



DETOCS: Decarbonising the European Regional Tourism Sector Through Collaboration

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The tourism industry has long been a cornerstone of the European economy, attracting millions of visitors to experience the continent's rich cultural heritage and breathtaking landscapes. However, the travel restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic drastically reduced the number of tourists, creating severe hardships in the sector that were worsened by the subsequent increase in energy prices. As the world struggles with climate change and the current energy crisis, the need for the tourism sector to become more energy efficient and lower its carbon emissions is more urgent than ever.

In response to these challenges, the Interreg Europe DETOCS project, DEcarbonising the TOURism Industry Post Covid-19 Support, has been

on a mission to transform the EU's regional tourism infrastructure into a more sustainable and efficient one. The Ministry for Tourism and the University of Malta are full partners in representing Malta's involvement in the project alongside 11 other organisations from 7 countries; Slovenia, Greece, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Netherlands. Malta's representation is being led by Prof. Ing. Charles Yousif from the Institute for Sustainable Energy, together with Dr Anne Marie Thake from the Department of Public Policy and the project support officer Ing. Krista Rizzo.

As stated by Thake: 'This project has a forward-looking approach, to build a greener and more resilient future for Malta's tourism industry while

contributing to the global efforts to combat climate change.' DETOCS aims to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism sector, aligning with the EU's long-term decarbonisation policies. Moreover, it seeks to improve energy efficiency within the current tourism-related infrastructure, making it more economically viable while reducing energy consumption. Furthermore, it is working towards strengthening the energy self-sufficiency of the sector minimizing its vulnerability to energy crises. In addition, the project intends to explore new forms of tourism that could reshape the industry.

The DETOCS partners are currently focusing on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of this sector in their respective regions, taking into



DETOCS Team
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Roman Kekec, Slovenia

consideration six different aspects, namely; political, economic, social, technical, legal, and environmental (PESTLE). The outcomes of this process will be shared among partner regions in a meeting that will take place in November 2023 in Finland.

The next step will be to identify successful practices and policies in sustainable tourism that can be used to effectively improve policies within the project's lifetime. This is facilitated by the presence of the policymakers, such as the Ministry for Tourism in the case of Malta, as full partners in the project. As Yousif commented, 'one of the strengths of this new Interreg Europe programme is that it requires the policymaker to be a full partner in order to facilitate policy change within the timeframe

of the project, rather than ending up with the provision of policy change proposals that cannot be guaranteed to be implemented.' One area where DETOCS can significantly contribute is by identifying good practices and policies that can enrich the National Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 to substantially improve energy efficiency of the Tourism Sector.

In the words of Rizzo, 'One of the aims of DETOCS is bringing the people together and fostering collaboration between governments, tourism associations, and businesses.' One of the most effective modes is that of sharing good-practice examples of how the tourism industry succeeded in drawing closer to net zero carbon emissions in the different regions. This approach ensures not

only more efficacy and cost reduction but also a higher likelihood of acceptance from all stakeholders. One interesting good practice example for Malta is the recent introduction of the Virtual Underwater Museum (<https://underwatermalta.org/>), which offers new options for tourism at a reduced carbon footprint. Moreover, it opens the door for a broader sharing of history with a larger number of tourists, who otherwise could never experience such underwater treasures.

As the Interreg Europe DETOCS project progresses, a more sustainable and resilient future for Europe's tourism industry takes shape and reminds us that by combining our efforts and acting together we can make a change. **T**