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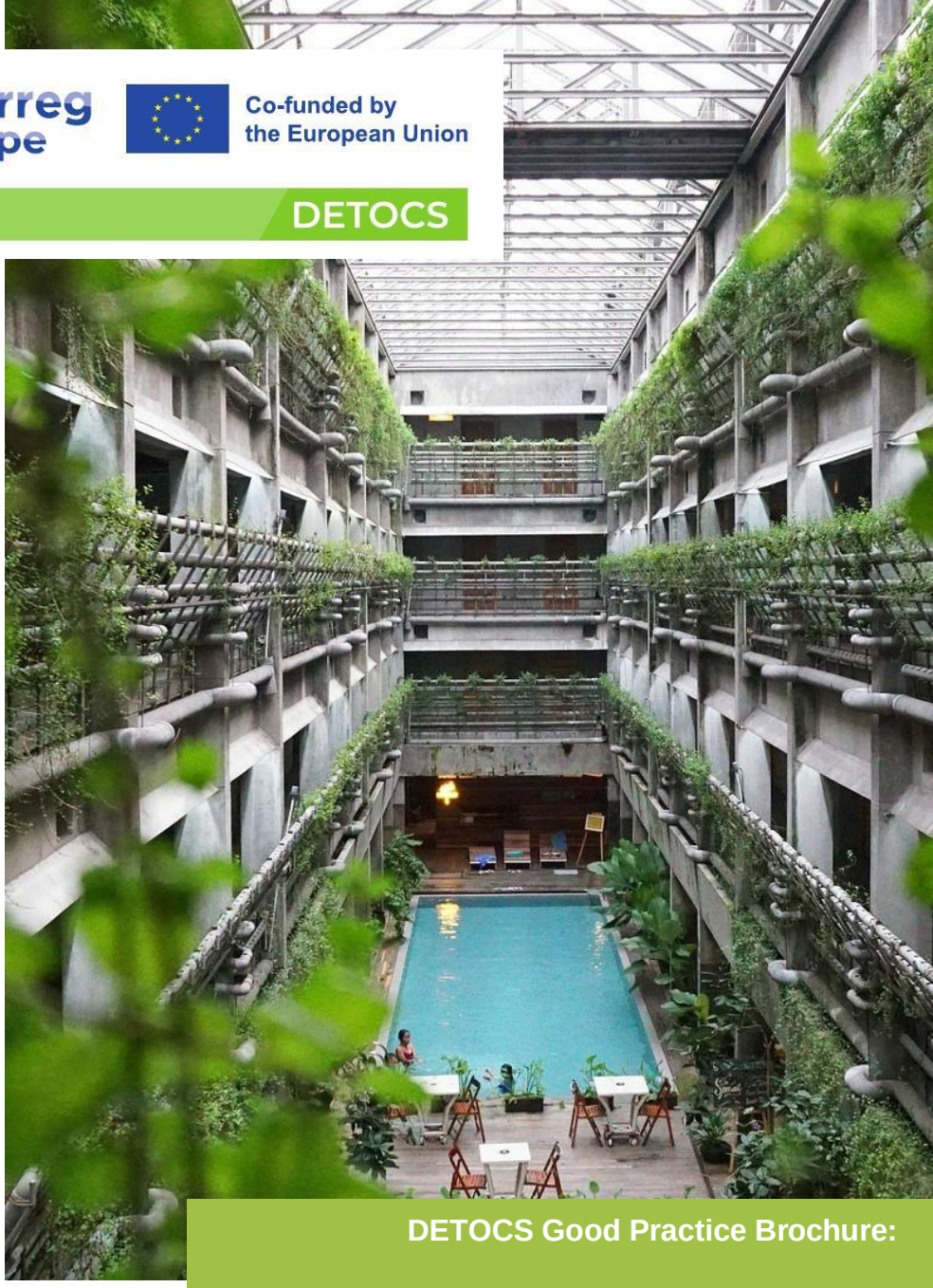

DETOCS Good Practice Brochure:

Innovative Solutions for Promoting Sustainable Tourism through Interregional Cooperation

GREEN

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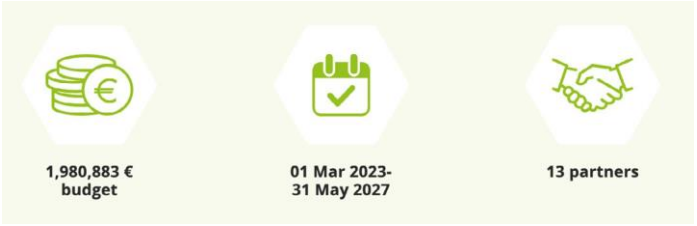
Good Practice

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has committed to decarbonising its economy by 2050 to address climate change. At the same time, the ongoing energy crisis has sharply increased energy costs, threatening the financial viability of tourism infrastructure across many member states. To address these challenges, the EU is also prioritising energy security, self-sufficiency, and competitiveness. Additionally, the tourism sector has suffered significant decline due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with further strain from the current energy crisis.

In response to these challenges, the Interreg Europe DETOCS – DEcarbonising the Tourism Industry Post Covid-19 Support – project aims to support the recovery of the EU tourism infrastructure in a sustainable and low-carbon manner. In doing so, DETOCS aligns with EU long-term policies for the decarbonisation of the economy. During the project, best practices for sustainable tourism are identified and shared across partner regions, including Slovenia, Greece, Malta, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Netherlands. Partners also work to enhance regional policies that support the decarbonisation of the tourism industry through capacity building and the adoption of successful practices from other regions.

DETOCS contributes to EU Cohesion Policy, and specifically to the "Policy Objective 2 (PO2): A greener, low-carbon Europe". The project promotes the transition to clean and sustainable energy in tourism infrastructure, supporting the achievement of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. The targeted policies will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions through investments in energy efficiency, energy-saving initiatives, and renewable energy solutions, in line with Directive (EU) 2018/2001.



As part of its knowledge-sharing objectives, DETOCS is producing a good practice brochure that showcases selected key practices from all partner regions. This brochure is designed to serve as a valuable resource for regional stakeholders involved in the tourism and sustainability sectors. By highlighting innovative and transferable solutions already in use, the brochure facilitates mutual learning and encourages the uptake of effective good practices across different regional contexts. The good practice brochure represents a cornerstone of DETOCS' commitment to fostering interregional cooperation and supporting the green transition in tourism infrastructure.

Read on to discover how partner regions across Europe are paving the way for a more sustainable and resilient tourism sector.

Renewable energy sources contact point in Slovenia

About

Before its implementation, there was no centralized system to guide renewable energy (RES) investors, resulting in fragmented and inefficient processes with little support for RES project investments. Potential investors struggled with accessing subsidies, navigating administrative requirements, and implementing projects.

To address this issue, 35 RES OSS, managed by Borzen (Slovenian electricity market operator) and supported by local energy agencies like LEASP, were established to:
- Provide expert guidance on RES project implementation.
- Assist in obtaining necessary permits and accessing support programs.
- Streamlining administrative processes to encourage renewable energy investments.
- The initiative operates through a network of 16 advisory offices strategically located across Slovenia. These offices offer personalized consulting services while leveraging a centralized IT system for monitoring, reporting, and knowledge sharing. The model ensures consistency in service delivery and accessibility for all stakeholders.

Resources needed:

- Human Resources: 2 - 4 consultants per OSS location, totalling 50 experts across Slovenia.
- Infrastructure: Offices and IT systems for reporting, monitoring, and centralized support.
- Financial Resources: Primarily funded by national (taxes from the electricity bill) and EU programs.

Potential for learning or transfer:

The OSS model is an exemplary framework that can be adapted and implemented in other regions seeking to accelerate renewable energy adoption (according to the Directive 2018/2011). Key success factors include:
- Holistic Approach: Combining administrative guidance, technical expertise, and subsidy navigation under one roof.
- Scalable Framework: Flexibility to expand services to accommodate diverse renewable energy technologies and growing demand.
- Collaborative Governance: Strong partnerships among government agencies, local authorities, and private stakeholders ensure comprehensive support and sustainability.
-Regions aiming to replicate this model should focus on establishing a robust institutional framework, ensuring skilled human resources, and leveraging digital tools for streamlined operations.

Learn more

Evidence of success

Simplified administrative processes have greatly improved the efficiency of renewable energy projects, leading to increased investments across all sectors. Greater transparency and predictability in procedures have boosted investor confidence. A key long-term success factor is aligning with the EU 2030 sustainability goals.
The first OSSs launched in June 2024, and by year-end, 1,077 consultancy services were provided, with 500 leading to continued investment.

Municipal assistance to local businesses for prioritising energy projects and sharing knowledge

Expert approved

About

According to Greek legislation framework regarding energy saving and buildings energy efficiency, the Tourism sector was obliged to renovate a minimum percentage of their building stock. However, the combination of the vast information related to energy technologies along with the wide bandwidth of their cost and the insularity of Crete (with all the pros and against of this) led the sector to delays.
Acknowledging this obstacle, Hersonissos Municipality cooperated closely with hotel owners and operated as an assistant and a mediator to succeed both the local tourism sector's goals but also to reach the achievement of its' SEAP's targets. Employees from the technical and environmental department assisted the hotels to prioritize their energy efficiency projects to accelerate their renovation process. By adapting and implementing our recommendations they managed to achieve a mitigation on their energy cost and at the same time, they contributed to the achievement of the municipality's SEAP goals.

Expert opinion:

With the EU committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, all sectors of the economy will need to play a role in reducing their carbon emissions. Municipalities and regions can play a key role by enable access to expertise for development and implementation of new projects, as done in Hersonissos, providing technical guidance, facilitating access to funding, and disseminating best practices. Other regions can draw lessons from this practice on the need to establish partnerships with the private sector, to provide tailored support, and to share knowledge. The impact is impressive, demonstrating the benefits of the approach.

Resources needed:

Personnel / Technical Staff from Municipality's Technical and Environmental Department for disseminating the acquired knowledge and presenting good practices both local and from EU countries.

Potential for learning or transfer:

When local stakeholders and local authorities work together, a productive and effective environment is created. Knowledge and experience are exchanged to overcome financial barriers related to the development of the necessary infrastructure and the accomplishment of the national NECP goals through the creation of a Renewable Energy Community which will reduce its members' energy cost along with their footprint.
It is easier to achieve a proper bottom-up analysis that would genuinely meet the demands of all participants if information and guidance on pertinent funding and finance sources for local energy and climate projects is shared and disseminated. Also, the sustainability of the practice will be fueled by the development of the active REC which plans in the near future to extend an invitation to other municipalities and local business, creating thus a fruitful ground for adapting to future challenges.

Learn more

Evidence of success

Through the cooperation of the municipality with hotel owners, a reduction of 212,119.00 tonnes CO2/year was achieved by the hotels and a total of 25.8% for the entire municipality area (according to the submitted SEAP). Nowadays there are over 366 hotels in the area that create strong ground for the Municipality's future transformation, aligned with the National Regional Energy Goals.

Utilisation of an innovative online platform to support regional climate change observatory

About

The Region of Crete has developed its Regional Plan for Climate Change Adaptation to shield the productive sectors, environment and society against climate and environmental challenges. For monitoring and evaluating climate changes, providing directions and proposing specific projects and actions for resilience, the Region of Crete is now implementing the Regional Observatory of Climate Change. EcoHotel Plus is a platform that offers hotels all the necessary tools to reduce energy and carbon footprint. Moreover, it is the first platform certified by EUROCERT for following the methodology and guidelines of the Greek Climate Law, helping the hotel owners to get prepared for upcoming environmental commitments in legislation. The steps for the implementation of EcoHotel Plus platform include Data input on basic characteristics and operating data of the hotel, Energy & Carbon footprint calculations, In-depth analysis of the results of the hotel's energy and carbon footprint and Identification of reduction measures.

Ecohotel Plus platform was utilised by the Region of Crete to calculate and assess the carbon and energy footprint of all the hotels in Crete. Each were given a star rating. The outcomes were used during preparation of the Regional Observatory of Climate Change in Crete, specifically addressing measures and actions to be proposed for the tourism sector. This is a direct effort by the Region of Crete to integrate innovative digital tools into public policy for decarbonisation.

Resources needed:

The implementation of EcoHotel Plus was financed by 65% from NSRF 2013-2020 funds, National Operational Program "Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation" with the call "RESEARCH – CREATE – INNOVATE".
Additional resources: Experts and IT systems for monitoring.

Potential for learning or transfer:

The EcoHotel Plus platform demonstrates strong potential for transferability, offering a comprehensive framework that can be adapted to a variety of regions and hotel types. Key success factors include its user-friendly interface, customisable tools tailored to different environmental objectives, and its capacity to support both large and small accommodation providers.
Elements of the platform have already been shared with organisations in Greece, encouraging collaboration and promoting sustainable practices across diverse areas. In particular, the Region of Crete has found EcoHotel Plus to be a valuable tool for assessing the current situation and effectively advancing the decarbonisation of the tourism sector.
Furthermore, the Region of Crete intends to utilise the platform as part of its efforts to achieve certification as a sustainable tourism destination within the framework of the "Green Crete" initiative.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The EcoHotel Plus online platform not only calculates energy use and carbon footprint, but also converts these results into indicators that allow for the comparison of environmental performance across different hotels. By using this feature, the Region of Crete was able to gather valuable insights into the overall environmental footprint of its hotel sector, even in the absence of detailed analytical data.
In addition, the platform supported the identification of actions to enhance tourism resilience, which are now being incorporated into the Regional Climate Change Observatory.

Electric transportation with vehicles and bicycles in the municipality of Chania, Crete, Greece

About

Transportation in the city of Chania, Crete, Greece is currently achieved with conventional vehicles using fossil fuels. The necessity to minimize GHG emissions is urgent for the achievement of a net-zero carbon economy by 2050. Although pure electric vehicles and hybrid electric vehicles are currently used in the private sector the percentage of electric vehicles in the total vehicles' fleet in Crete is very low. The current practice is related with the development of electric transportationinside the city. The use of municipal electric buses and other electric vehicles in Chania has several benefits:
a) It reduces CO_2 emissions due to transportation. The public sector offers a good example for the reduction of CO_2 emissions, and
b) Citizens and visitors using electric buses are getting aware about electric transportation and its benefits which might mobilize them to aquire a private electric verhicle.
The main stakeholders of the current practice are the local municipality and the citizens and visitors using electric transportation. The beneficiaries are the municipality of Chania and the local society using electric transportation. Additionaly, the visitors and tourists who uses the local electric infrastructure.
More electric buses are going to be bought with the financial support of the EU structural funds. The ongoing maintenance cost of the electric buses is going to be covered from the surplus generated from a social enterprise of the municipality of Chania.

Resources needed:

In order to set up and run the practice the following resources are necessary: For seting-up the practice 6 man-months of engineers are needed while the cost in Chania was at 4,104,276 €. For running the practice, the same number of human resources are required as for using conventional buses.

Potential for learning or transfer:

This good practice aligns with EU and national policies for achieving a net-zero carbon economy by 2050 and supports regional development in Crete. It produces measurable results by promoting electric transportation in Chania, including buses, vehicles, charging stations, and bicycles. Key outcomes, such as daily usage rates, man-km covered, and carbon emission savings, are quantifiable. This practice is also relevant for regions with similar policies targeting a net-zero carbon economy. With each electric bus saving 245 tonnes of CO_2 daily, the total annual savings are estimated at 89,425 tonnes.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The practice is considered as good since it facilitates the low/zero carbon transportation of tourists inside the city of Chania without the use of conventional vehicles using gasoline or diesel oil. Electricication in private and public transportation is low nowdays in Greece. Municipal authorities in Crete have started to use electric buses and other electric vehicles and bicycles. The first electric municipal buses in the city of Chania are already used by tourists.

Guesthouse owners and Users Embarking on a Sustainable Transition

Expert approved

Guest
Guesthouse owners and Users Embarking on a Sustainable Transition

About

In recent years, the number of guesthouses in Malta has grown significantly, but their adoption of sustainable energy and water practices has not kept pace. A number of challenges have been identified, as follows:

• Insufficient time for owners to dedicate to energy studies.
• Inadequate technical knowledge.
• Restricted financial means.
• Unawareness of financial schemes available.
• Apprehension of funding application complexities.

This good practice addresses these challenges through the provision of free services of certified energy auditors, appointed by The Energy & Water Agency, who carry out detailed analysis of energy and water consumption and propose tailormade effective solutions to reduce the overall carbon footprint of the guesthouses.

Expert opinion:

Energy audit is a key first step in designing effective energy performance improvements, identifying the main areas for interventions to find those with maximum impact. This practice is promising for its comprehensive approach – not only providing energy audit, but also matching businesses with potential funding which can be complex and difficult to understand. Auditing energy and water together is another good aspect, as is the follow-up with actions implemented to share experiences between different guesthouses. Other regions can learn from aspects such as the need to provide tailored support, especially to smaller businesses, and the benefits of having a single contact point.

Resources needed:

Total budget: 81,228 Euro (National Funds)
Sponsored energy audits (x28): 60,401 Euro
Guest Welcome Packs (1750 kids bags, 1300 towels, 1750 Tote bags): 15,880 Euro
Technical support: 1,997 Euro,
Sector report: 2,950 Euro
Human resources: 1 coordinator and the contracted energy auditors.

Potential for learning or transfer:

The initiative's success stems from early stakeholder engagement to align with their needs. Free energy audits encouraged guesthouses to assess their energy use, while face-to-face meetings helped clarify audit findings and dispel energy saving misconceptions. Assisting participants with financial support applications enabled the implementation of proposed improvements. A single point of contact facilitated communication, strengthening relationships with guesthouse owners. A follow-up conference encouraged experience exchange, and the project provided valuable data for a final report on energy and water use in guesthouses.

Learn more

Evidence of success

- 28 (15% of total) guesthouses participated.
- 6 applications for funding under the EENergy programme (Enterprise Europe Network).
- 4 successfully secured funding for applying energy efficiency and renewables.
- Provided simple remedies to common issues resulting in savings for:
- excess water flow rates (-21,817 kWh).
- set temperatures for air-conditioning (-16,721 kWh) and water heaters (-21,133 kWh)
- Overall 8.1% annual electricity savings (23.62 tonnes of CO_2 emission)

Malta Tourism Awards – Responsible Tourism Development Award

Expert approved

MALTA TOURISM AWARDS

About

The Malta Tourism Awards were established to recognise tourism operators who are implementing strategies that contribute to responsible tourism development, thereby inspiring others in the sector to follow. The awards were inspired by the National Tourism Strategy (2021–2030), which aims to recover, rethink, and revitalise the tourism sector in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The key pillars of the strategy are: investment in and upskilling of human resources, a leap in digitalisation, and a strong drive towards sustainability. These align with the main objectives of the EU Tourism Transition Pathway leading to 2030. The National Tourism Strategy also led to the establishment of the Malta Tourism Observatory, whose primary role is to monitor the implementation of the strategy and encourage initiatives that align the industry with the country's long-term vision.In parallel, the Tourism Worker of the Year Award recognises outstanding employees in any one of various core sectors within the Tourism Industry.

Expert opinion:

Tourism has significant impacts on the environment, not only as a result of travel, but also through accommodation and other tourism services. As tourism numbers continue to increase, there will be increasing pressures to make the sector more sustainable. This is a good practice for encouraging more sustainable tourism and increasing awareness of sustainability initiatives. It could be replicated in other regions, particularly those with large numbers of tourists, with categories reflecting regional priorities. It is notable that the award is aligned with the National Tourism Strategy, ensuring that activities support policy goals.

Resources needed:

Six full-time working months and a €50,000 budget were allocated for outreach, application, evaluation, and coordination of the Responsible Tourism Development Award and the Tourism Worker of the Year across various categories.

Potential for learning or transfer:

National recognition adds prestige, while the initiative accelerates decarbonisation and encourages behavioural change through inspiration rather than enforcement. It fosters positive engagement between regulators and the market, increases visibility of good practices, and stimulates healthy competition in the tourism sector. The model is easily replicable with minimal resources, drawing on the experiences of past nominees.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The award's inaugural edition (2025) received 38 nominations from four key sectors: Accommodation, Catering, Travel & Tourism, and Visitor Attractions. It promotes multi-criteria excellence (e.g., combining sustainability with hospitality or upskilling) and serves as a platform to share best practices in sustainability, supporting broader replicability.

Eco-certification: Promoting sustainable tourism through eco-friendly practices in hotels

Expert approved

About

In 2024, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) strengthened its commitment toward sustainable hospitality by endorsing Green Key, EU Ecolabel, and GSTC, aligning Malta's tourism sector with international sustainability standards.

The eco-certification process ensures that hotels implement energy and water conservation, waste reduction, responsible sourcing, and community engagement. Businesses must invest in sustainable infrastructure and apply for certification, after which an auditor verifies compliance before granting the label.

Key stakeholders include the MTA, certification bodies, auditors, and hotel operators, while beneficiaries include hoteliers, tourists seeking eco-friendly stays, and the local environment. By promoting sustainable tourism, MTA helps Malta maintain its reputation as an eco-conscious destination, while supporting long-term environmental and economic growth.

Expert opinion:

Tourism has a significant ecological impact but is also a vital part of Europe's economy. The sector therefore needs to make efforts to reduce this impact, while also maintaining a strong economic role. This practice, making use of Eco-Certification is a good one for encouraging hotels to implement sustainable actions, as well as enabling consumers to make informed decisions when they travel to minimise their own impact. The provision of grants to enable investments in improvements, as well as the delivery of training, are also essential aspects for maximising impact. The practice aligns well with EU goals for reducing emissions as well as the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and can provide inspiration for other touristic regions.

Resources needed:

Hotels fund their own certification efforts, supported by national grants like Malta Enterprise's Smart and Sustainable Investment Grant, which covers up to 50% of costs. The MTA trains staff to guide hotels, and incentives promote sustainability and digital upgrades.

Potential for learning or transfer:

To promote eco-certification in tourism, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) offers initiatives like financial incentives via Malta Enterprise, regulatory support, staff training, and targeted marketing. Malta's eco-certification program is recognized for strong institutional support, strategic sector partnerships, and alignment with global standards like Green Key, EU Ecolabel, and GSTC. Its success makes it a model for regions aiming to build sustainable tourism. These best practices, which emphasize a structured sustainability framework, economic incentives, and community involvement, can be adapted by other destinations. For example, Turkey has launched a Sustainable Tourism Certification Program aligned with GSTC criteria. It sets environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability standards for accommodation providers. The program, mandatory for all hotels by 2030, is structured in three phases, encouraging gradual improvement across the tourism sector.

Learn more

Evidence of success

Eco-certification improves hotels' environmental performance, financial outcomes, and guest satisfaction. Studies show certifications like Green Key, EU Ecolabel and GSTC reduce environmental impact and boost market value. Guests report higher satisfaction and loyalty. Booking.com found 83% of travellers value sustainable travel. In Malta, eco-certified hotels report positive feedback, reinforcing the benefits of aligning with global sustainability goals.

Malta's Sustainability Indicators Toolkit & Action Plan for Tourism Satellite Account and Strategy

Expert approved

About

Malta has produced its Tourism Strategy Document 2021-2030 and there was a need for a more data-driven approach to tourism governance that balances economic growth with environmental and social sustainability. Malta faces challenges related to high tourism volumes, resource consumption (water, electricity), and the protection of natural and cultural heritage.
The Tourism Sustainability Indicators (TSI) and Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) were created 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.

Expert opinion:

Tourism is a major part of Europe's economy but also has a significant impact on the environment. TSIs and TSAs are valuable tools for ensuring that tourism development is both economically beneficially and socially responsible, and can help to inform robust strategy development, as with the Malta Tourism Strategy Document. Together, they enable governments and stakeholders to make informed decisions to the positive impact of tourism. The framework, developed by the UN, is widely replicable to other regions looking to tackle challenges related to sustainable tourism.

Resources needed:

Human resources: 8 MTA specialists working on fact-finding and stock-taking with experts and stakeholders.
Technical resources: International sustainability experts providing technical expertise
Financial resources: 45,000 Euro (2-day stakeholders consultation event and 150 person-hours)

Potential for learning or transfer:

This practice can serve as a model for other small island states or regions heavily dependent on tourism. The integration of sustainability indicators with economic satellite accounts provides a holistic approach to tourism management.
Key success factors include:
• Data-driven policymaking using real-time sustainability metrics.
• A clear focus on quality over volume, shifting the tourism model toward long-term sustainability.

Challenges for transfer include the need for robust national data collection systems and government commitment to integrating sustainability into tourism strategies.

Indicators were chosen based on international standards and local needs identified through extensive stakeholder engagement. Therefore, there exist potential transfer opportunities of the good practice example for Mediterranean and island economies facing similar tourism pressures.

Learn more

Evidence of success

Tourism Satellite Accounts to clarify tourism's economic inter-relationships. Widening of tourism KPIs with emphasis on sustainability rather than volumes/values through OECD 37 sustainability indicators.Enhanced data availability for decision-making on economic, environmental, and social tourism impacts. Increased focus on renewable energy, sustainable water consumption and waste management in tourism establishments. 29 out of 37 indicators can be immediately collected as of 2025.

Shifting to solar heating for potable hot water and pool heating in a large hotel

About

Hot water consumption is one of the resort's highest energy demands. Rising light fuel oil costs, the EU's upcoming fossil-fuel boiler ban, and the 2050 decarbonisation target prompted the resort to transition to renewable energy, beginning with solar water heating. To integrate solar water heating at the resort, 103 solar collectors (206 m2) are connected to a thermal battery that is backed up with the existing light fuel oil boiler. Priority is given to solar heating usage, especially during summertime when tourist numbers soar. Since 2022, an average of 11,000 litres of hot water is produced per day and indoor pool heating is covered for over 80% of the year.

The main stakeholder is the resort operator. The beneficiaries are the resort and the guests.

Resources needed:

Total budget of €187,195 (€152,582 for solar heating system and €34,613 for installation).

Potential for learning or transfer:

• Rooftop solar heating is a highly cost-effective solution for hotels with high hot water demand, with no redundancy as excess heat warms the indoor pool.

• The solar heating system enhances the hotel's green image, making its commitment to sustainability visible to guests. This, in turn, raises awareness of eco-friendly practices and encourages responsible hot water use.

• The opportunity of benefitting from available EU and national funds to install renewable energy is fully utilised, supporting the transition to lower carbon footprint.

• To avoid legionella contamination, a solar battery is used, meaning water is heated as it passes through the heat exchanger that is placed within the solar tank. No direct contact between the fluid in the solar panels and the potable water is made.

• The next step is to completely replace the light fuel oil boiler with high temperature heat pump water heating systems.medium-sized enterprises for the joint management of investments in energy goods and social goods.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The solar thermal plant achieved an average annual saving of 28% in light heating oil (36,510 litres), cutting CO_2 emissions by 95 tonnes/ year (2023–2024). It maintains pool heating at 29°C for over 80% of the year. The project was successfully co-financed under the Malta Enterprise Smart and Sustainable Investment grant (2021–2023) to promote renewable energy.

South Ostrobothnia Tourism Forum

About

Cooperation between tourism operators requires transparency, trust and common goals. Effective cooperation can bring benefits to all parties and improve the competitiveness of the tourism industry. The Tourism Forum was launched to support the cooperation in the region.The chair is assisted by a working group of tourism stakeholders. Together they ensure that the objectives and tasks are achieved, and that information is actively circulated. The Tourism Forum meets twice a year and is coordinated by the current presidency. The work of the forum is beneficial to all parties. It encourages actors to present needs, challenges, for which cooperation can be used to find solutions. The forum is also a place to highlight success, innovations and good practices.

Resources needed:

The activities of the Tourism Forum were launched as a measure of a tourism project during 2019-2020. The Forum has transitioned from being a project activity to a self-sustaining initiative without additional funding. The working group consists of 11 representatives and meets 6 times a year.

Potential for learning or transfer:

The Tourism Forum started as part of the project, but the way it was implemented was so good for tourism operators that it has continued for several years after the end of the project. The twice-yearly meetings have brought together a wide range of stakeholders each time: tourism entrepreneurs, municipal decision-makers and financiers. In tourism forum activities, current information about the industry is shared with stakeholders, which also facilitates learning.

Other regions in Finland have implemented similar tourism forums, showcasing the model's adaptability and relevance beyond South Ostrobothnia.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The Tourism Forum has already become a well-established practice that has fostered networking among tourism sector. The Tourism Forum brings together 70–80 participants twice a year, representing a broad range of tourism stakeholders. The presidency and the working group are actively working together. The Tourism Forum implements the communication and presentation of topical themes in tourism, as well as the transmission of regional tourism information.

Supporting Tourism SMEs in Sustainable Responsibility

About

"Making Tourism SMEs' Sustainability Efforts Visible" is a project designed to strenghten tourism companies´ knowledge of sustainable and responsible practices, while helping them communicate these efforts more effectively. Business owners gained new skills, and fresh methods emerged to support the adoption and visibility of sustainability in day-to-day operations. This led to greater recognition among customers and tourism operators, both regionally and nationally.
Business cooperation was central to the project, with peer learning and knowledge exchange as key approaches. Sustainability and responsible communication also helped companies identify and reach new customer segments. By the end of the project, companies had deepened their understanding of sustainability and made their efforts more visible to customers and partners.

Resources needed:

Funded by the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of South Ostrobothnia 62 901,20 €. One part-time employee.

Potential for learning or transfer:

This approach has proven to be an effective way to increase companies' commitment to sustainability. The support provided to apply for certification and the funding for certification provided by the project significantly increased the willingness of SMEs to take sustainability forward. Already during the certification process, companies noticed how putting things into practice brought visible changes and cost savings, for example in terms of reduced mixed waste when customers were offered the option of sorting. And customers appreciate the opportunity to sort.One of the best things the companies highlighted about the project was the peer learning and collaboration.The approach can be adopted as it is or with minor modifications in other regions.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The project involved 6 companies, 5 of which have completed the Ekokompassi environmental certificate and 1 have completed the Green Key. All 6 companies are in the process of completing or have completed 7 steps to sustainable tourism development and will or have received the Sustainable Travel Finland certificate. Companies also improved their communication, for example by increasing the amount of information about responsible activities on their websites.

Vast area energy communities for sustainable tourism

Expert approved

About:

Energy communities enable both prosumers and consumers to access green energy, even for structures that can't install renewable sources due to constraints. Accommodation facilities joining as consumers benefit from shared energy and receive a "carbon free" sticker, which incentivises CO_2 reduction and rewards their decarbonisation efforts, promoting sustainable tourism. This initiative reduces the carbon footprint of the tourism sector, cuts management costs, and fosters sustainability. Several municipalities in the Campobasso area are forming energy communities, with a primary substation supplying multiple small municipalities. The ability to join at any time allows the project to expand over time.

Expert opinion:

Energy communities have high potential for decarbonisation, enabling co-ownership of renewable energy technologies and unlocking local investment. Their application in this practice for sustainable tourism is a good approach, accompanied with a label which can make participating venues more attractive for sustainable-minded travellers. Such measures help to achieve EU policy goals for sustainable energy use. This is a good model of the potential role of a municipality in energy communities, supporting in several aspects of community establishment.

Resources Needed:

- Fund for territorial planning
- feasibility studies for new REC (municipalities up to 5000 inhabitants): €20,000/municipality
- Design and construction: € 1650/kWp
- Bureaucratic procedures: € 200/kWp
- Analysis and evaluation of energy needs for issuing the carbon free sticker: €500/applicant

Potential for learning or transfer:

The RED II Directive provided the European regulatory basis for the development of energy communities in the EU. Its reception by European countries represents a strong push for the development of renewables and for achieving the goal of increasing renewable energy. EU communities therefore become one of the key elements for achieving the energy transition. Although the European regulatory base is common, there are many differences from country to country regarding the type of management. The comparison between the different realities can lead the energy community to increasingly address not only the issue of decarbonisation, but also the issues of energy poverty and environmental sustainability. In Molise these communities were established as non-profit legal entities, allowing natural persons to collaborate with local authorities and small and medium-sized enterprises for the joint management of investments in energy goods and social goods.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The Municipality of Campobasso has received the certificate of "Testimonial of the Energy Transition" from the energy service manager, GSE, while the Municipality of Fossalto (vast area of Campobasso) has received the "VIVI - Livable Territory" award as a virtuous municipality for the creation of an energy community. The Fossalto REC currently produces approximately 24.3 MWh/year of green energy, with an estimated carbon reduction of approximately 10tCO_2/year.

Green Innovation on the Water: The Solar-Powered Tourist Catamaran

About

Problem Addressed and Context:
The Municipality of Burgas recognised the need for sustainable and eco-friendly tourism solutions to remain competitive as a summer destination. With increasing concerns over carbon emissions from conventional marine transport, the city initiated the development of a solar-powered tourist catamaran to promote green mobility and environmentally conscious tourism.

Implementation and Objectives:
The 'Burgus' catamaran was developed to boost Burgas's cultural and marine tourism by providing low-emission, innovative transport to popular local attractions. It features a hybrid propulsion system that combines photovoltaic solar panels with a marine diesel generator, helping reduce emissions and ensuring energy independence for key onboard systems. A solar array covers around 20–25% of the vessel's total energy needs. In 2021, a solar system with a peak capacity of 4.4 kWp was installed on various parts of the navigation bridge, supplying reliable backup power and significantly cutting fuel consumption and environmental impact.

Stakeholders and Beneficiaries:
The project involves the Municipality of Burgas, EU and national funding bodies, local tourism businesses, and shipbuilders. Direct beneficiaries include residents, tourists, and event organisers, who use 'Burgus' for leisure trips, team buildings, and cultural tours—positioning Burgas as a leader in sustainable coastal tourism.

Resources needed:

Financial Resources: Total investment: €850,000, provided through the project "The Power of Water", co-financed by the Operational Programme "Regions in Growth 2014–2020".
Human Resources: Involvement of a multidisciplinary municipal team and marine engineers.

Potential for learning or transfer:

The hybrid design and implementation strategy of 'Burgus' can serve as a replicable model for other coastal cities aiming to reduce maritime emissions and develop sustainable tourism. The modular solar system allows scalability and adaptation to various vessel sizes. Municipalities with similar geographic and touristic profiles could benefit from adopting such practices.

Learn more

Evidence of success

The solar system meets up to 25% of the vessel's energy needs and has generated 9 MWh over three years, covering 80% of key systems. This has saved around 2,250 litres of diesel and cut CO_2 emissions. The catamaran has become a popular attraction, enhancing Burgas's reputation as a green destination. Its strong performance has led to growing interest in expanding the solar array for increased efficiency and capacity.

Enhancing Sustainable Tourism in Middelburg through Digital and Virtual Experiences

Expert approved

About:

Middelburg's digital and virtual tourism initiative addresses the challenge of balancing tourism growth with sustainability. With over 500,000 annual overnight stays and millions of day visitors in Zeeland, the region seeks to reduce tourism-related CO_2 emissions while enhancing visitor experiences. The municipality, in collaboration with ICT specialists and tourism stakeholders, developed immersive virtual experiences using 360° video, VR platforms, and AR tours. These initiatives provide alternative and complementary ways to explore heritage sites, such as the Abdij, Zeeuws Museum, and Zeeuws Archief, reducing physical travel and congestion while promoting cultural heritage. The main stakeholders include the municipality, local tourism operators, technology providers, and visitors. Beneficiaries include tourists, SMEs, and local authorities seeking to promote sustainable tourism while maintaining economic growth.

Expert opinion:

Overtourism is a significant burden for many regions, straining local infrastructure, causing environmental and cultural degradation, and diminishing quality of life for citizens, while also reducing the quality of visits for tourists themselves. As such many regions are looking for ways to reduce the impact. This practice enables digital tourism to heritage sites, thus aiming to reduce in-person journeys and limit all of the mentioned impacts. Key takeaways for other regions include the importance of leveraging digital technologies as well as the need for collaboration between municipalities, technology providers, and tourism stakeholders to find innovative solutions.

Resources needed:

The virtual tourism initiative costs approx. €14,750 for three (museum) public spaces, covering production, post-production, and direction. Hosting costs €500 per year. Implementation involved the municipality, commercial ICT firms, and tourism operators, requiring specialised digital expertise.

Potential for learning or transfer:

This practice is valuable for other regions as it demonstrates how digital and virtual tourism can enhance accessibility, reduce environmental impact, and support local businesses. Key success factors include strong municipal involvement, collaboration with ICT experts, and integration into a wider digital strategy. The practice is highly transferable, with clear cost structures and scalable implementation. Challenges include securing SME participation and ensuring engaging content. If integrated strategically, virtual tourism can redirect visitor flows, reduce congestion, and lower CO_2 emissions. The concept has strong potential for replication in heritage-rich cities across Europe. Middelburg's model can inspire municipalities seeking to balance tourism growth with sustainability, particularly in regions facing high visitor numbers and environmental pressures. Transfer opportunities are being explored, with potential interest from other Dutch municipalities.

Learn more

Evidence of success:

This practice is considered good as it enhances accessibility while reducing environmental impact. Zeeland hosts nearly 22 million tourist nights annually, with Middelburg attracting over 500,000 visitors. If 10% of tourists opted for virtual experiences instead of physical travel, 1,500 tonnes of CO_2 is saved per year, based on average transport emissions alone. Virtual tourism also ensures year-round cultural access and supports local businesses.

On a sustainable path - Tamási

About

Meeting the heating gas demand of public buildings became an increasing financial burden for the municipality. Traditional methods (e.g. façade insulation, replacement of windows and doors) only partially solved the problem. The first step towards a solution was a geothermal heating system that uses the available thermal water to heat the buildings. A pair of thermal wells form the basis of the system: the production well brings up the 47°C water from a depth of 1,000 metres; while the injection well presses back the water, which has been pre-circulated in the town, to a depth of 750 meters. 14 public institutions in the city are connected to the system, which maintains a heat loss of only 1-2°C, thanks to a fully closed and automated control system. To further reduce natural gas consumption, a biomass heating plant was integrated into the system, which, in addition to help meeting peak heating demand, also provides 100% heating security. The biomass boiler can be loaded up to nearly 1300 megawatts and can be used down to -10°C. To run the biomass heating plant, green and wood waste are collected from the city and chipped, and woodchips are also purchased from an external contractor and burned in the biomass boiler.

Resources needed:

The cost of the geothermal heating system was 2.5 million EUR (HUF 971 million), provided by KEOP funding. The biomass heating plant required additional TOP funding of 625 000 EUR (HUF 250 million). The operation is assisted by the staff of the Urban Development and Management Office of Municipality of Tamási.

Potential for learning or transfer:

- The use of renewable energy has significantly increased the energy security of the city.
- The system installed has resulted in significant energy savings.
- Operates with minimal heat loss due to the closed system.
- The circular system means that there is no waste and no damage to the environment (no run-off of used thermal water).
- There is the additional possibility of a “warm and go” system.
- In the warm and go system, the residual heat from the incineration of waste is collected by containers mounted. on trucks through appropriate tubes and transported to public facilities in batteries.
- This system could also be extended to smaller municipalities/settlements, providing them with renewable energy without the need for extensive infrastructure such as heat pipes.

Evidence of success

17 district heating substations in 14 public institutions connected to the system
- Natural gas saved: 11 000 GJ/year

Sustainability Investment in the Zalakaros Spa

Expert approved

About

The Zalakaros Spa was opened in 1960. Its waters are fed by the 96°C thermal water from a depth of 2700 metres. The spa is one of the country’s most popular tourist attractions, welcoming nearly 600,000 visitors in 2023.
The cost of running the spa is dominated by energy costs, in addition to human resources. Until 2021, the annual consumption of natural gas, which amounted to around 260,000 m3 per year, was only 40 million HUF (100,000 EUR), but by 2022, due to the energy crisis, it rose to 280 million HUF (700,000 EUR).
The increased energy prices have therefore risen the running costs to such an extent that the problem could not be effectively tackled by traditional means (e.g. closing parts of the building, replacing windows and doors).The solution was to build a geothermal energy supply system that uses the available thermal water to heat the buildings.
In order to use the thermal water for heating purposes, a system had to be built that would both prevent the high mineral content of the water from precipitating in the system and keep the water in a liquid state (i.e. flowing rather than “knocking”) when it reached the surface.

Expert opinion:

The Zalakaros Spa, a prominent thermal bath in Hungary, has undertaken significant sustainability investments to enhance its environmental performance and promote eco-friendly tourism. The practice aligns with EU policy goals including climate neutrality by 2050. Other regions can learn valuable lessons from the practice, including that sustainable tourism interventions can help to attract environmentally conscious travellers while also reducing operational costs and high energy bills.

Resources needed:

The total cost of the project was EUR 538 000, which was entirely carried out as an own investment by Zalakaros Bath Ltd. The expertise required for operation is provided by the contractor under an operation contract.

Potential for learning or transfer:

- The installed system made it possible to use the thermal water with high mineral content for heating purposes
- The system was made using the highest quality materials to ensure long-term operation
- Water quality improved
- As the system is completely closed, microbiological risks were avoided
- Reduced dependence on fossil energy
- Further potential for the use of thermal energy for cooling purposes
- By including additional thermal wells, the thermal energy extracted from them can be sold to hotels and businesses in the area, providing the spa with a steady and fixed income and allowing operators to obtain energy at a more favourable price.
- The next step will be the installation of a solar panel system at the spa, which will reduce annual electricity consumption by more than 16% This is approximately 350,000 kWh, which is worth 3.5-4 million HUF (9,000-10,000 EUR) at current prices.

Learn more

Evidence of success:

90-92% of annual natural gas consumption is replaced by geothermal energy. As a result, in 2023:
- annual natural gas consumption: 25 000 m3
- expenditure on natural gas consumption: 11 500 000 HUF (29 000 EUR)
- Savings achieved: HUF 130 000 000 (EUR 325 000)

Performance of the installed system:
- 17 m3/h for heating purposes
- Available thermal capacity: 711 kW

Interregional cooperation through a diverse partnership

The DETOCS project consortium consists of 12 project partners and 1 advisory partner from 9 different European countries:

Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje – LEASP (Slovenia), Lead Partner

Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania – CIHEAM MAICh (Greece)

Region of Crete (Greece)

University of Malta (Malta)

Ministry for Tourism (Malta)

Thermopolis (Finland)

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (Finland)

Municipality of Campobasso (Italy)

Regional Energy Agency - Pazardjik (Bulgaria)

Burgas Municipality (Bulgaria)

Central Danube Development Agency Nonpro it Ltd. (Hungary)

Middelburg Municipality

The European Institute for Innovation – Technology