts a significant number of tourists, and the Mediterranean Sea is among the most important cruise destinations in the world. As a result, there is a growing demand for spatial expansion on the Mediterranean coast. Applying sustainability principles to the development of **tourism strategies and planning** in the Mediterranean is crucial to reducing tourism pressures and increasing economic, social and territorial cohesion. To reach a sustainable approach for planning and managing the Mediterranean areas, a more flexible, bottom-up cooperation is required; one that takes a wide range of economic, social and environmental factors into consideration and bases itself on consultation with local stakeholders and brings in their participation. This would ensure longer-term sustainable solutions and build on common aspirations and understandings among the relevant stakeholders. Such a sustainable approach provides economic, social and environmental arguments relating to tourism that can be used to argue the case for environmental conservation when controversial developments are under discussion.

- **Using planning approaches** such as Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) protocol, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) principles and tools that respect the determined acceptable thresholds will guide local, regional, national and planning authorities towards more sustainable planning practices.
- **Sharing good practices** as part of a general capacity building process, in order to improve spatial planning regulations that integrate social, cultural and environmental impacts assessments of tourism will help regional and national governments disseminate good practices to local authorities, facilitating their transferability and scaling up. This can be done by:
 - studying tours and other exchanges to learn about the experience of similar destinations or initiatives within the same country or from abroad;
 - using award schemes for recognising a good practice;
 - encouraging networking of local authorities to work more closely together, thereby achieving more for themselves and for the local community.

CASE STUDIES

Developing methodologies for sustainable tourism planning



Touristic coastal areas should be planned and managed with an integrated perspective by using approaches like ICZM Protocol and MSP principles.

CO-EVOLVE applies this approach to promoting sustainable touristic activities. The project performed an analysis of threats and enabling factors for sustainable tourism at Mediterranean scale. It has developed a toolkit including indicators and a methodology for sustainable tourism planning.

Based on this analysis' findings, and using the toolkit, actions (plans and measures) were implemented in 7 pilot areas, setting conditions for a sustainable tourism in coastal areas and related maritime areas, and promoting robust, transparent decision-making processes. The actions are systemic, ecosystem-based and dynamic, taking into account future scenarios of natural (i.e. climate change) and anthropogenic changes.

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



Setting up a Mediterranean Maritime and Coastal Tourism management model

The Mediterranean is the world's leading destination, where maritime and coastal tourism is a growing business and predominant source of revenue and jobs. Although many destinations adopt local and regional integrated tourism development strategies, no real governance for tourism activities exists at wider transnational level, and environmental governance is still very fragmented.

MITOMED+ enhances sustainability and responsibility in maritime and coastal tourism by implementing an integrated management model in different Mediterranean region, based on ICZM/MSP principles.

A policy learning process, with a co-creative bottom-up approach, is encouraged in order to refine the management model by involving stakeholders such as the local and high level policy makers or the community of experts (research centres and EU institutions like DGs Mare, Growth, EU Parliament Tourism Committee , etc.).

For more info see [MITOMED+ project](#)



DEVELOPING AWARENESS AND CAPACITIES, CHANGING BEHAVIOUR



Communicating about tourism impacts and opportunities to stakeholders is the key **to raising awareness and changing behaviours**, in order to ultimately reduce tourism pressures.

All the stakeholders are involved: industry players (public and private) at each destination; local communities and end-users (tourists), belonging to civil society; institutional practitioners and policy makers in tourism, environmental, cultural, economic or social domains.

Information, awareness raising, social marketing, education and capacity building are relevant **instruments that must be tailored** to different target groups and messages.

To raise awareness and build capacity, there are two key messages to spread: natural and cultural ecosystem services are **assets**; and natural and cultural environments are everyone's **responsibility**. In addition, it is important to note that economic instruments have a role in **influencing behaviour**.

- **Making the business case** for sustainable tourism helps raise awareness of **natural and cultural environments as assets** that, sustainably managed, add to destinations' prosperity and quality of life. Actions include:
 - **Raising awareness** amongst private (e.g. hospitality/recreational services, etc.) and institutional actors, communicating business opportunities via campaigns, curricula in higher education and economic clusters.
 - **Building capacity** amongst actors both institutional and private via professional and academic training, workshops, knowledge-sharing platforms, cooperation partnerships
- and exchange of experience. This enables moving from an “emergency” to a “prevention” culture in areas like: assessing environmental-social-cultural indicators and values; understanding needs of visitors and residents; developing territorial/sectoral strategies and action plans; designing and promoting products and services in the value chain that are more sustainable; developing communication links between destinations, products (supply) and visitors (demand); establishing and creating adhesion to standards and labels.

- Emphasizing the **collective responsibility to protect natural and cultural heritage** of tourist destinations is needed amongst target groups, stressing the social value of destinations' natural and cultural ecosystem services. Raising awareness and building capacity are complementary approaches:
 - **Raising awareness of natural and cultural heritage** amongst tourist and resident populations, supports stakeholders' empowerment, and facilitates **reduction of water and energy consumption**, and of terrestrial and maritime **pollution** through the use of renewable sources, cleantech, suitable infrastructure, better information services (e.g. public transport) and sustainable procurement. This can also be done via social marketing campaigns, cultural exchanges or information centres.
- **Building capacity of civil society** at destinations can be supported by introducing sustainable development into **education curricula**; promoting **new forms** of cultural and eco-tourism; facilitating **cooperation** for the enhancement of cultural and natural heritage.
- **Influencing behaviours with economic instruments** can be effective when activated at local, regional or national levels via direct and indirect incentives such as taxes and charges, financial incentives, agreements, fines or pricing structure.

CASE STUDIES

Knowledge awareness centres



Knowledge Awareness Centres enhance traditional museum exhibitions by combining the main information and communication activities of Visitor Centres and Info-Points with innovative digital technologies. Technological progress provides ways and options (mainly based on digital technologies) to enhance traditional museum exhibitions and extend them with different contents and solutions. These new approaches raise great interest among visitors, offer opportunities to convey information and improve knowledge and interest in cultural heritage.

The **BLUEMED** project preserves underwater natural and cultural heritage in some Mediterranean locations with a sustainable blue tourism model based on the promotion of Underwater Museums and Diving Parks that also include Knowledge Awareness Centres.

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



Building professional capacity

Interregional networks and **training tools for capacity building** are efficient ways to involve public and private stakeholders in the promotion of sustainable business models.

BLUEISLANDS focuses on improving knowledge about waste streams, building common guidelines and enhancing synergies among MED islands' communities.

Special attention is given to capacity building and community engagement activities. The main targets are the local authorities responsible for tourism development and waste management, and private stakeholders in the HORECA² sector. BLUEISLANDS offers partners and stakeholders **capacity building webinars** where speakers share knowledge and good practices on waste management issues, coming from organisations like [PAP RAC](#) or [Conservatoire du Littoral](#).

For more info see [BLUEISLAND project](#)

2 - Hotels, Restaurants and Catering



REDISTRIBUTING TOURISM FLOWS IN SPACE AND TIME



The tourism industry in the Mediterranean is marked by **seasonality**. This has implications for the local economy, environment and inhabitants.

Mass tourism leads to a **concentration of activity**, with a greater number of people **over a shorter time period in coastal areas** at the expense of hinterlands. However, seasonal and territorial imbalances provide an opportunity to diversify **the offer to alternative tourism models**. It reduces negative impacts on the environment, culture and society, and often even creates positive impacts. Such diversification therefore contributes to protecting Mediterranean cultural and natural heritage.

There is a growing touristic demand for hinterland destinations. Local actors are responding to these new demands and developing relationships to **make their territories and local products more attractive**, by:

- **Promoting alternative off-season offers:**

Managing seasonality includes considering the **seasonal dimension** of tourism and the relationship between employment, economic returns, use of infrastructure and natural resources. Public and private tourism actors should encourage changes in the temporal distribution of tourism **through attractive incentives** such as discounted seasonal offers, organising events at less busy times of the year, creating new products and encouraging attractions to stay open longer.

That way, they would be able to target different audiences most likely to travel in the off-season. Actions could focus on:

- creating tourism packages/itineraries based on alternative types of tourism,
- promoting a more diffused tourism model,
- implementing marketing plans that take local needs and challenges into account.

● **Promoting alternative hinterland destinations:**

Seasonality management can also be addressed by considering the spatial dimension and the relationship between coastal, hinterland and mountain areas.

The Mediterranean needs **to diversify its tourism offer** with more sustainable products and services in the value chain. This would in turn reinforce social cohesion and cultural and economic development, enhance Mediterranean diversity and specificities, and strengthen synergies with other economic sectors such as agriculture. Public and private tourism actors should develop and promote a **wider spatial distribution of tourism**.

This could take the shape of:

- boosting and promoting the **uniqueness of the Mediterranean identity** in alternative regional locations via marketing campaigns and Label/Quality standards,
- promoting **alternative regional destinations and alternative tourism models** (e.g. ecotourism, slow tourism) by promoting off-season images and values,
- offering and promoting **low carbon mobility solutions** to ensure an effective tourism flow from coastline to inland areas via: the integration of transport and tourism policies; targeted and user-friendly transport information services; and appropriate infrastructure.

CASE STUDIES

Promoting alternative destinations



Eco-itineraries designed for visitors to experience the unique identity of inland areas address both the spatial and temporal dimensions of seasonality. The aim is to attract new visitors and redirect visitors from saturated spots (mountain summit areas, coastline) toward less popular locations, whilst capitalizing on their easy access to extend seasonality and encourage slow mobility.

EMbleMatiC develops such alternative offers. This “slow tourism” is developed in destinations committed to integrating and applying sustainability principles, where the resulting tourism activity benefits hinterland communities. Economic development thus comes with social gains, social cohesion, and cultural heritage valorisation. Meanwhile, the concentration of the tourism flow in both space and time is partially re-directed, bringing relief to areas under social, cultural and environmental pressures.

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



Fostering a cycling tourism model

The promotion of alternative tourism models must be accompanied by sustainable transport and mobility solutions facilitating territorial connections.

The MEDCYCLETLOUR project is promoting the EuroVelo 8 (Mediterranean route that connects the whole Mediterranean) as an alternative holiday destination. It leverages cycling tourism as a tool to rapidly and efficiently achieve lasting economic, social and environmental positive impacts. In addition, the participative planning methodology facilitates the inclusion and integration of sustainable tourism in regional and national policies.

For more info see [MEDCYCLETLOUR project](#)

THE VISION

The coastal mass tourism model in the Mediterranean has shown its limits with the undue pressures it exerts on cultural, social and natural resources. Mediterranean tourism is characterized by densely occupied coastal areas and sparsely frequented hinterlands. This geographical context calls for diversification of the tourism industry to offer real alternatives that respect the environment, culture and society.

Coastal, hinterland and mountain areas in the Mediterranean now have an opportunity to embrace alternative and sustainable tourism models that push towards the mutually beneficial goals of socio-economic development and environmental protection.

Tourism management practices that embrace the environmental-cultural-social impacts of tourism right from design stage can facilitate the assessment and responsible planning of these new alternative and sustainable tourism models, while also raising awareness and increasing expertise in the field.

They also lead to increased responsiveness from institutions and policy makers and they can effectively exert influence on both institutional and business actors, in order to re-distribute tourism impacts and benefits. This would lead to a win-win situation for all areas concerned: hinterland and coastal, tourism and other economic sectors such as agriculture, social well-being, cultural heritage and natural ecosystems, not to mention economic prosperity.

The four key messages in this factsheet point to the leading role policy makers and governments must play in order to achieve significant progress towards a sustainable tourism model. The four categories of tools in this factsheet guide and support their leadership role:

- **Measuring tools** – assessing the impact of tourism through a thorough understanding of the limits to tourism development;
- **Planning tools** – enabling development control supported by legislation to manage tourism sustainably;
- **Communication tools** – exerting direct and indirect influence on all those involved in the tourism industry to encourage more sustainable behaviours;
- **Diversification models** – promoting new products and attractive incentives to redistribute tourism flows in space and time.





SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

These policy recommendations were successfully elaborated thanks to the collaboration of external tourism experts and the commitment of 15 EU Mediterranean projects: ALTER ECO, BLUEISLANDS, BLUEMED, CASTWATER, CO-EVOLVE, CONSUME-LESS, DestiMED, EMbleMatiC, HERIT-DATA, INHERIT, MEDFEST, MECYCLETOUR, MITOMED+, PANORAMED, 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, **46 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 to reduce the environmental-cultural-social impacts of tourism in the Mediterranean region?”, the living Community brought together, in a single working group, a comprehensive network of experts from **10 countries** and no fewer than **5 research centers, 16 NGOs, 8 local authorities, 4 national authorities 3 International organisations** and **3 SMEs**. 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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