



TOURISMO

**Interreg
Euro-MED**



Co-funded by
the European Union



December 2025

D2.3.1: Best Practices Guide on tools & strategies for Certification of Sustainable Tourism Destinations

Activity 2.3

Development of best practice framework for
Certification of Sustainable Tourism Destinations

www.tourismo.interreg-euro-med.eu



Deliverable ID

Project acronym	TOURISMO
Project title	Tourism Innovative and Sustainable Management of flows
Project mission	Enhancing sustainable tourism
Project priority	Smarter MED
Specific objective	RSO1.1: Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies
Type of project	Test project (Thematic Project)
Project duration	01/01/24 – 30/09/26 (33 months)

Deliverable title	Best Practices Guide on tools & strategies for Certification of Sustainable Tourism Destinations
Deliverable number	2.3.1
Deliverable type	Capacity building material
Work package number	2
Work package title	Implementation and Evaluation of pilot interventions
Activity name	Development of best practice framework for Certification of Sustainable Tourism Destinations
Activity number	2.3
Partner in charge (author)	FSMLR
Partners involved	All

Document history

Versions	Date	Document status	Delivered by
Version 1.0	01/12/2025	V1	FSMLR



Table of contents

- 1. Context of TOURISMO 5
 - 1.1. WP2 – "Implementation and Evaluation of pilot interventions" 5
 - 1.2. Activity 2.3.1 - Reference Framework for Sustainable Destination Certification 7
 - 1.3. Background to the Deliverable..... 7
 - 1.4. Methodology 10
- 2. Overview of existing Certification Systems 11
- 3. Comparative analysis of Certification Systems..... 19
 - 3.1. Thematic Focus and Dimensions 19
 - 3.2. Indicator Types and Requirements 20
 - 3.3. Verification Processes and Transparency 20
 - 3.4. Alignment with the SDGs and Compatibility with HERIT-DATA Indicators..... 21
 - 3.5. Conclusions of the Comparative Analysis 23
- 4. Guidelines for Sustainability Certification Processes for Tourism Destinations..... 25
 - 4.1. Purpose of the Guidelines..... 25
 - 4.2. Guiding Principles for the Certification Process 25
 - 4.3. Minimum Requirements to Initiate the Certification Process..... 26
- 5. Set of Indicators, Data and Tools to be considered..... 30
 - 5.1. Essential Sustainability Indicators: an Integrated Framework 30
 - 5.2. Data and Tools Required to Support the Measurement System..... 31
 - 5.3. Use of Indicators for Decision-Making and Certification..... 32
- 6. Reference Good Practices for Mediterranean Destinations 34
 - 6.1. Criteria for Selecting Good Practices..... 34
 - 6.2. Types of Good Practices Relevant for MED Destinations..... 35
- 7. Final Conclusions 53
- 8. Annexes 55
- 9. References 82



Abbreviations

DMO	Destination Management Organisation
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
ETIS	European Tourism Indicator System
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SF-MST	Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism
SICTED	Sistema Integral de Calidad Turística en Destinos
UNWTO / UN Tourism	United Nations World Tourism Organization



Executive summary

This deliverable corresponds to the first reporting output foreseen under **Activity 2.3** of the **TOURISMO** project (TOURism Innovative and Sustainable Management of fLOws), implemented under the Interreg Euro-MED Programme. Activity 2.3 is dedicated to exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of existing sustainable tourism certification schemes and related approaches, as a supporting element for destinations seeking to address tourism impacts in a more structured and informed manner.

This document, prepared in line with the common deliverable template requested for Sustainable Tourism Mission projects, sets out the analytical content that was subsequently adapted and graphically designed as a **Best Practices Guide**, conceived as capacity-building material to facilitate its dissemination and use beyond the project partnership. The guide adopts a more accessible format and layout in order to facilitate its dissemination and use beyond the project partnership. It is intended to support other Mediterranean regions and destinations that may benefit from the insights gathered through this activity, by offering practical references and examples that can be adapted to different local contexts. This approach is consistent with the objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Mission, as it supports cooperation, mutual learning and the gradual strengthening of sustainable tourism management practices across Mediterranean destinations.

The deliverable provides an overview of the sustainable tourism certification landscape, with a focus on widely recognised reference frameworks and initiatives operating at international, European and Mediterranean levels. The analysis seeks to clarify how these schemes are structured, the principles on which they are based and the types of objectives they pursue, paying particular attention to their relevance for destination-level governance and planning. Throughout the document, certification is approached as part of a broader sustainability journey rather than as an end in itself, and is considered in relation to monitoring practices, data availability and institutional coordination.



1. Context of TOURISMO

TOURISMO project – Smart and Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean – is part of the Interreg Euro-MED 2021-2027 program. It aims to improve the management of tourist flows in Mediterranean destinations by leveraging Big, Open, and Smart Data, digital technologies, and innovative methodologies to foster more sustainable, balanced, and resilient tourism.

TOURISMO's mission is to advance towards a tourism model that combines efficient data management with sustainable land-use planning, contributing to the reduction of tourism's negative impacts. To this end, it promotes the integration of technological solutions, the analysis of visitor behaviour, the redistribution of flows in space and time, and the application of measures aimed at reducing pressure on areas of high tourist concentration.

TOURISMO emerges as a continuation and building upon the HERIT-DATA project, expanding its scope and tools to foster innovative management of tourist destinations. Through digital platforms, the initiative seeks to optimise monitoring of tourist flows and assess their impact on cultural heritage, local resources, and the quality of life of the resident population.

The project is being implemented in eight pilot areas located in seven Mediterranean destinations: Rhodes (Greece), Florence (Italy), Valencia (Port and City) (Spain), Limassol (Cyprus), Varna (Bulgaria), Biševo Island (Croatia), and Golden Bay (Malta). These pilot projects will allow testing and validation of available technological tools to develop solutions that can be transferred to other Mediterranean destinations.

In each case, the actions are geared towards addressing specific problems related to visitor flow balance, heritage management, tourist mobility, and local sustainability.

Overall, TOURISMO accelerates the transformation of the Mediterranean tourism model towards responsible, resource-efficient practices that can be scaled to other regions.

1.1. WP2 – "Implementation and Evaluation of pilot interventions"

Work Package 2 (WP2) constitutes the operational core of the TOURISMO project, as it is responsible for translating the conceptual and methodological framework developed in WP1 into practice through the implementation of pilot solutions in the seven participating Mediterranean destinations. Its purpose is to demonstrate the feasibility, effectiveness, and transferability of the tools and methodologies developed for the sustainable management of tourism flows through technological solutions.



WP2 is structured around two complementary dimensions:

➤ **Development of the Sustainability Framework**

This phase establishes the technical and methodological architecture that enables the homogeneous application of sustainability principles across all pilot destinations.

- Reference indicators and measurement standards derived from the HERIT-DATA project are defined and adapted to territorial specificities.
- Priority action lines are formulated in relation to flow management, carrying capacity, heritage conservation and resource efficiency.
- Protocols are developed for the collection, anonymisation and interoperability of data, ensuring compatibility with the Snap4City platform and local management systems.

➤ **Implementation of Pilot Actions**

In this second phase, WP2 coordinates the deployment of technological and methodological solutions in the seven selected destinations: Rhodes, Florence, Valencia (Port and City), Limassol, Varna, Biševo and Malta. Based on the profile and specific objectives of each pilot, different actions will be carried out:

- A range of technologies will be applied, including IoT sensors and devices, thermal and counting cameras, and drone-based imagery, to monitor visitor inflow and behavioural patterns.
- Data will be integrated into the Snap4City platform, generating visualisations and digital twins of the destination that facilitate dynamic and predictive management of tourism flows.
- Decision-making tools, communication campaigns, and strategies for the spatial and temporal redistribution of visitors will be implemented and adapted to each local context.
- Dashboards will be developed for tourism managers to facilitate evidence-based decision-making.

Each pilot will be able to assess the impact of the solutions on reducing congestion, improving the visitor experience, enhancing resource efficiency, and generating benefits for local communities.



1.2. Activity 2.3.1 - Reference Framework for Sustainable Destination Certification

The main objective of this deliverable is to define a common reference framework for the certification of sustainable tourism destinations in the Mediterranean area. This framework builds on the information developed in the previous WP1 deliverables, as well as on an analysis of selected existing certification systems, chosen for their practical usefulness and transferability to the Mediterranean context and the pilot destinations.

This activity acknowledges the proliferation of multiple existing certification schemes, both public and private, and seeks to harmonise criteria, indicators and methodologies to facilitate comparability, coherence and transparency among them. The aim is to identify the essential elements a destination should meet to advance sustainable management, along with the associated mechanisms for monitoring and verification.

The work has focused on:

- Analysing the main certification systems for sustainable tourism at a destination level.
- Examining the applicability and relevance of these schemes in the project's pilot destinations.
- Establishing a Mediterranean reference framework that integrates the principles of sustainability, digitalisation, participatory governance and data-driven management.
- Developing a methodological proposal and set of indicators to assess the degree of alignment of each destination with international standards.

1.3. Background to the Deliverable

The development of the Framework for Sustainable Destination Certification within WP2 of the TOURISMO project builds on the results obtained in Activities 1.1 and 1.2, which were respectively dedicated to the analysis of tourism flows in the pilot areas and to the review and enhancement of the HERIT-DATA sustainability indicator system.

Both deliverables constitute the empirical and methodological foundation for the future certification framework, providing a shared understanding of the current tourism context in the pilot destinations and a technical framework for measuring their sustainability.



Results of Activity 1.1 – Analysis of Tourism Flows

Deliverable 1.1, "Report on Current Situation and Tourism Flows in the selected areas", provides a detailed diagnosis of tourism behaviour, visitor profiles and governance structures in the eight TOURISMO pilot destinations: Rhodes, Florence, Port of Valencia, City of Valencia, Port of Limassol, Varna, Biševo Island and Golden Bay (Malta).

Based on an analysis of existing data, the study identifies common patterns, shared challenges and opportunities for sustainable management, which are essential for defining certification criteria adapted to the diverse Mediterranean contexts.

Key findings include:

- High concentration of visitors in heritage and environmentally sensitive areas, resulting in risks of saturation and loss of experience quality.
- Pronounced seasonality, particularly in island and coastal destinations, and a significant influence of cruise tourism in several cases.
- Lack of comprehensive monitoring systems, despite the existence of specific initiatives (sensors, counts, mobile applications).
- Need to diversify the tourism offer to redistribute flows and reduce pressure on high-concentration areas.
- Complex governance ecosystems involving numerous public and private actors (administrations, port authorities, tourism operators, social entities, etc.) require stronger coordination.

These results highlight the urgency of equipping destinations with shared measurement and evaluation tools that enable them to compare, learn, and improve jointly, in line with WP2's objectives: creating a shared and adaptable sustainability framework.

Results of Activity 1.2 – Review and Enrichment of the HERIT-DATA System

Deliverable 1.2, "Revision and Enrichment of HERIT-DATA List of Indicators, reviews and updates the sustainability indicator set developed under HERIT-DATA, adapting it to the needs and specificities of the TOURISMO pilot areas.

The objective was to define an operational, comparable, and relevant system of indicators for managing tourism flows, ensuring applicability across urban, port, natural, and island contexts.



The document provides a critical analysis of international reference frameworks and proposes a refined structure of indicators grouped into three levels of applicability:

- Key indicators: applicable to all destinations, focused on measuring saturation, carrying capacity and environmental conditions.
- Secondary indicators: context-specific, depending on priorities and data availability. They explore aspects such as heritage conservation, tourism pressure on residents (overnight stays), visitor perception, access to services (transport, parking), and impacts on prices and commercial dynamics.
- Complementary indicators: corresponding to HERIT-DATA indicators excluded from TOURISMO. These were omitted primarily due to (1) limited technical feasibility and the high effort required to collect homogeneous and reliable data across destinations (e.g. perception of safety, cleaning service capacity), and (2) weaker direct relevance to the core project objective, which focuses on tourism flow management rather than broader socio-economic dimensions (e.g. access to housing, job quality or commercial structure).

Among the key indicators defined for all pilot destinations, the following stand out:

- E1.2: Optimal saturation levels of cultural heritage sites.
- E2.4: Saturation levels of pedestrian traffic.
- E3.5: Tourist perception of overcrowding (real-time and post-experience).
- E4.12: Environmental conditions (air and noise).
- E0.20 / E0.22: Characterisation of tourism areas and carrying capacity.

The integration of the results from Activities 1.1 and 1.2 provides a comprehensive picture of the Mediterranean tourism system. It establishes a robust technical foundation for developing the Framework for Sustainable Destination Certification.

From an empirical perspective, analysing tourism flows provides a territorial and operational understanding of the challenges facing destinations (overcrowding, congestion, data gaps, fragmented governance). Meanwhile, the indicator review offers a methodological framework for the tools needed to measure, compare, and improve sustainability in each context in a coherent, replicable way.



1.4. Methodology

The development of the reference framework for sustainable destination certification has been based on a progressive methodology, grounded in the knowledge generated during earlier phases of the project and complemented by a targeted exploration of the relationship between the pilot destinations and existing certification systems.

Building on the analysis carried out in Deliverables 1.1.1 and 1.2.1, key insights regarding the understanding of territorial context, tourism flows, and stakeholder ecosystems were incorporated, together with the technical structure and logic of the indicators inherited from the HERIT-DATA project. These documents provided the conceptual and operational foundation for constructing a certification model applicable to the Mediterranean destinations involved, ensuring that the proposed framework was grounded in a robust understanding of the challenges, capacities, and real needs identified across the pilots.

To enrich this analysis, a survey was designed and sent to the pilot destinations to assess their current situation regarding certification schemes, alignment with other frameworks, and the resources available to undertake evaluation processes or continuous improvement. The questionnaire addressed existing certifications, labels or quality and sustainability systems in place; potential alignment with international reference frameworks such as the GSTC Criteria, ETIS standards or European environmental management systems; the existence of management or monitoring tools supporting certification; and the type of resources, technical capacities or previous experience in audits or self-assessments that each destination could mobilise. Information was also collected on perceived barriers, specific needs and other contextual factors relevant to assessing the feasibility and applicability of a common certification framework.

This process was complemented by a comparative analysis of the main destination certification systems at international, European and national levels, reviewing their structures, criteria, evaluation mechanisms, requirements and maturity levels. Particular attention is given to approaches supporting the transition towards “green destinations”, mitigating pressures on ecosystems, and preserving living conditions, wellbeing and social acceptance of tourism among local communities.

Overall, the methodology combined technical analysis, comparison of standards, empirical knowledge generated by the pilots and an assessment of their current capacities, in order to build a robust, scalable and context-sensitive framework capable of supporting destinations in their transition towards more intelligent, resilient and regenerative tourism models.

The insights and gaps identified through this analysis will be directly operationalised in D2.3.2, guiding the selection of strategic actions at pilot level.



2. Overview of existing Certification Systems

Over recent decades, sustainability certifications in tourism have become one of the most recognised tools for guiding destination management towards more responsible, transparent models. Their primary function is to verify, through standardised procedures and independent audits, the extent to which a destination, business or tourism product meets defined sustainability standards. These systems translate principles and objectives into concrete, measurable and comparable criteria, facilitating the assessment and continuous improvement of tourism management.

In their most common structure, a certification system combines three essential components:

1. A framework of criteria or indicators defining the applicable sustainability standards;
2. an external evaluation process validating compliance through verifiable evidence; and
3. a recognition or communication mechanism that gives visibility to the result.

This process provides legitimacy to the destination while generating trust among visitors, tourism operators and public administrations.

The evolution of these systems has been gradual and diverse. Initially, certifications were primarily directed at tourism businesses (such as accommodation providers, agencies, or tour operators) with a focus on environmental management and operational efficiency. Later, growing attention to territorial sustainability led to the development of schemes applied to destinations, incorporating broader dimensions such as governance, social cohesion, culture and quality of life for local communities. This shift reflected a more systemic understanding of tourism as a territorial phenomenon requiring comprehensive evaluation frameworks.

Today, certifications act as governance and accountability mechanisms, contributing to the professionalisation of public tourism management and supporting coherence across sectoral policies. Their main value lies not in the label obtained, but in the improvement process they generate: they enable the establishment of baseline indicators, the identification of areas for progress, the prioritisation of actions and the periodic assessment of results achieved. This feedback dynamic turns certification into a continuous learning process, helping destinations adapt to emerging challenges such as capacity management, digitalisation or the reduction of environmental impacts.



Despite their expansion, certifications still face structural challenges. The multiplicity of existing schemes creates fragmentation and complicates the unified interpretation of results. In some cases, associated costs and administrative complexity may limit access for smaller or less technically equipped destinations. There is also a growing need to evolve from models focused solely on verification to approaches oriented towards capacity-building, support and value creation.

Despite the diversity of approaches, all certification systems share a set of common principles: standardised criteria, an evaluation and verification mechanism, and public recognition of performance. However, they differ in their geographical scope, requirements levels, fields of application, and managing entities.

Below, the main existing typologies are described and classified by their level of implementation and recognition.

International Certifications

International schemes are those implemented across multiple countries and based on globally recognised standards. They typically include external accreditation mechanisms and are often aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria, which constitute the global reference framework for tourism sustainability.

1. GSTC Criteria for Destinations and Industry

The GSTC Criteria constitute the international benchmark for the sustainable management of destinations and tourism businesses. They are structured into four areas: sustainable management, socio-economic benefits, cultural heritage and environmental conservation.

The GSTC does not certify directly; instead, it recognises and accredits the certification bodies that apply its principles. In this way, accredited programmes maintain coherence with international standards and ensure the comparability of results across territories. The criteria are commonly used as a shared foundation for developing or revising certification systems and for guiding public policies and sustainable tourism strategies.

2. EarthCheck

EarthCheck is a sustainability certification system applied to destinations and tourism businesses, based on performance evaluation and periodic external verification.



The model uses standardised quantitative indicators for energy consumption, water management, waste generation, emissions, biodiversity, and social well-being. Results are compared against sectoral benchmarks, enabling benchmarking and temporal monitoring.

The process includes external audits and annual document review, supported by a digital platform for data collection and analysis. The standard is recognised by the GSTC and widely used in contexts that require traceability and objective measurement of environmental and social performance.

3. Green Destinations Standard

The Green Destinations Standard is a certification system designed explicitly for tourism destinations, focusing on sustainability management, governance and stakeholder participation.

The model is aligned with the GSTC Criteria and structured into seven thematic areas that cover strategic planning, social and economic well-being, culture, environment, climate change and marketing. Its methodology combines self-assessment, independent verification and a scoring system that determines the destination's recognition level.

A digital platform is used for assessment and reporting, facilitating document management and public communication of results, and incorporating annual review mechanisms to maintain certification validity.

4. Biosphere Certified Destinations

The Biosphere Certified system was developed by the Responsible Tourism Institute (ITR) and is based on the principles of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism and the 2030 Agenda.

The methodology aims to integrate sustainability across the environmental, social, cultural, economic, and governance dimensions, establishing a direct correspondence with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The process combines digital self-assessment, submission of verifiable evidence and external review, using a platform that enables monitoring of actions implemented and their contribution to the SDGs. The system is recognised by the GSTC and promotes coordinated participation of administrations, businesses and citizens in sustainable destination management.



5. Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SFMST)

The **Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST)** is an international statistical framework developed by UN Tourism (UNWTO) and the United Nations Statistics Division to organise and harmonise data on the sustainability of tourism.

Its approach systematically integrates economic, environmental and social information related to tourism, linking tourism data with existing accounting frameworks such as Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). In this way, it provides a coherent basis for generating comparable indicators that allow the contributions and impacts of tourism on sustainable development to be analysed at different territorial scales, from the national level down to the destination level.

SF-MST is **not** a certification system nor a closed list of indicators, but rather a reference statistical framework that defines concepts, classifications and accounting structures so that countries and destinations can compile robust and mutually compatible data. Its implementation is progressive and flexible, and it is designed to support both national statistical institutes and tourism administrations in developing information systems, dashboards and sustainability indicators aligned with the 2030 Agenda and other international frameworks.

European and Regional Certifications

At the European and regional levels, a range of tools for assessing and managing tourism sustainability has been developed and promoted by the European Union, regional networks, and specialised organisations to harmonise measurement criteria and support the green and digital transition of the sector. These systems do not always operate as formal certifications; in many cases, they serve as methodological reference frameworks or voluntary improvement programmes aimed at strengthening planning, governance, and coherence with EU policies.

The main current standards and tools in Europe that provide the technical basis for aligning indicators and comparative evaluation of tourism destinations are outlined below.

6. ETIS (European Tourism Indicator System)

The **European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)** is a self-assessment and monitoring tool developed by the European Commission to measure the sustainability performance of tourism destinations.



Its structure comprises 27 core indicators and 40 supplementary indicators to provide a comprehensive sustainability perspective at the destination level, grouped into four areas: destination management, social and cultural impact, environmental impact, and economic performance.

ETIS is not a formal certification system, but a common methodological framework that facilitates data collection and comparison between destinations. Its implementation is voluntary and adaptable, and it is used as a basis for developing sustainable tourism observatories and local monitoring tools.

7. EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme)

The **Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)** is a voluntary initiative of the European Union that provides organisations with a structured framework to assess, manage and improve their environmental performance, while ensuring legal compliance and public transparency. Its objective is to help public and private entities, including tourism destinations and the operators working within them, to reduce their environmental impact and move towards more efficient resource management.

In the tourism sector, EMAS is applied both to individual businesses and to destinations that can register their environmental management system within this scheme. The model is based on the principles of the international standard ISO 14001 but incorporates additional requirements that strengthen accountability and communication with stakeholders.

The EMAS registration process requires an initial environmental review, the implementation of an environmental management system, the setting of measurable objectives and targets, the implementation of periodic internal audits, and the publication of an environmental statement validated by an accredited verifier. Only after completing this process can the organisation or destination be officially listed in the European Union's EMAS register.

The European Commission provides sectoral reference documents such as the *Sectoral Reference Document on Best Environmental Management Practices in the Tourism Sector*, which compiles best practices and sector-specific environmental indicators to improve performance. In addition, the **EMAS Green Forum** acts as a platform for exchange and dissemination of resources, including an interactive map of registered organisations, accessible to travellers and professionals interested in environmentally certified options and destinations.



8. Charter for Sustainable Tourism (EUROPARC Federation)

The **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST)** is a management and certification tool developed by the EUROPARC Federation to enable protected areas to develop sustainable tourism. Its main objective is to safeguard natural and cultural heritage while promoting tourism that generates measurable economic, social and environmental benefits for the local community.

The ECST is based on a collaborative, partnership-based approach among protected area authorities, municipalities, tourism businesses, and other stakeholders, who work together to develop and implement a medium-term sustainable tourism strategy and action plan. The key principles include heritage protection, improvements in the quality of the visitor experience, and increased local benefits derived from tourism.

Certification is granted by the EUROPARC Federation following an independent verification process, and areas must be re-assessed every five years to ensure continuous improvement. The Charter is structured into three parts: sustainable destinations (Part I), sustainable businesses (Part II) and sustainable tour operators (Part III).

9. UNE 178501 and UNE 178502 (Smart Tourism Destinations)

The **UNE 178501** (Management system for Smart Tourism Destinations) and **UNE 178502** (Requirements for Smart Tourism Destination projects) standards form part of the UNE 178000 series on Smart Cities, developed by the Spanish Standardisation Association (UNE).

These standards set out the requirements for planning, implementing, maintaining, and improving an intelligent destination management system, integrating the dimensions of governance, innovation, accessibility, sustainability, and technology.

The model combines qualitative and quantitative indicators and requires external audits to obtain certification. Its application supports data interoperability and the creation of digital tourism governance platforms aligned with sustainability and continuous improvement principles.

The UNE 178501 / UNE 178502 standards are national Spanish standards developed by UNE and applied directly in Spain rather than at the European level. However, Spain is a global pioneer in developing standards for Smart Tourism Destinations (DTI), which has generated interest in other countries and international organisations, and these standards may serve as a basis or inspiration for the development of similar frameworks at the European scale in the future.



10. SICTED (Integral Quality System for Tourism Destinations)

SICTED is a programme promoted by Spain's State Secretariat for Tourism and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), aimed at improving the quality of the tourism experience in destinations.

Its methodology is based on evaluating tourism businesses and services through checklists, improvement plans, and continuous training, to achieve a uniform level of quality across the destination.

Although it is not an environmental or sustainability certification as such, the system has, in recent years, incorporated specific modules on sustainability, digitalisation and responsible management, thereby extending its scope towards a more integrated model of tourism quality and sustainability.

11. Blue Flag

Blue Flag is an international voluntary environmental certification programme managed by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and applied to beaches, marinas and tourism boats.

The award is based on compliance with technical criteria for water quality, environmental management, safety, services, and environmental education.

Inspections are carried out annually by national bodies accredited by FEE, and results are verified through external audits. Blue Flag is present in more than 50 countries and is an operational benchmark for environmental management and communication in coastal areas.

12. EcoPorts / PERS (Port Environmental Review System)

The **Port Environmental Review System (PERS)** is the specific environmental management standard for European ports, developed under the **EcoPorts** initiative and coordinated by the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO).

The scheme sets out environmental and operational requirements for planning, emissions control, waste management, energy efficiency, and transparency.

Certification is obtained through external verification by auditors accredited by ESPO and is valid for three years. The system is compatible with EMAS and ISO 14001, enabling its integration into broader port sustainability strategies.



National and Local Certifications

In parallel with international and European frameworks, many countries and regions have developed sustainability certifications and programmes tailored to their legislative, cultural and territorial contexts. These systems have been designed to translate global standards into local operational realities, offering tools that are closer to and more applicable in destination management.

Unlike international schemes, which tend to promote harmonisation and comparability across territories, national and local certifications are characterised by greater methodological flexibility and a more practical orientation. They often combine verification of environmental, social and economic criteria with participatory processes of support, training and continuous evaluation.

Many of these programmes follow hybrid models that integrate components of quality, sustainability, and digitalisation and seek to strengthen destination management capacity through adaptable indicators and self-assessment tools. Some are structured as formal certification systems, with external audits and official recognition; others operate as voluntary adherence or improvement programmes that encourage participation by local authorities, businesses, and citizens around a shared set of objectives.

Common initiatives include national and local tourism quality programmes, environmental labels and good-practice recognition schemes that promote responsible resource management and continuous improvement of destinations. In many cases, these systems combine elements of quality, sustainability and governance, integrating actions related to environmental management, service efficiency, digitalisation and stakeholder participation. Also frequent are excellence labels for beaches, ports or accommodation, and monitoring platforms for tracking tourism performance, which strengthen transparency and coherence with international sustainability frameworks.



3. Comparative analysis of Certification Systems

The comparative analysis of the main certification schemes enables identification of convergences, differences, and varying levels of maturity among the international, European, and national models currently in use. All systems share the aspiration to ensure more responsible, transparent, and measurable tourism management, but they differ in their thematic focus, indicator structure, verification processes, and degree of alignment with international sustainability agendas.

3.1. Thematic Focus and Dimensions

In general terms, international and European certifications structure their criteria around four main dimensions:

- **Destination management and governance**, including strategic planning, stakeholder participation, continuous improvement and regulatory compliance.
- **Socio-economic impact**, addressing local employment, social inclusion, redistribution of benefits and support for the resident economy.
- **Conservation of natural and cultural heritage**, assessing resource protection, reduction of environmental impacts and territorial management.
- **Quality of the tourism experience and visitor satisfaction**, incorporating accessibility, safety, information and carrying capacity.

Although this structure reflects the framework of the **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria**, different programmes vary in their degree of specialisation. **EarthCheck**, for instance, focuses on environmental measurement and operational management of destinations, whereas **Green Destinations** or **Biosphere** adopt a broader approach, integrating participatory governance, local culture and social dimensions.

At the European level, initiatives such as ETIS and the UNE 178501 Standard also incorporate digitalisation, data management, and interoperability as key elements of institutional sustainability.



3.2. Indicator Types and Requirements

The analysed certification systems show significant differences in the types of indicators used and their evaluation methodologies.

More technical models, such as **EarthCheck** or **EMAS**, rely on standardised quantitative metrics (energy consumption, emissions, waste, water), enabling the establishment of thresholds and international comparison.

By contrast, schemes such as **Biosphere** or **Green Destinations** combine qualitative indicators, focusing on policies, processes or documentary evidence, with quantitative metrics, introducing scoring systems that facilitate self-assessment and continuous monitoring.

European and national models (such as **ETIS**, **SICTED** or **UNE 178501**) tend to adopt more flexible structures, allowing indicators to be adapted to the destination's scale and local competences. While this adaptability improves practical applicability, it also reduces comparability between countries.

In more recent schemes, the digitalisation of processes (through online platforms and interactive dashboards) is facilitating continuous data updates and reinforcing transparency.

3.3. Verification Processes and Transparency

Independent verification is a key factor in the credibility of certification systems.

The more established programmes (**EarthCheck**, **Green Destinations**) include periodic external audits conducted by accredited entities, with on-site inspections and documentary reviews.

Other systems, such as **Biosphere**, combine digital self-assessment with external validation, while tools like **ETIS** or **SICTED** focus on guided self-assessment and internal use as instruments for continuous improvement.

Regarding transparency, most programmes publish overall results or recognition levels, although not all disclose complete audit reports. Recent trends point towards greater use of open platforms and online data visualisation tools, allowing destinations to communicate progress publicly and in a standardised format, in line with European policies on governance and open data.



3.4. Alignment with the SDGs and Compatibility with HERIT-DATA Indicators

Virtually all current systems declare explicit alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly SDGs 8 (decent work and economic growth), 11 (sustainable cities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land).

Among the more advanced cases, **Biosphere Certified** integrates the SDGs into operations, enabling destinations to assess and communicate their contribution to the SDGs through a system of indicators and verifiable evidence. **Green Destinations** and **EarthCheck** also incorporate correspondences with the SDGs, though in a more transversal manner.

Several systems also show strong thematic coherence with the **HERIT-DATA indicator framework**, particularly in the areas of tourism pressure, mobility, environmental management, cultural heritage and governance. Those that operate with digitalised metrics or interoperable platforms (such as **EarthCheck**, **ETIS** or **UNE 178501**) demonstrate a high capacity for integration with data analytics tools and sustainability observatories.

This convergence enables linking certification with the intelligent management of tourism data and strengthens the role of these systems as technical support for evidence-based decision-making.



Table 1 – Comparative overview of selected sustainable tourism certification systems

SYSTEM	THEMATIC FOCUS & DIMENSIONS	INDICATOR TYPOLOGY & REQUIREMENTS	VERIFICATION & TRANSPARENCY	SDG ALIGNMENT	HERIT-DATA COMPATIBILITY†
GSTC Criteria (Destinations & Industry)	Reference framework structured around four pillars: management, socio-economic, cultural and environmental.	Matrix of criteria with guiding indicators (qualitative and quantitative). Serves as a basis for developing or revising standards.	Accredits certifiers; does not audit destinations directly. Criteria are publicly accessible.	Explicit in the criteria.	High – methodological reference framework applicable to all HERIT-DATA indicators.
EarthCheck (destinations)	Assesses environmental, social and economic performance with a focus on operational measurement and verifiable results.	Standardised quantitative indicators (energy, water, waste, GHG emissions, etc.) and international benchmarking.	Annual external audit, documentary validation and structured reporting.	Declared in the standard documentation.	High – especially E4.12 and E0.20/E0.22; extendable to E1.2 and E2.4 through flow data.
Green Destinations Standard	Governance, land management, social participation, culture, economy, climate and communication.	Mixed: qualitative policies and evidence + quantitative metrics. Level scoring (bronze–platinum).	Independent verification and annual review. Transparent publication of results.	Explicit through SDG mapping.	High – E1.2, E2.4, E3.5, E0.20/E0.22.
Biosphere (destinations)	Integrated sustainability based on the SDGs, with a participatory and continuous improvement approach.	Digital self-assessment with verifiable evidence and action tracking.	Document review and external checks. Public monitoring platform.	Explicit (by goal and target).	Medium-High – especially aligned with E3.5 (perception) and partially with others.
SF-MST	International statistical framework integrating economic, environmental and social dimensions.	Does not define a closed list of indicators; provides structures, domains and variables.	Not a certification or audit system.	Explicit as a reference for Agenda 2030 measurement.	High – methodological basis for structuring indicators.
ETIS (EU)	European indicator framework for sustainable destination management.	Environmental, social, cultural and economic indicators. Flexible templates.	Voluntary system without certification; possible public use of results.	Aligned with EU policies.	High – useful for E1.2, E2.4, E3.5 and E0.20/E0.22.
EMAS	Organisational environmental management and continuous improvement under EU regulation.	Environmental management system + validated environmental statement.	External verification and annual publication.	Transversal across environmental SDGs.	Medium – E4.12 direct; others via destination frameworks.
UNE 178501/178502	Smart Tourism Destinations: governance, sustainability,	System requirements + interoperable, data-based indicators.	External audit and formal certification.	Aligned with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.	High – applicable to E1.2, E2.4, E3.5, E0.20/E0.22.



SICTED	Tourism quality programme with progressive integration of sustainability.	Checklists, improvement plans and continuous training.	Mixed evaluation and annual follow-up.	Aligned with SDGs on quality and decent work.	Medium – E3.5; others require external integration.
Blue Flag	Environmental management in beaches/marinas: water, services, safety, education.	Technical and operational criteria reviewed annually.	Annual audits and inspections with public results.	Aligned with SDGs 14 & 15.	Medium – E4.12; partial for E0.20/E0.22.
EcoPorts / PERS	Port environmental management (EcoPorts initiative, ESPO).	Compatible with EMAS/ISO 14001; environmental plan.	External verification every three years.	Aligned with EU environmental policy.	Medium – E4.12; E0.20/E0.22 for port capacity.

**Estimated compatibility for integration with indicators on tourism pressure, mobility, heritage and the environment, as well as their potential for digital reporting (low/medium/high).*

3.5. Conclusions of the Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis highlights a diverse certification ecosystem that is, nevertheless, moving towards consolidation and methodological convergence. Most standards align on the core principles that define sustainable tourism—responsible governance, socio-economic benefits, heritage preservation, and environmental protection—although they differ in how these are measured, the intensity of audits, and the technical robustness of their indicators.

The main findings may be summarised as follows:

- **Thematic content is increasingly converging around a common set of pillars**, albeit with varying levels of specialisation. International systems tend to prioritise comparability and standardisation, while national and local models adapt criteria to territorial scale and institutional capacities, which improves applicability but reduces uniformity. Balancing homogenisation with contextualisation is one of the central challenges for the future of certification systems.
- **Systems based on standardised quantitative metrics** (EarthCheck, EMAS, UNE 178501) offer greater potential for integration into data-monitoring platforms.
- **Self-assessment and support-based schemes** (ETIS, SICTED, Biosphere) are more accessible for destinations with limited size or resources, although they provide lower international comparability.



- **Models that require external auditing (EarthCheck, Green Destinations, EcoPorts, EMAS, Blue Flag) enjoy greater** recognition and credibility in international markets.
- **Alignment with the SDGs is now a generalised standard**, and compatibility with indicator systems such as HERIT-DATA is emerging as a key factor for future interoperability.

Taken together, certification schemes are evolving from an accreditation-centred approach towards a strategic role within destination governance, acting as instruments for adaptive management, transparency and organisational learning.



4. Guidelines for Sustainability Certification Processes for Tourism Destinations

4.1. Purpose of the Guidelines

These guidelines provide a practical framework to enable Mediterranean destinations—and in particular the eight TOURISMO pilot sites—to prepare for, structure and progress towards a comprehensive improvement process in tourism sustainability. They apply to both formal certification systems and evaluation, self-assessment, or recognition schemes. Their purpose is to:

- Establish minimum requirements for implementing a reliable system for sustainability management and evaluation.
- Define a realistic operational framework adaptable to different levels of institutional and technical maturity.
- Enable a progressive implementation, especially in destinations with limited capacities or resources.
- Guide the use of data, indicators, governance structures and analytical tools developed in WP1 to support evidence-based decision-making.
- Align monitoring, management and planning efforts with a Mediterranean model of sustainable and resilient destinations.

4.2. Guiding Principles for the Certification Process

The proposed framework is built upon a set of principles that should guide any process of improvement or evaluation of tourism sustainability, regardless of the standard or methodology chosen by the destination.

Flexibility and adaptation to context

Each destination presents distinct territorial, institutional and operational realities. The framework must apply to urban, natural, port, and island destinations and allow for differentiated solutions based on their capacities, scale, and maturity.



Progressiveness

Sustainable tourism is not an immediate outcome but an evolutionary process. These guidelines propose different levels of advancement—from a basic starting point to a fully developed system—enabling each destination to progress gradually, realistically and in line with its capacities.

Data-driven approach

Sustainable management requires decisions grounded in verified information. The use of indicators, sensors, flow analysis, perception data, and operational datasets is essential for monitoring trends, anticipating risks, and evaluating results.

Collaborative governance

Tourism sustainability is built through collaboration among public administrations, the private sector, local communities, heritage managers, tourism operators, port authorities and other key stakeholders. Shared governance ensures legitimacy, coherence and continuity.

Transparency and accountability

The credibility of any improvement process requires the publication of key information, sharing of progress, clear communication of decisions and the provision of evidence on destination performance. Transparency is essential for both public trust and quality management.

4.3. Minimum Requirements to Initiate the Certification Process

Before beginning any formal certification process, the destination must ensure a set of basic conditions that guarantee the work will be carried out coherently, realistically and in a sustained manner over time. These requirements constitute the common starting point for any tourism destination in the Mediterranean area, regardless of its scale, typology or level of maturity.

a) Clear Delimitation of the Area of Analysis

The first step is to define precisely the territorial scope to which the certification process will apply. This delimitation is essential to guarantee methodological coherence, ensure data comparability over time, and establish clear responsibilities among the actors involved.

The area of analysis may encompass a historic centre, a heritage site, a protected natural area, a



beach or stretch of coastline, a port area, an entire island or a tourism municipality. The scale is not what matters; what is essential is that the perimeter is clearly identified and agreed upon by the competent entities.

A clear delimitation allows the destination to:

- Apply indicators consistently, avoiding mixing different areas or realities in a single analysis.
- Collect comparable data over time and across similar zones of the destination.
- Focus management and investment on areas experiencing higher tourism pressure or greater fragility.
- Assign responsibilities appropriately, avoiding ambiguity when multiple administrations are involved (e.g. municipalities, port authorities, environmental agencies or heritage managers).
- Select measurement and control tools suited to the space being analysed (pedestrian sensors, visitor counts, environmental monitoring, etc.).

In the Mediterranean context—characterised by high typological diversity and the coexistence of urban, natural and coastal areas—this initial delimitation is particularly important to ensure that the evaluation process is realistic and reflects the specificities of the territory.

b) Operational Governance Structure

Robust governance is indispensable for activating and sustaining the certification process. The destination must have a stable operational structure, usually organised around a local committee or working group that brings together key public, private, and civil society actors. Participation from community organisations, neighbourhood associations, cultural or environmental bodies and other civic groups is essential to ensure that the process incorporates diverse perspectives and is built upon a broad understanding of the territory.

This structure should assume functions such as data collection and validation, coordination between administrations, tourism operators and heritage managers, operational decision-making in situations of overcrowding or environmental deterioration, planning and monitoring improvements, and internal and external communication of the process. Well-defined governance avoids fragmentation, strengthens transparency and enables actions to be grounded in verifiable evidence.

A robust operational governance structure ensures the system operates continuously, prevents



fragmentation, and strengthens the destination's capacity to implement practical, evidence-based actions.

c) **Basic Measurement System**

No tourism sustainability process is viable without a minimum measurement system that allows the destination to understand what is happening, identify trends and anticipate impacts. This requires essential, reliable and periodic information that can serve as a basis for decision-making.

This system should include basic data across the three dimensions of sustainability:

- **Economic dimension:** information on tourism employment, seasonality, spending structures and the contribution of tourism to the local economy.
- **Environmental dimension:** data related to water and energy management, waste production and treatment, sustainable mobility, and the conservation of ecosystems and natural heritage.
- **Social and cultural dimensions:** information on the quality of life in tourism areas, coexistence between residents and visitors, accessibility, cultural heritage protection, and citizen participation.

From the specific perspective of TOURISMO, this core information should be complemented by additional data linked to tourism flow management and pressure, such as visitor concentrations in different areas of the destination, saturation levels at critical points, resident and visitor perceptions of the tourism experience and potential conflicts, basic environmental conditions (noise, air quality, pressure on services), as well as the capacity and use of public and tourism spaces.

A robust measurement system forms the basis for evaluating destination performance, prioritising interventions, communicating progress, and generating consistent evidence for future audits, recognitions, or certifications.

d) **Participation Mechanisms**

The participation of local actors is essential to legitimise the certification process and ensure that sustainability is addressed inclusively. The destination should establish stable mechanisms to collect perceptions, needs, and proposals from residents, businesses, social organisations, cultural groups, and other relevant stakeholders.



These mechanisms may include periodic surveys, participatory workshops, interviews with key actors, local forums or observatories, and digital channels for continuous consultation.

Having these participation spaces not only improves the quality of the diagnosis but also ensures that adopted measures are built upon shared knowledge, reinforcing social acceptance and co-responsibility in destination management.

e) Institutional Commitment

Any certification process must be supported by a firm institutional commitment to guarantee continuity, minimum resources and coherence over time. This commitment may be formalised through an official declaration, an administrative resolution, integration of the process into existing strategic plans, or collaboration agreements between administrations and competent entities.

What is essential is to ensure that the destination recognises the importance of advancing towards a more responsible management model, commits the necessary resources, and guarantees coordination among the involved areas. This institutional backing increases the credibility of the process among citizens, the private sector and any external evaluation or audit.

In addition to strong institutional commitment, the destination must designate a lead entity responsible for overseeing and coordinating the certification process. This body should act as an operational reference point, convene key actors, ensure methodological consistency and maintain continuity of the process over time. Its role is, ultimately, to ensure that the initiative does not depend solely on short-term projects, political changes or contextual fluctuations, but becomes established as a stable, progressive and verifiable process.



5. Set of Indicators, Data and Tools to be considered

The certification of a sustainable tourism destination requires a robust, verifiable measurement system that enables the evaluation of territorial performance, the orientation of management decisions, and the demonstration of progress during external audits. This section integrates, in a unified way, the essential indicators, the necessary data and the recommended tools, forming a technical framework adaptable to different certification standards and to the diversity of Mediterranean contexts.

5.1. Essential Sustainability Indicators: an Integrated Framework

Any certification process requires measuring destination performance across the three fundamental dimensions of sustainability—economic, environmental and sociocultural—complemented, in the Mediterranean context, by specific indicators on tourism pressure and flow management.

Economic sustainability

Destinations must monitor variables that allow them to understand how tourism contributes to the local economy and whether this contribution supports balanced development. This includes the volume and quality of tourism employment, seasonality and its impacts, the distribution of visitor spending across local sectors, economic dependence on tourism, and effects on prices and accessibility to goods and services.

Environmental sustainability

Environmental indicators are a core component of any certification. They include water and energy consumption and efficiency, the energy mix and share of renewables, waste generation and treatment, emissions associated with mobility, air quality and noise, as well as the conservation of coastlines, ecosystems and natural heritage.

Social and cultural sustainability

This dimension assesses the relationship between tourism, the local community and cultural



heritage. Indicators encompass residents' perceptions and coexistence with visitors, universal accessibility, protection of tangible and intangible heritage, safety, risk management, and the degree of citizen participation in decision-making regarding the destination.

Indicators of tourism pressure and operational management (derived from TOURISMO)

In Mediterranean destinations—characterised by strong seasonality and spatial concentration of visitors—it is essential to complement the traditional framework with indicators measuring:

- Visitor flows and concentrations in different zones and time periods
- Saturation levels and alert thresholds at critical points
- Perceptions of overcrowding and quality of the experience
- Environmental conditions in high-affluence areas (noise, air quality, pressure on services)
- Capacity and use of public space, including footfall and pedestrian mobility

This integrated set of indicators enables balanced evaluation of destination performance while demonstrating operational capacity to manage tourism pressure.

5.2. Data and Tools Required to Support the Measurement System

An indicator system is only effective if reliable, comparable and traceable data support it. Destinations must ensure the availability and quality of diverse sources, which may include:

- Administrative records (employment, waste, consumption)
- Tourism statistics and sectoral data
- Environmental information generated by competent authorities
- Surveys of residents and visitors
- Mobility and transport data
- Information provided by businesses, port operators or heritage managers
- Measurements obtained through sensors, manual counts or digital tools

The frequency of data updates must be suited to each indicator—monthly, quarterly or annual—and aligned with the destination's operational needs.

For data analysis and management, destinations may use a wide range of tools, from counting



sensors and access control systems to monitoring dashboards, GIS tools, digital surveys, consumption management systems, and collaborative platforms for citizen participation.

In contexts with limited resources, simple methods such as manual counts or in-person surveys can also be valid if applied systematically and consistently.

The key requirement is to have an **integrated information management system** that brings together, within a single operational framework:

- A centralised repository where data is stored
- Clear definition of those responsible for data updating and validation
- Structured quality-control procedures ensuring data reliability
- Periodic reporting systems to evaluate destination trends
- Accessible visualisation tools to support the interpretation and use of information by relevant stakeholders

Aligned with this approach, the TOURISMO project incorporates an advanced data management system through the **Snap4City platform**, developed by the University of Florence. This infrastructure facilitates the collection, harmonisation and real-time visualisation of information from sensors, mobility systems, tourism flow counts, environmental indicators and various administrative and sectoral sources.

Snap4City enables destinations to operate within a unified environment for indicator monitoring, data quality control and the development of temporal analyses. It also offers continuous monitoring and decision-support capabilities aligned with international sustainable tourism standards, thereby strengthening the capacity of pilot destinations to implement a coherent, interoperable measurement system oriented towards active tourism flow management.

5.3. Use of Indicators for Decision-Making and Certification

Certification is not limited to proving that indicators exist; it requires demonstrating that they are integrated into the destination's decision-making processes. For this reason, the measurement system must be linked to:

- Operational protocols, such as decongestion measures, access regulation or mobility adjustments



- Strategic tourism and sustainability plans
- Environmental and heritage protection policies
- Internal resource allocation decisions
- Public communication and participation processes

Traceability between data, decisions and results is one of the most valued elements in any external audit.

Finally, the destination must ensure that its measurement system is compatible with regional, national or European frameworks to facilitate alignment with broader territorial strategies and reinforce its credibility at the international level.



6. Reference Good Practices for Mediterranean Destinations

The identification and analysis of best practices constitute a fundamental pillar for guiding Mediterranean destinations in their transition towards more sustainable models, particularly towards certification processes. These practices enable observation of how other territories have addressed similar challenges—from tourism pressure and heritage conservation to governance and resource management—and facilitate the extraction of transferable elements for the TOURISMO pilot destinations.

The selected experiences reflect a balanced approach to environmental, sociocultural, and economic sustainability and are characterised by verifiable results and consolidated processes, making them robust references for the Mediterranean context.

6.1. Criteria for Selecting Good Practices

To ensure that the practices chosen offer operational relevance and real usefulness for MED destinations, the following criteria have been defined:

Transferability. The practice must be adaptable to different scales and types of destinations (urban, island, coastal, natural or port-based).

Mediterranean relevance. It must address recurring challenges in the region: seasonal congestion, heritage conservation, pressure on resources, climate vulnerability or multi-actor coordination.

Integrated sustainability. The practice should consider, at least in part, the environmental, social, cultural and economic dimensions of sustainability.

Alignment with certification schemes. Practices should facilitate compliance with criteria established by international standards (GSTC, EarthCheck, ETIS, etc.) and serve as a reference for building a MED framework.



6.2. Types of Good Practices Relevant for MED Destinations

Based on comparative analysis, the good practices are grouped into four complementary categories. The first category (A) includes cases related to destination certification and collaborative governance, while the second category (B) brings together key thematic practices for sustainable management—particularly those linked to the TOURISMO approach—such as impact and carrying capacity management, and competitiveness and differentiation through sustainability.

A) Cases Applied to Destination Certification

A.1 Slovenia – “Slovenia Green”

General description

The *Slovenia Green* programme is Slovenia’s national tourism certification scheme, integrating destinations, accommodation providers, attractions and operators under a single methodology aligned with the GSTC. It is one of the most advanced examples of incorporating international standards into a country-wide system. The initiative operates as a continuous-improvement mechanism, combining self-assessment, external audits, recognition levels, and the controlled use of the national brand.

Context and challenges

Slovenia aimed to position itself as a sustainable country without fragmenting efforts across multiple labels. The main challenge was to create coherence among highly diverse actors—from major cities to small Alpine municipalities—while providing them with a common tool to evaluate, communicate and improve their environmental, social and cultural performance.

Practice development

The programme establishes homogeneous criteria for destinations and businesses, supported by technical guidelines and diagnostic tools. Destinations and companies begin the process with a comprehensive self-assessment, followed by an improvement plan validated by the Slovenian Tourism Board, and conclude with an external audit to verify compliance.

The programme includes methodological guides, manager training, controlled brand communication, and periodic reviews. It also integrates data platforms, monitoring tools and campaigns that align sustainability, promotion and management.



Results and evidence

Within a few years, Slovenia has built a solid network of certified destinations and positioned the *Slovenia Green* brand as a mark of quality in major European source markets. The programme has strengthened the capacity of local DMOs to measure impacts, engage stakeholders and communicate sustainable practices rigorously.

Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

Slovenia's model demonstrates how a national scheme can structure the certification ecosystem and provide systematic technical support to destinations of different sizes. Its approach is scalable across the Mediterranean, particularly for regions or networks of destinations that require a shared governance and reporting framework.

Web: <https://www.slovenia-green.si/>

A.2 Azores (Portugal) – EarthCheck Certification at Archipelago Scale

General description

The Azores are the world's first archipelago certified as a sustainable destination under EarthCheck. The certification encompasses all nine islands and is embedded in the region's tourism and spatial planning, making it a global model for island destinations.

Context and challenges

The archipelago has experienced significant tourism growth, accompanied by pressures on ecosystems, water resources, marine biodiversity and infrastructure capacity. Territorial dispersion complicates municipal coordination, harmonised data collection and the implementation of a common strategy.

Practice development

The Regional Government implemented a data-collection system for environmental (water, energy, emissions, waste) and social indicators (employment, citizen satisfaction), applying EarthCheck standards. Based on this foundation, annual audits are carried out, and impact-reduction and performance-improvement targets are established. Certification is accompanied by training for businesses, plastic-reduction policies, marine protection measures and community participation in tourism decision-making. It is also integrated into tourism promotion, strengthening the destination's positioning.



Results and evidence

The archipelago has achieved improvements in energy efficiency, waste reduction and better management of carrying capacity in protected areas. Certification has strengthened its image as a responsible nature destination and increased private-sector involvement in sustainability. The islands are now recognised as an international benchmark for integrating sustainability, conservation and tourism.

Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

The model is particularly relevant for Mediterranean island destinations that require supramunicipal coordination, monitoring systems and a common evaluation structure. It is a direct example of certification at the regional scale.

Web: <https://earthcheck.org/news/the-azores-the-worlds-first-certified-archipelago/>

A.3 Barcelona (Spain) – SITS–OTB Sustainable Tourism Indicator System

General description

Barcelona's SITS–OTB Sustainable Tourism Indicator System, developed by the city's Tourism Observatory, comprises 30 indicators assessing environmental, social, cultural and economic performance. Although not a formal certification, it has become a key governance instrument guiding policy decisions and offering transparent communication of tourism impacts.

Context and challenges

Barcelona faces tensions linked to sustained tourism growth: saturation in specific neighbourhoods, housing-market pressure and coexistence conflicts. To address these issues, the city required a robust information system to support policy decisions, improve transparency and strengthen adaptive tourism management.

Practice development

The Observatory collects data from multiple sources, validates them technically and produces periodic reports. The system is dynamic: new indicators are incorporated when emerging needs are identified (e.g. sustainable mobility, residents' perception), and revisions involve participatory processes with experts and local stakeholders. Results are disseminated through reports and dashboards, strengthening transparency and accountability.

Results and evidence

SITS–OTB has provided Barcelona with a rigorous evidence base for regulating and monitoring



tourism impacts, becoming a European reference. It has strengthened the legitimacy of measures such as tourist licence regulation or public space reorganisation. The information is also used to assess policy effects, inform the private sector and improve communication with residents.

Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

Barcelona demonstrates how a destination can transform an indicator system into a governance tool, an essential component of any certification scheme. Its methodology helps destinations structure an observatory, integrate indicators and ground decisions in evidence.

Web: <https://observatoriturisme.barcelona/en/sustainability-sits-otb-otb-sustainable-tourism-indicators-system/>

A.4 Pyrenees (France–Spain) – Transboundary Branding and Governance

General description

The Pyrenees brand articulates cross-border cooperation between France and Spain to offer a joint tourism proposition based on nature, culture and outdoor sports. The model stands out for harmonised criteria, shared products and multilevel governance.

Context and challenges

The Pyrenees constitute a continuous territory with strong tourism potential but historically fragmented across administrations, standards, and promotional strategies. Lack of cohesion reduced competitiveness and international visibility.

Practice development

Cross-border cooperation has enabled the development of common criteria, shared signage, integrated tourism products and joint promotional tools. The management of EU funds dedicated to tourism has facilitated the establishment of technical structures and participatory processes across administrations, businesses, and operators.

Results and evidence

The Pyrenees have positioned themselves as a coherent transnational destination, with structured products (hiking, MTB, skiing) and a unified image. Collaboration has improved product quality and generated synergies between previously disconnected territories. The destination operates under multiple quality certifications.



Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

This case is highly relevant for fragmented Mediterranean territories needing common criteria, shared governance and integrated planning to progress towards certification.

Web: <https://www.tourism-mediterraneanpyrenees.com/labels-and-brands>

A.5 Normandy (France) – Regional Strategy for Responsible Destinations

General description

Normandy has developed a regional strategy that places sustainability at the core of its tourism model, providing instruments to support DMOs and businesses in adopting responsible practices and, where relevant, certification.

Context and challenges

The region comprises a highly frequented coastline, historic cities and extensive rural areas. Challenges involved coordinating multiple actors, ensuring coherent territorial marketing and reducing tourism impacts while maintaining competitiveness.

Practice development

The region provides training, methodological tools, diagnostics and funding to advance tourism sustainability. It has also created a regional label that incentivises good practices and promotes professionalisation among local destinations.

Results and evidence

The number of sustainable tourism initiatives has increased across businesses and municipalities, reinforcing territorial coherence. Normandy is now recognised nationally as a leading region in responsible tourism.

Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

Normandy illustrates the importance of the regional level as a driver of standards deployment and as a supporter of destinations in their transition towards certification.

Web: <https://en.normandie-tourisme.fr/plan-your-trip/labels-sustainability/>



A.6 Occitanie (France) – Regional Responsible Tourism Policy

General description

Occitanie—one of France’s largest and most diverse regions—has developed a responsible tourism policy that links ecological transition, territorial development, sustainable mobility, and tourism competitiveness. Its strategy is based on strong regional governance, dedicated financial instruments and continuous technical support for destinations and businesses.

Context and challenges

Occitanie faced multiple challenges: coastal congestion, tourism-related housing pressures, depopulation in rural interiors, dependence on private transport, and increasing climate vulnerabilities (drought, fires, coastal erosion). Territorial diversity made it difficult to build a shared strategic vision. There was also a need to harmonise multiple labels and fragmented practices and strengthen DMOs’ technical capacities.

Practice development

The region has designed an integrated strategy with measurable objectives for decarbonisation, biodiversity, low-emission mobility, circular economy and territorial resilience. To accelerate the transition, it has created funding calls for sustainable tourism projects, supported energy renovations in accommodation, promoted sustainable mobility (cycle tourism, tourist trains, green routes) and strengthened short local supply chains. It also promotes certification among destinations and businesses through technical assistance, training, methodological guides and pilot audits. Policies are coordinated with departments, natural parks, municipalities and business actors.

Results and evidence

The number of destinations and businesses integrating sustainability criteria or pursuing certification (e.g. Green Destinations, regional French labels) has increased significantly. The region has advanced in green mobility, energy efficiency, and cohesion between rural and urban areas, driven by heritage, agriculture, and sustainable tourism products. Occitanie is recognised nationally as one of the most active regions in responsible tourism.

Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

Occitanie demonstrates the decisive role that an intermediate level of governance (region, island, province) can play in facilitating sustainability transitions. The approach focuses on creating an “enabling ecosystem” that combines funding, technical assistance, evaluation frameworks, and continuous support—highly relevant for Mediterranean destinations with limited resources or



numerous small municipalities.

Web:

<https://www.tourisme-durable.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/guide-labels-tourisme-crtl-occitanie.pdf>

<https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/actions-du-crtl/strategies/le-schema-regional-de-developpement-du-tourisme-et-des-loisirs-2022-2028/>

A.7 Menorca (Spain) – Biosphere Reserve and Island Sustainable Tourism Model

General description

Menorca was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1993, recognising the exceptional value of its agricultural landscapes, dune systems, wetlands, cliffs and cultural heritage. The island is a living laboratory for Mediterranean sustainability. The entire island forms part of the Reserve, with the Insular Council as the main governance body, and a set of instruments that combine territorial planning, natural resource management, socio-environmental monitoring, and a tourism model aligned with biosphere values.

Context and challenges

Menorca's economy combines tourism, agriculture, light industry and services. However, seasonal tourism pressure, water and energy consumption, waste generation and pressure on untouched beaches have posed recurrent threats to ecosystem conservation. Studies have shown high resource consumption in tourism areas, particularly in low-density developments, underscoring the need to adjust the model and strengthen carrying capacity management.

Practice development

Management of the Biosphere Reserve is articulated through several complementary instruments. The *Pla Territorial Insular* (PTI) and associated regulations have helped limit urban sprawl, preserve rural landscapes and regulate land use under a sustainability approach. In parallel, the Observatori Socioambiental de Menorca (OBSAM) monitors environmental and socio-economic indicators, providing a scientific basis for the island's planning. The "Menorca Reserva de Biosfera" umbrella brand is used for products, services, and businesses that meet sustainability criteria, strengthening links between the local economy, identity, and conservation.

Results and evidence

After three decades as a Biosphere Reserve, Menorca has preserved a high degree of coastal, agricultural and biodiversity integrity while developing a tourism industry that, although large in



annual volumes, is increasingly managed in line with sustainability principles. The Reserve brand has become a value-added seal for local products and services, and targeted funding lines have encouraged tourism businesses to invest in efficiency, renewable energies and responsible management. Menorca is frequently cited as an international example of a Mediterranean island seeking to balance tourism, conservation and residents' well-being.

Relevance and transferability for MED destinations

Menorca demonstrates the long-term value of embedding sustainability into territorial planning, governance, monitoring and tourism development. Its integrated model is highly relevant for Mediterranean islands facing resource constraints, ecological pressures and strong seasonal tourism patterns.

Web: <https://www.menorcabiosfera.org/portal.aspx?!DIOMA=2&utm>

B) Thematic Good Practices

B.1 Ljubljana (Slovenia) – Green Governance and Tourism Mobility

General description

Ljubljana has established itself as one of Europe's leading capitals in urban sustainability, integrating active mobility, intelligent public-space planning and tourism management into a single strategic vision. The transformation of its historic centre into a large pedestrian area, together with clean-transport policies and coordinated governance between the municipality and the DMO, has turned the city into an international reference for reconciling tourism, liveability and heritage protection.

Context and challenges

In the early 2000s, the city faced congestion, air pollution and saturation in its historic centre, exacerbated by growing tourist numbers. Residents were calling for a healthier urban model, and the municipality needed to balance tourism growth with quality of life. In addition, the city lacked a unifying narrative that brought together tourism, sustainability and urban culture.

Practice development

Ljubljana has undertaken a profound urban transformation based on four pillars: gradual closure of the city centre to private traffic, strengthening public transport and cycling corridors, creating high-quality public spaces, and building an integrated governance model that ensures continuous cooperation between the DMO, the city council, business associations and citizens. Sustainability has been embedded in tourism promotion under the "Green Ljubljana" brand, linked to the



national “Slovenia Green” label.

Results and evidence

The city has significantly reduced motorised traffic in the centre, improved air quality and increased resident and visitor satisfaction. Ljubljana has received European recognition, including the title of “Green Capital,” as well as numerous awards for sustainable management. Tourism has been more evenly distributed, active mobility is now a core part of the city’s identity, and its international image has been strengthened.

Transferability to MED destinations

Ljubljana is an exemplary case of a Mediterranean city with a vulnerable historic centre. The key lies in integrating mobility, tourism, and urban planning, including interdepartmental governance, the strategic use of public space, and destination narratives linked to sustainability. Its experience shows that urban improvement can become a driver of responsible tourism positioning.

Web: <https://www.visitljubljana.com/en/visitors/travel-information/green-guidance/>

B.2 Kotor (Montenegro) – Port-City Management and GSTC Assessment

General description

Kotor has moved towards a more sustainable tourism model through a comprehensive assessment based on the GSTC Criteria and by establishing agreements with the cruise industry to manage tourism pressure in its historic centre. The combination of global tools and local governance has enabled the city to initiate structured change in a highly sensitive environment.

Context and challenges

Kotor Bay, a World Heritage site, receives large numbers of cruise ships, with thousands of visitors disembarking in a physically limited area. This led to overcrowding, heritage deterioration, social tensions, and environmental risks. The city needed a robust methodology to understand its carrying capacity and a governance framework to negotiate with cruise lines and tour operators.

Practice development

Kotor undertook a GSTC assessment, which identified gaps in governance, planning, mobility and heritage protection. At the same time, a structured dialogue was established with CLIA, port authorities, tourist guides and operators to define measures such as redistributing calls, limiting the number of ships in port simultaneously, adjusting guided routes, and implementing visitor-awareness actions. The GSTC assessment has become a roadmap for tourism management in the coming years.



Results and evidence

Kotor now has a precise diagnosis and a shared strategy to improve tourism management. Some congestion peaks—especially on days with high cruise concentrations—have been reduced, and cooperation among the port, the municipality, and the private sector has increased. The city presents its transition as an exemplary response to pressure from cruise tourism.

Transferability to MED destinations

Kotor is highly relevant for Mediterranean destinations with cruise ports. It offers a model for using international standards (GSTC) as a basis for negotiating with global actors and structuring port-city governance.

Web: https://europe.cruising.org/knowledge_hub/gstc-successful-destination-assessment-for-the-city-of-kotor/

B.3 Dubrovnik (Croatia) – “Respect the City” Programme

General description

“Respect the City” is a pioneering initiative to manage overtourism developed by the city of Dubrovnik to reduce saturation in the historic centre and improve coexistence between residents and visitors. The programme combines regulation, flow management, agreements with cruise lines, communication and citizen participation.

Context and challenges

Following its global recognition as a World Heritage site, Dubrovnik experienced an exponential increase in visitor numbers, triggering tensions with residents, degradation of the visitor experience and reputational risks for the destination.

How it works

The programme is structured as an action plan with coordinated measures. In terms of flow management, it introduces operational limits on the number of cruise ships in port at the same time and on the maximum number of daily visitors in the historic centre, backed by digital monitoring systems and capacity-control data. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) to coordinate calls, stagger arrivals, and reduce saturation peaks.

In parallel, communication campaigns under the “Respect the City” umbrella raise visitor awareness about respect for residents, heritage and the environment. The programme has also been used as the basis for Dubrovnik’s Integrated Action Plan in the context of European projects



on sustainable tourist cities.

Results and evidence

The initiative has reduced the number of days and time slots with extreme saturation, particularly linked to cruise arrivals. Coordination between the city council, the port authority and the cruise industry has been strengthened, and Dubrovnik has shifted from being a paradigm of unmanaged tourism to an international reference in flow management. The programme has been recognised in professional networks and sector awards as a pioneering model for sustainable management in heritage cities.

Transferability to MED destinations

For Mediterranean destinations with fragile historic centres and cruise tourism, Dubrovnik shows how public authorities can lead a transition grounded in data, regulation, and communication.

Web: https://tzdubrovnik.hr/lang/en/get/kultura_i_povijest/75284/respect_the_city.html

B.4 Cinque Terre (Italy) – Quotas and Reservations on Hiking Trails

General description

Cinque Terre National Park, one of Europe's most emblematic landscape destinations, has developed an advanced flow-management model for its coastal trails, particularly the *Via dell'Amore* and other sections of the "Sentiero Azzurro". The system combines in advance reservations, time slots, access control, one-way circulation and an integrated service package via the *Cinque Terre Card*. It is one of Europe's best-known examples of practical application of the carrying-capacity concept in fragile natural areas under high tourism pressure.

Context and challenges

The boom in international tourism, amplified by social media imagery, led to a sharp and sustained increase in visitor numbers. This caused safety issues (especially on exposed sections), accelerated erosion, congestion at critical points, accident risks and tension between landscape protection and free access. The territory's fragility, the heritage value of terraced landscapes and the need to maintain liveability for residents made a structured intervention imperative.

Practice development

The park authority designed a comprehensive public-use management system with three complementary components. The first focuses on access control and reservations, via an online system that sets daily quotas and time slots for the most fragile trails, especially the *Via dell'Amore*. This is managed through the *Cinque Terre Card*, which also helps finance maintenance, supervision



and associated infrastructure.

The second component addresses flow and safety management. To avoid crossings in narrow sections and reduce risk, one-way circulation was introduced on specified stretches, while railings, evacuation points and signage were reinforced. During peak periods, on-site staff help guide visitors and facilitate movement.

Finally, an adaptive management and communication approach was adopted, with preventive closures in the event of heavy rain, geohazard risks, or saturation, and up-to-date information on physical and digital panels indicating trail status, occupancy levels, and recommended alternatives. This is complemented by awareness-raising actions that highlight the value of the terraced agricultural landscape and explain the risks and impacts of inappropriate behaviour.

Results and evidence

The system has helped redistribute peak flows, reduce extreme saturation and decrease erosion in sensitive segments. Informed visitors report higher satisfaction due to a safer and less crowded environment. Revenue from the *Cinque Terre Card* has secured stable resources for trail restoration, terraced landscape maintenance, and monitoring. The experience is now cited internationally as an exemplary case for managing heavily frequented coastal trails.

Transferability to MED destinations

Cinque Terre offers a direct reference for Mediterranean destinations with coves, cliffs, dunes or coastal routes facing intense seasonal pressure. Its value lies in demonstrating that carrying-capacity management requires an integrated approach: digital tools, on-the-ground presence, dynamic closure mechanisms, earmarked funding and a clear governance framework.

Web: <https://www.parconazionale5terre.it/Eindex.php>

B.5 Port-Cros National Park (France) – Bountîles Observatory

General description

Port-Cros National Park, one of France's oldest and a Mediterranean benchmark in marine conservation, has developed the Bountîles Observatory: an advanced monitoring and analytical system for recreational uses in terrestrial and marine areas. This instrument enables real-time measurement of tourism intensity and translates data into adaptive regulation decisions. It is one of Europe's strongest examples of science-based carrying-capacity management in marine protected areas.



Context and challenges

The area faces growing pressure from tourism-related activities: anchoring in Posidonia meadows, boat traffic, snorkelling, diving, paddleboarding, and visits to small beaches and fragile coastal paths. The park found that a lack of precise data prevented fair and effective regulation without unduly penalising users or businesses. A transparent system was also needed to legitimise restrictions in the eyes of residents, operators and visitors.

Practice development

The Bountiles Observatory integrates multiple information sources: boat counts from vantage points, sensors, patrol records, anchoring data, diving-operator reports and terrestrial flow records. On this basis, the park applies an adaptive management approach, adjusting rules based on ecological status, weather conditions, habitat vulnerability, and use intensity. Measures include bans on anchoring in Posidonia areas, ecological mooring fields, daily diving limits at specific sites, rerouting of trails on days of saturation, preventive closure of sensitive zones and real-time communication of alerts.

Results and evidence

The observatory has significantly reduced pressure on Posidonia meadows, improved control over recreational diving and helped avoid extreme saturation episodes in small coves and beaches. Data-driven decision-making has increased acceptance of restrictions among tourism operators, who perceive them as legitimate and necessary. The park is now a European reference in science-based management, and its model has been partially or fully replicated in other French marine protected areas.

Transferability to MED destinations

For Mediterranean destinations with fragile natural sites—such as small islands, sensitive coves, high-intensity anchoring zones, or marine parks—this case demonstrates that sustainable management requires data, technical governance, and the capacity to adjust rules quickly. Bountiles is a direct reference for pilot destinations needing to regulate recreational uses without abandoning tourism, using a scientifically robust, gradual and socially acceptable model.

Web: <https://portcros-parcnational.fr/>

B.6 European Alpine Lakes – Access Control and Sustainable Mobility

General description

The case of the Alpine lakes is a paradigmatic example of managing natural destinations that have



become global icons through social media. In response to sudden increases in visitors, these territories have introduced mandatory reservation systems, limits on private-vehicle access, and exclusive public transport during peak seasons. The combination of controls, sustainable mobility and communication has helped restore environmental and experiential quality.

Context and challenges

Many Alpine lakes became “viral” through social networks. This generated traffic jams, overcrowded car parks, noise, visitor safety risks, erosion of sensitive shorelines and tensions with residents. The main problem was not the annual visitor volume, but extreme concentration in short time windows and the almost total dependence on private cars.

Practice development

Local authorities have implemented an integrated management model combining mandatory in-advance reservations—so that access is only possible with a digital ticket or a pre-booked parking permit with daily quotas—with restrictions on private traffic during the high season, replaced by shuttle buses or e-bikes. These measures are complemented by active flow and safety management, including one-way systems on walkways, improved signage, on-site staff presence and diversions in high-risk situations. A multichannel communication strategy provides real-time information on availability, sends discouraging messages on critical days and promotes alternative routes and sites to avoid saturation.

Results and evidence

Pressure on the environment has dropped significantly: reduced traffic, improved safety, less shoreline erosion and a better visitor experience. Residents report a positive perception of regained tranquillity. In the case of Lake Braies, the system has been the subject of international studies on managing saturated destinations.

Transferability to MED destinations

This case shows that regulating vehicular access is often the most effective measure to prevent congestion and improve conservation in sensitive areas. In-advance reservations spread demand and reduce saturation without completely prohibiting access, while shuttle systems are essential in linear or highly fragile spaces where private vehicles generate disproportionate impacts.

Web: <https://www.praghs.bz/en>



B.7 Costa Navarino (Greece) – Regenerative, High Value-Added Tourism

General description

Conceived as a territorial regeneration initiative in the region of Messinia, Costa Navarino combines rigorous environmental standards, landscape-integrated architectural design, ecological restoration programmes and local-value creation. It is an exceptional example of how high-end tourism can drive ecological and socio-economic regeneration rather than degradation.

Context and challenges

Messinia was a predominantly agricultural region with limited economic opportunities and a high risk of youth outmigration. There was concern that tourism development could lead to intensive “sun and beach” models and massive coastal urbanisation. Costa Navarino emerged as an alternative project, aiming to prove that employment, wealth and tourism appeal could be generated without sacrificing landscape, biodiversity or local culture.

Practice development

The project was developed as an integrated territorial intervention combining bioclimatic design, water and energy efficiency, renewable energies and local materials with active landscape restoration and the creation of a network of local producers and professionals, strengthening the destination’s gastronomic and cultural identity. Advanced water management, low-emission internal mobility and interpretative experiences linked to the territory complement a model grounded in local employment and training, monitored through periodic sustainability reports.

Results and evidence

Costa Navarino has created thousands of direct and indirect jobs, strengthened the local agricultural fabric and restored degraded coastal ecosystems. It has positioned itself as a sustainable luxury destination, attracting high-value visitors who generate greater benefits with lower quantitative pressure. The project is frequently cited in regenerative tourism forums.

Transferability to MED destinations

This case is particularly relevant for Mediterranean destinations seeking to move away from intensive tourism models. It demonstrates that environmental regeneration, local identity and efficiency can form the core of the tourism product. Destinations can draw lessons on public-private partnerships, water management, local supply chains and strategic repositioning.

Web: <https://www.costanavarino.com/sustainability-development/>



B.8 Alonissos and Northern Sporades (Greece) – Regulated Marine Ecotourism

General description

The National Marine Park of Alonissos and Northern Sporades is one of the most important protected areas in the eastern Mediterranean. Management combines strict zoning, regulation of tourism activities, and a responsible marine ecotourism model that integrates conservation, education, and local development.

Context and challenges

The region faced a complex combination of extremely sensitive biodiversity, communities economically dependent on tourism, growing recreational boating and a lack of regulation. Marine biodiversity was threatened by uncontrolled recreational activities and by the expansion of tourism.

Practice development

The park is organised through a marine zoning system defining no-access core areas, regulated-use zones for navigation and diving, and interpretation zones for guided nature activities. Tourism operators must comply with strict requirements (minimum distances, timetables, quotas, noise and speed limits) to obtain authorisation. Awareness-raising campaigns, training for local guides and joint surveillance by marine authorities, scientists and volunteers have been implemented. The park also promotes scientific research on the behaviour and habitats of the Mediterranean monk seal.

Results and evidence

Regulation has reduced disturbance in sensitive areas and created an internationally recognised marine ecotourism product. Alonissos is positioned as a safe destination for biodiversity and an attractive site for responsible tourism. Notably, the monk seal population in the area has shown signs of recovery.

Transferability to MED destinations

This case demonstrates how to reconcile strict conservation with regulated tourism in marine protected areas. It is particularly relevant for destinations with marine reserves, dive sites or sensitive fauna. Its combination of zoning, accredited operators, surveillance, and education offers a highly replicable model.

Web: <https://alonissos.gr/en/marine-park/overview.html>



B.9 Calvià (Spain) – Transformation of a Mature Destination

General description

Calvià, one of Mallorca's best-known tourism destinations, has undergone a profound transformation in recent years, moving away from a model based on excess and repositioning itself as a destination focused on quality, sustainability, coexistence and diversification. The strategy combines nightlife regulation, urban renaturalisation, investment in public facilities, strengthened sustainable mobility and a repositioning narrative as a sports, family and nature destination.

Context and challenges

For decades, Calvià faced issues associated with low-quality tourism: concentration of alcohol and nightlife, antisocial behaviour, degradation of public space and reputational damage. This affected coexistence, destination appeal and environmental sustainability. The municipality needed to transform itself without losing competitiveness in the international tourism market.

Practice development

The destination's reconversion has been structured around three complementary lines of action. The first focuses on regulating and managing nightlife through measures to curb excess tourism, reinforce control in sensitive areas, limit alcohol promotions and close particularly problematic venues.

The second line addresses renaturalisation and public-space recovery, expanding pedestrian areas, creating new parks, regenerating degraded urban fabric, refurbishing seafront promenades and improving beach access.

The third aims to diversify the tourism offer and move towards a sustainable model, promoting nature- and sport-based products such as cycle tourism, hiking or triathlon; building partnerships with accommodation providers to accelerate responsible practices; allocating eco-tax revenues to environmental projects; and developing a smart-destination strategy to improve management and competitiveness. The municipality also works with hotels and businesses to promote energy efficiency, waste management and noise and pollution reduction.

Results and evidence

The destination has reduced antisocial behaviour, improved its international perception, and attracted higher-value-added segments. Renaturalised public spaces offer better environmental quality, and diversification has helped extend the season. The municipality has received awards



and recognition for its smart-destination strategy and sustainable urbanism projects.

Transferability to MED destinations

Calvià is a model for mature Mediterranean destinations seeking to break with unsustainable models without undermining their tourism economy. Its approach shows that firm regulation combined with urban investment and strategic repositioning can drive profound transformation.

Web:

<https://dspace.uib.es/xmlui/handle/11201/152918>

<https://www.calvia.com/es/areas-municipales/medioambiente-y-bienestar-animal/indicadores-ambientales/calvia-destino-turistico-inteligente>



7. Final Conclusions

The analysis undertaken shows that the current landscape of tourism sustainability certifications is broad and diverse, yet reveals convergence trends that can be useful for Mediterranean destinations. Although each scheme differs in scope, level of ambition, audit mechanisms, or degree of digitalisation, most share a structure built around common pillars: governance, socio-economy, heritage, and environment. This heterogeneity, far from being an obstacle, offers a beneficial space for constructing a Mediterranean framework that serves as a bridge between established standards and the real capacities of the pilot destinations.

Throughout the study, the importance of ensuring that any certification process is closely linked to the day-to-day management of the destination has been underscored. A purely accreditative system loses much of its value if it does not directly contribute to understanding tourism flows, guiding operational planning or supporting continuous improvement processes.

In this respect, a clear opportunity emerges: linking certification processes with smart data management, leveraging the tools developed under HERIT-DATA and further expanded in TOURISMO. The compatibility between the selected indicators and monitoring platforms enables certification to move beyond being merely an accreditation label and to become a governance tool oriented towards continuous improvement.

Finally, the diversity of contexts and maturity levels among the pilot destinations underscores the need for a progressive, scalable framework. An overly rigid system would lie beyond the reach of many territories; one that is excessively flexible would lose its capacity to serve as a shared reference. The evidence gathered points towards an intermediate model, based on a concise set of essential criteria and indicators, complemented by stepwise pathways for advancement and supported by data, digital tools and participatory processes.

The study does not propose a definitive system; instead, it lays out a shared foundation for project partners to continue building on. This foundation is articulated around three main elements:

- An initial structure of standard indicators, which can evolve as the pilots progress and more information becomes available.
- A comparative reading of the certification ecosystem, identifying compatibilities, gaps and opportunities for alignment.



- A more nuanced understanding of the challenges facing Mediterranean destinations, particularly in relation to tourism flows, carrying capacity and multi-level governance.

Taken together, this deliverable fulfils the objective of preparing the ground for the subsequent phases of the TOURISMO project, and provides the analytical and conceptual groundwork for D2.3.2. The review of certification frameworks, criteria and emerging trends informs the definition of pilot-oriented and context-sensitive Action Plans, which will translate these principles into concrete and replicable actions tailored to TOURISMO pilot areas.

The conclusions presented here do not close a process; instead, they open a shared working space from which to continue developing a certification model that is useful, applicable, and coherent with the transition towards more sustainable and innovative tourism destinations in the Mediterranean region.



8. Annexes

Preparatory survey for deliverable 2.3.1 – Development of a Best Practice framework for certification of sustainable tourism destinations.

As part of the Activity 2.3 – Development of a Best Practice Framework for Certification of Sustainable Tourism Destinations, we are collecting key information from TOURISMO pilot destinations regarding their current involvement, interest, and readiness in sustainability certifications or related frameworks.

The purpose of this short survey is to:

- *Identify which certification schemes or standards are already in place or under consideration in each pilot destination.*
- *Understand the main motivations, challenges, and support needs for advancing sustainability certification.*
- *Inform the development of the upcoming Deliverables D2.3.1 (Best Practices Guide) and D2.3.2 (Action Plan for Pilot Implementation).*

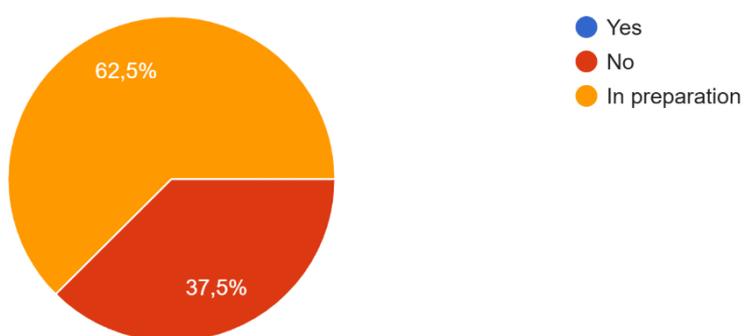
Your input will help ensure that the certification framework developed is relevant, practical, and aligned with the real context and ambitions of TOURISMO destinations.



Pilot's Preparatory survey results :

Section 1. Current Involvement

1) *Is your destination currently certified or working towards any sustainable tourism certification or label?*



Rhodes : In preparation

Florence : No

Valencia Port : No

Valencia City : In preparation

Limassol : In preparation

Varna : In preparation

Island of Biševo : In preparation

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : No



2) *If YES or IN PREPARATION, Please specify: Name of certification or label :*

Rhodes : The South Aegean Region in cooperation with TUI are working on the Rhodes Co-Lab, a major sustainability initiative/, not sure that is a certification though.

Valencia City : València City destination is interested in piloting a certification or recognition process. This objective is explicitly included in the Sustainable Tourism Plan 2022–2024 of the City of València as a key action to strengthen competitiveness, with a specific budget allocation of €155,000. The plan proposes developing a certification aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The process is still ongoing and not yet completed. It foresees either an accredited certification under the GSTC framework or an expert evaluation of València's tourism practices against the GSTC Destination Criteria. The strategy also aims to increase the number of sustainability certifications among local tourism organisations, providing technical assistance, and developing a specific training programme. In 2021, Visit València joined the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) as a Destination Member. While València is not yet certified as a sustainable tourism destination, it has achieved notable progress by becoming the first city in the world to measure and certify the carbon and water footprints of its tourism activity, verified by AENOR.

Limassol : EU MISSION LABEL

Varna : Varna Municipality participate in the pilot program D3HUB (Data-Driven Destinations Hub) that aims to create a European Competence Centre to drive the green and digital transition of tourism destinations.

Island of Biševo : Green Destinations



3) *Year started/expected :*

Rhodes : 2023/2030

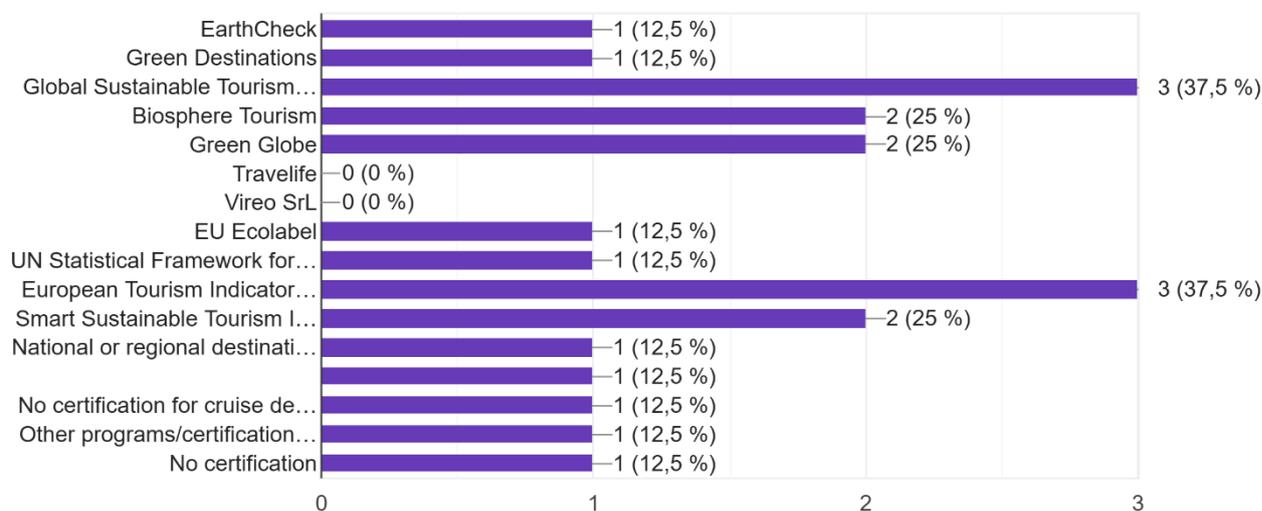
Limassol : 2023

Varna : The D3HUB project (Tourism of Tomorrow Data-Driven Destinations Hub) aims to establish and sustain a self-sustainable European Competence Centre, facilitating the data-driven green and digital transition of tourism destinations and their ecosystem, with a focus on SMEs. Co-financed by EISMEA, the project spans from November 2023 to November 2026. By implementing a knowledge hub, D3HUB will empower destination ecosystem actors to adopt a data-driven culture, promoting tourism sustainability and resilience through enhanced data management and business intelligence. It also seeks to enable data-driven marketing and management while fostering knowledge transfer and best practices in data management and sharing through European collaboration.

Island of Biševo : 2024/2026



**4) Which of the following certifications or frameworks are relevant for your destination?
(select all that apply):**

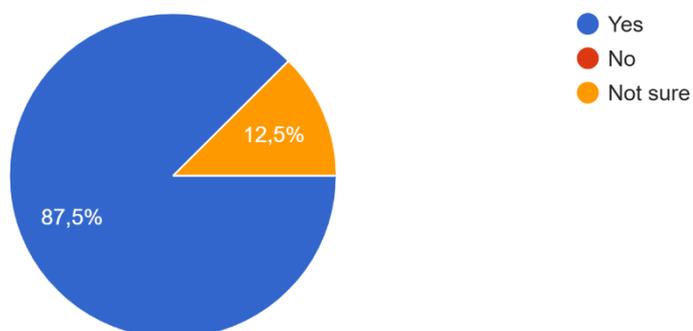


Others :

Rhodes : Other programs/certifications implemented on other islands in the Region but not in Rhodes, such as Zero Waste Cities on the island of Tilos or the “GR-eco Islands” initiative on the island of Halki. Also, please note that Greece is actively developing indicator systems for sustainable tourism management so ETIS should be relevant to Rhodes’ monitoring as well.



5) *Is your destination covered by any other environmental or quality schemes relevant to tourism management? (e.g., Natura 2000, Green Key, Ecostars, Blue Flag, ISO 14001/9001)*



Rhodes : Yes

Florence : Yes

Valencia Port : Not sure

Valencia City : Yes

Limassol : Yes

Varna : Yes

Island of Biševo : Yes

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : Yes



6) If YES, please specify:

Rhodes : Natura 2000: Rhodes is included in the network of protected areas of Greece. NECCA +3 geogreece.gr +3 City of Rhodes +3 Blue Flag beaches: There are Blue Flag-certified beaches on Rhodes. For example: Ixia, Kiotari, Lardos are mentioned as Blue Flag beaches in Rhodes. H Hotels Collection +1 Green Key (for tourism accommodation): Several hotels on Rhodes hold Green Key certification (for example, Electra Palace Rhodes certificate until Feb 2026). Electra Hotels & Resorts +2 rodospalladium.gr +2 Accommodation eco-labels: Some hotels mention they hold multiple certifications (e.g., a hotel listing both Travelife Gold and Green Key) on Rhodes.

Florence : Green Key and Ecostars in some hotels.

Valencia City : València participates in the following programmes and has completed the corresponding assessments: SICTED, Red DTI-CV, Red DTI (SEGITTUR), Analysis of SDG implementation measures (Turisme CV), and the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) based on the MITOMED+ Project (Interreg MED Programme). The city has also carried out the calculation of the carbon footprint of its tourism activity, becoming the first destination in the world to be certified by AENOR, as well as the calculation of the water footprint of its tourism activity, also verified by AENOR. Additionally, the city includes sites and resources with top-level recognitions and protection designations, as indicated in other sections: UNESCO World Heritage Sites (La Lonja), the Natura 2000 Network, and FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS).

Limassol : NATURA 2000, BLUE FLAG

Varna : Yes — the Varna tourism region is covered by some environmental & quality schemes relevant to tourism (e.g., Blue Flag beaches, Natura 2000 nature protection, Green Key for some accommodations) though not a full destination-level certification for the municipality as a tourism destination under e.g. a “sustainable tourism destination” scheme.

Island of Biševo : Natura 2000

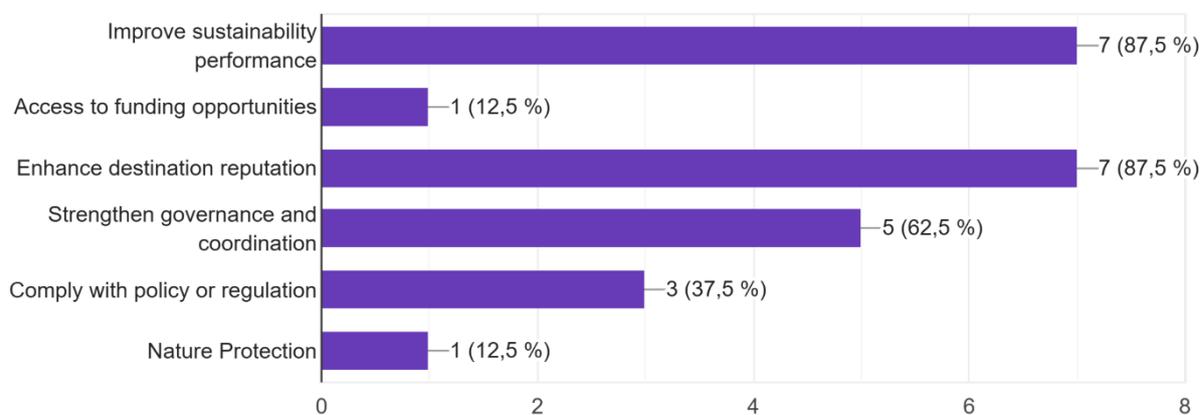
Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : In 2025, Ghajn Tuffieha (Golden Bay) received yet again “Blue Flag Certification” for meeting over 30 strict criteria related to environmental, educational, safety, and accessibility standards. The Blue Flag Certificate is a prestigious eco-label confirming their world-class standards in beach management, environmental education, safety, water quality and related services. Beach operations have to abide by the 32 standard criteria of the Blue Flag Programme, that is administered by the Federation for Environmental Education (FEE) Denmark represented in Malta by Nature Trust. Beach management falls under the responsibility of the MTA. Golden Bay is also located within a Natura 2000 site due



to its ecological importance for both marine and terrestrial habitats and species. The land surrounding the bay is part of the Il-Majjistral Natural Park, a component of the EU's Natura 2000 network, and the sea area is designated as both a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protected Area (SPA). These designations protect habitats like sandy dunes and marine features, as well as species such as loggerhead turtles and seabirds. The designation means the area is subject to management plans to balance conservation with public use. For example, recent regulations have implemented a smoking ban, that will take effect from 1 January 2026, on Golden Bay and another nearby beach to protect the environment.



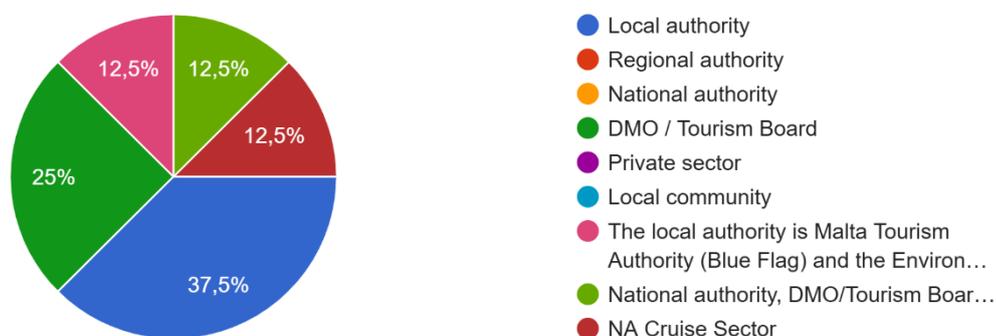
**7) What motivated your destination to engage (or consider engaging) in certification?
(select all that apply)**





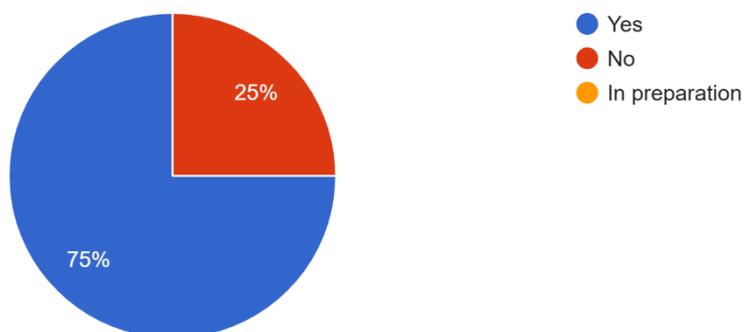
Section 2. Governance & Readiness

8) Who is leading or coordinating sustainability certification efforts at the tourism destination level?





9) *Does your destination have an active sustainable tourism policy or action plan?*



Rhodes : Yes

Florence : Yes

Valencia Port : No

Valencia City : Yes

Limassol : Yes

Varna : Yes

Island of Biševo : Yes

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : No



10) If YES or IN PREPARATION, could you share it with us?

Rhodes : The Action Plan for Rhodes as a destination was drafted in 2023 by the Institute of Greek Tourism Confederation (IN-SETE) in the framework of the National Tourism Strategy 2030 and can be found here (in Greek): <https://insete.gr/wp-content/uploads/pdf/proorismoiproorismos-rodos.pdf>

Florence : 10 actions for sustainable tourism were developed to reduce the impact of overtourism and improve the quality of life of residents: <https://www.comune.firenze.it/novita/comunicati/turismo-sostenibile-citta-vivibile-la-giunta-approva-un-piano-10-punti> The FeelFlorence project (2023-2026) uses digital technology to pivot Florence towards a model of sustainable tourism. Its primary goal is to rationalize, distribute, and decentralize tourist flows: by monitoring people's location (using a BigData platform), the app can provide real-time information to tourists, warning them about overcrowded destinations and suggesting alternative, less-congested cultural and local experiences in surrounding neighborhoods and the metropolitan area: <https://www.comune.firenze.it/turismo/feel-florence-dalla-transizione-digitale-alla-sostenibilita-una-nuova-destinazione> The Metropolitan Strategic Plan focuses on flow management, diversifying tourism offer, and territorial integration to alleviate pressure on the historic center of Florence. It aims at expanding the geographical scope of the "Florence" tourist destination to enhance the diffuse cultural heritage throughout the entire metropolitan area (Chianti, Mugello, Empolese Valdelsa, Montalbano). It also aims to raise the average quality of tourism, attract visitors with a higher spending profile and increase the average length of stay, while simultaneously promoting the de-seasonalization of flows. Thirdly, it prioritises accessibility by favoring sustainable transport modes to reduce environmental impact and urban congestion. <http://pianostrategico.cittametropolitana.fi.it/> The Destination Florence Foundation is the official Destination Management and Promotion Organization for the City and Metropolitan Area of Florence. The Foundation's main goal is to promote a sustainable and high-quality tourism model for Florence. It focuses on high-profile segments like MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events), Destination Weddings, and individual travelers with high spending profiles. It implements coordinated policies to improve hospitality culture, de-seasonalize tourist flows, and de-localize visitors away from the hyper-congested historic center to the broader metropolitan area. It aims to become a reference technological hub for the territory in tourism matters, particularly for data collection and analysis. <https://fondazione.destinationflorence.it/en/the-activities/>

Valencia City : Yes, Tourism Sustainability Plan 2022–2024 (Plan de Sostenibilidad Turística en Destino 2022–2024). Aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the actions of the Plan aim to promote a balanced, responsible, and innovative tourism model.



The full PDF of the plan is available in the project's shared drive folder and at:

[https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-](https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/webform/2022_progress_update_from_signal/107248/progress_update_.pdf?VersionId=ynEs5x8s1BdaJKRGgCBvgi8m8piZSnYy)

[1.amazonaws.com/webform/2022_progress_update_from_signal/107248/progress_update_.pdf?VersionId=ynEs5x8s1BdaJKRGgCBvgi8m8piZSnYy](https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/webform/2022_progress_update_from_signal/107248/progress_update_.pdf?VersionId=ynEs5x8s1BdaJKRGgCBvgi8m8piZSnYy)

Limassol : SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY TOURIST ACTION PLAN

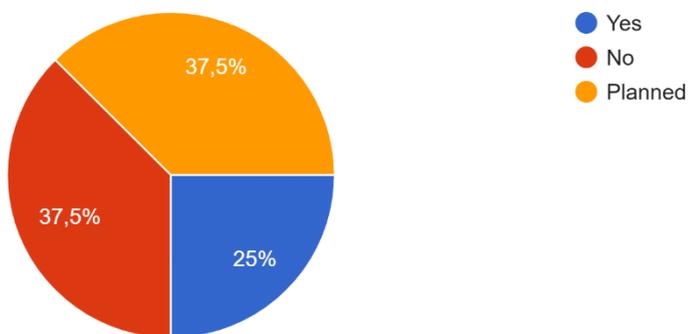
Varna : Varna Municipality does have active sustainable tourism / sustainability policies and action plans. Here are some of the relevant ones, with key highlights: • Green City Action Plan (GCAP) - Varna joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Green Cities programme in June 2019. The Varna Municipality adopted its “Plan for Action for a Green City” (GCAP) in August 2022. The GCAP sets out the municipality's vision: “Green, clean city that promotes healthy and sustainable living through intelligent and resilient solutions”.

Island of Biševo : National Island Development Plan RH; Territorial Development Strategy for the Islands of Split Dalmatia County

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : Malta's sustainable tourism policy applies to the pilot site, and is outlined in its Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 (<https://tourism.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/National-Tourism-Strategy-2021-2030.pdf>), which focuses on balancing economic growth with environmental and social sustainability. Key initiatives include improving connectivity to reduce seasonality, encouraging eco-certification for accommodations, developing data-driven governance through indicators like the Tourism Satellite Account, and diversifying the tourism product to protect cultural and natural heritage. The Tourism Sustainability Indicators (TSI) and Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) were created, in collaboration with the OECD, to enhance sustainable tourism planning. The indicators were inspired by best-practice indicators adopted internationally and tailor-made for Malta. The TSA is an internationally adopted framework used to measure tourism's economic impact within a country. The practice achieves its objectives through: • The calculations derived from the TSA Tables to provide a detailed picture of the economic significance and sectoral inter-relationships of tourism. • Creating a set of TSIs to monitor key sustainability metrics such as energy use, water consumption, waste generation, and community well-being. • Collaboration with the OECD under the EU's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) to align Malta's indicators with global best practices. The main stakeholders are the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism (MFT), the National Statistics Office (NSO), the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), the European Commission (DG Reform), and the OECD. Beneficiaries include policymakers, tourism businesses, local communities, and researchers. (https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/01/strengthening-the-evidence-base-for-a-sustainable-tourism-future-in-malta_11bec53c/aa270ff4-en.pdf)



11) Does your destination have a monitoring system or dashboard for sustainability indicators?



Rhodes : No

Florence : Yes

Valencia Port : No

Valencia City : Planned

Limassol : Planned

Varna : Yes

Island of Biševo : Planned

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : No



12) If YES or PLANNED, please specify the main indicators or digital tools used (e.g., ETIS dashboard, local observatory, smart tourism platform, etc.)

Florence : The Smart City Control Room in Florence functions as a monitoring system and dashboard for sustainability indicators by collecting, analyzing, and visualizing vast amounts of real-time urban data. It leverages an integrated technological ecosystem to manage and optimize resources, reduce environmental impact, and support policies aimed at long-term sustainability. It uses specialized dashboards and platforms to provide a unified, actionable view of the city's sustainability performance. This monitoring focuses on several key areas: Environmental Aspects like Pollution, Noise Pollution, Waste Management, Smart Irrigation; Energy and Consumption; Mobility and Transport. The Smart City Control Room in Florence provides Data Collection, Big Data Analytics, Dashboard Visualization, Decision Support. By connecting these diverse data sources and visualizing the results, the Smart City Control Room transforms raw data into actionable intelligence, ensuring that the city's operational decisions are constantly informed by and directed toward its environmental and efficiency goals. The Smart Region Toscana platform serves as a powerful monitoring system and dashboard for sustainability indicators by acting as a centralized, multi-entity data and analytics platform for the entire Tuscan region. Smart Region Toscana aims to create a unified digital infrastructure across the regional territory, encompassing both urban and smaller municipalities. It aggregates diverse data sources to support informed decision-making across the region, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and quality of life. While the platform provides the raw data infrastructure, its primary output for sustainability is the ability to create personalized and thematic dashboards for different regional bodies. The platform focuses on monitoring sustainability across several domains including Environmental Monitoring and Smart Mobility and Services. The University of Florence and Snap4 have developed the Snap4City platform, which allows the monitoring of tourist flows in the city center 24/7. The platform is set to provide predicted tourist behaviour to policy-makers and the general public to support future policy decisions, also thanks to the TOURISMO project. <https://www.snap4city.org/dashboardSmartCity/view/newTheme.php?iddashboard=NDM2Ng> == The Regional Tourism Observatory of Tuscany collects and analyzes tourism data to support regional policies and provide a comprehensive view of the sector. Its purpose is to monitor tourism trends (demand and supply), provide real-time data and information to municipalities and promotional agencies, and support the development of sustainable and competitive tourism. ot.toscanapromozione.it/about/

Valencia City : València is progressively implementing its Smart Tourism Destination (DTI) model, and Visit València has joined the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) as a Destination Member in 2021. Visit València has designed the foundation of its sustainability



strategy through a dashboard with 151 indicators, integrating those of the European Commission, the UNE standard, the Regional Government of Valencia (Generalitat Valenciana), the GSTC Criteria, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The city received in 2022 the highest recognition granted by the European Union to tourism destinations: the title of European Capital of Smart Tourism.

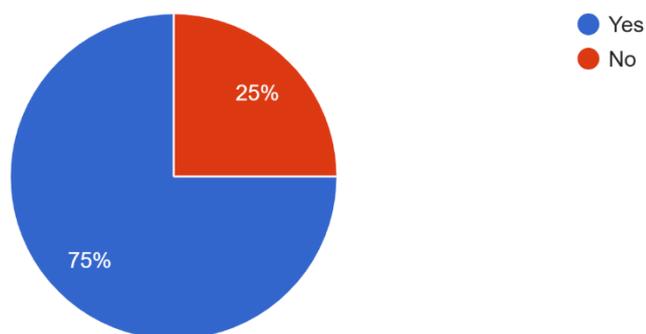
Limassol : WebGIS Dashboard analytics

Varna : Yes — Varna has monitoring infrastructure and plans for dashboards covering municipal environment/sustainability indicators. But the monitoring systems tend to focus on urban/municipal environmental indicators (air quality, water, waste etc) rather than a full tourism-destination monitoring dashboard that tracks specifically tourism flows, tourist impact, accommodation occupancy, visitor behaviour, seasons, etc.

Island of Biševo : Green Destinations Criteria and Indicators, QR Code



13) Does your destination collaborate with any external organisations or networks on sustainability? (e.g. NECSTouR, ETC, UNWTO, national tourism boards, NGOs)



Rhodes : No

Florence : Yes

Valencia Port : No

Valencia City : Yes

Limassol : Yes

Varna : Yes

Island of Biševo : Yes

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : Yes



14) If YES, please specify:

Florence : NECSTour; UNESCO (with the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a monitoring framework to assess the contribution of the city's heritage-related strategies toward sustainable development); the Great Italian Destinations for Sustainable Tourism (GDITS Network) (to encourage sustainable use of the city); partnership with GetYourGuide to promote more conscious and respectful tourism + sharing aggregated data on tourist flows to help the city manage visitor trends; Destination Florence Convention & Visitors Bureau (DFCVB) (This foundation, founded by the Municipality, acts as a bridge between public governance and private operators to ensure that commercial efforts align with the city's sustainability goals); the University of Florence (on joint research projects to strengthen site governance and analyze complex visitor dynamics); EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities (which includes Florence and aims to Deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 and Ensure that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050); Eurocities.

Valencia City : The City Council of València actively collaborates with the main regional organisations, including:

- Consell Valencià de Turisme of the Valencian Community.
- Tourism Commission of the Valencian Federation of Municipalities and Provinces.
- Network of Smart Tourism Destinations of the Valencian Community (Red DTI-CV).

It is also part of several national tourism entities coordinated by Spain's State Secretariat for Tourism, such as:

- Spain Convention Bureau.
- Red de Ciudades AVE (Spanish High-Speed Train Cities Network).
- National Network of Smart Tourism Destinations (SEGITTUR).

At the international level, València carries out extensive information exchange, knowledge-sharing, and cooperation activities with entities such as:

- Affiliate Members of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), where it actively participates in initiatives like the Silk Road Programme.
- European Cities Marketing (ECM).
- European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT).



Through the Visit València Foundation, the city also takes part (either as a member or frequent guest) in initiatives of organisations such as Exceltur, the Tourism Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Committee of the Valencian Business Association, and INVAT·tur (as a leading member of its Tourism Sustainability Working Group).

Additionally, it maintains tourism cooperation agreements with its sister cities in different countries, and participates in European projects such as Interreg programmes and other similar initiatives.

Limassol : CYPRUS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INITIATIVE, LIMASSOL TOURISM BOARD, MEDCITIES NETWORK OF MEDITERRANEAN

Varna : Yes, Varna actively collaborates with several national and international organizations to promote sustainable tourism. These partnerships enhance the city's efforts in environmental stewardship, responsible tourism practices, and sustainable development. Here's an overview of Varna's key collaborations: I. International and Regional Collaborations 1. Interreg Euro-MED Programme Varna is involved in the Sustainable Tourism Mission of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme, which focuses on fostering circular tourism, considering the sustainability of ecosystem services using innovative technologies, and promoting the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage. 2. CIVITAS PROSPERITY Project Varna participates in the CIVITAS PROSPERITY project, which aims to turn Varna into a sustainable mobility and tourism city. This project focuses on sustainable neighbourhood planning and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) to improve urban mobility and tourism sustainability. 3. Black Sea Basin Cooperation Varna University of Management is at the forefront of initiatives supporting the sustainable development of tourism in the Black Sea Basin region. These initiatives aim to address challenges such as overdevelopment, pollution, and seasonality in Black Sea tourism. II. National Collaborations 1. Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism Varna collaborates with the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, which shares the vision of promoting competitive and sustainable tourism policies as a driver of economic growth and environmental sustainability. 2. Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Bulgaria In April 2024, Bulgaria's Ministry of Environment and Water and Ministry of Tourism, alongside leaders from various organizations, officially signed the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Bulgaria. This charter promotes eco-friendly, inclusive travel through shared principles and SDG-aligned policies. III. Recognition and Awards In 2021, Varna received two prestigious awards: the Award for Tourist Destination of the Year from the National Information Agency and the Magazine "Destinations - Ultimate Guide for Your Holiday," and an Award from the Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Association for its contribution to the development of sustainable tourism.



These collaborations and recognitions underscore Varna's commitment to sustainable tourism and its proactive approach in working with various stakeholders to achieve this goal.

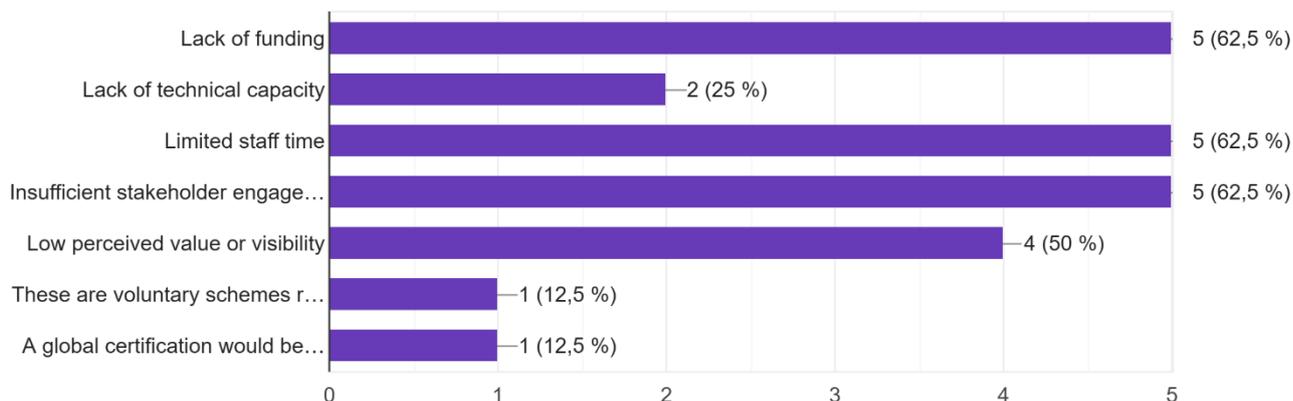
Island of Biševo : UNESCO Global Geopark Network, Tourist Board of the Republic of Croatia

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : The Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park is a member of the EUROPARC Federation (<https://www.europarc.org/>), which is an international organisation that supports and promotes protected natural areas across Europe.



Section 3. Barriers and needs

15) What are the main barriers to adopting or maintaining a certification? (Select all that apply)

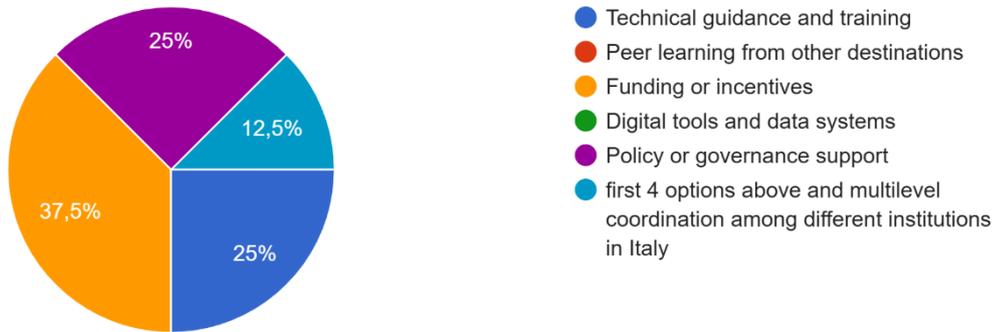


Others :

Florence : A global certification would be needed. Representatives of local authorities pointed out that certifications force authorities at local level to monitor data and processes; this entails efforts which are not always possible and high costs. Sustainability criteria are both tangible and intangible, with the latter being more difficult to assess and monitor.



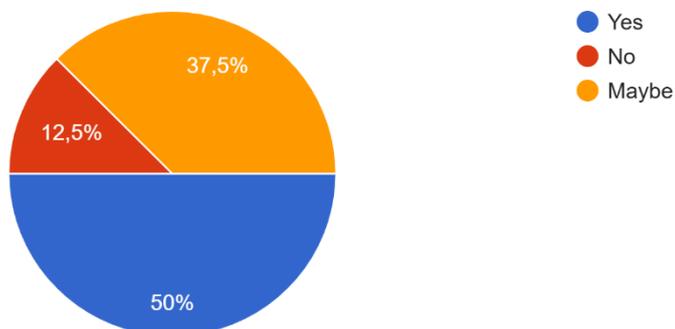
16) What type of support would help you most in the process of adopting a certification?





Section 4. Final contributions

17) Would your destination be interested in piloting a certification or recognition process?



Rhodes : Maybe

Florence : Yes

Valencia Port : Maybe

Valencia City : Yes

Limassol : Yes

Varna : Maybe

Island of Biševo : Yes

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : No



18) Please share any additional information or examples you consider relevant for this survey.

Rhodes : The South Aegean Region is the first in Greece to create a separate Carrying Capacity Monitoring Directorate and Climate Neutrality Offices, establishing permanent mechanisms to ensure sustainable development.

Florence : Representatives of local authorities reported that a given certification should be relevant to the specificities of one type of destination. They also mentioned the link between sustainability goals and actual ethical work/assessments in destinations, as well as the importance/preservation which should be given to the cultural identity of places in tourism-oriented policies; in this regard, the City of Florence has been keeping in touch with local stakeholders on sustainable tourism thanks to a dedicated committee which engages with the ecosystem on a regular basis.

Valencia City : Sustainable tourism initiatives in València are mainly promoted by the City Council of València, through the Visit València Foundation and the Tourism Department. Among local sustainability initiatives, the city promotes the use of filtered water fountains (over 50 PUSDAR points) to encourage the use of reusable bottles and reduce plastic consumption. In terms of mobility, València promotes sustainable urban transport and bike-friendly tourism. The public bike-sharing service Valenbisi offers 2,750 bicycles across 275 stations, facilitating low-emission travel around the city. With nearly 200 km of cycle lanes, flat terrain, and a 30 km/h limit for motor vehicles in the historic centre (the TOURISMO pilot area), València is recognised as one of Spain's most bicycle-friendly cities. The València 2030 Strategic Framework, also known as Missions València 2030, aims to make València a European benchmark in sustainability, innovation, and social wellbeing. Its primary goal is to achieve climate neutrality and foster an inclusive cultural and leisure environment accessible to all. This is particularly relevant to the TOURISMO pilot, which supports the city's objective of managing visitor flows sustainably while preserving cultural heritage and museums. The Strategic Tourism Plan 2025–2028, presented in mid-2025, includes 14 sustainability actions, such as developing an accessible tourism plan, launching awareness programmes for tourists and residents, and strengthening the city's positioning through internationally recognised certifications, standards, and sustainability indices. Under its innovation actions, the plan also foresees the creation of a Tourism Sustainability Observatory. València has received multiple awards for its environmental achievements, including the title of European Green Capital 2024, granted by the European Commission, becoming the first Mediterranean city to obtain this distinction. The city also has a clear interest in participating in international benchmarking initiatives such as the Global



Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index), which evaluates and recognises destinations committed to sustainability in tourism, events, and business travel.

Limassol : Limassol received the EU Mission Label (2024) for its Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities plan and promotes sustainable mobility through the CIVITAS DESTINATIONS and Sustainable Mobility Tourist Action Plan.

Varna : On September 26 and 27, 2025, the ninth edition of Tourism Expo Destination Varna – the leading autumn event for the tourism industry in Bulgaria – was held in the renovated conference center of the Black Sea Hotel in Varna. The forum has established itself in recent years as a significant platform for a meeting between representatives of business, institutions and the media with an emphasis on innovation, sustainable development and the creation of new partnerships in tourism. From 24 to 25 October 2024 in Aquahouse Hotel & SPA, Varna will again be a host of the TOURISM EXPO "Destination Varna". This leading event in the tourism sector, will present a variety of destinations, cultural and natural landmarks in Bulgaria and Europe. The event will bring together all representatives of the tourism business – investors, professionals, employees, managers and partners, creating a platform for the exchange of ideas and innovations in the industry. On 30.10.2025 Varna (Varna University of Management) will host the event COLABORATORY "SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN BLACK SEA TOURISM" (Project BSB00332: INTERSMARTS: Interdisciplinary Solutions for Smart Sustainable Tourism and Blue Growth Services in the Black Sea Basin) with VEDA presentation of TOURISMO: Innovative and sustainable management of tourist flows in coastal areas. On 18.11.2025 Varna will host the "Sustainable Tourism Mission - 3rd Joint Annual Forum, organized by DIALOGUE4TOURISM & COMMUNITY4TOURISM Interreg Euro-MED projects, Enhancing Sustainable Tourism Mission. VEDA will take part in the panel presentations with focus on TOURISMO project.

Island of Biševo : Memorandum of Understanding entitled "Development of responsible, sustainable, regenerative and transformative tourism in the Split-Dalmatia County using sustainable tourism labels/certificates" represents an expression of the interest of the signatories to actively contribute to the encouragement, promotion and the development of responsible, sustainable, regenerative and transformative tourism in the area of Split-Dalmatia County, through adaptation for obtaining and maintaining internationally recognized certificates/marks of tourism sustainability of the destination itself, as well as of individual stakeholders in the tourism sector.

Golden Bay (Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa) : The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) is endorsing The Global Sustainable Tourism Council® (GSTC), Green Key, and the EU Eco label for ensuring



the environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural sustainability of hotels, guest houses, and other tourist accommodation on the Maltese Islands. None of the HORECA in the pilot study are certified under these schemes to our knowledge. - The Global Sustainable Tourism Council® (GSTC) establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, known as the GSTC Criteria. There are two sets: Destination Criteria for public policy-makers and destination managers, and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators. They are the result of a worldwide effort to develop a common language about sustainability in tourism. They are arranged in four pillars: (A) Sustainable management; (B) Socioeconomic impacts; (C) Cultural impacts; and (D) Environmental impacts. Since tourism destinations each have their own culture, environment, customs, and laws, the Criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity. (<https://www.gstcouncil.org/about/>) - The Green Key certificate is a leading standard of excellence in the field of environmental responsibility and sustainable operation within the tourism industry. This prestigious certificate represents a commitment by businesses that their tourism establishments adhere to the strict criteria stipulated by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). A Green Key assures guests that, by choosing to stay with a Green Key establishment, they are helping make a difference for the environment. The high environmental standards expected of these establishments are maintained through rigorous documentation and frequent audits. Green Key is eligible for hotels, hostels, small accommodations, campsites, holiday parks, conference centres, restaurants, and attractions. (<https://www.greenkey.global/our-programme>) - The EU Ecolabel is a world-renowned, voluntary scheme promoting goods and services that clearly demonstrate environmental excellence, based on standardised processes and scientific evidence. It is managed by the European Commission and Member States according to the priorities established in the Strategic Working Plan for the EU Ecolabel. EU Ecolabel is the only EU-wide ISO 14024 Type I ecolabelling scheme. Recognised throughout Europe, it is multi-criteria and tackles the main environmental impacts of products along their full lifecycle, from extraction of raw material to disposal. The EU Ecolabel is third-party verified, which means independent experts are responsible for checking compliance with the EU Ecolabel criteria. (https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/eu-ecolabel/eu-ecolabel-tourist-accommodation_en) - Quality Assured (QA) Seal is a Malta Tourism Authority voluntary quality recognition scheme aimed at businesses offering high levels of quality, consistency and professionalism. The QA seal covers three key tourism business operations, namely restaurants, visitor attractions and destination management companies (DMCs). The participating businesses are assessed either annually or once every two years. The QA seal was launched in 2008 for DMCs and in 2009 the first companies



TOURISMO

Interreg
Euro-MED



Co-funded by
the European Union

were awarded. In 2010 the first visitor attractions were awarded and in 2015 the first restaurants were awarded. (<https://www.mta.com.mt/en/quality-seal>)



9. References

TOURISMO Deliverable 1.1 – Analysis of touristic habits and tourism flows in the selected areas.

TOURISMO Deliverable 1.2 – Revision and Enrichment of HERIT-DATA List of Indicators.

European Union. Transition Pathway for Tourism. European Union.

UNWTO, UNEP & UNDP. Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030. UNWTO.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). GSTC Destination Criteria.

EarthCheck. EarthCheck Certified – Destination Standard.

Green Destinations. Green Destinations Standard for Good Practice in Sustainable Destination Management.

Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI). Biosphere Certified – Destinations and Companies.

UN Tourism & United Nations Statistics Division. Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST).

European Commission. European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destinations (ETIS).

EMAS Eco-Management and Audit Scheme.

EMAS Sectoral Reference Document on Best Environmental Management Practice in the Tourism Sector.

EUROPARC Federation. European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST).

Spanish Association for Standardisation (UNE). UNE 178501: Management System for Smart Tourist Destinations.

Spanish Association for Standardisation (UNE). UNE 178502: Requirements for the Implementation of Smart Tourism Destination (STD) Projects.

Secretariat of State for Tourism & FEMP. SICTED – Integral System of Tourism Quality in Destinations.

Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). Blue Flag Programme – Criteria for Beaches, Marinas and Tourism Boats.

European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO). EcoPorts / Port Environmental Review System (PERS).



TOURISMO

Interreg
Euro-MED



Co-funded by
the European Union

Slovenia Tourism Board. Information on the national certification programme for destinations and businesses “Slovenia Green”. Available at: <https://www.slovenia-green.si/>

EarthCheck. “The Azores – the world’s first certified archipelago. Available at: <https://earthcheck.org/news/the-azores-the-worlds-first-certified-archipelago/>

Barcelona City Council / Barcelona Tourism Observatory. Sustainable Tourism Indicator System SITS–OTB. Available at: <https://observatoriturisme.barcelona/en/sustainability-sits-otb-otb-sustainable-tourism-indicators-system/>

Tourism Promotion Committee of the Mediterranean Pyrenees. Available at: <https://www.tourism-mediterraneanpyrenees.com/labels-and-brands>

Normandie Tourisme. Available at: <https://en.normandie-tourisme.fr/plan-your-trip/labels-sustainability/>

Comité Régional du Tourisme et des Loisirs d’Occitanie (CRTL). Available at: <https://www.tourisme-durable.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/guide-labels-tourisme-crtl-occitanie.pdf>

Schéma Régional de Développement du Tourisme et des Loisirs 2022–2028. Available at: <https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/actions-du-crtl/strategies/le-schema-regional-de-developpement-du-tourisme-et-des-loisirs-2022-2028/>

Menorca Biosphere Reserve. Available at: <https://www.menorcabiosfera.org/portal.aspx?IDIOMA=2&utm>

Visit Ljubljana / City of Ljubljana. Available at: <https://www.visitljubljana.com/en/visitors/travel-information/green-guidance/>

CLIA Europe. “GSTC successful destination assessment for the city of Kotor”. Available at: https://europe.cruising.org/knowledge_hub/gstc-successful-destination-assessment-for-the-city-of-kotor/

Dubrovnik Tourist Board. Official information on the “Respect the City” programme. Available at: https://tzdubrovnik.hr/lang/en/get/kultura_i_povijest/75284/respect_the_city.html

Cinque Terre National Park. Available at: <https://www.parconazionale5terre.it/Eindex.php>

Port-Cros National Park. Available at: <https://portcros-parcnational.fr/>

European Alpine Lakes. Available at: <https://www.prag.s.bz/en>

Costa Navarino. Available at: <https://www.costanavarino.com/sustainability-development/>



TOURISMO

Interreg
Euro-MED



Co-funded by
the European Union

Municipality of Alonissos / National Marine Park of Alonissos Northern Sporades. Available at: <https://alonissos.gr/en/marine-park/overview.html>

Calvià (Spain) – Transformation of a mature tourism destination and smart destination strategy. Academic work on the transformation of Calvià as a tourism destination (University of the Balearic Islands). Available at: <https://dspace.uib.es/xmlui/handle/11201/152918>

Calvià City Council. Environmental indicators and smart tourism destination strategy. Available at: <https://www.calvia.com/es/areas-municipales/medioambiente-y-bienestar-animal/indicadores-ambientales/calvia-destino-turistico-inteligente>



TOURISMO

Interreg
Euro-MED



Co-funded by
the European Union



PROJECT PARTNERS

