MEDITERRANEAN ECOTOURISM POLICY ROADMAP

Document Information

Interreg MED Programme – DestiMED PLUS Project

Work Package	WP5
Developed by	CPMR Intermediterranean Commission
With support from	AnySolution, S.L., DestiMED PLUS Partners
Contribution from stakeholders	CPMR Islands Commissions, IUCN and other conservation and tourism
Main author(s)	Pierrick Le Guillou, Dolores Ordoñez, Tayrne Butler
Date	June 2022
Revised by	CPMR Intermediterranean and Islands Commissions, IUCN
Approved by	Lazio Region

DestiMED PLUS Partnership

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The present document provides context and key policy orientations for the development of ecotourism governance and the integration of tourism and conservation policies in the Mediterranean. This Policy Roadmap is based on the outcomes of the Interreg Med DestiMED PLUS project with the aim for the recently established **Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium** (MEC[1]) to better define its strategic priorities. The Policy Roadmap is meant to be used as a basis for the MEC to identify the entry points where to influence the regional, national and European strategies, policies and regulations so as to ensure the integration of conservation objectives into tourism policy towards obtaining a lasting impact over time.

The objective of this roadmap is to become a comprehensive document which should mainly be implemented by the Mediterranean Regions involved in the MEC.

This document provides:

1. A presentation of the context and analysis of Ecotourism in the Mediterranean;
2. A description of the process used for the definition and development of the policy roadmap;
3. A presentation of the recommended actions, policy orientations and identified policy interventions that contribute to the sustainable development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean;
4. Some recommendations for regions of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium, or that wish to be part of it, to demonstrate their commitment and pave the way for the sustainable development of ecotourism in their region.

ECOTOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

State of Play

The Mediterranean basin is the world's leading destination for marine and coastal tourism, representing 33% of international tourists' arrivals in 2021 (UNWTO, 2022)[2]. As such tourism plays a crucial role in the economic development of the Mediterranean Region. However, it also puts significant pressures on environmental resources (e.g., the Mediterranean is one of the seas most affected by sea plastic pollution in the world[3] and the density of marine litter may increase by 40% in the summer months due to the high numbers of tourists[4]). Water supplies are also subject to important pressure due to tourist activities, tourists using on average one third more water per day than a local inhabitant[5]. Hence, tourism activities add significant environmental stress on the Mediterranean Region and especially its islands, which are already highly vulnerable to climate change, as highlighted by the last IPPC Report[6].

However, tourism can contribute positively to local development, and to nature conservation and support economic activities, and cohesion if managed in an integrated, sustainable and responsible manner. For islands contexts, tourism represents the only economic alternative capable of overcoming the structural constraints imposed by their small size and the insular physical conditions[7].

In this respect, **ecotourism** provides a solution to tackle the detrimental effects of mass tourism described above by capitalising on natural assets and contributing to a better awareness of the benefits of conservation.

According to one of the most widely accepted definitions of this term, ecotourism is defined by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) as: "*Environmentally responsible visiting of relatively unspoilt natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations*". It is also mentioned that "*Ecotourism is widely regarded as a form of tourism that respects nature and culture, engages local people, brings significant economic benefits to local communities, and minimises the disruptive effects associated with mass tourism*".

In this aspect, **Protected Areas** (PAs) represent the most important instrument for nature protection in the Mediterranean and, consequently, an important asset for the development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean countries since they can act as a laboratory to test new methodologies and tools for the development of ecotourism in the region.

Ecotourism in the Mediterranean PAs became a priority since the beginning of the **Covid-19 crisis, as the tourism sector has been one of the most affected by the pandemic** (international tourism faced a decline of 60% in 2020[8]). Countries positioned on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea have been the most affected by the crisis and have proved to be more vulnerable to the pandemic[9]. If tourism is one of the hardest-hit sectors, it is also one of the sectors that will take the longest to recover[10,11]. Nevertheless, the Covid-19 pandemic also led to new trends in tourism behaviour[12]. Indeed, the crisis gave rise to more nature-seeking tourism, in addition with the increase of local tourism, making Protected Areas more attractive for tourists. This behavioural change in the tourism sector represents an opportunity to enhance the emergence of more ecotourism in PAs and to engage with a new audience. It appears that **the pandemic is contributing to lead a shift towards a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive form of tourism, not only in the Mediterranean, but also at European and global levels**[13]**.**

Ecotourism is a respectful and responsible form of tourism, and thus constitutes an economic activity that can contribute to the preservation of the Mediterranean environment and natural heritage at destination level, which is currently exposed to a wide range of dangerous anthropogenic and climate related pressures.

Policy Context

In terms of tourism, the European Union (EU) policy aims to maintain Europe's standing as a leading destination while maximising the industry's contribution to growth and employment and promoting cooperation between EU countries, particularly through the exchange of good practices. The EU does not have a specific structure for decision-making in relation to tourism and its financial support to the tourism sector is ensured by different budgetary instruments of the Cohesion Policy (e.g. ERDF, ESF, EMFF). Hence the EU's competence in tourism is one of support and coordination to supplement the actions of Member States, and the current governing structure of the sector, having a transversal dimension, hinders an adequate territorialization of related EU measures.

As the European governance tends to complete the action of the Member States, decision-making for the tourism sector is mainly regulated at national level, which is taking actions regarding the development of the sector and defining its general priorities. Moving to a lower layer, Regions then ensure the execution of tourism strategies at the territorial level calibrated for targeted objectives, in line with their specificities and mid-term priorities.

The development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean is aligned with several international objectives of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), and other important and relevant initiatives and strategies such as the **European Green Deal**, the **EU Digital Strategy**, the **2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy**, and the **EU new approach for a sustainable blue economy** and follow the principles of marine and coastal activities regulatory instruments, such as Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), the Ecosystem-Based Management Approach, the **European Charter for sustainable tourism in Protected Areas**.

The UNWTO "One Planet Vision for the Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector" Programme and the EU strategy for sustainable tourism (the DG GROW Tourism transition pathway co-creation) are calling for a responsible recovery of the tourism sector with the aim to develop a more sustainable tourism industry.

Moreover, EU funding and Cohesion Policy represent two key elements to support the long-term strategy for recovery, particularly in coastal and insular regional economies that are strongly dependent on tourism. The European Parliament resolution on "transport and tourism in 2020 and beyond" supports the development of a 2050 roadmap towards a sustainable, innovative, and resilient European tourism ecosystem ('European Agenda for Tourism 2050').

The European Commission and its Member States, through the **Next Generation EU recovery funds**, aim to boost this tourism recovery with special **focus on green and digital transition**.

Some Member States in particular are committed to the transformation of the tourism sector, including via the tourism component in their National Recovery Plans.

There are governing strategies for sustainable development and conservation of PAs of the Mediterranean region, such as the **Barcelona Convention**, the **UNEP/MAP Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025**, the UNEP/MAP Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean MPA Forum Post-2020 MPA Roadmap, the **BlueMed Initiative**, and the **Bologna Charter**.

Other relevant networks, initiatives and strategies existing at global, European and Mediterranean levels are:

Global Level	- Tourism2030 - The Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism - The Future of Tourism Coalition (FoT) - The Glasgow Declaration - The Local2030 Islands Network
European Level	- Network of European Region for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism - NECSTouR - Natura 2000 - European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN) - European Network for Sustainable Travel
Mediterranean Level	- Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community - MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (NSTO) of BEST MED Interreg Med project - The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and the Task Force on Culture and Sustainable Tourism of its Intermediterranean Commission (IMC) - The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and its work on Blue Economy - International Union for Conservation of Nature - IUCN - WINTER MED Transnational Strategy - Mediterranean Experience of Ecotourism Network

Key Findings

Ecotourism respects the resources of a Protected Area (PA) destination and the well-being of the people living in and around it, whilst also providing incentives for conservation and operating in tourism´s off-season. However, in order for this sustainable development model to be effectively adopted in the Mediterranean, **enabling conditions around governance and policy making must be improved and strengthened** to establish balance between the historically conflicting interests of tourism and conservation sectors in the region.

In particular, the results of the pilot actions carried out in the frame of the DestiMED PLUS project have shown that, in general, these enabling conditions are weak at both local and regional levels for Mediterranean PAs, and that the development of ecotourism is currently limited and has less opportunity to thrive due to several factors, such as:

- **Governance and distribution of competences among main stakeholders are often fragmented**
- **Tourism and environmental agendas rarely align**
- **Mediterranean conservation efforts continue to struggle tremendously over key anthropogenic pressures such as mass-tourism**
- **Insufficient private sector skills and political support**

Although there are already existing initiatives and policies that directly aim to improve the regional socioeconomic conditions in the Mediterranean (while fostering the preservation of its natural, environmental, and cultural assets), it seems that there is no structured consortium working together for conservation and tourism policy integration at Mediterranean level, that reflects the needs and perspective of Regional Authorities.

All actors involved in ecotourism development and management (Regional Tourism and Conservation departments; public and private stakeholders at protected area level; NGOs etc.) are key to strengthening the enabling conditions for ecotourism to thrive in the Mediterranean Protected Areas.

More coordination and dialogue between all stakeholders involved in ecotourism, as well as cohesive guidelines for policy influence are thus needed in order to expand forms of tourism that respect more Mediterranean ecosystems, that are particularly threatened by climate change, biodiversity loss, mass tourism and even by potential future health crises.

The most important challenge for nature conservation and sustainable development lies in the necessity to achieve a balance between the effective protection and conservation of ecosystems, species and habitats in Protected Areas and allowing the development of sustainable tourism activities such as ecotourism.

With respect to the challenges faced by the tourism sector and considering the opportunities for the development of more sustainable forms of tourism in Mediterranean PAs, the key role of coastal and maritime territorial cooperation programmes, such as the Interreg MED programme, shall be highlighted. Many Interreg MED projects and other EU and international initiatives addressed the question of sustainable coastal and maritime tourism governance in the Mediterranean region, but no defined or structured working group of institutions or consortium currently exists to discuss and exchange, in a participatory and organised way, upon experiences and strategies related to ecosystem development, integration and governance within the Mediterranean protected areas. This is aligned with the recommendations of the MPA Forum to "*further develop Mediterranean MPA policy and governance structures to be more equitable, integrated with other sectors and responsive to local MPA conditions*", and to support networking and sharing of experiences and good practices of MPA managers and other stakeholders, establishing permanent connections between MPA stakeholders at all levels to bring the voice from the field into decision-making processes.

On the one hand, ecotourism in protected areas is a growing trend in sustainable tourism, which has been significantly highlighted with the COVID-19 health crisis (during the pandemic the natural parks were particularly frequented, especially by domestic tourists). On the other hand, it is clear that collaboration between tourism and conservation departments, at different levels of administrations, is a key enabler for the development of ecotourism. However, such collaboration mechanisms are seldomly implemented and are not disseminated enough yet as good practice all over the Mediterranean and Europe.

Although the situation in each of the regions is unique, some common challenges and trends were identified across all the destinations. The collected data has shown that the integration of tourism in a protected area context is widely acknowledged, but unclear in practice. The institutional and legal separation of protected areas and tourism remains an issue and the cooperation between them is rarely institutionalised. In general, there is lower awareness in the tourism sector regarding conservation than in the conservation sector regarding tourism[14,15].

Similarly, the short overview of existing initiatives for the governance of sustainable tourism/ecotourism and for the development of tourism and conservation policy integration at International and Euro-Mediterranean level, showcases the lack of a comprehensive body gathering regional authorities to establish multi-level and intersectoral governance to improve the collaboration between tourism and conservation policies. Indeed, most of the organisation and initiative are related to sustainable tourism development, or conservation but few of them are gathering regional authorities and, when it is the case, too often the link is not made between the two themes.

Some key results of the pilot actions of the DestiMED PLUS project have shown the high discrepancies between Mediterranean regions/countries in terms of ecotourism governance and integration of tourism and conservation policies. Some regions are more advanced than others, with some governance structure and mechanisms already in place and with some strategic plans implemented for the sustainable development of ecotourism in their regions.

In addition, the **Mediterranean Ecotourism Vulnerability Map** produced during this project (see Figure 1), made an attempt at overlapping conservation areas with high tourism pressure areas with the aim of identifying particularly vulnerable hotspots. This shows the Mediterranean regions with higher or more urgent needs in terms of tourism and conservation policy harmonisation for an effective protection and use of Protected Areas.
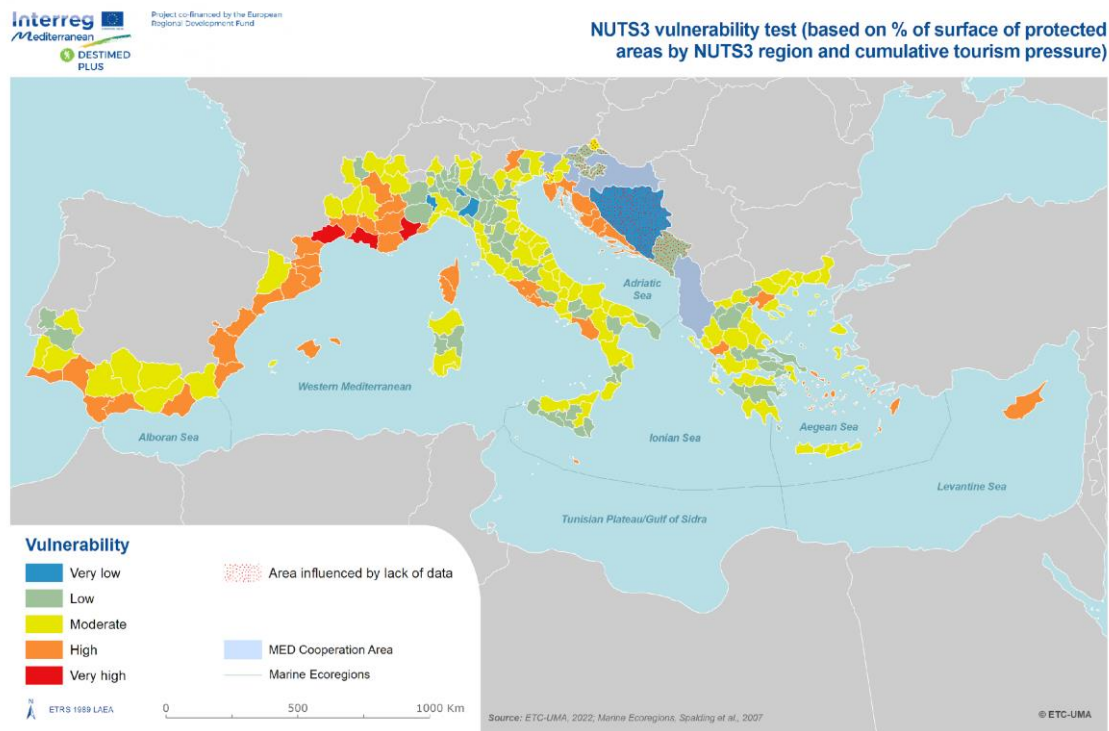

Figure 1. DestiMED PLUS Mediterranean Ecotourism Vulnerability Map

The assessment of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Vulnerability map has identified regions that show high to very high vulnerability with specific characteristics that need to be tackled in upcoming tourism and conservation policy and management initiatives. The most vulnerable

regions are coastal regions in the Western Mediterranean with a high coverage of protected area (>30% of its territory), and characterised by high to very high demand (e.g., number of nights spent) and very high tourism offer (high number of bed places and establishments), leading to potential high pressure on sensitive ecosystems. This situation requires adapted regional planning regulations and effective protected area management plans that prevent tourism related constructions to occupy protected areas, as well as smart destination management to channel and limit visitors' flows.

Some of these regions include in addition important cruise destinations or high density of tourism infrastructure (golf courses and marina ports) that require specific management and regulations linked to international maritime traffic and urban and coastal planning instruments, respectively. Other highly vulnerable regions such as the coastal regions in the Adriatic-Ionian ecoregion and the Aegean Sea are less exposed to pressures from tourism infrastructure, but require special attention due to the high tourism demand and offer. Finally, most hinterland regions and destinations show low vulnerabilities due to low exposure to main tourism pressures. Nevertheless, the growing promotion of rural ecotourism must be handled in a way that tourism offer, demand and activities and their related infrastructure do not negatively affect protected areas.

It is based on these observations that the DestiMED PLUS project proposed, and is currently pursuing, the creation of a **Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium** (MEC) to fill in the governance gap, allowing the monitoring of sustainable practices, exchange of best practices through a participatory, bottom-up approach that will support the development of policies supportive of ecotourism actions and more generally of integrated conservation and tourism actions in PAs in the Mediterranean and beyond. As such, the MEC aims to:

- **Exchange and capitalise good practices** (in particular regarding ecotourism projects/regional policies);
- Discuss the **collection, sharing and use of specific data** regarding ecotourism for improved political decision making (e.g., developing or contributing to better decision support systems);
- Define **joint advocacy actions** and enable better conditions for the promotion of ecotourism at the Mediterranean level.

POLICY ROADMAP'S DEFINITION PROCESS

The recommended actions and policy orientations that form the core of the policy roadmap have been identified and selected based on results and outputs from several projects, more specifically from the DestiMED and DestiMED PLUS Interreg MED projects. A thorough analysis of all the concepts, recommendations and best practices related to ecotourism and integration of conservation and tourism policies that have been stipulated in the previously-mentioned projects have been carried out so as to define the strategic priorities and recommended action.

The key documents that have been taken into account were the following:

- The **DestiMED Policy Brief**[16]. This document highlights the challenges faced by regions for the development of ecotourism and provides a list of recommendations, especially some key recommendations for policy making. In general, this policy brief is pointing out the need for harmonised policies, concepts, standards, and monitoring methodologies at Mediterranean scale (as there is disconnection between tourism and conservation policies), and the need for cooperation between regions and ecotourism stakeholders at national, transnational, sub-regional and regional levels.
- The **Terms of Reference of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium** (MEC ToRs). This document sets up the definition of the concepts and governance mechanisms of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium to improve the integration and coordination of conservation and tourism policy in the Mediterranean, regionally and locally. As such, the document provides an overview of the policy framework related to ecotourism in the Mediterranean, a presentation of the objectives of the MEC, its implementation, mechanisms and proposed activities.

- The **Governance and Policy Baselines**[17] of regional partners involved in DestiMED PLUS project. In the frame of this project, nine pilot actions have been carried out in different Mediterranean regions (Albania, Andalucia, Catalunya, Corsica, Crete, Croatia, Lazio Region, Sardinia and South Aegean). This document is a comprehensive baseline of information on the current policy and governance situation in each of the project's pilot actions. Based on this context analysis, a series of recommendations and a database of **good practices** related to tourism and conservation policy integration were developed. In addition, a **SWOT analysis** has been undertaken for each participating region so as to detect the internal strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of the regions (in terms of ecotourism development). As a result, individual **Action Plans** were developed for each participating region of the DestiMED PLUS project, establishing strategic priorities, time-framed actions and responsibilities among stakeholders at local/regional level.

As mentioned, all the recommendations, challenges, good practices, and any relevant information arising from the previously identified documents and projects have been collected, analysed and categorised. Different priorities arise from this analysis, namely: (i) governance; (ii) ecotourism products development; (iii) ecotourism data management and monitoring; (iv) awareness, communication and networking; (v) capacity building; and (vi) funding. However, as the present Policy Roadpmap is meant for the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium and its members, and to avoid overlapping work and competences with other existing networks (such as [MEET](#) and [NECSTouR](#)), a selection has been made to reflect only the actions and recommendations related to integration and harmonisation of tourism and conservation policies in the Mediterranean. As such, the present Policy Roadmap delivers a list of recommendations distributed between **three strategic axes**, which are the ones defined by the Terms of References (ToRs) of the MEC:

- **Ecotourism Governance**: actions and recommendations to improve the cooperation, participation and communication between tourism and conservation stakeholders (at local, regional and Mediterranean levels), and to improve resource-efficiency.
- **Data management and monitoring**: actions and recommendations to collect, share and use data related to ecotourism and implement evidence-based decision-support systems.
- **Networking**: actions and recommendations to develop strategic alliances among stakeholders and Mediterranean regions.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND POLICY ORIENTATIONS

The DestiMED PLUS project team pinpointed three strategic policy areas to focus on and influence ecotourism development and management in the Mediterranean, and has selected and defined a set of recommended actions and policy interventions, which constitutes the core of this policy roadmap. This list is obviously non-exhaustive and serves as a guidance tool. Therefore, it should not be understood as a "how to" measure, but rather as a starting base to implement the enabling conditions for a sustainable and comprehensive development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean area.

These actions are specifically addressed to the regions that are part of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium (MEC), and are meant as a guideline for paving the way and providing the enabling conditions for an effective support and development of ecotourism in their own region.

As previously described, the roadmap is centred around 3 strategic policy areas:

1. **Ecotourism Governance**
2. **Ecotourism Data Management and Monitoring**
3. **Ecotourism Networking**

For each strategic area, 3 "milestones" are identified, representing the short (<5 years), mid (5 to 10 years) and long (>10 years) term objectives and outputs for the development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean, but also representing the maturity level and the state of enabling conditions implemented at local/regional level. For each milestone, a list of recommended actions is provided.
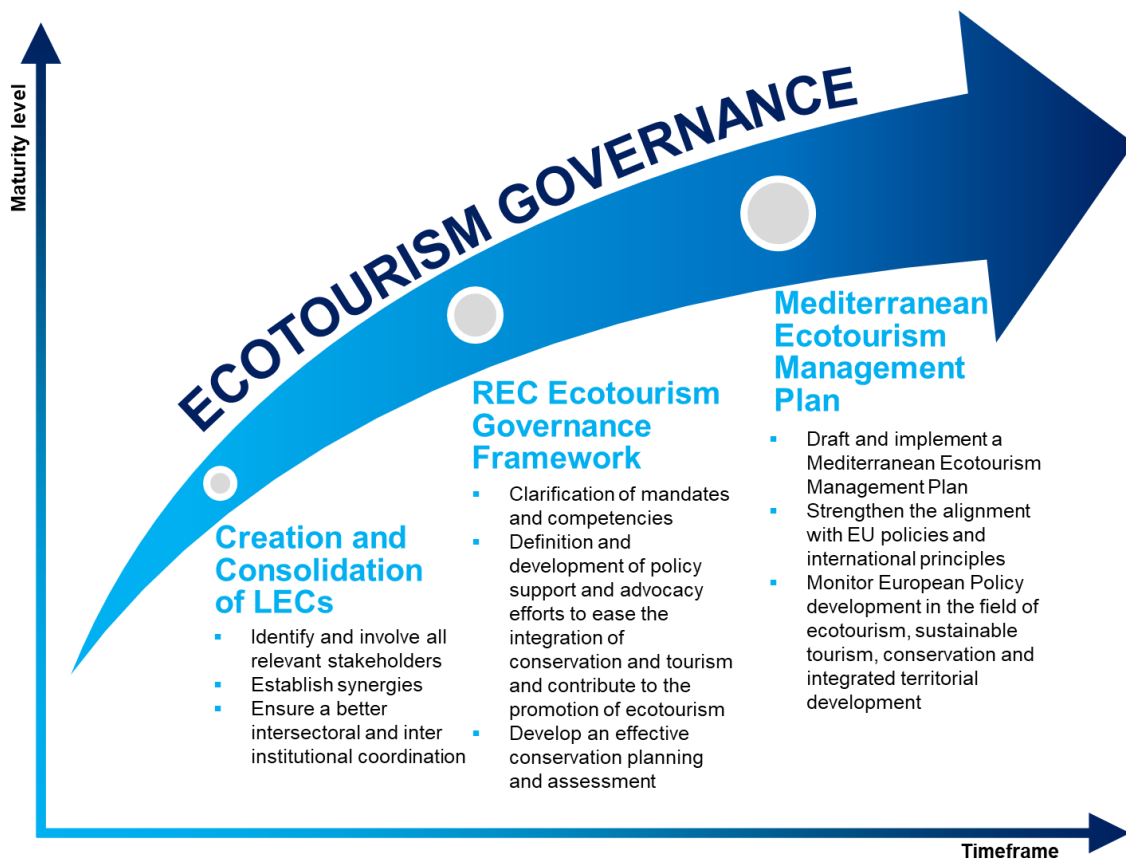
Ecotourism Governance

The actions and recommendations presented hereafter are meant to improve the cooperation, participation and communication between tourism and conservation stakeholders at local, regional and Mediterranean levels, but also to improve resource-efficiency. As such, the actions under this priority aim:

- to establish a multi-level and intersectoral governance to improve the collaboration between tourism and conservation policies
- to define and implement a common policy framework at European/Mediterranean scale which looks at how conservation and tourism can be better integrated.

Therefore, this strategic priority is related to the **creation of a comprehensive governance of ecotourism for the integration of tourism and conservation** following the ICZM protocol. This includes the definition and development of policy support and advocacy efforts including lobbying activities that can ease the integration of conservation and tourism, through the synergies of ecosystem services/ecotourism. The foreseen actions aim to contribute to the promotion of ecotourism based on the experience and knowledge of MEC members and other relevant entities, as well as to provide general support to MEC members and participants working with ecotourism or in related fields. This axis will support the MEC to represent the interest and political agenda of tourism and conservation departments in each participating country, region and destination, and monitor Mediterranean/European Policy developments in the field of tourism/conservation/ecotourism and ensure relevant information sharing on possible consultations and funding for better ecotourism management/governance.

ECOTOURISM GOVERNANCE

Maturity level (vertical axis) — **Timeframe** (horizontal axis)

Creation and Consolidation of LECs
- Identify and involve all relevant stakeholders
- Establish synergies
- Ensure a better intersectoral and inter institutional coordination

REC Ecotourism Governance Framework
- Clarification of mandates and competencies
- Definition and development of policy support and advocacy efforts to ease the integration of conservation and tourism and contribute to the promotion of ecotourism
- Develop an effective conservation planning and assessment

Mediterranean Ecotourism Management Plan
- Draft and implement a Mediterranean Ecotourism Management Plan
- Strengthen the alignment with EU policies and international principles
- Monitor European Policy development in the field of ecotourism, sustainable tourism, conservation and integrated territorial development

---

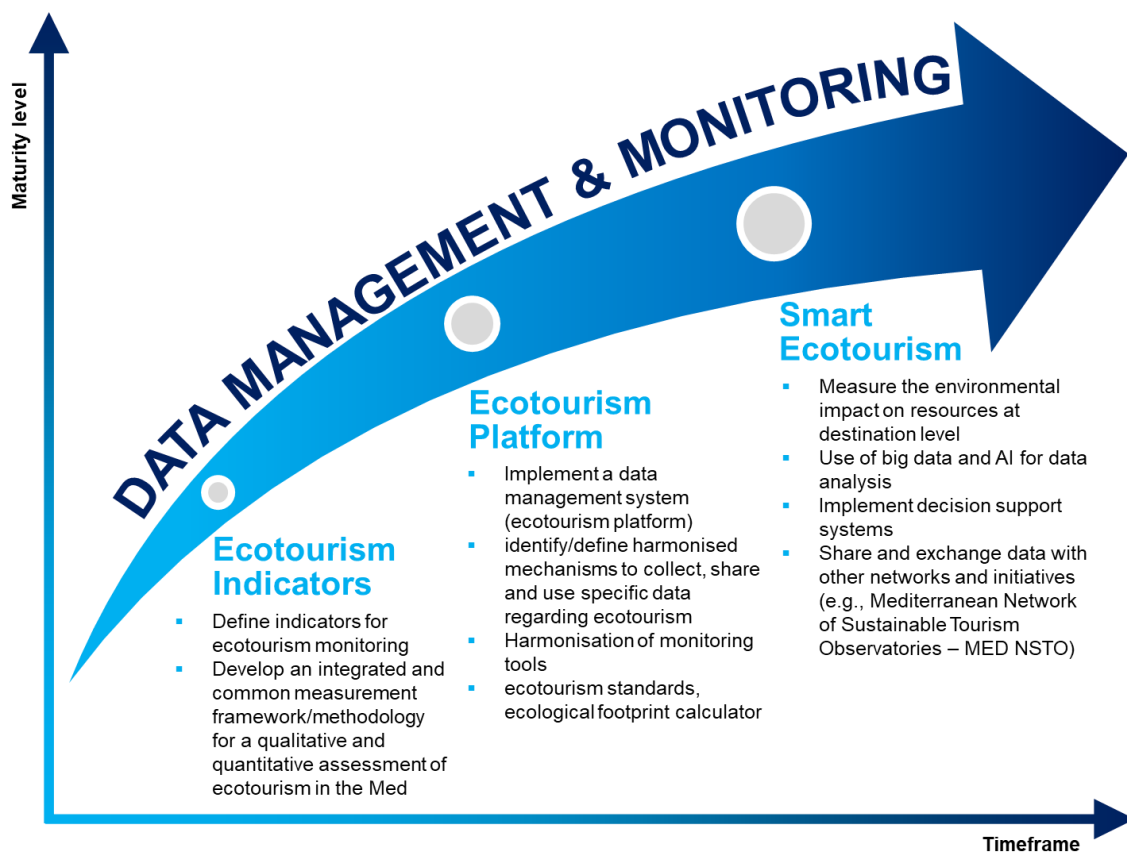| **Good Practice Example** | **Catalan Tourism Board** (Catalonia, Spain) |

The Catalan Tourism Board is a consultancy body created in 2015 that represents the ecotourism sector in the Catalonia Region. Its members are public bodies and private companies. Its role is to evaluate and control the Action plan to promote tourism in natural protected areas. Different working groups or commissions on different matters are set up and concrete actions are decided upon in relation to the improvement of the competitiveness of ecotourism products. One of its main tasks is to control the correct use of the word "ecotourism" in the different activities carried out in Catalonia. This is a perfect instrument to promote collaboration between private companies and public bodies and to help implement the defined Action Plan to promote nature tourism in the protected natural areas of Catalonia. This Regional Ecotourism Consortium (REC) works as a representative for the ecotourism sector in front of public bodies, forums, commissions, working groups, among others and helps in the creation of new ecotourism products. It serves as an ecotourism lobby and acts as a "go-between" between public bodies and private companies where private companies have the chance to put their needs to the public sector.

Ecotourism Data Management and Monitoring

The actions and recommendations indicated hereafter are meant to improve the collection, sharing and use of data related to ecotourism and tourism related environmental pressures, and to implement evidence-based decision-support systems at local, regional and Mediterranean levels in favour of the sustainability of territories and local communities.

Indeed, to improve ecotourism governance in the whole Mediterranean area and unlock the power of evidence-based decision making at destination levels, it is necessary to connect the existing tourism observatories and entities, to build on existing tools and platforms (such as the EC and UNWTO Tourism Dashboards), and increase the sharing, harmonisation and interoperability of data in all the Mediterranean area. The use of Big Data will provide relevant information to tourism companies for the development of new products, services or business models, while it will enable policymakers and authorities to create value out of these data and improve sustainable ecotourism management and development.
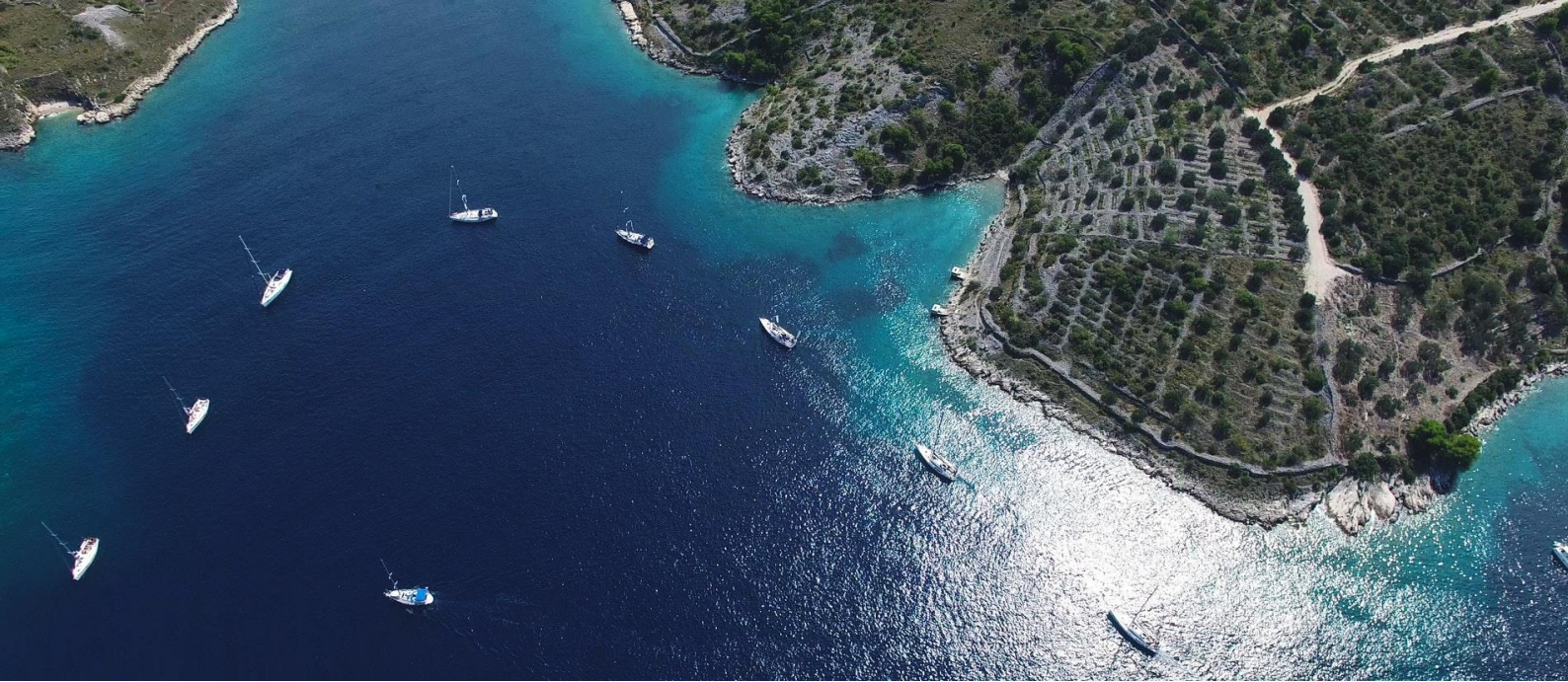
DATA MANAGEMENT & MONITORING

Maturity level →

Ecotourism Indicators
- Define indicators for ecotourism monitoring
- Develop an integrated and common measurement framework/methodology for a qualitative and quantitative assessment of ecotourism in the Med

Ecotourism Platform
- Implement a data management system (ecotourism platform)
- identify/define harmonised mechanisms to collect, share and use specific data regarding ecotourism
- Harmonisation of monitoring tools
- ecotourism standards, ecological footprint calculator

Smart Ecotourism
- Measure the environmental impact on resources at destination level
- Use of big data and AI for data analysis
- Implement decision support systems
- Share and exchange data with other networks and initiatives (e.g., Mediterranean Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories – MED NSTO)

Timeframe →

Good Practice Example	Costa Nostrum Sustainable Beaches (Crete, Greece)

The startup company Costa Nostrum developed, jointly with public administrations and local development agencies of Crete, the "Certification Standard for Sustainable Management and Development of the Mediterranean Beaches – Costa Nostrum Sustainable Beaches". It is the first international protocol for the sustainable development and management of Mediterranean beaches. It aims to prevent environmental impacts, instead of "curing" them, and to define proposals for economic viability and social well-being of the wider region, in order to achieve a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development. This innovative certification standard is based on specific indicators through the effect of which the sustainable management and development of each beach (public or "privately" exploited) may be achieved in an objective manner. It is designed to be adopted and applied by all municipalities and regions of the countries around the Mediterranean Sea, as well as, by private entities/businesses, such as hotel units and camping, organised or not, that financially exploit a number of beaches.

Tourist-cultural information system for the *Routes of El legado Andalusí* (declared European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe) consisting of intelligent signage supports for both urban and natural routes, with NFC (near field communication) technology and QR codes that redirect the user to the information of the environment in a centralised information platform with visual elements, multi-language system, georeferencing of places and geolocation of the user in relation to the points of interest on the street map. The system is open and allows the quantification of visits at each intelligent point and planning based on statistics of visitor flows received without transmission of personal data and in real time. The use of digital media reduces to the maximum the carbon footprint due to the energy impact of their facilities and the services they provide for the achievement of the project.
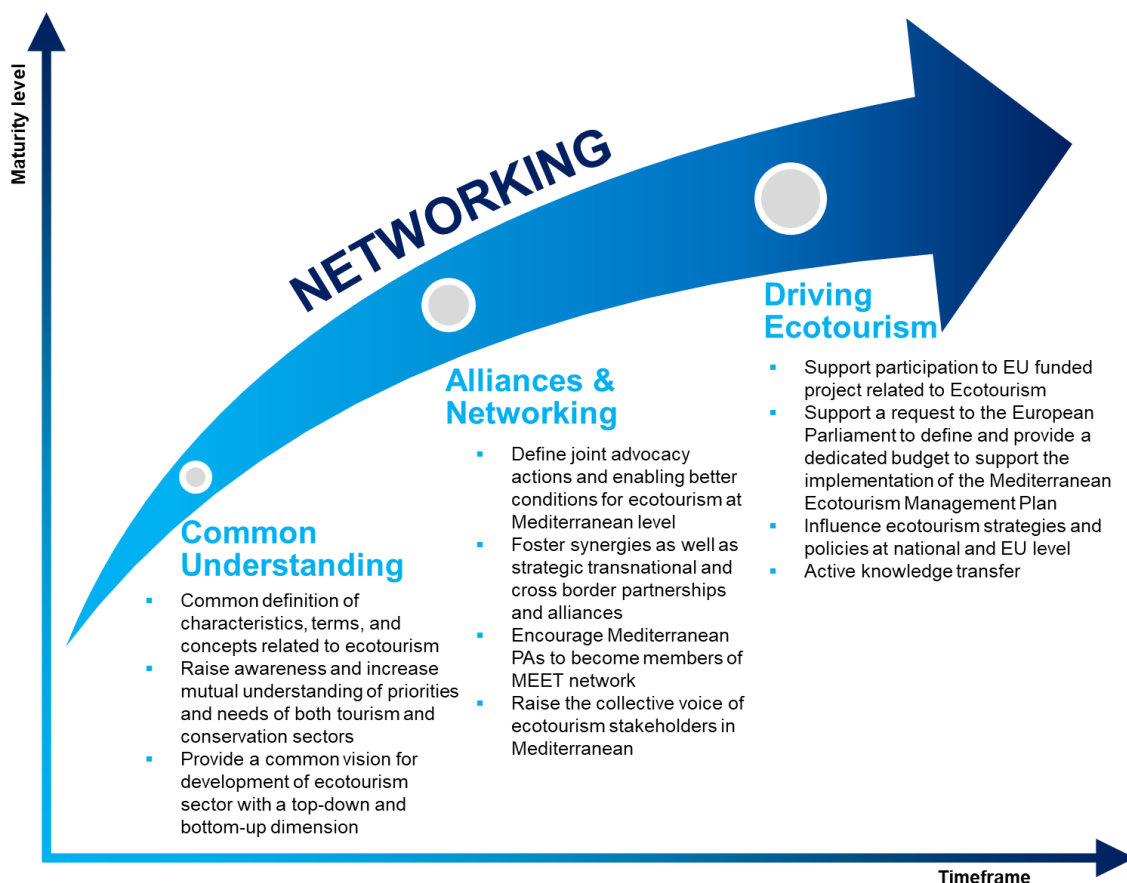
Ecotourism Networking

One crucial issue to address in view of building a more resilient tourism that takes into account conservation matters is the scarce coordination among tourism actors and limited integration of policies across governance levels, which usually results in a slow and inefficient reaction to emergency situations. In addition to this, the still limited **role of local and regional actors, that are the best placed to identify their territorial needs**, entails the risk of not matching their needs through EU and national policies.

The actions and recommendations presented hereafter are specifically targeting policy makers, regional public authorities and key stakeholders of ecotourism. These actions have the objective to develop strategic alliances among ecotourism stakeholders in the Mediterranean area. As such, they focus on (i) developing a common understanding of ecotourism; (ii) implementing concrete actions to develop alliances and strengthen networking; and (iii) on driving ecotourism policy at European level. Therefore, this strategic priority is the umbrella of all **networking activities** benefiting ecotourism / tourism and conservation policy integration.

This includes collaboration with other international/macroregional institutions, networks and initiatives focusing on ecotourism and on balance between tourism and conservation with shared objectives, to enable the sharing of information and experience, providing assessment, knowledge, documentation, research and innovations in the field. Another key aspect is to establish synergies with EU/Med funding programmes (such as EMFAF).

This axis will allow for the exchange of best practices on ecotourism / tourism and conservation policy integration within the Mediterranean regional authorities, to enable building a Mediterranean sustainable tourism and conservation governance community.

NETWORKING

Common Understanding
- Common definition of characteristics, terms, and concepts related to ecotourism
- Raise awareness and increase mutual understanding of priorities and needs of both tourism and conservation sectors
- Provide a common vision for development of ecotourism sector with a top-down and bottom-up dimension

Alliances & Networking
- Define joint advocacy actions and enabling better conditions for ecotourism at Mediterranean level
- Foster synergies as well as strategic transnational and cross border partnerships and alliances
- Encourage Mediterranean PAs to become members of MEET network
- Raise the collective voice of ecotourism stakeholders in Mediterranean

Driving Ecotourism
- Support participation to EU funded project related to Ecotourism
- Support a request to the European Parliament to define and provide a dedicated budget to support the implementation of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Management Plan
- Influence ecotourism strategies and policies at national and EU level
- Active knowledge transfer

Good Practice Example	MEET Network

The **MEET Network** (Mediterranean Experience of Ecotourism Network) consists of Mediterranean Protected areas working for ecotourism development. It gathers the Mediterranean natural parks with the objective to develop high-quality ecotourism experiences that benefit conservation and local communities. The MEET Network approach establishes two levels of governance: **(i) Local Ecotourism Clusters** (LECs), established in all the pilot parks involved in the different projects, ensuring private-public collaboration at destination level; and **(ii) the Regional Ecotourism Coordination tables** (RECs), gathering conservation and tourism departments in each project-related Regional administration, with the objective to achieve stronger coherence with existing policies and planning processes, and to implement a Mediterranean Ecotourism Roadmap based on ICZM principles, and promoting ecotourism and the LECs.

Other means of exchange and networking exist, notably through the MEC meetings which take place within the framework of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission's Task Force on Culture and Sustainable Tourism, which brings together 40 Mediterranean regions and allows for the exchange of good practices between member regions. The CPMR and its 150 members in total can also extend these activities to other regional maritime authorities in Europe. By collaborating with networks such as NECSTouR for example, networking activities can also be extended to other territories and organisations. Finally, by participating in the calls for projects such as the ones of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme and fostering synergies with other funding programmes, it will be possible to collaborate on the implementation of activities that can contribute to the MEC.

BRINGING THE IDENTIFIED POLICY INTERVENTIONS TO IMPLEMENTATION

The integration of tourism and conservation policies for the sustainable development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean is a step-by-step process that requires the involvement and participation of all stakeholders, from citizens, private and public entities, and policy-makers. To do so, and to raise awareness and guide these stakeholders in the implementation of the recommended actions previously identified, the regions that are part of the MEC, or that wish to be part of it, should demonstrate their commitment and pave the way.

This could be achieved by:

- Signing the **Memorandum of Understanding** (MoU) of the DestiMED PLUS project so as to commit to ensure the continuity of the activities developed within the project.

- Signing the **Glasgow Declaration** that is a catalyst for increased urgency about the need to accelerate climate action in tourism and to secure strong actions and commitment to support the global goals to halve emissions over the next decade and reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050.

- Signing the **Granada Charter** that promotes sustainability and ecosystem-based management principles for the development of cultural tourism in Europe. This Charter also advocates for the implementation of efficient multi-level governance and cross-sectoral integrated approaches, and for an increase in the sharing, harmonisation and interoperability of data in all the Mediterranean area.

- Inviting the European institutions to develop a **European policy and a dedicated fund for tourism** with a strong territorial dimension: a key role for regions should be guaranteed in this, following the example of the Cohesion Policy.

- Answering the **consultations** published by the European Commission so as to influence the current and next funding programmes.

- Participating in the **tourism transition pathway**, notably by answering the published [Call for commitments and participation](#), in order to promote the integration of conservation to the agenda and to establish public commitment towards greener, more digital and resilient tourism.

By doing so, regions will demonstrate their willingness to implement joint transnational actions, to share more interoperable data and exchange knowledge and best practices on ecotourism management and governance. As such, the regions that will follow the guidance and recommendations exposed in the present document, will contribute to the sustainable socioeconomic development of the Mediterranean area while preserving its environmental, cultural and natural assets, and will contribute to the development of wealthy and vibrant communities at local, regional, national and European levels.

REFERENCES

(1) Terms of Reference of the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium. Online document.

(2) UNWTO (2022), Global and regional tourism performance
https://www.unwto.org/global-and-regional-tourism-performance

(3) State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean, 2020, Plan Bleu

(4) F. Galgani, D. K.A. Barnes, S. Deudero, M. C. Fossi, "*Marine litter in the Mediterranean and Black Sea - Executive Summary*" in Marine litter in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (2014), p.7-20.

(5) Pérez, D.M.G.; Martín, J.M.M.; Martínez, J.M.G.; Sáez-Fernández, F.J. *An Analysis of the Cost of Water Supply Linked to the Tourism Industry. An Application to the Case of the Island of Ibiza in Spain*. Water 2020, 12, 2006. https://doi.org/10.3390/w12072006.

(6) 2021 International Panel on Climate Change report
https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Full_Report.pdf

(7) Ruggieri, G.; Calò, P. *Tourism Dynamics and Sustainability: A Comparative Analysis between Mediterranean Islands—Evidence for Post-COVID-19 Strategies*. Sustainability 2022, 14, 4183. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14074183

(8) OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), Tourism Policy Responses to the coronavirus (COVID-19), 2020
https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=124_124984-7uf8nm95se&title=Covid-19_Tourism_Policy_Responses&_ga=2.21196275.916183796.1637830718-91161558.1614154483

(9) Juan Antonio Duro, Alejandro Perez-Laborda, Judith Turrion-Prats, Melchor Fernández-Fernández, *Covid-19 and tourism vulnerability*, Tourism Management Perspectives, Volume 38, 2021, 100819.

(10) UNWTO (2022), Tourism grows 4% in 2021 but remains far below pre-pandemic levels https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-grows-4-in-2021-but-remains-far-below-pre-pandemic-levels

(11) Murali R., Syiemlieh J. D., Govindan M., *Tourism in the new normal post Covid-19: Is eco-tourism the solution?* (2021), Access: https://www.teriin.org/article/tourism-new-normal-post-covid-19-eco-tourism-solution

(12) Eichelberger, S.; Heigl, M.; Peters, M.; Pikkemaat, B. *Exploring the Role of Tourists: Responsible Behavior Triggered by the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Sustainability 2021, 13, 5774. https://doi.org/10.3390/ su13115774

(13) European Travel Commission. Sustainable Travel in an Era of Disruption: *Assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travellers' sustainable tourism attitudes and projected travel behaviour*. January 2022. ISBN No: 978-92-95107-56-4.

(14) DestiMED PLUS Policy Baseline https://destimed-plus.interreg-med.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Sites/Sustainable_Tourism/Projects/DESTIMED_PLUS/Del._3.3.2_governance_and_policy_analysis_draft_Final_NoAnnexes.pdf

(15) POSBEMED2 project and its charter:

(16) Towards a multilevel governance of ecotourism in Mediterranean Protected Areas: Key recommendations for policy making. DestiMED, October 2019. https://destimed.interreg-med.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Sites/Sustainable_Tourism/Projects/DestiMED/Archive_of_DELIVERABLES/WP4/Act_4.2/Del_4.2.2_DestiMED_Policy_brief_oct19.pdf

(17) DestiMED PLUS Deliverable Database. https://destimed-plus.interreg-med.eu/what-we-achieve/deliverables-database/

DestiMED PLUS

Ecotourism in Mediterranean Destinations: From Monitoring and Planning to Promotion and Policy

DestiMED PLUS is a European project funded by the European Commission under the Interreg Mediterranean Programme. The project aims at fostering the sustainable development of Ecotourism in the Mediterranean Area by improving and strengthening ecotourism governance and policy-making, and by fostering a balance between the interests of the conservation and tourism sectors in protected areas. The project also responds to a greener post-covid recovery of the tourism sector, as DestiMED PLUS intends to give way to an alternative sustainable model of tourism in the Mediterranean protected areas.

https://destimed-plus.interreg-med.eu/