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SMARTIES for SMEs

"Pills of Sustainable, Smart, Regenerative Tourism to Empower SMEs in the EU Mediterranean area"

DELIVERABLE No D2.2

COMPENDIUM ON SMEs NEEDS AND BEST PRACTICES IN REGENERATIVE TOURISM

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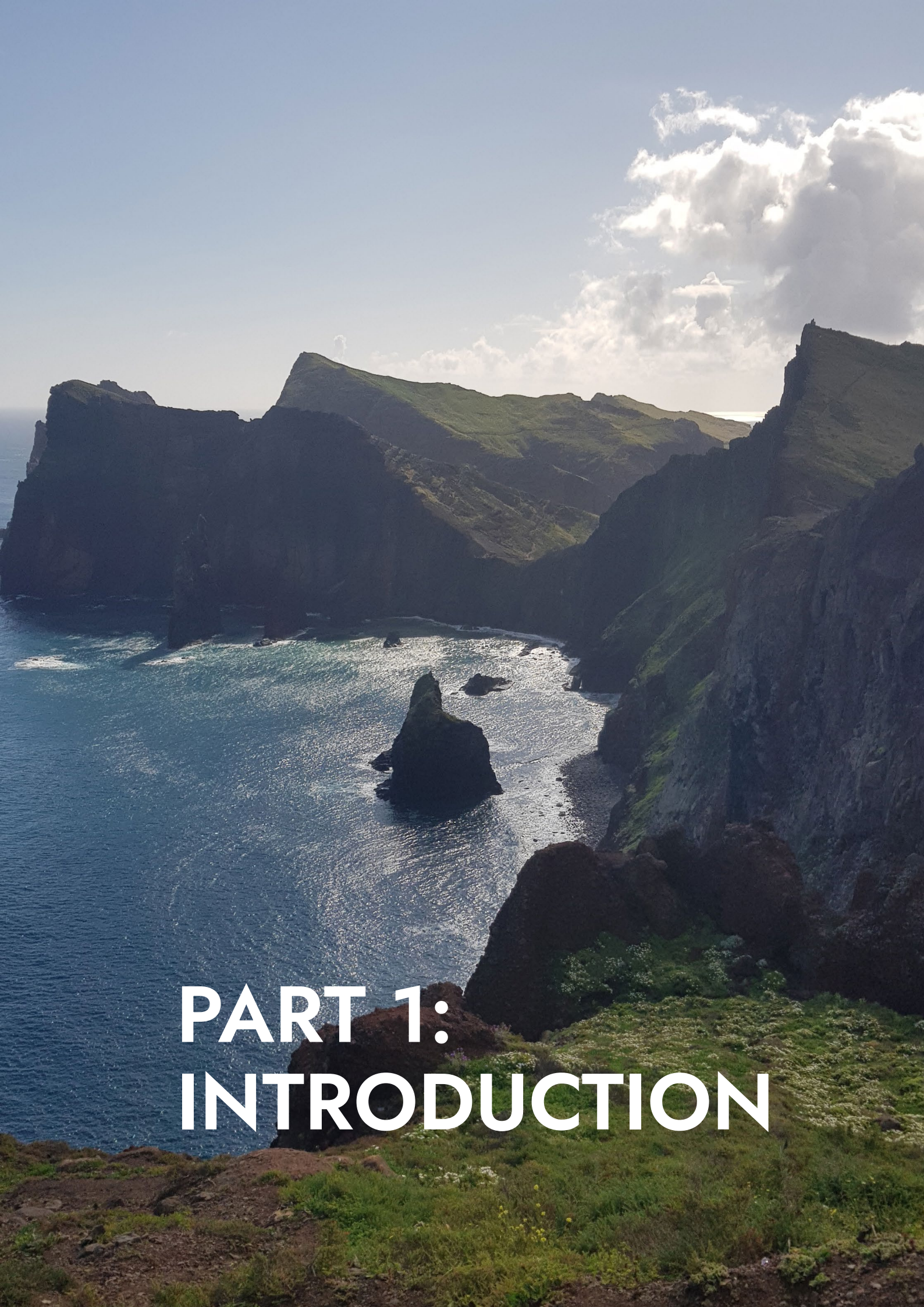
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ABBREVIATIONS

CBT - Community based tourism
SMARTIES - SMARTIES FOR SMEs project
TTP - Tourism Transition Pathway
PNRR - Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan
USP - unique selling proposition



PART 1: INTRODUCTION

The SMARTIES for SMEs project was conceived to facilitate a bold rethinking of Mediterranean tourism in light of the European Commission's *Tourism Transition Pathway* (TTP) — a roadmap guiding the sector through recovery and into a sustainable, digital, and inclusive future, taking as well into account two more documents: The Future of Mediterranean Tourism in a (post) COVID World & Social and Economic Regeneration of the Mediterranean After the Crisis in compliance with the SMARTIES FOR SMEs National Strategies

The TTP, developed by the European Commission in collaboration with stakeholders, lays out a roadmap for the twin transition, digital and green, across tourism ecosystems. SMARTIES' aim was to bring forward a refined understanding of how tourism can foster social, ecological, and economic regeneration. The Project contextualizes TTP ambitions for the Mediterranean, proposing a cohesive approach that engages SMEs, local governments, and communities. In short, the project translates the Tourism Transition Pathway (TTP) into a place-based strategy for innovation and transformation.

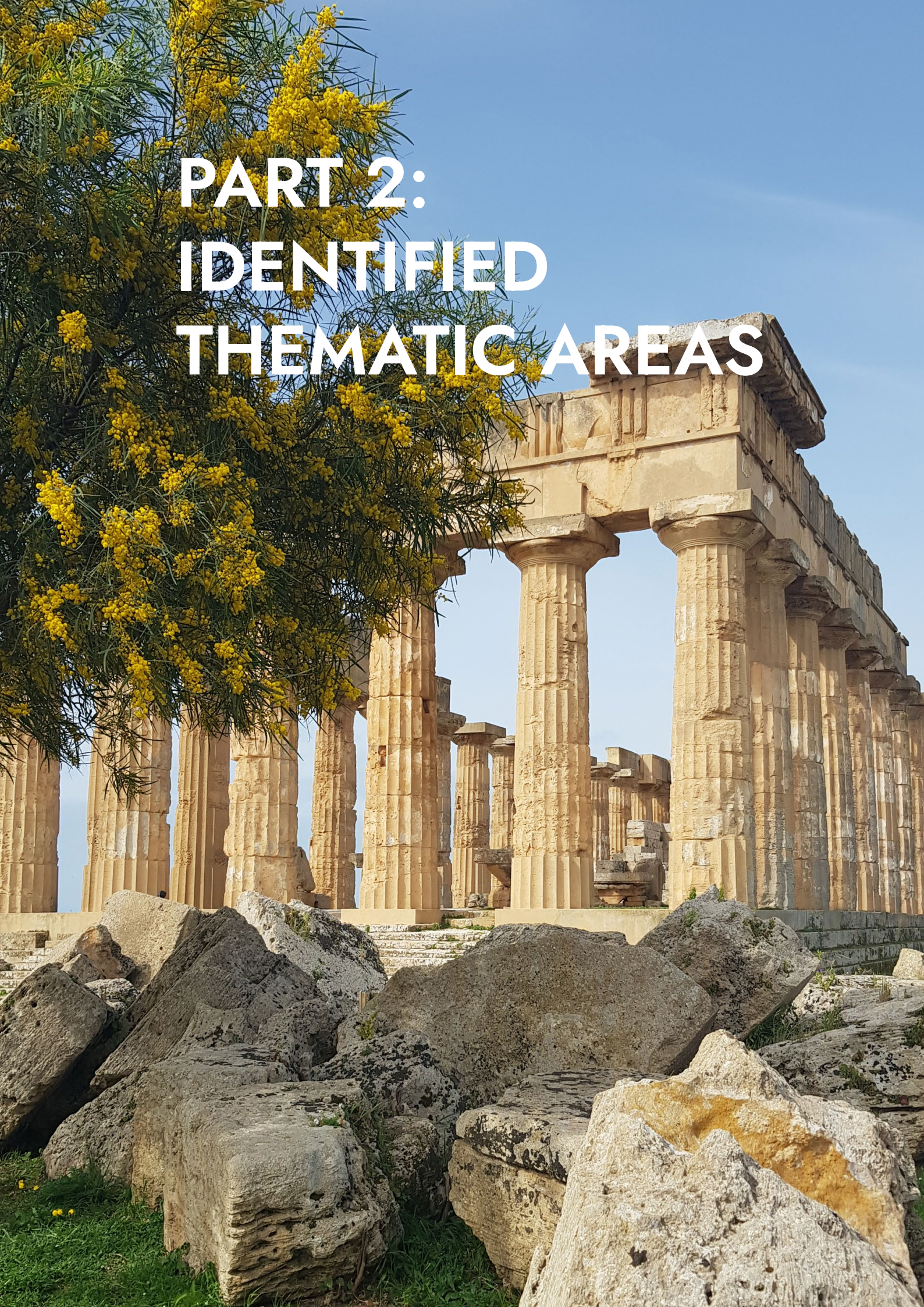
ELABORATING SMARTIES THROUGH THE TOURISM TRANSITION PATHWAY

At its core, the Project is a response to the recognition that Mediterranean tourism is a complex, vulnerable ecosystem. As the European Commission emphasizes in the TTP, tourism is "a key part of Europe's economy and way of life," yet one facing "growing pressures from climate change, digital disruption, health crises and overtourism" (European Commission, 2022). The TTP outlines a series of priorities and enabling conditions for the sector's transformation. The Project expands on this by translating the TTP's high-level goals into eleven thematic areas tailored to Mediterranean realities.

The SMARTIES project operationalizes the goals of the Tourism Transition Pathway through a Mediterranean lens and national strategies of countries involved in the project. It takes the broad ambitions of the TTP, resilience, digitalisation, green transformation and social inclusion and translates them into concrete actions across eleven thematic areas.

Adding to the theoretical framework, SMARTIES should present a practical guide for SMEs and local actors who want to align with the EU's twin transition. SMARTIES recognizes that transformation is not one-size-fits-all, and that Mediterranean destinations face unique challenges, from climate threats to demographic pressures, from rural depopulation to overtourism.





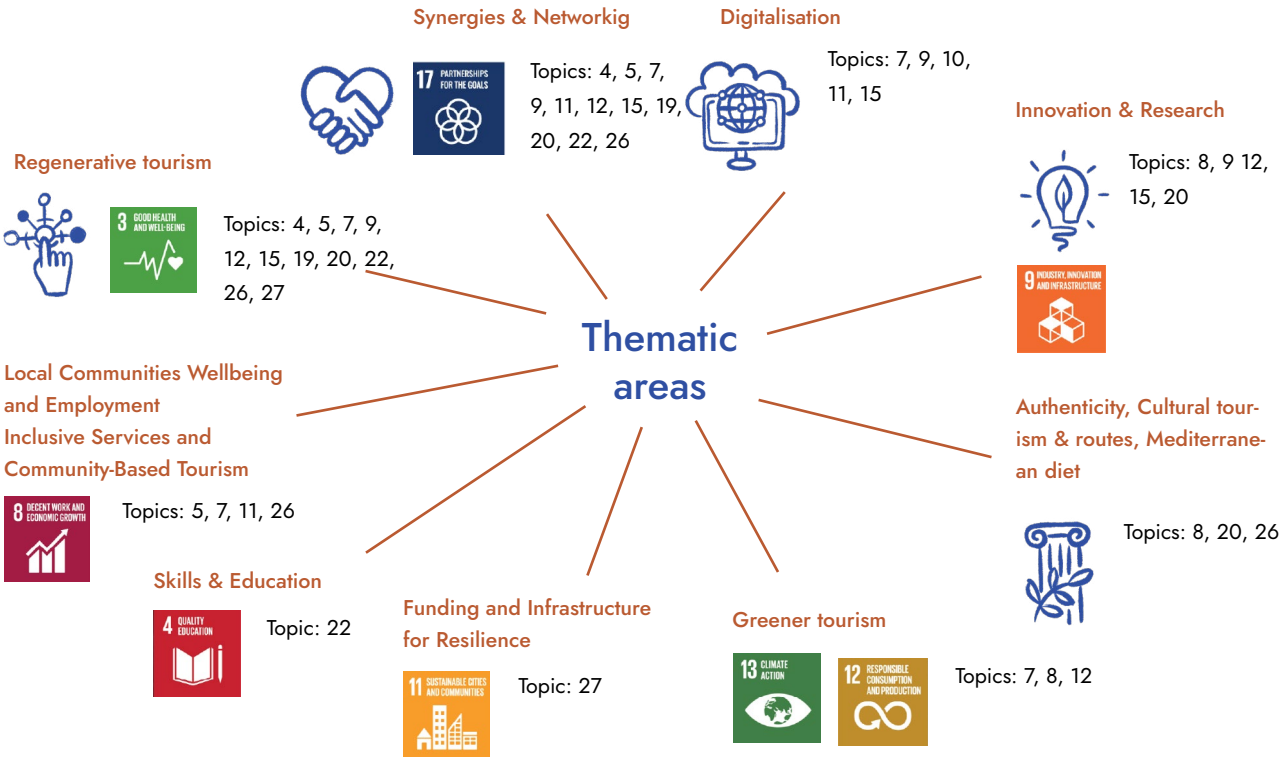
PART 2: IDENTIFIED THEMATIC AREAS

SMARTIES thematic framework demonstrates how regional strategies can bring the Tourism Transition Pathway to life. By aligning regeneration, digitalisation, inclusivity, and resilience, SMARTIES contributes to European goals. Project builds a tourism model that sustains and celebrates the Mediterranean as a living, evolving system. Its thematic areas identified translate the TTP's policy vision into place-based, participatory action.

There are 11 thematic areas identified corresponding to Transition Tourism Pathway:

1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance
3. Local Communities Wellbeing and Employment
4. Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems
5. Digitalisation and Data-Driven Services
6. Authenticity, Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition Readiness
8. Funding and Infrastructure for Resilience
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism
10. Innovation, Research and Pilots
11. Networking, Best Practice Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement

THEMATIC AREAS IDENTIFIED BASED ON THE TRANSITION PATHWAY FOR TOURISM



Chosen thematic areas echo the TTP's ambitions and offer a bottom-up framework that supports local stakeholders, especially SMEs leading in tourism innovation. This synthesis should explain how SMARTIES aligns with and advances, the goals of the Tourism Transition Pathway, while addressing the needs of the region's diverse tourism destinations and actors.

SHORT OVERVIEW OF THEMATIC AREAS COVERED THROUGH TRANSITION TOURISM PATHWAY (TTP)

Topic	EU EXPECTED Actions	EU EXPECTED Output	SMARTIES' Thematic Area Support Identified
Topic 4: Comprehensive tourism strategies development or update	Developing comprehensive national or regional strategies taking account of economic, environmental and social sustainability of tourism Guidance and best practice exchange for strategy development on national, regional and local level	All Member States or their key tourism regions to have comprehensive tourism strategies by 2025	National Strategies - identified approach towards: Regenerative tourism initiatives, Synergies
Topic 5: Collaborative governance of tourism destinations	Establishing collaborative and data-supported destination management models Awards for smart destination management Studying and sharing best practice on destination management This should include public and private-sector organisations, local producers and services, cultural and creative sectors and industries, local authorities, tourism management organisations and local associations and residents.	All publicly funded destination marketing and management organisations (DMMOs) support collaborative governance which includes public and private stakeholders, residents as well as visitors Results and recommendations of a study on DMMO management models in the EU i.e.	Collaborative governance identified in the context of: Regenerative tourism Synergies Cultural tourism Local communities
Topic 7: Circularity of tourism services	Developing the use of locally supplied ingredients with low environmental footprint to reduce the environmental impact of food services	Tourism/hospitality organisations to reduce food waste following EU-wide targets by 2030	Circularity supported by: Digitalisation Local communities Proximity food Regenerative tourism
Topic 8: Green transition of tourism companies and SMEs	'Cultural and creative industries' for developing innovative tourism based on cultural heritage, traditions, arts and authentic cultural experiences	Increased number of EMAS registered tourism organisations Increased number of EU Ecolabel tourism services Increased involvement of SMEs in ecological certification Schemes...	Green transition supported through: Synergies Authenticity Innovation Green tourism Cultural creativity
Topic 9: Data-driven tourism services	Increasing use of data sharing in personalised tourism services and destination management, monitoring and service provision, including the cration of new platforms among SMEs Use of artificial intelligence and data-based innovation	Increased offer of personalised tourism services and take-up of data-driven destination management tools i.e.	Data driven areas for: Regenerative tourism Synergies Digitalisation Innovation Mediterranean Diet
Topic 10: Improving the availability of online information on tourism offer	Developing partnerships with on-line portals and booking platforms to provide more visibility to certified accommodation providers	Improved perceptions of EU citizens on the availability of trustworthy information on tourism services and characteristics	Availability of online information through: Digitalisation Networking
Topic 11: Easily accessible best practice, peer learning and networking for SMEs	Establishing a collaboration platform for tourism SMEs and destinations that supports their access to information, specific tools, best practice and knowledge sharing opportunities to support their engagement in twin transition	Platform launched https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/tourism	Best practices for: Networking Synergies Community based actions Compendium Research and innovation
Topic 12: Research and innovation projects and pilots	Developing models and transferable practices for sustainable tourism Establishing large-scale pilots on sustainable tourism, e.g. on islands and remote regions, including the outermost regions	Validated and transferable circular and climate-friendly tourism models for different implementation levels	Research and innovation for: Regenerative tourism Synergies Cultural tourism Mediterranean diet Cultural routes

Topic	EU EXPECTED Actions	EU EXPECTED Output	SMARTIES' Thematic Area Support Identified
Topic 15: R&I for digital tools and services	Data-driven destination management models and mechanisms Innovative tourism services using advanced technologies (virtual reality, augmented reality, AI) and digitised cultural heritage	Solutions for data-driven local destination management to monitor carrying capacity and wellbeing Pilot services to enhance tourism experiences through extended and augmented reality, big data and AI	Research & Innovation for: Regenerative tourism Synergies Digitalisation Mediterranean diet Cultural tourism
Topic 19: Awareness raising on skills needs for twin transition in tourism	Preparing information materials on skills needs for diverse types of tourism actors	Information brochure published in 2022	Support in Awareness raising on skills for: Regenerative tourism Synergies Mediterranean diet
Topic 20: Awareness raising on changes in tourism demand and the opportunities of twin transition for tourism	Supporting networking and best practice sharing - by award-winning cities in Europe on smart tourism, culture, sustainability, innovation, accessibility and European heritage	Dissemination activities on the tourism transition pathway in 2022 Incorporation of information on sustainability schemes and labels in the EU supported tourism campaigns Best practice exchange and promotion events between award-winning cities	Support in Awareness Raising on tourism demand for: Regenerative tourism Synergies Cultural tourism Mediterranean diet
Topic 22: Pact for skills in tourism	Establishing of national, regional and local skills partnerships in major EU tourism regions Engaging tourism companies, education providers, trade unions and other organisations to commit to jointly agreed training targets for their workforce	Regional and national skills partnerships established in all Member States	Support in Establishing trainings for skills in: Regenerative tourism Synergies Partnerships Networking
Topic 26: Tourism services for visitors and residents alike	Diversifying and developing tourism services so that they benefit both residents and visitors Taking into account diverse types of customers, such as families or individuals, or people with different religious, spiritual or sexual orientations	Increased variety and diversity of tourism offer which also supports links between residents and visitors, and authentic tourism experiences linked with the local culture	Community oriented: Regenerative tourism Synergies Authenticity Cultural tourism Mediterranean diet Cultural Routes
Topic 27: Support visibility of funding opportunities for tourism actors	Enhancing the 'Guide on EU funding for tourism' by providing information on recently funded projects and upcoming calls. Providing a one-stop-shop that links to key support resources and funding opportunities for tourism SMEs on European, national and regional level Ensuring effective communication on the direct SME support provided under COSME actions in the Member States	Supporting these through the stakeholder collaboration platform	Establishing visibility tools for funding for: Regenerative tourism Digitalisation Cultural tourism Mediterranean diet Cultural Routes

By engaging stakeholders, using cultural assets, fostering innovation and anchoring tourism in place-based regeneration, SMARTIES helps rewrite the story of Mediterranean tourism. It invites SMEs to adapt and to lead, to become protagonists in shaping a future where tourism is a force for restoration, connection and shared prosperity.

SMARTIES - REGENERATIVE TOURISM AS A DRIVING FORCE

The principles of regenerative tourism in SMARTIES for SMEs project emphasize the importance of the already existing goals of sustainable tourism and enhance these foundations with new building blocks of interactive synergies, cooperation and networking of stakeholders, as well as with interactive engagement of visitors and education to encourage regenerative tourism development. This is reflected in three areas:

SOCIAL ASPECTS:

- **Community Empowerment and ownership:** involving them in decision-making processes and in shaping tourism development.
- **Cultural Preservation and Enhancement:** preserve and enhance cultural heritage as a means of promoting local identity, revitalization and identity formation - valuing and celebrating local traditions, customs and practices
- **Social Equity and Inclusivity:** promoting capacity building, social inclusion, diversity and equal access to opportunities

ECONOMIC ASPECTS:

- **Local Economic Development:** supporting small-scale enterprises, local supply chains and community-owned initiatives
- **Diversification and Resilience:** diversifying tourism offerings beyond mainstream attractions and mass tourism promoting and encouraging niche markets such as ecotourism, agro-tourism and cultural tourism, creative tourism... etc.

INTERACTIVE ASPECTS:

- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** including governments, businesses, NGOs and communities. Co-creation of sustainable tourism initiatives through participatory decision-making processes and the establishment of trust-based relationships
- **Supporting stakeholder roles** in regenerative development
- **Visitor Engagement and Education:** providing visitors with meaningful participatory experiences that promote cultural exchange, environmental stewardship and local engagement.

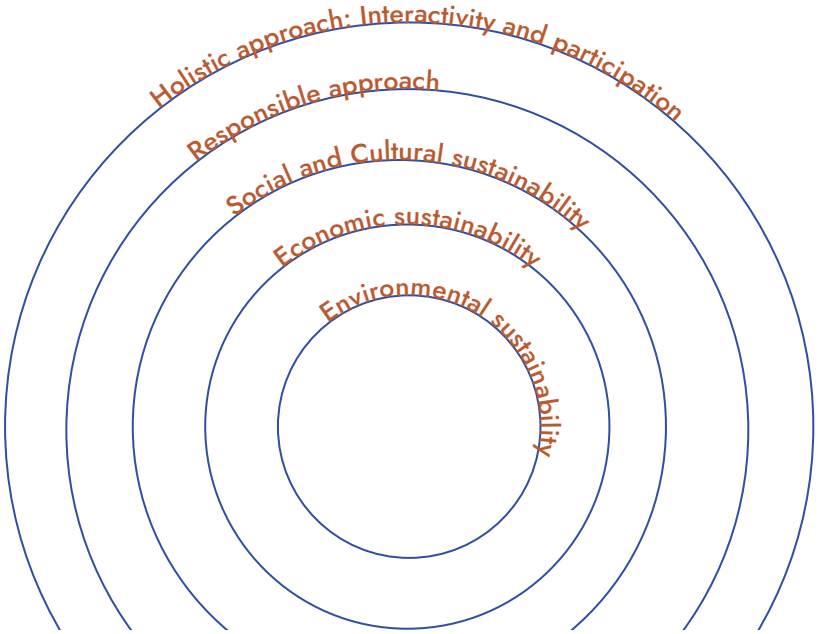
By embracing inclusive decision-making processes, offering authentic visitor experiences, and promoting environmental and cultural education, destinations can move toward a regenerative model of tourism that benefits both communities and ecosystems. Innovative segments of tourism such as creative tourism, participatory tourism, volunteer tourism, responsible tourism and transformative tourism further enrich the landscape of regenerative tourism, offering diverse and meaningful experiences for tourists and contributing to the resilience and sustainability of the destination.

ADDED VALUE OF REGENERATIVE TOURISM: NEW BUILDING BLOCKS



Innovation | Community Engagement | Interactivity and Participation | Preserving culture and Authenticity | Digitalisation

REGENERATIVE TOURISM BUILDING BLOCKS



Beyond the existing definitions: Regenerative tourism represents a comprehensive approach to environmental sustainability within the tourism industry. By prioritizing conservation, biodiversity preservation, and carbon neutrality, regenerative tourism aims to restore and enhance natural environments while minimizing its ecological footprint. Through a combination of principles and practices, regenerative tourism seeks to create positive environmental impacts and foster long-term sustainability.

Regenerative tourism encompasses:

Environmental sustainability
Conservation, Biodiversity preservation, Carbon neutrality

Economic sustainability
Local Economic Development, Diversification and Resilience

Social and Cultural sustainability
Community Empowerment, Cultural Preservation and Enhancement, Social Equity and Inclusivity

Responsible tourism approach
Respecting environment, Preserving cultural heritage, Benefit for local communities and visitors

Interactivity and Synergies
Community engagement, Stakeholder Collaboration, Visitor Engagement and Education, Transformation

REGENERATIVE TOURISM AS AN EVOLUTION – NOT REVOLUTION

Regenerative tourism presents a transformative shift in the tourism industry, going beyond mere sustainability to focus on active involvement of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects of communities and destinations. ***As we have often heard, regenerative tourism emphasizes the idea of leaving a place better than it was found, nurturing connections between people and place, and fostering resilience in the face of change.*** *Drawing inspiration from the principles of regenerative agriculture, regenerative tourism aim is to create positive outcomes for both visitors and host communities, while preserving and enhancing natural and cultural resources.*

As one of the key principles of regenerative tourism we recognize the promotion and enhancement of the Mediterranean diet, a cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO for its unique values and traditions. The Mediterranean diet is not just about what we eat, but also about how we eat, emphasizing the importance of shared meals, hospitality, and community engagement. It is a way of life guided approach by respect for diversity, creativity, and sustainability, rooted in centuries-old traditions of farming, fishing, and culinary craftsmanship.

The Role of Food Exchange: The Mediterranean has been a hub of cultural interaction for millennia, and the exchange of food items played a crucial role (Galaty, Tomas, Parkinson). This process, often referred to as "culinary diffusion" (Spagnoli, 2010) involves the spread of culinary practices, ingredients, and recipes across different cultures. The sharing of food not only facilitated economic transactions but also led to the blending of culinary traditions, contributing to a rich and diverse Mediterranean food culture.



MEDITERRANEAN DIET as inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

"The Mediterranean diet involves a set of skills, knowledge, rituals, symbols and traditions concerning crops, harvesting, fishing, animal husbandry, conservation, processing, cooking, and particularly the sharing and consumption of food. Eating together is the foundation of the cultural identity and continuity of communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. It is a moment of social exchange and communication, an affirmation and renewal of family, group or community identity. The Mediterranean diet emphasizes values of hospitality, neighbourliness, intercultural dialogue and creativity, and a way of life guided by respect for diversity. It plays a vital role in cultural spaces, festivals and celebrations, bringing together people of all ages, conditions and social classes. It includes the craftsmanship and production of traditional receptacles for the transport, preservation and consumption of food, including ceramic plates and glasses. Women play an important role in transmitting knowledge of the Mediterranean diet: they safeguard its techniques, respect seasonal rhythms and festive events, and transmit the values of the element to new generations. Markets also play a key role as spaces for cultivating and transmitting the Mediterranean diet during the daily practice of exchange, agreement and mutual respect."
Source: https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mediterranean-diet-00884

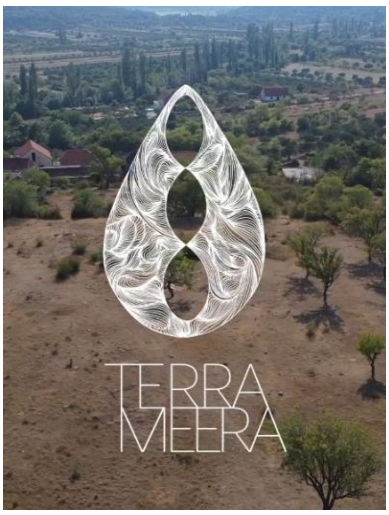
Authenticity lies at the heart of the Mediterranean diet, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Mediterranean basin.
As the research of the origins of the Mediterranean diet shows, from the cultivation of crops to the preparation of meals, every aspect of the Mediterranean diet is imbued with meaning and symbolism, representing a deep connection to the land and its people. Eating together is **not just a culinary experience but also a social ritual**, an opportunity for communication and a celebration of community identity so appreciated in regenerative tourism.

Meals structure the lives of those who prepare food and those who consume food, creating a foundation for social life, cooking and food processing is an aspect of social and cultural identity and a fundamental part of social life(Atalay and Hastorf 2006, Villing and Spataro 2015). Trade and the exchange of goods have historically been fundamental to understanding intercultural relations in the Mediterranean. The exchange of commodities such as spices, textiles and metals not only fueled economic prosperity but also created networks that linked distant cultures. The movement of goods was not merely an economic transaction but served as a medium for the transfer of cultural ideas and practices.

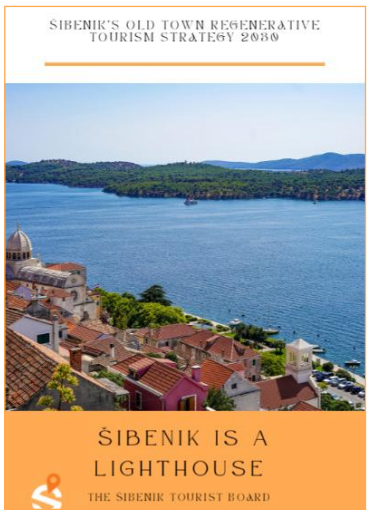
Synergies between regenerative tourism and the Mediterranean diet are evident in their shared values of sustainability, community engagement, and cultural preservation. By promoting the Mediterranean diet as part of the tourism experience, destinations should not only showcase their culinary heritage but also support local farmers, artisans, and food producers. Cultural tourism initiatives that highlight traditional cooking methods, local ingredients, and regional specialties can create opportunities for authentic experiences and meaningful interactions between tourists and residents.



Rovinj Vocational School, completed the project **"Dishes from works of art - Frescoes on the Plate"** in 2021. Students of cookery visited Istrian medieval churches and filmed frescoes with food details and reconstructed recipes. That's how a small cookbook of what our elders ate was created for future use in tourism.



Terra Meera is a freshly founded Center for Regeneration and Human Potential, born in Croatia. Located in an abandoned valley, Terra Meera pioneers are laying the foundations for a community project dedicated to local and regenerative agriculture and tourism in the area.



As a leader in regenerative tourism the city of **Šibenik**, in cooperation with Dr. Irena Ateljević and her research team, adopted in 2022 **the first ever prepared Strategy for Regenerative Tourism** of the Old Town Center of Šibenik until 2030.

Local communities play a central role in the success of regenerative tourism initiatives, serving as stewards of their cultural and natural heritage. Empowering local communities to actively participate in tourism development ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and contribute to the overall well-being of the community. By involving local residents in decision-making processes, destination management, and tourism activities, regenerative tourism can foster a sense of ownership and pride in the local culture and identity.

Cultural tourism is a key component of regenerative tourism, offering visitors the opportunity to engage with local culture, history, and traditions. By promoting cultural heritage sites, museums, festivals, and culinary traditions, destinations can attract visitors who are seeking authentic and meaningful experiences. Green tourism initiatives that emphasize sustainable transportation, eco-friendly accommodations, and responsible tourism practices can help minimize the environmental impact of tourism while preserving natural landscapes and biodiversity.



The Greek word "gastronomy" (in Greek«γαστρονομία») derives from the word "abdomen" (in Greek «γαστήρ») and "nomy" (like "autonomy") – "Nomos", which means knowledge or law. The term designates the art of haute cuisine, the set of rules for the selection of suitable primary materials and the preparation of dishes which satisfy both the taste and the visual pleasure. It also means, in general any activity related to cooking and enjoying food.
(Bampiniotis, 2002)

Innovation is essential for the continued success and sustainability of regenerative tourism initiatives, particularly in the face of emerging challenges such as climate change, overtourism, and changing consumer preferences. Embracing innovation in areas such as sustainable agriculture, food production, and culinary tourism can help destinations adapt to evolving trends and create unique and memorable experiences for visitors. By integrating digital technologies, such as mobile apps, virtual reality, and social media, destinations can enhance the visitor experience, promote cultural exchange, and facilitate sustainable travel practices.

Today Shelf-ie Souvenirs are turning Kitchen Shelves into Cultural Showcases. In 2026, the humble kitchen cupboard is becoming a cultural canvas, filled with travel souvenirs that reflect personal taste, design flair and a story of place. These shelf-ie souvenirs are moving from fridge magnets to pantry shelves, with travelers increasingly seeking edible and design-led treasures that turn everyday kitchens into showcases of global culture... More than a quarter (26%) say edible souvenirs help them relive a destination each time they cook, while 25% value how these items showcase local craft, sustainability, and traditional methods. For others, exclusivity and style play a role, with nearly one in five (17%) choosing destinations for rare souvenirs, limited-edition cookware or packaging that looks as good on a shelf as it does on social media. (Booking.com 2025)

Symbolic Connections and exchanges through history, play a crucial role in understanding the interconnectedness of Mediterranean cultures. Symbols include religious motifs, artistic representations, and architectural elements. Those shared symbols in material culture indicate a commonality of ideas and beliefs. The use of common symbols creates a sense of cultural belonging and fosters a shared identity, transcending geographical and linguistic boundaries. Travel and tourism allow visitors to uncover hidden narratives of interconnectedness in the material remains of the ancient cultures and elements of it connected to food consumption and production.

By promoting the Mediterranean diet as part of the tourism experience, destinations can showcase their culinary heritage, support local economies, and foster authentic interactions between tourists and residents. Through collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to sustainability, regenerative tourism has the potential to create positive outcomes for both visitors and host communities.

Regenerative tourism incorporating Mediterranean diet offers a holistic approach to tourism development that prioritizes the restoration and enhancement of communities and destinations.

MEDITERRANEAN REFLECTIONS



Apart from the Tourism Transition Pathway, two documents specific for the Mediterranean tourism relate closely and confirm the relevance of the SMARTIES identified thematic areas: *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism in a (Post) Covid World* (Eco-Union, 2022)[1] and the *Operational Handbook on Social and Economic Regeneration of the Mediterranean after the crisis* (Union for the Mediterranean, 2022)[2].

These important policy and research documents, offer convergent analyses of the challenges and pathways forward. Together, they illustrate how the chosen thematic areas of the SMARTIES project are priorities embedded in current regional positioning of the eight partnering countries. These thematic areas appear as a potential to demonstrate how SMEs can use them as both inspiration and roadmap for the twin transition: **the green and digital transformation** that must reinforce Mediterranean tourism's renewal.

1 https://www.ecounion.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Nota_Thefuture_mediterranean_tourism_03.pdf

2 https://medblueconomyplatform.org/vkc/news/social-and-economic-regeneration-of-the-mediterranean-after-the-crisis-shared-methods-and-tools-for-relaunching-a-sustainable-post-covid-19-tourism-model-8b56fe11e6/

Mediterranean Tourism, SMEs and the Twin Transition

Covering 2.6 million km², The Mediterranean Sea is bordered by 22 coastal countries[3]. The Mediterranean region is at a historic turning point. Long celebrated as one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, it has become both a laboratory of opportunity and a hotspot of vulnerability. With its "unique natural ecosystems and amazing diversity of cultural and historical heritage", the region holds unparalleled potential for cultural tourism. Yet it also faces "severe weaknesses such as instability caused by climate change (e.g. coastal erosion) and global shocks (financial crises, pandemics, etc.)". These vulnerabilities were fully exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only decimated international arrivals but also revealed the fragility of over-dependence on mass tourism.

Regenerative Tourism, as key thematic area identified, although not mentioned directly in the documents, still is an essence recognizable throughout. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism...* underlines that the sector must go beyond mere mitigation: "It is crucial that the decision and policy-makers from the public and private sectors play their part in turning the industry into a more sustainable one, promoting positive externalities for the environment, the workers and the local communities". This statement echoes regenerative principles: tourism should not simply avoid harm, but actively restore ecological systems and strengthen social fabrics.

The Operational Handbook (UfM) frames regeneration as implicit in sustainable recovery: "To be fully beneficial for the territories, countries and the Mediterranean region at large, sustainable and innovative tourism should therefore take into account... new forms of tourism, targeting not only international visitors, but also, and above all, local visitors and operators, so as to make the overall sector more resilient". The focus on resilience, diversification, and local anchoring is at the heart of regenerative tourism. It positions SMEs not merely as service providers but as custodians of ecosystems and communities.

Promoting Synergies with Other Ecosystems: both documents stress the importance of synergies across sectors. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism...* highlights investment in "ecosystem restoration. This suggests that tourism cannot be viewed in isolation but must co-invest in broader ecological resilience.



3 https://bluetourisminitiative.org/main-publications/sustainable-blue-tourism-in-the-mediterranean-trends-challenges-and-policy-pathways/

The Operational Handbook (UfM) goes further, stating: "Integration and synergies with other related sectors (e.g. agriculture, fisheries, restauration, transport, infrastructures for energy efficiency, etc.) [are needed] to maximise the added value of local tourism (e.g. pescatourism, ecotourism, supporting immaterial heritage such as the Mediterranean diet, underwater tourism…)". Here, the vision of tourism is intertwined into a diversified local economy, creating win-win solutions. SMEs are encouraged to act as bridges, connecting farms to visitors, fisheries to gastronomy, or renewable energy initiatives to eco-hospitality.

Meeting the Demand for Greener Tourism:
One of the strongest points highlighted is the need **to respond to the rising demand for greener tourism offers.** *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* is explicit: "Ambitious, green and inclusive recovery plans are therefore strongly needed to ensure a positive future to the Mediterranean tourism and contribute to a prosperous region". It ties this to European frameworks: "The European Commission was already on track to establishing a Green New Deal path for the European Union before the coronavirus pandemic, with the aim to reach carbon neutrality by 2050".



The Operational Handbook (UfM) frames the "green revolution" as transformative factor: "The green revolution is a game-changer when it comes to local tourism models and more traditional offers, promoting unique opportunities to fully adopt sustainable and green tourism models". For SMEs, this signalizes clear business opportunities, whether in energy-efficient accommodations, low-impact transport options, or eco-certified gastronomy linked to local biodiversity.

Respecting Authenticity:
Authenticity is repeatedly stressed as the cornerstone of sustainable Mediterranean tourism. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* emphasizes that "local communities should be involved, which also presupposes their authenticity". Authenticity is not only a cultural value but also a governance principle: policies must involve "local Communities, Businesses and Civil Society Organizations in the tourism planning, decision and policy processes as well as Recovery and Resilient Plans".

The Operational Handbook (UfM), insists that sustainable tourism must "take into account the specific features of each territory, the traditions of local communities and the governance systems within the different countries". For SMEs, this means aligning products with genuine traditions, rather than commodifying them. The Mediterranean diet, artisanal crafts, and seasonal cultural rituals are not mere staging but core assets that distinguish authentic offers from mass-market imitations.

SMEs and the Benefits of Digitalisation:
Digitalisation is framed in both documents as a megatrend with immense potential. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* writes: "Digitalisation is one of two major trends [that] appear for the future of the tourism sector… storytelling tools

allow for personalized, valuable experiences that can avoid mass tourism and favor the protection of the environment. Contactless technologies, biometrics and Artificial Intelligence are part of this trend.

The Operational Handbook (UfM) expands on this transformative potential: "The powerful role of digitalisation has just scratched the surface of the tourism sector… Augmented reality and its impact on remote experiencing of local tourism assets is certainly at its infancy… Artificial intelligence and its impact in revolutionizing tourism planning across the board is another field to be fully explored, which will certainly explode commercially in the future". For SMEs, this is both challenge and opportunity. They must invest in upskilling and seize the chance to bypass intermediaries, connect directly with visitors, and differentiate themselves through immersive, tech-enabled storytelling.

The Central Role of Local Communities:
Local communities are elevated from peripheral beneficiaries to central actors. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* insists that "public authorities should involve local communities in the tourism planning, decisions and policy processes". The Operational Handbook (UfM) is even more emphatic: "The main points that emerged… relate to the need to: Educate local communities to develop internal tourism!!!".

This emphasis highlights tourism as a two-way process. Communities are certainly not passive hosts but active co-creators of experiences. For SMEs, this means anchoring their strategies in participatory governance, ensuring that local voices shape product design, and that economic benefits are rightly distributed. It also means aligning with communities' cultural rhythms, ensuring that tourism reinforces rather than erodes local life.

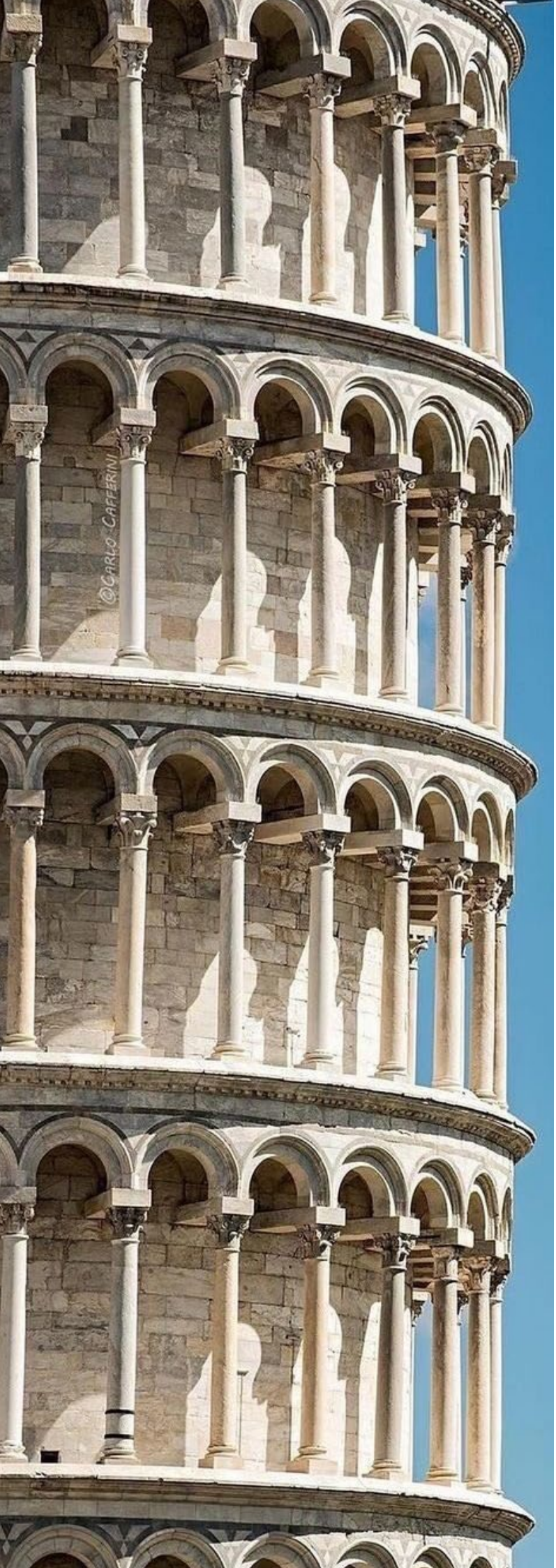
Networking and Best Practice Sharing:
Another area of convergence is the recognition that the Mediterranean suffers from fragmented efforts. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* stresses that digitalisation "has the power to better inform decision-making by sharing real-time information and best practices widely: notably, the compliance of enterprises to environmental and social sustainability". It cites initiatives such as Interreg MED Tourism as examples of regional knowledge-sharing platforms.

The Operational Handbook (UfM) confirms this concern: "Sustainable tourism operators are growing but remain endangered across the region due to a lack of strong networking across the basin and limited visibility of existing offers". SMEs therefore need not only to innovate individually but also to connect across borders, forming alliances that amplify visibility, pool resources, and advocate for supportive policies.

Innovation for Local Businesses:
Innovation is consistently treated as an indispensable driver of Mediterranean regeneration. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* notes that policies should "support finance research and innovation programs on environmental and social management through public funding and knowledge sharing activities".

The Operational Handbook (UfM) is even broader: "Innovation will play a key role in this transformation, which includes planning and implementing sustainable tourism activities involving all concerned stakeholders, and reducing the consumption of energy and water. The overarching principle and goal of innovation should also help to reduce impacts on biodiversity and natural resources, while contributing to their conservation. This situates SMEs as laboratories of change: their agility allows them to pilot creative experiences, experiment with low-impact technologies, and blend cultural heritage with contemporary innovation.

Mediterranean Diet, Heritage, Domestic Tourism and Cultural Routes:
The final SMARTIES area bundles several thematic areas. *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* highlights the Mediterranean diet as part of cultural values and underscores the role of domestic tourism:
"Domestic tourism has a critical role in sup-



porting hotels, restaurants and tour operators while expecting the deployment of vaccines…" Indeed, COVID 19 has shown that domestic tourism was the backbone of the Tourism industry, since during this crisis 75% of tourism expenditure were coming from internal travelers.

The Operational Handbook (UfM) likewise stresses domestic markets as the backbone of recovery: "Domestic tourism is providing a much-needed boost to help sustain many tourism destinations and businesses and will continue to be a key driver of recovery in the short to medium term". It also explicitly links heritage and the Mediterranean diet with synergies in agriculture, fisheries and cultural tourism. Cultural routes are less directly referenced, but the document acknowledges that "heritage, along with new forms of tourism, the local community, community tourism, and all other assumptions that form the basis of cultural routes' functioning" are mentioned.

Together, these themes illustrate how SMEs can root their innovation in heritage, through food, culture, and local traditions, while capitalizing on domestic markets to stabilize demand. Cultural routes, though underexplored, remain a promising integrative product, capable of linking cross-border heritage with sustainable itineraries.

The SMARTIES Framework as Shared Agenda

What emerges from these analyses is a consistency with thematic areas identified by SMARTIES. Though both of the documents use slightly different terminologies, all SMARTIES thematic areas are clearly recognized and confirmed as essential. Regenerative tourism, synergies across ecosystems, greener offers, authenticity, digitalisation, community roles, networking, innovation, and heritage, including the Mediterranean diet and domestic tourism, are not peripheral concerns but central pillars of Mediterranean tourism's future.

As *The Future of Mediterranean Tourism…* concludes, "ambitious, green and inclusive recovery plans are therefore strongly needed", while

The Operational Handbook (UfM) insists that sustainable regeneration "should therefore take into account new forms of tourism, targeting not only international visitors, but also, and above all, local visitors and operators". For SMEs, these insights provide both guidance and inspiration. They are called upon to lead the transformation, harnessing the twin transition to create tourism that regenerates rather than reduces, that empowers rather than marginalizes, and that connects rather than isolates. This Compendium, based on the SMARTIES thematic framework, is not just a catalogue of isolated best practices, but a shared agenda with the aim of ensuring that the future of Mediterranean tourism is sustainable, digital, authentic, and deeply rooted in the communities and ecosystems that make this region unique.



SMARTIES THEMATIC REFERENCES IN PARTNERS' NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Thematic Area	Cyprus	Croatia	Greece	Italy
1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	Moderate: Focus on sustainability certification; lacks explicit regenerative models	Strong: Explicit circular economy references	Strong: Regenerative tourism included in flagship projects	Strong: Clear regenerative tourism principles in strategy
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance	Weak: Limited integration of ecosystem services	Moderate: Cross-sectoral plans emerging	Moderate: Steps for integrated coastal/marine governance	Strong: Multi-sector partnerships formalized
3. Wellbeing and Employment in Local Communities	Moderate: Mentions job creation, seasonal employment remains	Strong: Local employment and social inclusion prioritized	Strong: Employment in rural and island areas prioritized	Strong: Job quality and rural revitalization embedded
4. Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems	Strong: Cultural tourism emphasized; green mobility underdeveloped	Strong: Emphasis on green-certified destinations	Strong: Supports green mobility and cultural proximity routes	Strong: Deep integration of green tourism with cultural assets
5. Digitalisation and Data-Driven Services	Moderate: Basic digital tools mentioned; no advanced data systems	Moderate: Digital marketing supported; lacks AI focus	Moderate: Promotes smart tourism apps; limited interoperability	Strong: Digital transition high priority; smart platforms funded
6. Cultural Heritage, Mediterranean Diet, and Authenticity	Strong: Highlights Mediterranean heritage and gastronomy	Strong: Cultural routes and heritage valorization central	Strong: Focus on heritage, gastronomy, intangible culture	Strong: Mediterranean diet and heritage central to branding
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition Readiness	Moderate: Some training initiatives; lacks twin transition focus	Strong: Skills development integrated in national action	Moderate: Upskilling programs available; limited digital depth	Strong: Broad skills roadmap aligned with EU twin transition
8. Funding and Infrastructure for Resilience	Weak: Limited financial instruments for SMEs	Moderate: Funding schemes exist but bureaucratic barriers persist	Moderate: National resilience fund targets SMEs	Strong: Substantial funds for sustainable infrastructure
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism	Moderate: Accessible tourism referenced; lacks deep CBT approach	Moderate: Some CBT focus; accessibility addressed	Moderate: Accessibility initiatives in progress	Strong: Social inclusion a key strategic pillar
10. Innovation, Research, and Pilots	Weak: Few pilot programs identified	Moderate: Innovation hubs in progress	Moderate: Pilots linked to EU recovery programs	Strong: Innovation and research embedded in PNRR measures
11. Networking, Best Practice Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement	Moderate: Participation in EU projects; networking limited locally	Strong: EU networking and national platforms active	Strong: Regional cooperation structures reinforced	Strong: Networking and best practices shared via national clusters

Malta	Portugal - Madeira	Slovenia	Spain
Moderate: Sustainability framed but regenerative approach missing	Moderate: Sustainability addressed; regenerative ambition low	Strong: Pioneer in regenerative tourism frameworks	Strong: Regeneration and circularity integrated in tourism law
Weak: Limited reference to integrated governance	Weak: Cross-sector synergies not quite developed	Strong: Ecosystem-based governance active	Strong: Multi-level governance in place
Moderate: Workforce development mentioned; quality issues remain	Moderate: Employment focus exists but seasonal dependency persists	Strong: Community wellbeing integrated into tourism KPIs	Strong: Employment and social cohesion targeted
Moderate: Cultural tourism present; weak green mobility measures	Moderate: Cultural tourism linked to nature; green efforts limited	Strong: Green certification and proximity tourism advanced	Strong: Low-carbon mobility and sustainable cultural routes promoted
Moderate: Focus on digital tools for marketing; limited data analytics	Moderate: Digital marketing strategies outlined	Strong: Digital solutions and data-driven DMOs operational	Strong: National smart tourism program underway
Strong: Cultural heritage and gastronomy promoted	Strong: Heritage and gastronomy leveraged for branding	Strong: Heritage, local food systems and cultural identity core	Strong: Gastronomy and heritage used as core tourism drivers
Moderate: Training exists but not systemic	Weak: Skills policies fragmented	Strong: Twin transition skills prioritized in training	Strong: Digital and green skills linked to recovery plan
Weak: Limited access to new funding models	Weak: Financial tools underdeveloped	Moderate: Funding programs exist; gaps for micro SMEs	Strong: Funds channeled through recovery mechanisms
Moderate: Inclusion referenced; lacks CBT framework	Moderate: Inclusion acknowledged	Strong: Inclusive tourism deeply embedded	Strong: Accessibility and inclusive products widespread
Weak: Few innovation initiatives	Weak: Innovation ecosystem nascent	Strong: Living labs and research clusters functional	Strong: Pilots embedded in sustainable tourism strategies
Moderate: EU collaboration active; local networks small	Moderate: Some regional cooperation efforts	Strong: Networking recognized as strategic asset	Strong: Networks and observatories institutionalized

Comparative Analysis of partnering Mediterranean Countries' National Tourism Strategies

Analysis examines how eight countries, **Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal (Madeira), Slovenia and Spain,** recognize **11 thematic areas extracted from the Tourism Transition Pathway (TTP)** in their existing national tourism strategies, operationalized by the SMARTIES framework. The findings reflect a diverse but convergent trend towards regenerative, digital, and inclusive transformation in Mediterranean tourism, with variations in depth, implementation, and systemic integration (holistic approach to the entire tourism destination).

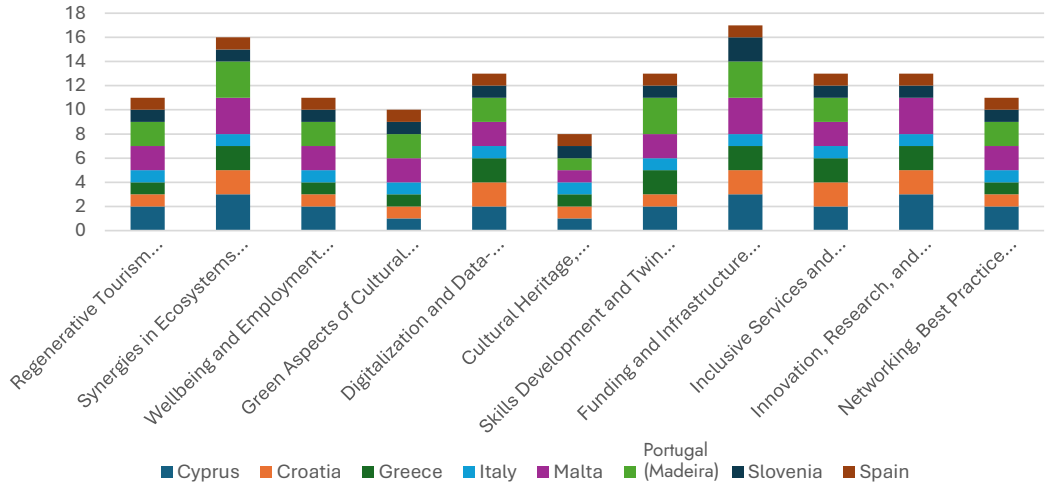
General Observations

High recognition: Italy, Spain and Slovenia exhibit **high recognition** of all 11 thematic areas, demonstrating comprehensive adoption of regenerative tourism postulates, green mobility, digitalisation and inclusive governance frameworks. They integrate these within broader policy agendas, such as Italy's PNRR and Spain's Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030.

Strong progress: Croatia and Greece present **strong progress**, particularly in cultural heritage valorization, employment and green infrastructure. Among all the countries only Šibenik in Croatia prepared the Strategy for the development of regenerative tourism in town until 2030. Both countries actively force EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funding for digital and green projects but show gaps in advanced data-driven systems and innovation ecosystems.

Moderate positining: Cyprus, Malta and Portugal (Madeira) show **moderate positioning,** emphasizing heritage and sustainability but still have space to fill for systemic regenerative strategies, robust digital innovation and research-driven pilots. These regions require stronger multi-sector governance and targeted SME support for twin transition readiness.

LEVEL OF INTEREST FOR IDENTIFIED THEMATIC AREAS IN PARTNERING COUNTRIES' NATIONAL STRATEGIES



1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	High interest: Italy and Spain embed regenerative tourism in strategic roadmaps with measurable goals. Moderate interest: Croatia and Greece mention regenerative principles but focus more on sustainability.Developing interest: Cyprus, Malta and Portugal (Madeira) address sustainability generically, still without clear regenerative indicators
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance	High interest: Italy and Slovenia implement cross-sector partnerships; Spain institutionalizes multi-level governance. Challenges: Malta and Portugal (Madeira) make little mention of cooperation in strategies; Cyprus remains fragmented in approach.
3. Wellbeing and Employment	High interest: All countries prioritize job creation, but only Italy and Slovenia link employment to systemic wellbeing indicators. Challenges: Seasonal dependency persists in Croatia, Cyprus and Portugal (Madeira).
4. Green Aspects and Proximity Tourism	Strong performers: Slovenia, Spain, and Italy drive green certification and sustainable mobility. Challenges: Croatia, Malta and Portugal (Madeira) lack robust low-carbon mobility plans.
5. Digitalisation and Data-Driven Services	Advancing: Spain's national smart tourism program sets a benchmark. Partial: Cyprus, Malta, and Portugal (Madeira) limit digitalisation to marketing; data interoperability is missing across most of the countries.
6. Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet	Universal recognition: All strategies strongly force cultural heritage and gastronomy, but integration into digital storytelling is uneven.
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition	Integrated models: Italy, Spain, and Slovenia link skills to green and digital transitions. Challenges: Cyprus, Malta and Portugal (Madeira) offer fragmented training schemes.
8. Funding and Infrastructure	Robust support: Italy and Spain deploy large-scale recovery funds. Challenges: Malta, Portugal (Madeira), Croatia and Cyprus need more targeted SME financial instruments.
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism	Innovators: Slovenia deeply embeds inclusivity & community based tourism (CBT). Others: Cyprus and Malta mention accessibility without systemic frameworks.
10. Innovation, Research and Pilots	Active ecosystems: Spain and Slovenia operate living labs and research clusters. Challenges: Cyprus and Portugal (Madeira) show minimal innovation infrastructure.
11. Networking and Best Practice Sharing	Satisfying: Italy, Spain, Croatia and Slovenia have formalized observatories and EU-linked platforms. Potential: Cyprus, Malta and Portugal (Madeira) need localized networking mechanisms.

Cross-Cutting Trends

- **Heritage and gastronomy** are consistently emphasized but often lack integration with **digital narratives and green mobility.**
- **SME support** remains uneven, countries with structured funding frameworks (Italy, Spain) outperform those with generic or fragmented tools.
- **Skills and inclusion** are acknowledged but rarely operationalized beyond pilot training programs, except in Italy and Slovenia.
- **Innovation ecosystems** (labs, data observatories, cross-sector R&D) remain the main differentiator between regions.

Strategic Recommendations

1. For High Performers (Italy, Spain, Slovenia)

· Scale innovation pilots to other regions; share data models with EU observatories.

2. For Moderate Performers (Croatia, Greece)

· Accelerate adoption of digital interoperability and regenerative tourism KPIs.

3. For other Regions (Cyprus, Malta, Portugal (Madeira)

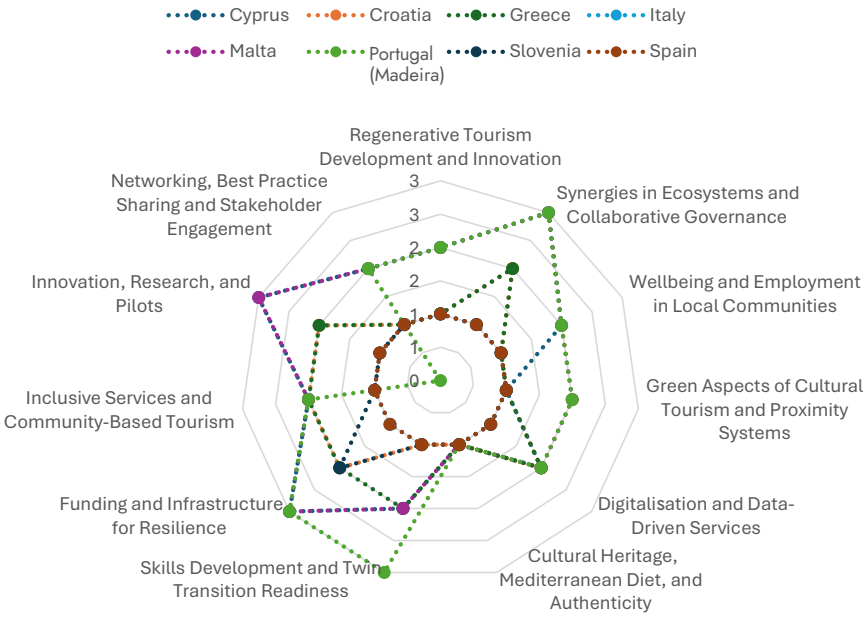
· Establish governance platforms, develop SME funding pipelines, and integrate skills training aligned with the twin transition.

To Conclude:

The Mediterranean is at a turning point. The era of uncontrolled mass tourism is no longer sustainable. Climate urgency, socio-economic fragility and changing traveler values demand a new direction. The twin green and digital transitions provide the framework for this transformation, and SMEs are key actors to drive it forward.

This compendium is both a **call to action** and a **celebration of opportunity**. By supporting SMEs on their journey, through training, funding, networking, and policy alignment, we can foster a Mediterranean tourism model that regenerates its ecosystems, empowers its communities, and delights its visitors. The inspiration drawn from post-COVID reflections is not merely about recovery; it is about **re-imagining tourism as a driver of shared prosperity, resilience, and cultural pride.**

The Mediterranean, with its extraordinary heritage, can lead the way in showing the world how tourism, when aligned with authenticity, innovation, and sustainability, becomes not a burden but a gift, to nature, to people, and to future generations.





PART 3: LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

THE SMARTIES FOR SMEs SURVEY

The Survey, conducted among tourism SMEs and key stakeholders across the Mediterranean region, was designed to assess the post-COVID tourism landscape and identify the needs, opportunities, and challenges shaping the transition toward regenerative tourism. Based on a structured questionnaire the survey was **divided into four thematic groups:**

- Impact of COVID-19,
- Strategic Issues,
- Stakeholder Roles and Visitors
- Best Practices

The survey gathered detailed qualitative and quantitative insights from businesses representing all segments of the tourism ecosystem, as defined by DG GROW's Annual Single Market Report. The survey covered accommodation providers, food service operations, tour operators, travel agencies, cultural and creative industries, museums, sports and recreation services, transport operators, and local and national public authorities.

The results obtained present the **current state of SMEs**, their **post-COVID adaptations** and the degree to which regenerative tourism principles are understood, applied, and supported across participating regions. The findings also shed light on how SMEs have responded to systemic challenges such as staff shortages, decreased visitor numbers, increased operational costs, and the need for digital and sustainable innovations.

A key focus of the survey was the identification of **weaknesses and strengths** in regenerative cultural and food tourism that directly impact SMEs. Respondents assess issues such as over-commercialization, overtourism, cultural insensitivity, and inadequate cultural resource management, while also highlighting strengths such as authenticity, community engagement, local food traditions, and innovative product diversification. These insights help clarify perceived challenges in implementing regenerative tourism, from balancing economic growth with environmental conservation to preserving authenticity and encouraging community and visitor participation.

The questionnaire further explored **stakeholder roles**, asking participants to identify the actors most essential to the success of regenerative tourism initiatives. From local communities to governmental bodies, destination management organizations, and private businesses, the survey gathered expectations regarding governance, funding, regulations, and public–private cooperation. It also investigated effective modes of education and awareness-raising, including workshops, cultural integration in product design, sustainable marketing strategies, visitor responsibility initiatives, and certification schemes.

Finally, the survey examined **best practices**, seeking concrete examples of innovative tools, strategies, and successful projects that combine cultural heritage, the Mediterranean diet, and regenerative tourism. Topics included farm/sea-to-table experiences, digital heritage interpretation, interactive and creative tourism formats, and collaborations with chefs. The questionnaire also asked participants to reflect on how territorial assets can be re-evaluated, mapped, preserved, and enhanced through technology and community-based approaches. Finally, survey invited respondents to identify visitor profiles most likely to engage with regenerative tourism, offering valuable insight for future product development and market segmentation.

Overall, the survey layed the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of how Mediterranean SMEs are navigating the twin transition while embracing regenerative tourism. The following results explore these themes in depth, highlighting challenges, gaps, strengths, and opportunities that can guide policy development, innovation strategies, capacity-building initiatives, and the creation of a more resilient, culturally grounded, and environmentally responsible tourism ecosystem.

IMPACT OF COVID 19

The impact was examined and the changes made relating to funding opportunities, infrastructure.

The impact of COVID-19 on tourism SMEs participating in the SMARTIES project was multifaceted. Across surveyed regions (such as Madeira, Paphos, Malta, Pisa, Carloforte, Poggiardo, Novigrad, and St. Maria del Puerto with multiple focus groups held), the dominant COVID impacts were **declines in visitor numbers, shorter stays, staff shortages, and increased health/sanitation costs.** For example, Madeira respondents highlighted staff shortfalls and higher sanitation costs explicitly as major operational stresses; Paphos SMEs cited "decrease of visitors number & the increase cost for health" as the immediate impacts. These trends join reduced demand and escalated overheads, straining revenue and operations.

Adaptive changes implemented: To adapt to this post-pandemic environment, SMEs implemented **changes in marketing strategies, targeted new audiences, purchased digital solutions and introduced innovative products and services**. Staff training was a key adaptive measure to ensure businesses could cope with the new operational demands. Madeira data show "change of marketing strategy," "purchase of digital solutions," and "staff training" among the top adaptations; Paphos SMEs similarly emphasize "high marketing strategy change & purchase of digital tools." These changes reflect moves toward resilience and trying to capture shifting traveler behavior post-COVID.

Support received and its effect:

National and regional supports were critical: many SMEs reported receiving **national-level financial/technical support**, which translated into greater resilience and financial stability. This was perceived as not just reducing the shock but enabling longer-term adaptability (e.g., stabilizing finances and expanding capabilities), indicating that policy interventions had tangible positive effects.

Environmental sustainability shifts:

Post-COVID, there was an emerging movement toward environmental sustainability: some businesses introduced waste management initiatives, green certifications, or new sustainable products. Although a significant proportion still reported "None", indicating uneven use, there was nevertheless a gradual alignment with regenerative tourism practices.

mixed adoption, suggesting need for stronger institutional incentives

Environmental shifts

decline in visitors/staff issues; ties into strategic weakness of overreliance on volume tourism

COVID impacts

financial stability/resilience; underpins capacity to invest in regenerative products

Impacts of support

Operational changes

digitalisation & marketing; linked to innovation best practices

Support sources

national/regional aid; enabling resilience (relates to stakeholder roles in enabling ecosystem stability)

STRATEGIC ISSUES

The strategic landscape for developing regenerative cultural tourism intertwined with the Mediterranean diet, based on the SMARTIES data, reveals a challenging and opportunity-rich terrain. Strategic issues r**elating to cultural tourism, authenticity, mediterranean diet, environment, community engagement, regenerative tourism** were examined through the survey.

The core strategic issues detected are clustered into **weaknesses, strengths** and **challenges/ opportunities**, each of which informs how destinations can turn toward more resilient, authentic and culturally rooted tourism models.

Weaknesses

A recurring and cross-origin weakness is the **erosion of authenticity**, often caused by **over-commercialization** and **overtourism**. In focus groups from Novigrad, Carloforte, Poggiardo, and Pisa, stakeholders highlighted" over-commercialization," "lack of sustainability," and "overtourism causing damage to sites" as problems that reduce cultural significance and drain local heritage resources. Such an approach risks turning distinctive cultural-food assets, central to the Mediterranean diet, into standardized souvenirs, separating the link between visitor experience and genuine local practice. Moreover, **cultural insensitivity** and "inadequate care for cultural resources," repeatedly named in Pisa and Paphos, show gaps in how tourism products are designed and presented, often ignoring local narratives and conservation norms, which undermines trust and long-term community support. This weakness is not just damaging the image; it also accelerates degradation of both tangible (sites, materials) and intangible (recipes, rituals) heritage.

Strengths

Strengths relating to cultural tourism diversification, authenticity, environment, community engagement, and regenerative tourism were observed.

Strengths are rooted in the **preservation of authenticity and the diversification of tourism offerings** based on local culture and gastronomy. Stakeholders particularly emphasized the potential of the **Mediterranean diet** and **culinary heritage** as cornerstones for innovative tourism products, fostering both economic and cultural value.

Strong basic assets and identity align naturally with regenerative aims. Across Madeira, Paphos, Novigrad, and other sites, **preservation of authenticity** and **diversification of offerings based on local food and culture** are seen as primary strengths. Survey respondents in Madeira highlighted "preservation of authenticity" and "diversifying offer" as key value propositions, indicating stakeholder recognition that rooted, locally unique culinary experiences (connected to the Mediterranean diet's principles) differentiate the destination and create added value.

Community engagement becomes not just a social goal but an enabling mechanism. Local actors are already involved in partnerships, co-production and cultural framing, offering a base for scaling regenerative products that celebrate rather than extract cultural food traditions.

Weaknesses

Over-commercialization and overtourism, eroding authenticity.
Cultural insensitivity and inadequate care for cultural resources, with negative impacts on the environment and community well-being, threatening both environmental and heritage integrity. This appears repeatedly in focus group diagnostics (e.g., listed as "cultural insensitivity"; "over-commercialization" and **"lack of sustainability"**).

Strengths

Preservation of authenticity: authenticity is perceived as a competitive differentiator and a foundation for innovation in cultural/food tourism.

Diversification of offerings using local cuisine and traditions "using cultural diversity for innovative products" and "community engagement" appear as strong enablers. These illustrate alignment with regenerative principles, where rootedness in place and diversification build resilience.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges and Opportunities relating to cultural tourism, authenticity, environment, community engagement, regenerative tourism were observed.

The **central strategic challenges**, in implementing regenerative tourism practices, specifically when integrating cultural tourism and promoting the Mediterranean diet, **are threefold**, yet each carries implicit opportunities if addressed with intentional design:

Balancing economic growth with environmental and cultural conservation: The highest-voted concern in multiple questionnaires (e.g., Madeira and Paphos) was the difficulty of reconciling tourism-driven economic benefits with the imperative to conserve ecosystems and cultural landscapes. This tension reflects classic growth-versus-preservation compromises. However, reframing this challenge opens an opportunity: embedding regenerative postulates into value creation, e.g., linking visitor consumption to measurable cultural heritage revitalization or environmental restoration, turns "growth" into a vehicle for regeneration rather than exhaustion.

Preserving authenticity while meeting tourist demand: Stakeholders in Novigrad, Paphos, and Carloforte warned that escalating tourism could erode the very authenticity that attracts visitors. This exposes a strategic risk of shifting the mission. The opportunity lies in **product differentiation through co-creation**: involving local knowledge holders, chefs and cultural custodians in designing experiences ensures that tourism demand is met on the terms of authenticity, e.g., curated Mediterranean diet food trails, participatory culinary workshops, and heritage storytelling formats that carry a local voice.

Stimulating and structuring local community participation: While community involvement is identified as a strength and goal, its effectiveness varies by place. The challenge is capacity, alignment, and empowerment; the opportunity is to build structured channels (community-led regenerative product development, revenue-sharing co-operatives, local heritage stewards) that turn passive hosts into active partners. For example, Madeira and Poggiardo respondents emphasized "creating regenerative tourism offers and products" and "supporting community-led enterprises," suggesting a readiness to operationalize community action if the empowering frameworks are present.

Challenges

Balancing economic growth with environmental conservation, the most- voted concern in multiple questionnaires, indicating friction between development pressure and ecological limits.

Preserving authenticity while satisfying tourist demand, a repeated tension in focus groups like Novigrad and Paphos which stress "preserving authenticity while meeting tourism demands."

Opportunities:

Stimulating community participation, while seen as critical, an opportunity that appears simultaneously as a challenge, as community capacity and engagement



INTEGRATION WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Strategically aligning cultural tourism with the **Mediterranean diet** amplifies both conservation and experiential quality. The diet is not just a cuisine but a cultural system, rooted in seasonality, local biodiversity, and communal food practices. Capitalizing on this means packaging tourism around f**arm-to-table (sea-to table) itineraries, agro-cultural festivals, culinary heritage preservation** and educational tastings that narrate the diet's ecological and cultural logic. This integration helps address authenticity concerns (because food practices are locally embedded), provides diversification (new product lines: diet-centered tours, cooking heritage labs) and positions destinations as custodians of a globally recognized intangible heritage.
Opportunities live in converting tensions into co-created solutions: embedding local communities in product design, leveraging genuine culinary heritage as premium experiences and channeling visitor expectations into conservation-supporting behavior.

SWOT ANALYSIS - STRATEGIC ISSUES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
· Preservation of authenticity · Diversification of offer based on local food · Community engagement	· Over-commercialization and overtourism · Cultural insensitivity · Inadequate care for heritage	· Embedding local communities in product design · Exploiting culinary heritage · Channeling visitor expectations into conservation	· Balancing growth with conservation · Preserving authenticity while meeting demand · Stimulating local community participation

REASSESSING REGENERATIVE PRACTICES CAME ANALYSIS - STRATEGIC ISSUES:

Correct **Addressing Weaknesses**	**Adapt** **Responding to Threats**	**Maintain** **Using Strengths**	**Explore** **Capitalizing on Opportunities**
Address over commercialization and overtourism to protect authenticity	Balance economic growth with conservation through regenerative criteria	Preservation of authenticity as a core strength	New regenerative frameworks integrating Mediterranean diet narratives
Improve cultural sensitivity in product design	Preserve authenticity by co-creating with local custodians	Diversification of offerings based on local food	Community-led product development models

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The strategic issues reflect an ecosystem at a crossroads. Weaknesses such as over-commercialization and cultural insensitivity threaten long-term sustainability, but built-in strengths – authenticity and community engagement – provide fertile ground for regenerative transformation. The key lies in integrating the Mediterranean diet as a cultural and ecological anchor, balancing growth with stewardship, and building inclusive, co-created governance and product design. If these strengths are deliberately pulled, the region can shift from extractive cultural tourism to a regenerative, identity-rich and resilient Mediterranean experience.



Challenges

Balancing growth and conservation, conflicts resolved through participatory approaches and mapping

Strengths

Using authenticity/diversification foundational to best practices and visitor value proposition

Weaknesses

Decline in visitor/staff issues ties into strategic weakness of overreliance on volume tourism

Expected impacts

Heritage conservation and community regeneration success metrics for regenerative initiatives

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Co-creation Frameworks:** Establish permanent participatory design labs where locals, culinary experts and tourism operators jointly develop Mediterranean diet-based experiences, ensuring authenticity is embedded from inception.
- **Regenerative Product Differentiation:** Market offerings that explicitly tie visitor experience to cultural preservation outcomes (e.g., "dine and restore" packages where part of spend supports heritage site conservation).
- **Capacity Building for Communities:** Provide training, microgrants and technical support so local actors can transform knowledge into sustainable tourism products.
- **Demand Management with Cultural Safeguards:** Introduce soft visitor caps or incentivize off-peak Mediterranean diet culinary tours to reduce pressure while extending economic benefit.
- **Narrative Marketing:** Use storytelling rooted in local food ethos to communicate value - not just "eat local" but "taste the legacy," linking diet, place and identity.

STAKEHOLDERS' ROLES

Stakeholder roles relating to synergies, partnerships, networking, local communities, skills were observed through the survey.

The success of regenerative cultural tourism, especially when interwoven with the Mediterranean diet, depends critically on how stakeholders are engaged, empowered, and structured. The SMARTIES data **reveal three interlinked stakeholder dimensions: local community engagement, institutional/authority responsibility and education & awareness.** Each dimension carries its own strategic imperatives and reflects both existing practices and gaps across regions like Madeira, Malta, Xanthi, Paphos, Novigrad, Poggiardo, Carloforte, st. Maria del Puerto and Pisa.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES' ROLE

Engagement of local communities, relating to skills development, interactivity, inclusiveness, cultural tourism product design were analysed. Two of the most effective community strategies were identified in response to the question of how local communities can be effectively engaged and empowered to participate in and utilize regenerative tourism initiatives that highlight cultural tourism and the Mediterranean diet.

Local communities are not passive beneficiaries but potential co-creators and curators. The survey results (e.g., Madeira, Poggiardo, Novigrad) consistently identify **creating regenerative tourism offers and products** as one of the most effective means for community participation. This implies that communities gain impact and economic and cultural returns when they own, design and manage experiences rooted in their traditions, particularly the Mediterranean diet. Examples include farm-to-table initiatives, culinary heritage workshops, and locally curated food trails where community members host, teach, or guide.

The second highly valued pathway is **engaging visitors in local actions** (Madeira, Paphos), such as participatory conservation, cleaning actions, gardening and cooking sessions, or cultural exchanges. This approach deepens the connection with visitors, transforming tourists into temporary allies, participants in cultural empowerment, rather than just consumers. It also helps to distribute tourism value more evenly and encourages behavioral alignment with regenerative goals (e.g., respecting heritage, sourcing local products). However, effectiveness varies: data indicate some gaps in community capacity and inconsistent structures for engagement, making it crucial to move from ad-hoc participation to systematic co-creation platforms where local voices shape product development and revenue flows.



Creating regenerative tourism offers and products: is recognized to empower communities economically and culturally e.g., local gastronomy experiences, heritage-based workshops (e.g., focus groups like Novigrad and Poggiardo explicitly advocate community-led product development).

Engaging visitors in local actions, such as participatory conservation, is to foster meaningful connections and shared responsibility., culinary workshops or cultural co-creation, which deepen connections between visitors and the community and create mutual value (evidenced in Paphos and Madeira where visitor engagement is cited as key).

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

Responsibility of Authorities and Institutions were surveyed relating to funding, synergies, regenerative tourism. The question to which an answer was sought was how government bodies and institutions should contribute to the promotion of regenerative tourism in relation to cultural tourism and the Mediterranean diet.

Governmental bodies and institutional actors have a dual enabling and regulatory role in realizing the regenerative potential. The SMARTIES findings (Malta, Pisa, Carloforte, Paphos, Novigrad) emphasize that authorities should **provide funding for cultural preservation projects,** support **the development of regenerative tourism products and facilitate synergies among stakeholders** including agri-tourism, hospitality and cultural heritage entities. Funding is not simply operational support; it functions as a signal of priority, reduces entry barriers for community initiatives and can be tied to regenerative criteria to ensure alignment with conservation/authenticity goals.

Stakeholders need **public-private partnerships,** a repeated recommendation from focus groups like Pisa and Carloforte, which merge governmental legitimacy with private innovation and local knowledge. Authorities are expected to **design policies that create enabling conditions:** regulatory changes, incentives for sustainability adoption, recognition/certification schemes and regulations that protect "hidden" cultural assets while enabling their responsible activation. For instance, Madeira respondents prioritized incentives for businesses adopting sustainable practices and regulatory frameworks that safeguard heritage, indicating a demand for both carrots (subsidies, tax breaks) and protective guardrails.







INSTITUTIONS should:

Provide targeted funding for cultural preservation and regenerative product development.

Introduce and enforce supportive governance like incentives for sustainability adoption and regulations protecting hidden cultural assets (i.e. "incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices" and "regulations promoting hidden cultural heritage").

Facilitate public-private partnerships to distribute benefits and scale regenerative initiatives.

AWARENESS RAISING

Education and Awareness were observed relating to greener tourism, skills development and cultural tourism. Questions were considered: how can stakeholders and the public be best informed about the benefits of regenerative tourism in preserving cultural heritage and advocating the Mediterranean diet?

Education and awareness serve as the connective tissue across stakeholder groups, transforming abstract regenerative ideas into shared understanding and practice. The data (Madeira, Paphos, Novigrad) show that **educational campaigns and workshops** are the top-rated mechanisms for informing stakeholders and the public about regenerative tourism benefits. These initiatives should not be one-way; they must be participatory, incorporating local knowledge, demonstrating how cultural elements (like the Mediterranean diet) can be integrated into product design and marketing to amplify authenticity and sustainability.

Embedding cultural elements into both, **product design** and **communication,** signals a shift from superficial "greenwashing" to real identity alignment, where tourism offers become storytelling vehicles, and awareness campaigns reinforce visitor expectations to support stewardship. For example, integrating local cuisine narratives into promotional material or packaging experiences around seasonal Mediterranean diet traditions makes the heritage dimension tangible and memorable.

Certifications, although lower-ranked than educational campaigns, can play a complementary role by giving stakeholders visible markers of commitment, especially when designed with local input so they feel credible rather than externally imposed.





PREFERRED MECHANISMS:

Educational campaigns and workshops are considered to be the primary channel for raising understanding among SMEs, communities and tourists.

Integrating cultural elements into product design and marketing communicates authenticity and sustainability as embedded values. Multi-level collaboration, from grassroots community initiatives to institutional frameworks, is a prerequisite for successful regenerative tourism tied to the Mediterranean diet.

SWOT ANALYSIS - STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
· Community co-creation · Cultural anchoring · Institutional support structures	· Capacity gaps in local communities · Limited engagement structures	· Local co-creation hubs · Regenerative funding streams · Layered education campaigns.	· Community alignment and capacity · Coordination needs · Awareness effectiveness

CAME ANALYSIS - STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Correct - Addressing Weaknesses	Adapt - Responding to Threats	Maintain - Using Strengths	Explore - Capitalizing on Opportunities
· Fill capacity gaps in local communities for engagement · Reduce fragmentation between institutional initiatives and community actions	· Develop participatory co-creation platforms for product design · Align policy incentives with community priorities	· Institutional support structures for partnerships · Educational campaigns and awareness programs	· Regenerative funding streams tied to cultural preservation · Multi-stakeholder feedback loops for adaptive governance



THREEDIMENSIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES AND STRATEGIC VALUE

The three dimensions, education, community engagement and funding, are closely interdependent. Effective community engagement (co-creation of regenerative products) without institutional support (funding, policy) risks fragmentation; institutional programs without community ownership lack authenticity and local legitimacy; and both can fade without consistent education that aligns expectations and builds capacity. Thus, a **multi-layered stakeholder ecosystem** is required: authorities provide structural support, communities drive content and delivery, and education/ widespread awareness ensures alignment and sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Design Regenerative Funding Streams:** Authorities should create earmarked grants or matching-fund schemes for projects that combine cultural preservation with sustainable food experiences. Tie eligibility to community participation and authenticity safeguards.
2. **Establish Local Regenerative Co-Creation Hubs:** Formal platforms where community members, chefs, heritage custodians, and tourism operators collaboratively design Mediterranean diet-centered products.
3. **Implement Layered Education Campaigns:** Combine storytelling (e.g., "taste the legacy" narratives) with technical workshops for SMEs and awareness programs for visitors. Ensure materials are multilingual and locally contextualized.
4. **Institutionalize Public-Private-Community Partnerships:** Use memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to align responsibilities, e.g., municipalities support infrastructure, private tour operators market experiences, communities provide content.
5. **Integrate Cultural Elements into Branding and Certification:** Develop locally co-branded regenerative labels that reflect adherence to Mediterranean diet authenticity and heritage stewardship, enhancing trust with visitors.
6. **Feedback & Adaptive Governance Loops:** Create mechanisms where community and visitor feedback inform iterative policy refinement and product evolution, closing the loop between practice and support structures.

Key stakeholders

local communities/cultural heritage bodies plus tourism operators; implies coalition- building

Authorities' roles

funding and enabling synergies; structural backbone

Community participation

community-led products and visitor engagement; ties to empowerment and co-creation

Policy support

preference for incentives/regulation; points to actionable levers for authorities.

To conclude:

Stakeholder roles are not sealed boxes but a dynamic, co-dependent ecosystem. The SMARTIES data illuminate both the promise, community engagement, cultural anchoring, and institutional appetite for support, and the gaps; capacity unevenness, the need for better coordination and the risk of superficial awareness campaigns. A strategic, layered approach that binds communities, authorities, and education around shared regenerative goals, particularly through the cultural vector of the Mediterranean diet, can convert these roles into a resilient, place-based tourism model that regenerates rather than exhausts.

VISITORS

Understanding visitor typologies is crucial for tailoring best practices. The survey data (Carloforte, Novigrad, Madeira and others) show that regenerative cultural-food tourism resonates strongly with **individual travelers, best agers (26–60), families, and solo travelers, with younger segments** also receptive, particularly when experiences are interactive or digitally enhanced. Organized visitors remain relevant but less dominant than personalized or small-group experiential seekers. The segmentation suggests a layered product strategy: deep heritage-immersive offerings for best agers and families (e.g., curated Mediterranean diet culinary retreats), participatory short-form experiences for solo or youth travelers (e.g., hands-on cooking labs, micro-volunteering conservation activities) and adaptive packaging for organized groups that integrate local narratives meaningfully.

This visitor insight also provides guidance on **communication and access:** digital channels and storytelling will attract younger groups, while authenticity-centric branding and narrative depth appeal to best agers and culture-seeking solo travelers. Likewise, integrating visitor participation in conservation or food production deepens their sense of contribution, turning consumption into co-regeneration.

CORE TARGET SEGMENTS:

Individual travelers, best agers (26 - 60), families, and solo travelers, with organized visits still relevant. Younger demographics and women travel segments show potential for experience/digital-centric offerings.

Focus groups add subtle layers, some products suit **seniors or "smartworkers".** Segmentation suggests crafting layered experiences: immersive cultural-food journeys for best agers and participatory, digital-light experiences for younger/solo travelers.

Regenerative tourism is most attractive to **independent travelers, including best agers and solo visitors. Younger travelers** are also engaged, presenting opportunities for digital and experiential marketing. Tailoring offerings for families, seniors, and women could help expand the audience.



SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Analysis of data from the SMARTIES questionnaire highlights that **regenerative cultural tourism succeeds with the involvement of authenticity, sustainability and community engagement.** COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation and awareness of resilience in the tourism sector, while at the same time exposing long-standing structural weaknesses such as over-commercialization and cultural vulnerability. In the future, integrated tourism strategies involving **SMEs, local communities and authorities, based on culinary heritage and territorial assets, offer the clear path towards sustainable Mediterranean tourism.**

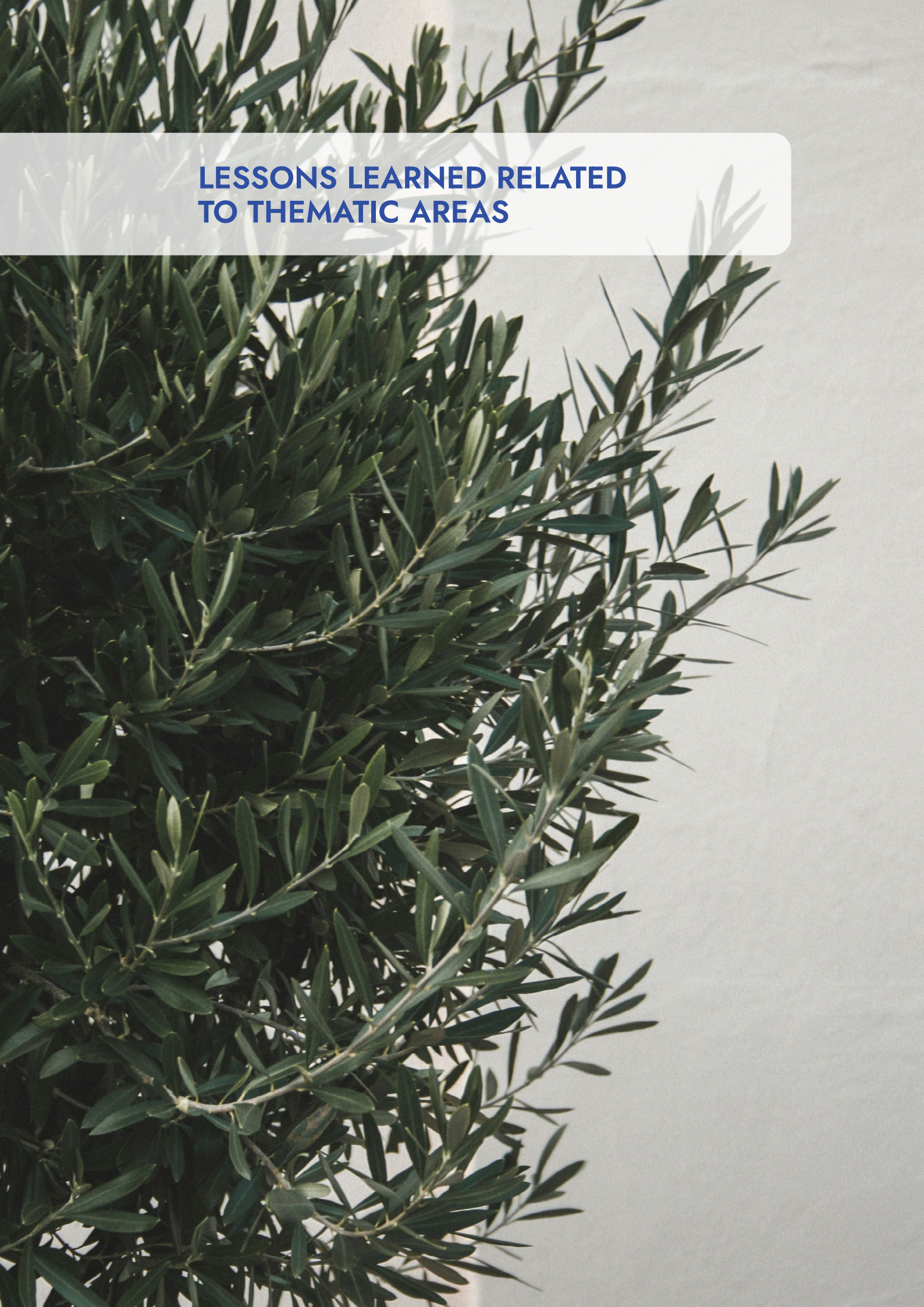


Question-by-Question Analytical Summary

1. **COVID impacts detected** → decline in visitors/staff issues; ties into strategic weakness of overreliance on volume tourism.
2. **Operational changes made** → digitalisation & marketing; linked to innovation best practices.
3. **Support sources detected** → national/regional aid; enabling resilience (relates to stakeholder roles in enabling ecosystem stability).
4. **Impacts of support claimed** → financial stability/resilience; underpins capacity to invest in regenerative products.
5. **Environmental shifts made** → mixed adoption, suggesting need for stronger institutional incentives.
6. **Weaknesses detected** → authenticity loss, cultural resource neglect; drives strategic need for governance and community engagement.
7. **Strengths detected** → using authenticity/diversification; foundational to best practices and visitor value proposition.
8. **Challenges detected** → balancing growth and conservation; conflicts resolved through participatory approaches and mapping.
9. **Expected impacts** → heritage conservation & **community regeneration**; success metrics for regenerative initiatives.
10. **Policy support needed** → preference for incentives/regulation; points to actionable levers for authorities.
11. **Key stakeholders involved** → local communities/cultural heritage bodies plus tourism operators; implies coalition-building.
12. **Community participation needed** → community-led products and visitor engagement; ties to empowerment and co-creation.
13. **Authorities' roles highlighted** → funding and enabling synergies; structural backbone.
14. **Awareness expected through** → education + cultural embedding; demand-shaping mechanism.
15. **Innovation expected through** → participatory experiences & tech; differentiators in visitor offerings.
16. **Territorial assets needs perceived** → mapping + community stewardship; supply-side enhancement.
17. **Visitors expected** → segmentation for targeting; product design and communication.
18. **Good practice examples** → concrete inspirations to replicate/adapt in other origins.

RECOMMENDATIONS / NEXT STEPS

1. **Develop pilot regenerative products and strategies** in each region that combine farm (sea)-to-table experiences with narrative cultural interpretation, tailored by visitor segment or even better create strategic approach like Šibenik Regenerative Tourism Strategy, Croatia.
2. **Institutionalize community co-creation labs** to map hidden assets and design offerings.
3. **Design incentive frameworks** for SMEs to adopt sustainability (tax rebates, certification support) tied to cultural preservation.
4. **Roll out layered education campaigns** combining workshops with embedded cultural storytelling in marketing.
5. **Document and scale origin-specific success stories** (e.g., Loulé Criativo-style festivals, Cyprus Breakfast models) as templates across the Mediterranean.



LESSONS LEARNED RELATED TO THEMATIC AREAS

COVID 19 AND LESSONS LEARNED

COVID-19 appeared to be a catalyst revealing the need for regenerative models: The survey results demonstrate that the COVID-19 crisis functioned as a stress test for Mediterranean tourism systems, exposing their dependence on volume-driven demand. Across Madeira, Paphos, Pisa, Carloforte, Poggiardo, Novigrad, St. Maria del Puerto, SMEs faced declining visitor numbers, shorter stays, staff shortages, and rising health and sanitation costs. These impacts highlight the limitations of extractive tourism models and reinforce the need for regenerative approaches that prioritize resilience, diversification, and community stability.

Digital transition acted as a foundation for regeneration: SMEs responded to the crisis by accelerating digital transformation and changes in marketing strategies, adoption of digital tools, product innovation, and staff training. Evidence from Madeira and Paphos highlights digitalisation and marketing changes as dominant adaptive strategies. These shifts represent an early alignment with the digital pillar of the twin transition, enabling businesses to reconnect with markets, improve flexibility, and support regenerative tourism models rooted in innovation rather than scale.

Public support was recognized as an enabler of regenerative capacity: National and regional support mechanisms emerged as critical enablers of resilience. SMEs reported that financial and technical assistance strengthened stability and reduced vulnerability, allowing them to withstand shocks and invest in adaptive measures. This confirms that regenerative tourism cannot rely solely on individual businesses; it requires coordinated policy frameworks that support long-term transformation, not just short-term recovery.

Environmental transition: progress marked by uneven adoption. Post-COVID practices indicate an initial shift toward environmental sustainability, including waste management initiatives, green certifications, and the development of sustainable products. However, a significant share of respondents reported no environmental actions, revealing uneven uptake. This highlights a key challenge for the green transition: translating awareness into consistent regenerative practices supported by incentives, guidance, and capacity-building.

From recovery to regeneration within the twin transition: Overall, the findings reinforce the SMARTIES focus on resilience and systemic preparedness. The crisis accelerated digital adoption and exposed the urgency of integrating environmental sustainability into tourism operations. Together, these lessons point toward regenerative tourism as a pathway that aligns recovery with the twin transition, strengthening ecosystems, empowering communities and ensuring tourism contributes positively to territorial regeneration rather than merely restoring pre-crisis conditions.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Rapid digital adaptation and resilience strategies.	High dependency on volume-based tourism models.	Use crisis lessons to strengthen resilience systems and diversify offers.	Future crises could destabilize fragile SME ecosystems.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand resilience training for SMEs.
- Embed sanitation and safety practices as permanent assets.
- Use adaptive responses for long-term innovation.

Best Practice Examples:

- Madeira SMEs: quick digital turns.
- Paphos SMEs: strengthened marketing strategies post-COVID.

1. REGENERATIVE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

SMARTIES for SMEs launched a bold vision of tourism as a regenerative force. It adopted a model where tourism activities dynamically heal ecosystems, support local livelihoods, and enhance cultural knowledge. This aligns with TTP Topics 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 20, 26, 27 etc. which encourage 'resilient destinations and support new business models' promoting circularity, value over volume, and territorial balance.

SMARTIES for SMEs project addressed the development of regenerative tourism models. This approach goes beyond sustainability to seek a net positive impact on people, places, and ecosystems, and that is why the Project supported businesses in co-creating tourism offer that "heals rather than harms" reflecting the TTP's call for "new tourism business models and social innovation" that deliver added value without increasing environmental and social burdens.

Regenerative tourism emphasizes territorial balance, low-impact mobility, and circular practices. It prioritizes "value over volume," encouraging destinations to move away from mass-market strategies and toward experiences that regenerate landscapes, support biodiversity, and engage local communities. This mirrors the TTP's shift from resource-extractive models to those that ensure "resilience, quality and authenticity."

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Community-rooted initiatives and innovative gastronomy.	Limited financial resources for regenerative products.	Scaling farm-to-table and eco-cultural offers.	Greenwashing risks if regeneration is superficial.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support SMEs in regenerative product innovation.
- Create certification schemes linked to regenerative impact.
- Scale pilots into replicable business models.



Best Practice Examples:

- Taste Azores: culinary sustainability tours.
- Madeira Wine Tours integrating viticulture and tourism.
- Croatia, Šibenik:Regenerative Tourism Strategy.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES frames regenerative tourism as going "beyond sustainability" to restore ecosystems, cultural knowledge and local livelihoods. Stakeholders in Poggiardo, Novigrad and Madeira prioritized **community-led regenerative products** such as farm-to-table (sea to table) experiences and participatory culinary workshops. Best practice examples (e.g., Taste Azores sustainable culinary tours, Madeira Wine Tours) illustrate how regenerative innovation links culture, food and ecosystems.

2. SYNERGIES IN ECOSYSTEMS AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

SMARTIES promotes multi-sector collaboration, in line with the TTP's Topics 4, 5, 11, 15 and 22 which call for systematic approaches, particularly between tourism, agriculture, fisheries, and energy. This speaks directly to the TTP principle that 'transition pathways aim to translate the twin transition into sectoral roadmaps with actions, targets and enablers.'

SMARTIES proposes collaborative governance platforms and integrated planning, emphasizing that 'public-private cooperation must be scaled to co-create and test new forms of smart, sustainable multidimensional services. Accordingly, the project recognizes in all project partners' countries' strategic documents the need for cross-sectoral synergies, particularly between tourism and sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, health, crafts, and culture. These interdependencies reflect **the TTP's emphasis on a systems-based approach to transformation.**

The project promotes integrated strategic governance mechanisms to manage common goods such as water resources and cultural landscapes. Collaborative governance is thus not only a tool for avoiding conflicts but also a platform for value creation through shared planning. This reflects the TTP's call for ecosystem-wide stakeholder engagement, wherein SMEs, authorities, civil society and citizens co-design tourism strategies aligned with the SDGs, the Green Deal, and territorial cohesion.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Shared stakeholder interest in cross-sectoral collaboration.	Fragmentation and weak governance mechanisms.	Development of cross-sectoral planning platforms.	Policy inconsistency and stakeholder misalignment.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create integrated governance bodies linking tourism, culture, and agriculture.
- Incentivize SMEs adopting sustainable practices.
- Introduce regulations protecting hidden heritage assets.



Best Practice Examples:

- Pisa & Carloforte: PPP encouragement.
- Madeira: incentives for sustainable SMEs.

LESSONS LEARNED: Cross-sectoral governance is essential. Synergies between tourism, agriculture, fisheries and culture are expected. Survey respondents reinforced this by calling for **public-private partnerships and incentives for SMEs adopting sustainable practices** (Madeira, Pisa, Carloforte). They also highlighted the need for regulations to protect "hidden heritage" while enabling responsible activation.

3. WELLBEING AND EMPLOYMENT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The third SMARTIES thematic area highlights the social dimension of tourism, focusing on employment quality, inclusion, and wellbeing. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted how vulnerable tourism-dependent communities are to global shocks, making the case for fairer, more resilient employment systems.

SMARTIES raises wellbeing and quality of life as core objectives of tourism development. It supports decent jobs, social entrepreneurship, and inclusive participation, aligning with TTP Topics 7, 19 and 26, which urge support for 'SMEs and workers through skills development, job quality and community resilience.'

SMARTIES promotes tourism as a path for social regeneration, particularly in peripheral and rural areas. It encourages business models that enhance decent work, intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and gender equity. This supports the TTP's emphasis on "reliable career paths, continuous learning and improved working conditions."

In addition, SMARTIES fosters spiritual and physical wellbeing of both hosts and visitors. It promotes slow, restorative tourism practices that offer personal enrichment and community pride, positioning tourism as a tool for wellbeing beyond economic metrics.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Community readiness for participation.	Precarious employment and seasonal reliance.	Enhance wellbeing through regenerative job creation.	Rural depopulation and inequality.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support social entrepreneurship and fair job systems.
- Build community-led revenue-sharing structures.
- Promote slow, restorative tourism.



Best Practice Examples:

- Novigrad & Poggiardo: visitor-community co-creation workshops.
- Paphos: participatory conservation initiatives.

LESSONS LEARNED: Tourism should be a vector of **wellbeing, social regeneration and decent work.** Survey findings confirmed vulnerabilities, over-commercialization and overtourism threatening authenticity, but also strong **community engagement** as a resilience asset. Locals consistently identified co-creation of tourism products and visitor engagement (e.g., participatory conservation, cultural workshops) as the most empowering forms of involvement.

4. GREEN ASPECTS OF CULTURAL TOURISM AND PROXIMITY SYSTEMS

SMARTIES responds to the climate emergency with green tourism innovations, from circular resource use to low-impact mobility. This fulfills TTP Topics 7 & 8, which call for 'climate neutral and circular tourism services and infrastructure.'

The alignment with the TTP is clear: *"The green transition for public and private-sector tourism organisations will be spearheaded by legislative initiatives proposing binding EU nature restoration targets, reducing food waste, implementing Directive on single-use plastics, and meeting objectives of the Urban Waste Water Treatment directive."* P. 6 (Source: Governance - Green transition).

One of the most pressing challenges addressed by SMARTIES is the green transformation of tourism products and infrastructure. This includes both physical assets, energy efficiency in accommodation, sustainable transport, waste management, and the promotion of cultural tourism rooted in environmental stewardship in line with TTP Topics 8, 20 and 26.

SMARTIES extends this by providing tools for SMEs to assess and reduce their footprint, and by embedding climate-consciousness in visitor narratives and experiences. Its promotion of proximity tourism and Mediterranean heritage helps shift focus from volume to value, delivering lower emissions and deeper cultural engagement.
The project encourages proximity tourism models that reduce carbon emissions by emphasizing local travel, regional circuits and off-season visitation. Cultural heritage and gastronomy, particularly the Mediterranean diet, are positioned as low-impact alternatives to energy-intensive attractions.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Emerging eco-certifications and waste management.	Uneven adoption of green practices.	Expand proximity tourism to cut emissions.	Balancing growth with conservation pressures.



RECOMMENDATIONS:
· Develop green certification support for SMEs.
· Promote Mediterranean heritage as low-carbon tourism anchor.
· Invest in sustainable mobility and infrastructure.



Best Practice Examples:
· Regional food circuits in Madeira.
· Mediterranean heritage festivals with low-impact models.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES stresses climate neutrality, circularity, and eco-certifications. Survey data show mixed concern, some SMEs adopted waste management and green certifications, while others reported no action. However, proximity tourism models (regional circuits, heritage trails, Mediterranean diet food routes) were seen as low-emission alternatives, addressing the top challenge identified in surveys: **balancing growth with conservation** (Madeira, Paphos).

5. DIGITALISATION AND DATA-DRIVEN SERVICES

Digital transformation is central to both the TTP and SMARTIES. Recognizing that Mediterranean SMEs often lag in digital maturity, Project developed actions enhancing digital literacy, service innovation, and platform visibility. It provided SMEs with insight into smart marketing tools, immersive storytelling, data analysis, and visitor experience personalization. These actions advance TTP Topics 7, 9, 10, 11and 15: support digital innovation and uptake by SMEs, including access to interoperable data and platforms.

The project encouraged the use of **digital storytelling, immersive technologies (AR/VR)** and data-driven service design to create meaningful, personalized experiences. By doing so, it enables SMEs to reach new markets, improve operational efficiency and build resilience.

The project also advocates for accessible data, empowering SMEs and destinations with access to analytics that inform decision-making. This supports TTP's push for interoperable data systems and smarter destination management.
It is important to note that the project bridges the digital divide by adapting solutions to different contexts, ensuring that digital tools are accessible, culturally relevant and used to enhance, not replace, human connection.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Growing SME digital adoption.	Digital divide in rural areas.	Enhance AR/VR tools for heritage promotion.	Risk of excluding non-digital users.



RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Offer targeted SME digital training.
- Invest in interoperable digital platforms.
- Bridge digital divide with tailored solutions.



Best Practice Examples:
- Paphos, Malta & Poggiardo: AR/VR for cultural heritage.
- Madeira SMEs: digital marketing upgrades.

LESSONS LEARNED: Digital tools are key for SMARTIES and post-COVID SME adaptations. Madeira and Paphos SMEs reported major shifts to **digital marketing, e-tools, and staff training.** Survey best practices also emphasized **digital heritage interpretation** (AR/VR, heritage mapping platforms in Poggiardo and Paphos). SMARTIES frames these as essential for **smarter, data-driven, personalized services.** Survey has shown that digital tools are key innovations for heritage marketing and promotion.

6. AUTHENTICITY, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Authenticity emphasizes the cultural identity of places as both a tourism asset and a community wealth. SMARTIES promotes the Mediterranean diet, intangible practices, local arts and crafts, music, rituals, and storytelling traditions as sources of cultural resilience. TTP Topics 8 and 26 emphasize authenticity, as well as cultural and creative industries as tool for "developing innovative tourism based on cultural heritage, traditions, arts and authentic cultural experiences". SMARTIES supports SMEs in creating authentic, community-rooted experiences that honor and sustain traditional knowledge and culture. By embedding these assets in tourism products, SMARTIES helps SMEs differentiate their offers while strengthening cultural continuity. The project supports cultural mapping and co-creation, ensuring that products are not only based on tradition but evolve through local participation.

The TTP similarly calls for preservation and celebration of European heritage, recognizing its potential to drive quality tourism while fostering a sense of place. SMARTIES operationalizes this by developing cultural itineraries, rural tourism labs, and local producer networks, thus creating value chains that respect and regenerate culture.

Authenticity is core to SMARTIES. The Mediterranean diet anchors regenerative tourism.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Preserved authenticity; culinary heritage.	Over-commercialization.	Brand. Mediterranean diet heritage trails.	Tourist demand eroding authenticity.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Engaging visitors in participatory conservation and cultural co-creation.
- Develop cultural-food itineraries.
- Support mapping hidden culinary assets.
- Facilitate chef collaborations to record and regenerate traditions.



Best Practice Examples:

- Cyprus Breakfast cultural events.
- Carloforte: chef-led heritage festivals.
- Ta' Mena Estate Malta.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES emphasizes authenticity, crafts, rituals and the Mediterranean diet as sources of resilience. Survey respondents repeatedly flagged **preservation of authenticity** as a core strength (Madeira, Malta, Carloforte, Novigrad), while warning of overtourism risks. Best practices such as Cyprus Breakfast or Loulé Criativo festivals show how cultural-food authenticity drives regeneration.

7. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND TWIN TRANSITION READINESS

Reskilling and upskilling are essential to equip SMEs for the twin transition. Addressing TTP Topics 19 and 22 on 'developing skills intelligence and tailored learning for the competences; SMARTIES supports training programs, workshops and mentoring for stakeholders across the tourism and cultural ecosystem. These build capacity in areas such as circular economy, storytelling, digital tools and sustainable business planning (11 focus groups and capacity building trainings were performed within the project).

SMARTIES identified skill gaps specific to Mediterranean tourism, e.g., understanding climate risks, building partnerships with local producers, or adapting hospitality to new visitor values. Trainings were tailored to diverse actors, including youth, women, artisans and entrepreneurs.

This supports the TTP objective of fostering "a skilled and motivated workforce," ready to lead change. SMARTIES emphasizes **transversal and soft skills**, co-creation, intercultural dialogue, alongside technical competences, ensuring tourism and cultural professionals are agile, adaptive and future-fit.

Surveys stressed educational workshops embedding cultural elements as essential.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Stakeholder demand for training.	Capacity gaps in rural communities.	Upskill SMEs in digital and green tools.	Exclusion if training access remains uneven.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish regional co-creation labs.
- Launch workshops on regenerative tourism.
- Integrate Mediterranean diet storytelling in training.



Best Practice Examples:

- Madeira: post-COVID staff training.
- Paphos and Malta: educational campaigns with cultural themes.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES highlights reskilling in digital, green, and soft skills. Surveys show strong support for **educational campaigns and workshops,** especially those embedding cultural values into products (Madeira, Paphos, Malta). Training was seen as essential for SMEs to adapt (staff training was a top COVID adaptation in Madeira). Stakeholders stressed capacity gaps in some communities, requiring systematic co-creation labs.

8. FUNDING AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESILIENCE

A major obstacle to transformation detected was the lack of access to finance. TTP stresses the need for tailored financing tools to enable SMEs' green and digital upgrades (Topic 27).

SMARTIES addresses this with funding navigation, capacity-building for grant access and promotion of community-centered infrastructure. SMARTIES recognized investment in community infrastructure as essential: spaces, skills and solidarity, moving beyond roads and hotels to holistic resilience, and building the capacity to apply for and manage funds.

The project advocates for **investment in small-scale infrastructure**: digital connectivity in rural areas, mobility hubs, green modifications, and multi-use community spaces that serve both residents and tourists.

This aligns with the TTP's Topic 27 call for "access to financing tools tailored to the sector's needs." SMARTIES played a critical role in facilitating the flow of resources to where they were most impactful and inclusive, as evident from 75 supported projects.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Stakeholder consensus on funding needs.	Limited SME access to finance.	Develop innovative financial tools.	Underinvestment in rural infrastructure remains uneven.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create regenerative tourism funds.
- Invest in connectivity and mobility hubs.
- Facilitate participatory budgeting.



Best Practice Examples:

- Pisa & Carloforte: cultural preservation funding demands.
- Novigrad: need expressed for regenerative product support.

LESSONS LEARNED: Lack of finance was identified as a systemic obstacle. SMARTIES calls for innovative financial tools. Survey evidence confirmed this: all sites (Pisa, Carloforte, Novigrad) requested **funding for cultural preservation and regenerative product development,** alongside better infrastructure (connectivity, mobility hubs). Authorities are expected to create incentives and assigned funding streams.

9. INCLUSIVE SERVICES AND COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Inclusive tourism is both goal and method in SMARTIES. TTP Topic 11 demands 'accessible, equitable tourism services that leave no one behind.' SMARTIES designs CBT (community-based tourism) models where locals are not just hosts but co-creators.

The project views inclusion not as a checklist, but as a value system embedded in every stage, from product design to marketing. It promotes **community-based tourism models,** in which residents are co-producers and beneficiaries of tourism value.
This reflects the TTP's concern with inclusive tourism practices and social sustainability.
SMARTIES helps build governance structures and support systems that enable inclusive entrepreneurship and equitable benefit-sharing.

Inclusion is both a value and method. Surveys confirmed CBT as effective but capacity gaps remain.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Community-led CBT initiatives.	Lack of formal governance structures.	Expand inclusive entrepreneurship.	Superficial inclusion practices remains uneven.



RECOMMENDATIONS:
- Design governance for equitable benefit-sharing.
- Develop inclusive CBT business models.
- Empower women, youth, and migrants in tourism.



Best Practice Examples:
- Novigrad: community-led product development.
- Poggiardo: participatory culinary workshops.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES positions inclusivity as a core value. The survey stresses: community-based tourism where locals act as **co-creators and beneficiaries** was rated highly effective (Novigrad, Poggiardo). However, capacity gaps remain; structured governance and revenue-sharing models were recommended. These findings reinforce the need for inclusion as a design principle.

10. RESEARCH, INNOVATION, AND PILOTS

SMARTIES supports in this sense TTP Topics 8,9, 15 and especially 12, by providing research, creating pilots that generate data, feedback, and replicable models. These address innovation not just in tech but in governance, food systems, and social enterprise. SMARTIES supports a culture of experimentation and learning. It promotes pilots and living labs where new ideas, such as regenerative tourism, digital heritage, or Mediterranean food trails, can be tested and refined in real conditions.

The aim is to refine pilot projects that generate data and stories that contribute to wider innovation processes. As such, they can also provide a space for SMEs to take risks and rely on feedback from peers and users.

Survey data suggests a search for concrete pathways: farm-to-table models, chef collaborations, digital heritage mapping, participatory workshops and creative tourism - based on locations such as Madeira and Poggiardo – showing how innovation generates best practices that can be replicated. Visitors also showed a strong interest in participatory, creative experiences (82.8% preference in Madeira). The aim is to create replicable models through pilots and living labs.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Innovative pilots across regions.	Limited scalability of pilots.	Replicate participatory models widely.	Risk of innovation fatigue without funding.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support living labs for regenerative tourism.
- Create feedback loops between pilots and policy.
- Replicate best practices across Mediterranean regions.



Best Practice Examples:

- Madeira: interactive visitor experiences (82.8% preference).
- Italy: participatory cook-along heritage formats.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES bridges academic research and practice, ensuring that innovation is grounded in territorial needs. It aligns with the TTP's ambition to stimulate innovation ecosystems and cross-sector knowledge exchange.

11.NETWORKING, BEST PRACTICE SHARING AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The final thematic area is perhaps the most transversal. TTP identifies networking as key to scaling transformation through Topics 4, 5, 10, 11, 20, 21, 22, 27. SMARTIES sees **stakeholder engagement** and **networking** as the foundation of any transition. It creates exchange possibilities between SMEs, researchers, policymakers, and community actors. The project curates **best practice collections**, toolkits, and matchmaking events that amplify existing successes and encourage replication. This supports the TTP's vision of shared learning and collaboration across the EU and beyond.

In a fragmented region like the Mediterranean, SMARTIES fills a crucial gap: building connective tissue between innovators, advocates, and funders who share a vision of tourism that is just, circular, regenerative and future oriented.

SWOT HIGHLIGHTS:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats/Challenges
Strong cultural identity and innovative pilots.	Fragmentation of initiatives.	Cross-regional knowledge exchange.	Failure to scale if knowledge remains local.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

· Build Mediterranean-wide networks for regenerative tourism.
· Publish best practice toolkits.
· Enable matchmaking between SMEs and policymakers.

Best Practice Examples:

· Portugal: Loulé Criativo creative tourism.
· Azores: Taste Azores sustainability-linked food tours.

LESSONS LEARNED: SMARTIES highlights the transnational network of stakeholders and accordingly, the surveys have shown **success stories** (Portugal's Loulé Criativo, Italian festivals, Cypriot culinary initiatives). It illustrates how **the exchange of best practices fosters replication** and how networks across the Mediterranean can increase regenerative impact. Networking across borders is essential for scaling up regenerative tourism. The survey data highlights the importance of sharing successes.

The research results in the context of the SMARTIES thematic areas point to challenges within the ecosystem: weaknesses such as overtourism and cultural insensitivity are countered by strengths such as authenticity and community readiness. Opportunities arise in digitalisation, financing of innovation and branding of Mediterranean food, while threats include global crises and fragmentation. Through structured governance, regenerative scaling of products and knowledge exchange networks, Mediterranean destinations can move from extractive to regenerative, resilient tourism.

The observation of the identified thematic areas through the survey results reveals alignment between the **theoretical paths of SMARTIES and the reality on the ground** (SME surveys). The data confirm that regenerative, authentic, co-led and digitally enhanced tourism is both desirable and feasible, provided that the authorities enable it through financing, governance and education. The Mediterranean diet emerges as a unifying cultural-ecological anchor across all areas.

For additional supporting data please address Desk Research Materials Deliverable No D2.1



MATRIX OF SURVEY BASED KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

MATRIX OF SURVEY BASED KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Topic	Survey Question	Key Insights	Recommended Actions	Priority
Impact of COVID	What was the impact of COVID-19 on your tourism operations?	Revenue losses, uncertainty, digital gaps highlighted by SMEs.	Develop resilience strategies, fasttrack SME digitalisation support, crisis preparedness planning.	High
	What changes were made due to COVID?	Shift towards domestic markets, safety protocols, hybrid cultural products.	Consolidate domestic tourism markets, invest in hybrid cultural offers, formalize safety standards.	Medium
Strategic Issues	What are the weaknesses in cultural tourism for regenerative development?	Fragmented governance, low SME capacity, lack of regenerative know-how.	Create governance bodies and platforms, training workshops, capacity-building for SMEs.	High
		Strong heritage assets, Mediterranean diet as a USP, engaged local culture.	Use heritage storytelling, integrate unique gastronomy into tourism products, strengthen place-branding.	High
	What are the challenges and opportunities in integrating regenerative tourism and cultural tourism?	Challenges: resistance to change, fragmented models. Opportunities: sustainability demand, EU policy alignment.	Pilot regenerative tourism on cultural routes, link SMEs to EU green/digital funding, create Mediterranean brand for regenerative tourism.	High
Stakeholder Roles	How can local communities be engaged in regenerative tourism?	Communities feel excluded; desire participatory processes and fair benefit- sharing.	Launch community consultation forums, incentivize community- based tourism cooperatives.	High
	How should authorities and institutions foster regenerative tourism?	Authorities perceived as under-supportive; policies fragmented.	Develop clear regenerative tourism policies, provide SME support schemes, establish monitoring mechanisms.	High
	How can stakeholders and the public be informed about regenerative tourism?	Low awareness of benefits; Mediterranean diet undervalued as a tourism driver.	Awareness campaigns, public education on Mediterranean diet and heritage, digital storytelling tools.	Medium
Best Practices	What innovative approaches or strategies are effective?	Digital storytelling, local gastronomy routes, regenerative heritage sites.	Replicate and scale pilots, invest in digital cultural platforms, support SMEs adopting innovations.	High
	What steps can optimize tourism and territorial assets?	Underutilized rural assets, uneven territorial planning.	Conduct asset mapping, strengthen rural-urban linkages, integrate regenerative criteria in planning.	Medium
	Who are the expected visitors for regenerative tourism products?	Eco-conscious travelers, culture-seeking tourists, domestic repeat visitors.	Target marketing towards eco/cultural segments, tailor regenerative products for return visitors.	Medium



PART 4: BEST PRACTICES

WHERE TO LOOK FOR BEST PRACTICES?

The SMARTIES data reveal a series of best new practices that, when deliberately aligned, together form a regenerative tourism ecosystem, rooted in cultural authenticity and supported by the Mediterranean diet. These practices include innovation in experience design, strategic use of hidden destination-based assets, and refined visitor targeting. Each dimension reinforces the others: thoughtful adaptation reinforces the sense of territorial assets, and both are tuned to the preferences of well-defined visitor segments.

Innovative Approaches and Adaptation
The question was: What innovative approaches or strategies have proven effective in combining regenerative tourism, cultural experiences, and the promotion of the Mediterranean diet?

Participatory approach for deeper understanding was identified as one of the most consistent signals across all sources (Madeira, Paphos, Poggiardo, Pisa, Carloforte, Novigrad, Xanthi) that **experiential innovations,** especially approaches that are interactive and food-focused, serve as **gateways to regenerative impact.**
The top-rated innovation in several surveys was "an interactive and participatory approach to visitors that offers them creative tourism products, craftmanship worshops, etc", indicating that when travelers are not just passive observers but **collaborators** (eg through cooking workshops, heritage crafting or co-creation of dishes), they develop deeper appreciation and protection. This approach also creates memorable connections with the Mediterranean diet by placing food in its cultural rituals, rather than taking it as mere consumption.

Farm (sea)-to-table experiences were highlighted as a cornerstone innovation, especially in focus groups like Poggiardo, Maribor, Carloforte, st. Maria del Puerto and Pisa. They transparently connect production and consumption with visitors seeing, tasting and understanding the origin of the ingredients, encouraging local economic benefit and respect for the seasonality and sustainability embedded in the Mediterranean diet. Chef collaborations (seen in Poggiardo, Novigrad and Paphos) are complementary: **chefs serve as cultural interpreters, translating local gastronomic heritage** into accessible yet authentic experiences while preserving traditional flavors through narrative and technique.

Digital and technology-driven solutions also appear as vital forces of adaptation. In Paphos, Madeira and Poggiardo, stakeholders noted the use of innovative technology for the interpretation and promotion of cultural heritage, such as augmented storytelling, heritage mapping platforms or mobile guided culinary trails. These tools extend reach, personalize experiences, and help uncover "hidden" or forgotten assets in an eye-catching way without overwhelming fragile sites. They also offer data feedback loops for frequent improvement.

HIGHLY RATED EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

Farm-to-table experiences - connecting visitors directly to producers, reinforcing the Mediterranean diet heritage and short supply chains.

Experiential Innovation - Interactive and participatory visitor approaches - creative tourism products and workshops that invite co-creation are seen as the top innovation.

Chefs as cultural interpreters, translate local gastronomic heritage into authentic experience.
Digital and technological interpretation - is important for cultural heritage promotion, for enhancing visitor understanding and mapping latent assets.

Tourism and Territorial Assets

Territorial aspects were examined relating to local communities, authenticity and heritage preservation, with the question posed: What steps can be taken to evaluate and optimize the utilization of both tourism and territorial assets for regenerative tourism initiatives?

The data underline that territorial assets, cultural, culinary and environmental, are most powerful when **re-evaluated, mapped, and activated in community-rooted ways.** Madeira respondents, for instance, ranked"engagement and work with local communities in the preservation and promotion of hidden or forgotten cultural, culinary **assets and traditional practices" highest, demonstrating that asset optimization starts with local knowledge and preservation.** This includes systematic asset-mapping workshops to identify neglected cultural niches (e.g., ancestral farming practices, small-scale producers, micro-heritage sites) and then **co-creating regenerative trails or thematic experiences** around them.

Re-evaluation and mapping (highlighted in Novigrad, Carloforte, and Madeira) function as both discovery and value creation: they renew underused heritage (like local food resources) into curated experiences, such as diet- focused heritage walks, community-hosted tasting events, or culinary storytelling hubs, while ensuring visibility and preservation. Community engagement in this process transforms territorial assets into living platforms, rather than static attractions; locals become guides, interpreters, and guardians not just sidelined observers.

Innovative digital tools also support territorial asset optimization by visualizing networks (e.g., linking producers to chefs to visitor experiences), tracking sustainability indicators, and showcasing how individual contributions (like sourcing from a particular cooperative) fit into broader regenerative narratives.

BEST PRACTICES RECOGNIZED INCLUDE:

Engaging local communities to surface and revitalize hidden cultural and culinary assets, making them central to regenerative offerings.

Re-evaluating/mapping heritage and food resources: systematic discovery transforms neglected assets into curated experiences.

Maximizing territorial assets involves working with local communities to preserve and promote hidden cultural and culinary heritage, as well as re-evaluating and mapping local resources for strategic tourism development. This approach ensures that regenerative tourism strengthens, rather than exploits, local identity.

SWOT ANALYSES – HOW TO LOOK AT THE BEST PRACTICES?

Strengths
· Preservation of authenticity
· Farm-to-table and chef collaborations
· Interactive, participatory experiences
· Community engagement in cultural and food heritage

Weaknesses
· Over-commercialization risk
· Limited digital integration in some regions
· Uneven community capacity for engagement
· Potential visitor pressure on fragile assets

Opportunities
· Asset mapping and revitalization
· Integrating Mediterranean diet into tourism branding
· Technology-driven heritage promotion
· Co-creation hubs linking locals, chefs and SMEs

Threats/Challenges
· Balancing growth with conservation
· Sustaining visitor interest while avoiding commodification
· Seasonal dependency on tourism flows
· Difficulty in scaling authentic experiences without loss of quality

CAME ANALYSES – HOW TO LOOK AT THE BEST PRACTICES?

Correct - Addressing Weaknesses	Adapt - Responding to Threats	Maintain - Using Strengths	Explore - Capitalizing onOpportunities
· Address uneven digital integration for heritage promotion · Mitigate visitor pressure on fragile territorial assets	· Integrate farm-to-table and chef collaborations more systematically · Research and track visitors' preferences, tailor experiences to segmented visitor profiles	· Interactive and participatory experience design · Community involvement in asset mapping	· Technology-enhanced storytelling (AR/VR) for hidden assets · Branded regenerative experience packages linking diet and heritage

RECOMMENDATIONS

The best practices emerging from SMARTIES are not isolated tactics but a coherent regenerative playbook: **innovate experience design, activate territorial assets through local knowledge and align them with clearly defined visitor segments.** Anchoring all three in the Mediterranean diet embeds sustainability in both substance and story, transforming tourism from extraction to mutual regeneration.

1. **Package Innovation Around Territorial Narratives:** Combine farm-to-table, chef-led storytelling and heritage mapping into integrated regenerative experience bundles (e.g., "Mediterranean Diet Heritage Tour" that includes a visit to a hidden producer, a cooking session with a local chef, and participatory preservation activity).
2. **Community-Led Asset Activation:** Embed local communities as curators in the asset mapping and experience delivery chain, ensuring they co-own the regenerative value.
3. **Segmented Experience Design:** Research and track audiences and their preferences. Align offerings with visitor profiles-deeper, longer-form immersion for best agers/families; bite-sized interactive modules for youth and solo travelers; tailored group itineraries for organized visits.
4. **Digital Story and Feedback Layer:** Use technology to surface lesser-known assets, collect visitor feedback on authenticity and impact, and adapt experiences in near real-time.
5. **Regenerative Branding:** Make the connection between visitor participation, cultural preservation and diet heritage explicit in marketing ("Your Taste Supports Tradition") to reinforce the co-creation/impact loop.

concrete inspirations to replicate/adapt in other origins

Good practice examples

participatory experiences & tech; differentiators in visitor offerings

Innovation

segmentation for targeting; informs product design and communication

Visitors

Awareness

education + cultural embedding; demand-shaping mechanism

Territorial assets

mapping + community stewardship; supply- side enhancemen

SUCCESS STORIES & LEARNINGS

Some specific origin-based examples are listed in the next section for:

- Cyprus: Tis Pitsas ta Mezeklikia.
- Greece: The House of Shadows
- Italy: T.I.D.E. project (Tradition, Inclusivity, Diversification, and Ecotourism).
- Portugal - Madeira: Fajã dos Padres Agricultural Society.
- Slovenia: Hudo Dobro

These examples reinforce the combined influence of **local food, cultural identity, and visitor participation** as a replicable regenerative model.



CYPRUS - PAPHOS

Name of enterprise: TIS PITSAS TA MEZEKLIKIA



Location: Prodromi, Polis Chrysochous, Cyprus
Core idea: The project aims to transform TIS PITSAS TA MEZEKLIKIA restaurant into a model of sustainable and digitally advanced Mediterranean tourism. By combining green transition measures, regenerative tourism practices, and advanced digital innovation, including AR, hologram technology, and data-driven systems, the initiative enhances restaurant operations while strengthening local supply chains, preserving culinary heritage, and improving community wellbeing.

Key Activities:

- **Development of the new website** - designed to feature local producers, seasonal dishes, and sustainability commitments.
- **Production of digital assets**, including photography, videography, and the **Hologram AR menu video,** presenting dishes in 3D for immersive visitor engagement. Installation of a modern POS system to reduce waste, optimize ordering patterns and support efficient operations.
- **Deployment of the interactive AR Menu** (https://ar.mediahologram.nl/p/Cy_Pizza_Grill_Menu), enabling visitors to visualize dishes, ingredients and Mediterranean Diet details.
- **Collaboration with local farmers and fishers** to highlight their products in digital storytelling and strengthen short supply chains.
- **Reducing energy consumption:** Adoption of **German stone-heating units** to reduce energy consumption and increase energy efficiency.

Type of Applicant / Partnership Structure
The project was led by a single tourism SME, collaborating with local farmers and digital solution providers to support green and digital transformation.

Main Objectives and Target Groups
Specific objectives: To digitally transform the restaurant through a new website, AR tools, POS systems and coordinated social media branding. The aim was to improve customer experience through interactive technologies, enhanced accessibility, and modern digital reservation flows. The goal was also to reduce energy consumption by using stone heating units, replacing photovoltaic systems due to regulatory and financial barriers. Specifically, the task was to strengthen the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises through digital visibility and operational optimization.

Targeted audiences:

- Local and international tourists.
- Eco-conscious visitors interested in sustainable operations.
- Digital - native customers expect modern interactive services.
- Local community and returning customers.

Intended impacts:

- Increased digital presence and online bookings.
- Lower energy consumption and improved heating efficiency.
- Enhanced visitor interaction through AR storytelling and QR-enabled digital menus.
- A more resilient tourism SME equipped to operate sustainably year-round.

Alignment with the Identified Thematic Areas

Thematic Area	Brief Explanation
1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	Introduces AR, hologram menu experiences and smart digital services to enhance visitor engagement. Strengthens community wellbeing by using digital tools to showcase local producers and seasonal Mediterranean Diet ingredients while adopting energy- efficient heating systems to reduce environmental impacts.
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance	The project collaborates with local farmers, a digital agency, AR developers, renewable energy consultants, graphic designers and videographers. This multi-stakeholder approach strengthens governance, enriches the tourism ecosystem, and promotes co-creation of value.
3. Local Communities Wellbeing and Employment	Supports local producers by prioritizing local sourcing and integrating their stories into the digital menu and website. Creates new roles in digital content management, AR menu operations and social media communication, enhancing rural employment opportunities.
4. Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems	Energy-efficient stone-heating units reduce carbon emissions while the project promotes low-impact tourism and local food culture. Digital storytelling emphasizes proximity sourcing, traditional recipes, Cypriot gastronomic identity and seasonal menus aligned with Mediterranean Diet principles.
5. Digitalisation and Data - Driven Services	Combines website, POS, AR QR code, hologram menu, and SEO optimization with data analytics for better decision-making, reducing waste, optimizing inventory and improving sustainability.
6. Authenticity, Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet	Showcases local farmers, Mediterranean Diet traditions, and heritage recipes through AR, video, and website storytelling. Highlights regional olive oil, herbs, vegetables, wine and traditional mezze culture.
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition Readiness	Staff are being trained to use POS systems, AR/QR digital tools and upcoming web-based booking systems.
8. Funding and Infrastructure for Resilience	SMARTIES funding supports infrastructure modernization (POS, digital tools, stone-heating units).
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism	Website designed with accessibility standards; digital menus and AR content benefit diverse audiences
10. Innovation, Research and Pilots	AR QR code pilot is an innovative tourism feature uncommon in rural Cyprus.
11. Networking, Best Practice Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement	The restaurant engages local farmers, SMEs, local community stakeholders and digital providers. Planned digital campaigns and participation in SMARTIES visibility activities ensure knowledge sharing.

Thematic Areas Explained

Innovation and Regenerative Tourism Approach and Interactivity with visitors involvement)

The project introduces multi-layer digital innovation, including a new professional website, AR interactive menus, POS systems, and the Hologram Menu Video, enabling visitors to view dishes in immersive 3D before ordering. These tools modernize the visitor experience, enhance accessibility and create a unique tourism product rooted in local culture.

Regenerative tourism value is generated by:

- supporting local producers through digital storytelling
- reducing energy use via stone-heating units
- minimizing waste using POS analytics
- strengthening community identity through Mediterranean Diet education
- offering inclusive interpretations of cultural heritage via AR and hologram tools

Visitors become active participants in heritage preservation by engaging with AR representations of dishes, local product stories, and Cypriot culinary culture.

Community Engagement, Local Employment, Skills Development, Participatory approach

The initiative fosters meaningful collaboration with local farmers, fishermen, and artisanal producers,ensuring their products are prominently featured on the menu and in digital tools. The website and AR menu present their stories, strengthening the agrifood ecosystem and helping farmers reach new audiences.

Employees are upskilled in:

- digital tools (POS, AR, website backend)
- sustainability practices
- Mediterranean Diet knowledge
- customer engagement using hologram and AR technologies

By increasing tourism flow to a rural area, the project strengthens community cohesion and stimulates micro-economies around agro-tourism, gastronomy and cultural heritage.

Synergy with Agrifood and Mediterranean Diet

The restaurant integrates fresh, seasonal products sourced from local farmers, supporting short food supply chains and reducing transportation emissions. The AR and hologram menu tools highlight ingredients' origins, nutritional benefits, and Mediterranean Diet principles such as plant-forward meals, local olive oil, legumes, herbs, and fish. Seasonal menus reflect regional agricultural cycles, promoting biodiversity, soil health and sustainable farming traditions.

Sustainability, Circularity and Green Transition Measures

The shift from planned photovoltaics to **stone-heating units** ensures sustainable heat generation while complying with regulatory constraints. Circularity practices include:

- reduced food waste via POS analytics
- partnerships with local farmers for seasonal sourcing
- digital menus reducing printed material
- energy-efficient technologies lowering electricity consumption

The Green Transition is supported by:

- optimizing resource use
- lowering carbon footprint
- enhancing operational efficiency through digital tools

Digitalisation, Data Use, and Replicability
Digital tools include:

- Website with accessibility features
- AR interactive menu
- Hologram menu video
- POS data analytics reducing waste
- SEO strategy
- Social media storytelling
-

This model is fully replicable for small tourism SMEs across the Mediterranean because:

- AR and hologram tools are low-cost and customizable
- POS and SEO systems require minimal training

- Local producer integration can be adapted to each region
- Energy-efficient heating offers a viable alternative for SMEs facing PV restrictions

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Success stems from coordinated collaboration with local farmers, digital agencies, AR developers, and energy consultants. The project demonstrated that even small rural SMEs can achieve high levels of innovation when supported by structured digital tools and accessible technologies.

Key lessons include:

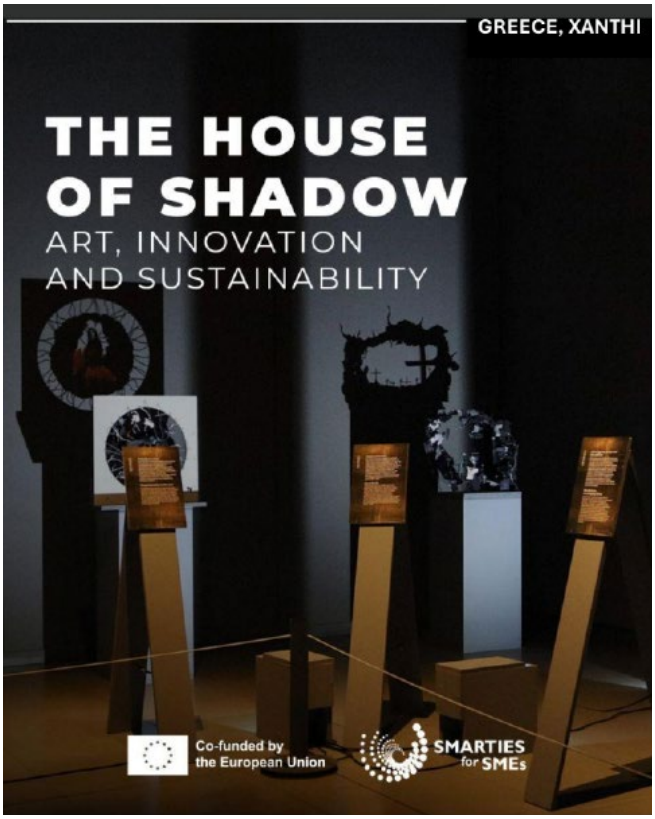
- Digital transformation boosts resilience and competitiveness.
- Energy-efficiency solutions must be adaptable to regional regulations.
- Collaborating with local producers enriches authenticity and increases visitor satisfaction.
- AR and hologram tools drastically improve visitor engagement and pre-purchase confidence, enhancing revenue and cultural appreciation.





GREECE - XANTHI

Name of enterprise: THE HOUSE OF SHADOW





Location: Xanthi, Greece
Core idea: The initiative revitalizes the cultural identity of Xanthi through a pioneering combination of Shadow Art, sustainable materials, and digital innovation. It introduces a unique cultural- tourism product that merges artistic creation from recycled materials with a state-of-the-art automatic guiding system, enhancing visitor interaction and promoting regenerative tourism principles.

Type of Applicant / Partnership Structure
Single tourism SME

Main Objectives and Target Groups

Specific objectives: To diversify Xanthi's cultural tourism offering by creating innovative, sustainable exhibition experiences that merge art, green practices, and digital tools. The project aims to improve visitor engagement, reduce environmental impact, strengthen local cultural identity, and enhance the SME's resilience through regenerative tourism.

Targeted audiences: Tourists seeking authentic and experiential cultural visits; residents and youth; students and educational institutions; environmentally conscious travelers; cultural organizations; and international audiences attracted by sustainable cultural products.

Intended impacts: A reinforced cultural brand for Xanthi; an expanded year-round visitor base; increased awareness of sustainability and recycling; enhanced community involvement; stronger links between tourism, culture, and education; digital upskilling of the SME; and long-term economic and social value for the region.

Key activities:

- Creation of thematic artworks and sculptures from recycled materials inspired by Xanthi's cultural heritage and the centenary of Manos Hadjidakis.
- Development and installation of an automatic audio-digital guiding system for exhibitions in indoor and outdoor cultural spaces.
- Educational visits and collaborations with schools and universities.
- Digital storytelling and targeted promotional campaigns through social media.

Alignment with the Identified Thematic Areas

Thematic Area	Brief Explanation
1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	The project regenerates cultural identity through sustainable artistic creation and immersive visitor experiences, offering a tourism product that restores cultural value while reducing environmental footprint.
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance	Collaboration with schools, universities, cultural bodies and external experts strengthens cross-sectoral exchanges and fosters a shared cultural-tourism ecosystem.
3. Local Communities Wellbeing and Employment	New roles in artistic production, cultural mediation, technology support, and event organization create employment while empowering local youth and creatives.
4. Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems	The exclusive use of recycled materials and low-energy exhibition installations advances circularity within cultural tourism.
5. Digitalisation and Data-Driven Services	The automatic guiding system introduces digital visitor navigation, supports multilingual access and lays the foundation for future data-informed curation.
6. Authenticity, Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet	The project regenerates cultural identity through sustainable artistic creation.
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition Readiness	Staff and collaborators develop skills in sustainable creation, digital exhibition management, and social media communication.
8. Funding and Infrastructure for Resilience	Investment in professional equipment, digital systems and strategic business planning strengthens long-term operational resilience.
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism	Accessible exhibition formats, participatory artistic sessions and educational visits ensure inclusion of diverse groups, including disadvantaged youth.
10. Innovation, Research and Pilots	The initiative pilots an uncommon fusion of sustainable Shadow Art and smart guiding technologies, creating a model for cultural tourism innovation.
11. Networking, Best Practice Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement	Interactions with schools, cultural actors and ethnic and international exhibition spaces foster knowledge exchange and dissemination.

Thematic Areas Explained

Innovation and Regenerative Tourism Approach and Interactivity with visitors involvement

The project introduces an uncommon synthesis of artistic innovation and technological enhancement. Shadow Art becomes a regenerative medium by transforming recycled materials into large-scale sculptural narratives that celebrate local heritage and significant cultural figures. This circular approach reduces material waste while conveying strong environmental messages to visitors.

The automatic guiding system elevates the exhibition environment into an interactive learning space. Visitors receive contextual, multilingual narration, historical insights, and artistic interpretation without requiring physical guides, offering accessibility, autonomy, and personalization. Through these elements, the initiative reinforces the regenerative tourism model: it restores cultural memory, reinforces community pride, and generates low-impact cultural experiences that extend beyond passive observation.

Moreover, the project's thematic focus on the centenary of Manos Hadjidakis provides cultural weight while anchoring the exhibition in place-based authenticity. The creative process - open to visitor participation through workshops depends on emotional engagement and cultivates a sense of co-ownership. Ultimately, innovation lies not merely in technological adoption but in the re-conceptualization of cultural tourism as a participatory, environmentally responsible, and emotionally resonant experience.

Community Engagement, Local Employment, Skills Development, Participatory approach

The initiative adopts a community-rooted methodology, engaging schools, universities, cultural associations, and local professionals. Educational visits introduce young people to sustainable artistic practices, heritage storytelling, and digital interpretation. Through hands-on exposure to recycled materials and Shadow Art techniques, students develop environmental awareness and creative skills.

Local employment is stimulated through roles in artistic fabrication, technical installation, digital content production, and visitor operations. By integrating external technologists and communication specialists, the project expands the local value chain and encourages knowledge transfer.

Community involvement is further strengthened through participatory sculpture-building sessions in the Old Town, where residents and visitors contribute to the creation of artworks depicting key historical moments. These activities enhance collective memory and reinforce civic cohesion. At the same time, the SME's team cultivates new competencies in digital transition, green production methods, and contemporary audience engagement, skills that will remain valuable beyond the project's completion and will benefit Xanthi's wider cultural ecosystem.

Synergy with Agrifood and Mediterranean Diet

Although not the central thematic pillar, the project naturally aligns with the agrifood ecosystem by promoting local identity and integrating gastronomy into the visitor journey. The exhibition content, combined with tours through the Old Town, highlights traditional gastronomic references linked to Xanthi's multicultural heritage, encouraging visitors to explore local producers, family-owned eateries and Mediterranean diet practices.

Collaborations with local schools and cultural bodies open pathways for incorporating elements of local food culture into educational narratives, reinforcing the region's intangible heritage. The storytelling surrounding Hadjidakis and other historical figures often intersects with themes of hospitality, local customs and communal gatherings - subtle yet meaningful

connections to the Mediterranean lifestyle. In this sense, the project indirectly supports short supply chains, gastronomic micro-entrepreneurship and the positioning of Xanthi as a destination where culture, creativity, and Mediterranean living coexist.

Sustainability, Circularity, and Green Transition Measures

Environmental responsibility is embedded in the project's artistic and operational DNA. All sculptures and installations are crafted exclusively from recycled materials, reducing waste streams and promoting circular design principles. This practice not only minimizes resource consumption but also educates visitors through tangible examples of upcycling.

Energy-efficient lighting, low-impact audiovisual systems, and digital guides substitute printed materials and paper-based signage, significantly lowering the exhibition's ecological footprint. The reduction of physical tours decreases transportation needs, indirectly reducing CO2 emissions. Moreover, the thematic content itself acts as a vehicle for environmental awareness, encouraging visitors to adopt sustainable behaviours in their everyday lives.
The project thus serves as a model for green cultural tourism: resource-conscious, technologically streamlined, and aligned with the EU's transition pathway for a climate-neutral tourism sector.

Digitalisation, Data Use and Replicability

The automatic guiding system is the project's core digital innovation. Designed for adaptability, it functions seamlessly in indoor and outdoor spaces, can host multilingual audio content and has the potential to integrate analytics to measure visitor flow, engagement time, and thematic preferences. Digital storytelling through social media creates a parallel narrative environment that extends the visitor experience online, fosters audience expansion, and builds long-term engagement. This digital layer also supports data insights that can inform future programming.

The model is highly replicable. Any cultural destination with heritage assets, creative industries, or environmental storytelling potential can adopt the concept: sustainable artwork creation, participatory methods, and digital guiding solutions. Its scalability ranges from small rural museums to Mediterranean coastal towns and urban cultural districts across the EU.

Additional Remarks: Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

The initiative's strength stems from its ability to merge tradition with contemporary sustainable art forms. Its reliance on recycled materials shows how creativity can serve environmental goals without compromising aesthetic richness. Another key success factor is the integration of digital tools that elevate accessibility, interpretation quality, and visitor autonomy.
A critical lesson learned is the value of community participation. Involving residents, youth and educational institutions enriches cultural content, strengthens local ownership, and ensures that the project's impact extends beyond the exhibition space. The initiative also highlights the necessity of targeted digital communication strategies, which amplify visibility and broaden the audience base. Furthermore, **the project demonstrates that small tourism SMEs can successfully navigate the twin transition** when supported by strategic partnerships and a clear creative vision. It provides a replicable blueprint for cultural destinations aiming to enhance resilience, generate year-round visitation and cultivate environmentally conscious tourism models.

Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/vaitsis_triantafyllos/?hl=es

ITALY - SICILY

Name of enterprise: In Rete s.r.l.:



Location: Mazara del Vallo - Trapani -Italia
Core idea: The core idea of the T.I.D.E. project (Tradition, Inclusivity, Diversification and Ecotourism for Sustainable Seas) is to create a r**egenerative tourism model in Sicily** that combines **digital innovation and cultural valorisation** to transform the fishing tourism (pescaturismo) and aquaculture tourism (ittiturismo) sector. The goal is to position Sicily as a benchmark for authentic and sustainable tourism, strengthening coastal SMEs and promoting the integration between the blue and the green economy.

Key activities:

- **Developing the digital platform PESCEINRETE** to centralise offerings, manage online bookings, and provide interactive mapping of experiences.
- **Collaborative workshops to develop 3 integrated regenerative tourism packages** focusing on biodiversity and local food and wine traditions (enogastronomia).
- **Training and mentoring sessions** for at least 10 local operators on autonomous platform management and marketing strategies.
- **Participation in sector-specific trade fairs** (e.g., Blue Sea Land) for international promotion and attracting strategic partners.

The expected outcome is increased visibility, income diversification for fishers, and mitigation of tourist seasonality.

Type of Applicant / Partnership Structure:
Single tourism SME

Recent Developments and Future Perspectives

Over the last two years, In Rete Srl has intensified its commitment to strengthening its international presence, particularly across the Mediterranean and in Africa. The company has launched new collaborations for projects focused on enhancing marine and local resources, with a specific focus on innovating its editorial and marketing offerings to meet the challenges of sustainability and digitalisation.

The Pesceinrete and Blue Life Hub platforms regularly publish articles on strategic topics for the fishing sector and maritime tourism, with particular attention to:

- **Valorisation of Traditions**
- **Sustainability and Environment**

Main Objectives and Target Groups
Specific objectives:

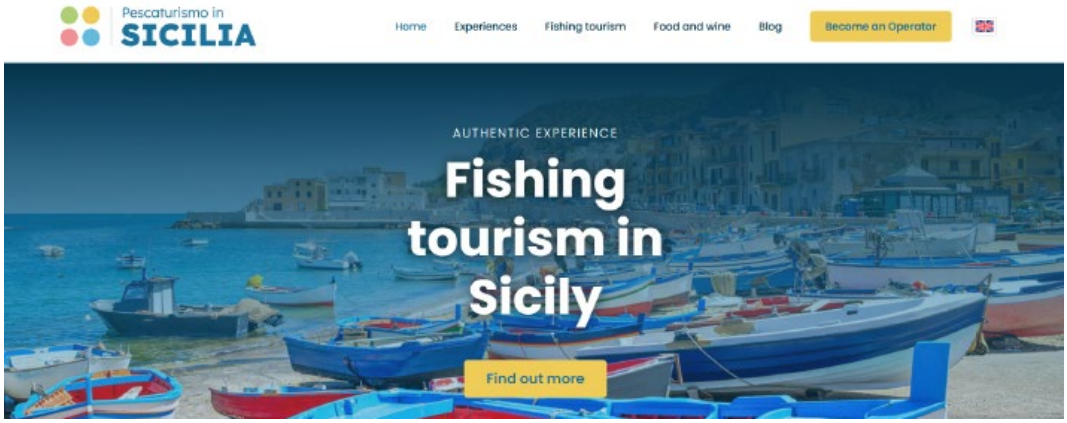
- Strengthen Sicily's pescaturismo/ittiturismo SMEs by co-designing and promoting integrated *regenerative tourism packages* that combine biodiversity, coastal culture and Mediterranean enogastronomy/Mediterranean Diet.
- Deploy the multilingual PESCEINRETE digital platform (online booking, interactive mapping and visitor-profiling/data collection) to increase international visibility and enable data-driven optimisation of the offer.
- Upskill at least 10 operators in platform management and marketing to support the green–digital ("twin") transition, prioritising women, youth (<40) and operators with limited digital skills.
- Reduce seasonality by launching three year-round packages and coordinated promotion.

Targeted audiences:

- Direct: fishing-tourism SMEs/operators and their families; women and young people involved in hosting and promotion.
- Tourists: national and international visitors seeking authentic, sustainable sea-based experiences.
- Indirect/vulnerable: residents in coastal communities; children, migrants and elderly tradition bearers; visitors with reduced mobility.

Intended impacts:

- Higher visibility and bookings, more stable and diversified incomes, improved skills and local job creation.
- Lower pressure on fish stocks and stronger environmental awareness through regenerative experiences; increased resilience of coastal communities and a replicable model.





Alignment with the Identified Thematic Areas

Thematic Area	Brief Explanation
1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	The project involves the most important local fishing communities in Sicily.
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance	It promotes synergy between the tourism and agri-food ecosystems (Mediterranean Diet).
3. Local Communities Wellbeing and Employment	The project aims to create new economic opportunities and strengthen the resilience of coastal communities, particularly for women and youth, through the diversification of activities (fish tourism) and de-seasonalization.
4. Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems	The project is involving fishermen, biologists, tourist guides, and local producers to create integrated itineraries.
5. Digitalisation and Data-Driven Services	The digital platform (www.pescaturismoinsicilia.it/) is the central tool of the project , offering online booking, interactive mapping, storytelling and a data collection system to optimize the offer and support the digitalisation of SMEs.
6. Authenticity, Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet	The project values fishing traditions and marine cultural heritage and integrates the Mediterranean Diet , promoting the consumption of local "poor" fish species and short supply chains.
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition Readiness	The project provides workshops and training sessions on digitalisation, marketing and sustainability for operators, facilitating the twin transition (digital and ecological) of SMEs.
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism	The project promotes inclusivity for women, youth and operators with limited skills , and accessibility (e.g., equipped boats), with a positive impact on coastal communities.
10. Innovation, Research and Pilots	The main innovation is the digital platform.
11. Networking, Best Practice Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement	The project has already involved 15 local businesses,along with participation in international fairs (e.g., Blue Sea Land) for networking and promotion. Workshops have been used to help best practices exchange between SMEs.

Thematic Areas Explained

Innovation and Regenerative Tourism Approach and Interactivity with visitors involvement

The main innovation is the https://www.pescaturismoinsicilia.it digital platform, which centralises a fragmented tourism offer and makes bookings accessible in real-time, including through messaging apps. It contributes financially to regenerative tourism by diversifying fishermen's activities and reducing fishing effort and environmental impact. Visitors are actively involved through: immersive fish tourism ("pescaturismo/ ittiturismo") experiences, learning sustainable fishing techniques, participating in marine waste collection, and sustainable cooking workshops to reduce food waste. The integrated storytelling on the platform enhances the cultural and natural heritage of the territory.

Community Engagement, Local Employment, Skills Development, Participatory approach

The initiative directly involves 15 local fish tourism (15 by now) businesses and promotes the inclusion of women, youth, and operators with limited digital skills, ensuring equal opportunities. It generates job opportunities by requiring the collaboration of biologists, tourist guides, and agri-food experts for the new integrated tourism packages. It supports the local supply chain by promoting short supply chain fish and agri-food products and the Mediterranean Diet. Targeted training sessions strengthen the digital and marketing skills of operators, fostering generational renewal.

Synergy with Agrifood and Mediterranean Diet

The project develops a synergy between tourism and the agri-food ecosystem, promoting the Mediterranean Diet as a sustainability model. Fish tourism enhances local fish products and gastronomic specialties, with tourism packages that combine fishing experiences and tasting of typical dishes, such as blue fish. Fishermen's cooperatives and local agri-food producers are involved in creating integrated itineraries (e.g., historical fishing harbor tours and winery visits). The https://www.pescaturismoinsicilia.it platform serves as a showcase for products and offers educational content on sustainable consumption.

Sustainability, Circularity, and Green Transition Measures

The project reduces the environmental impact of fishing practices and contributes to the protection of marine biodiversity. The diversification of activities reduces fishing effort and fuel consumption, decreasing CO2 emissions. The consumption of underutilized fish species is promoted for ecosystem regeneration. Tourists are involved in marine waste collection activities and sustainable cooking workshops for reducing food waste. The digital management of the platform contributes to a reduction in paper materials.

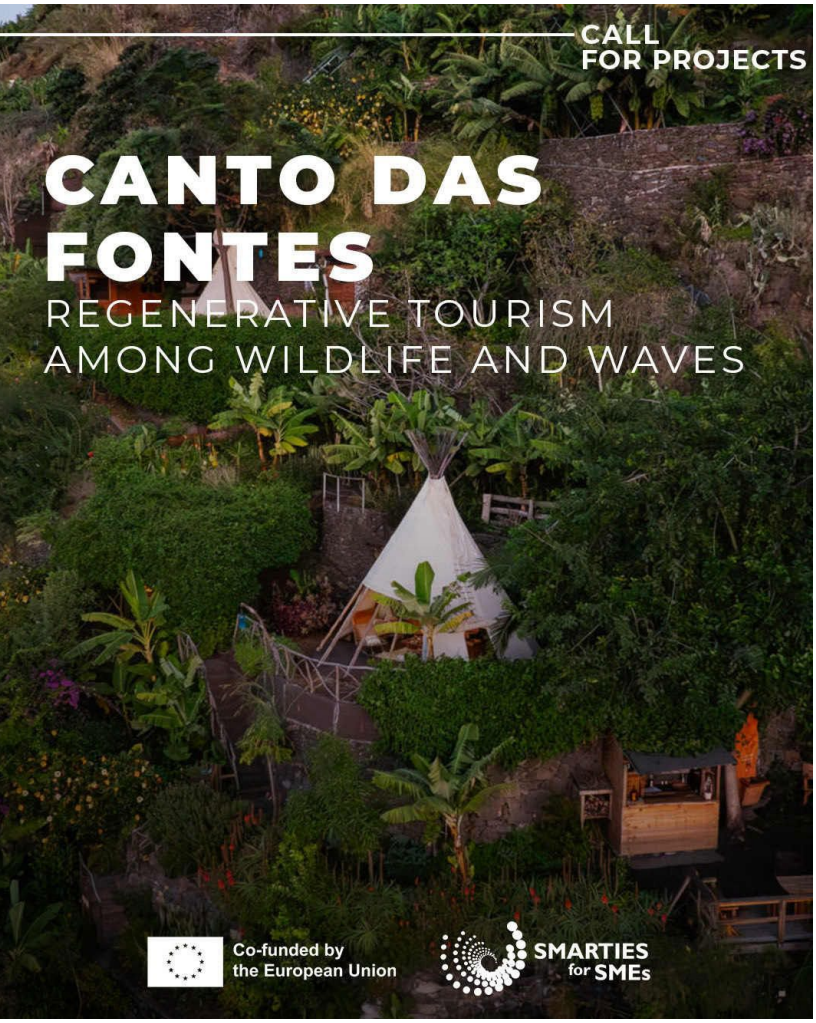
Digitalisation, Data Use, and Replicability

The https://www.pescaturismoinsicilia.it platform is the digital hub offering online booking, interactive mapping, storytelling, and a system for data collection to analyze tourists' profiles and preferences. Training sessions aim to make operators autonomous in managing the platform, ensuring sustainability and digitalisation after the project ends. The project is conceived as a scalable and replicable model in other Italian regions and the Mediterranean area.

Additional Remarks: The project is in its initial phase.
Relevant Links, website: https://www.pescaturismoinsicilia.it/

PORTUGAL - MADEIRA

Name of enterprise: the Fajã dos Padres Agricultural Society



Location: Estrada Padre António Dinis Henriques, no1 - 9300-261 Quinta Grande

Core idea: The creation of a "living museum" that values the historical, agricultural and cultural heritage of Fajã dos Padres, through the rehabilitation of the former Cistern House and the integration of innovative digital solutions. The objective is to allow the visitor to explore, autonomously and interactively, the history of the property, organic agricultural production and the wine identity associated with Malvasia Cândida. The project combines sustainability, technology and authenticity, reinforcing regenerative tourism in an isolated and high nature value territory.

Key activities:

- Rehabilitation of the Cistern House and creation of interpretative exhibition.
- Installation of information panels along the agricultural route.
- Development of a digital knowledge base with multimedia content.
- Implementation of an interaction bot to support the visitor.
- Pilot installation of a dry bathroom as an ecological solution.

Type of Applicant / Partnership Structure

Project led by a single tourism SME, supported by technical partners (architecture, design, software). Simple and efficient structure that facilitates implementation and quality control.

Main Objectives and Target Groups

Specific objectives:

- Appreciate and preserve the built and agricultural heritage.
- Create an interactive exhibition route based on digital tools.
- Promote regenerative, educational and cultural tourism.
- Integrate innovative ecological practices (dry bath house).
- Strengthen the link between tourism, organic farming and Malvasia Cândida.

Targeted audiences:

- Cultural and nature tourists.
- Families, schools, researchers and those interested in history and agriculture.
- Local community, craftsmen and producers.
- International visitors in search of authenticity and sustainability.

Intended impacts:

- Increased tourist flow throughout the year.
- Preservation of historical and agricultural heritage.
- Creation of new interactive tourism products.
- Visitor education on biodiversity, agriculture and sustainable practices.

Alignment with the Identified Thematic Areas

Thematic Area	Brief Explanation
1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	Heritage rehabilitation, educational tourism, use of advanced interpretive technology and regenerative practices.
2. Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance	It integrates organic agricultural production, wine history and integrated tourism offer.
3. Local Communities Wellbeing and Employment	Creation of local employment, valorisation of artisans and regional producers
4. Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems	Pedestrian routes, limited accessibility, promotion of gentle ways of visiting and enhancement of heritage.
5. Digitalisation and Data-Driven Services	Digital knowledge base, interactive app and bot with natural language.
6. Authenticity, Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet	Malvasia Cândida, adventurous fruit-growing, local gastronomy and agricultural history.
7. Skills Development and Twin Transition Readiness	Acquisition of digital skills (content and AI) and sustainability for in-house teams.
8. Funding and Infrastructure for Resilience	Rehabilitation of ruins, creation of new tourist hub and innovative ecological facilities.
10. Innovation, Research and Pilots	Pilot of dry bathroom and digital contextual knowledge system.
11. Networking, Best Practice Sharing and Stakeholder Engagement	Replicable project in other historical rural sites and with potential for Mediterranean network.

Thematic Areas Explained

Innovation and Regenerative Tourism Approach and Interactivity with visitors involvement

The project presents a unique combination of digital innovation, cultural preservation and environmental regeneration. The rehabilitation of Casa da Cisterna transforms a historic building into a modern interpretive nucleus, preserving the heritage while creating new forms of communication with the visitor. The introduction of state-of-the-art information panels, coupled with an expanding digital knowledge base, makes it possible to organise historical, agricultural and environmental content in a dynamic, personalised and accessible way.

The most advanced innovation is the development of a natural language interaction system ("bot"), which allows the visitor to ask questions



directly on their mobile device and receive answers tailored to their profile and interests — something extremely rare in this type of rural and heritage context. From a regenerative point of view, the project recovers a historic space, enhances existing organic production and encourages sustainable practices. The dry bathroom acts as an eco-pilot, drastically reducing water consumption and turning waste into fertilizer. The pedestrian path and the agricultural experience bring the visitor closer to the productive landscape, reinforcing the connection between people, culture and nature.

Community Engagement, Local Employment, Skills Development, Participatory approach

Fajã dos Padres integrates the local community on multiple levels: hiring of labor for heritage rehabilitation, participation of artisans, agricultural technicians and organic producers. The project creates job opportunities in design, heritage interpretation, construction, maintenance and agriculture, contributing to employment in isolated rural areas.

The digital aspect creates new qualification needs, allowing the internal team to develop skills in content curation, information management, multimedia production, storytelling and the use of interactive technologies.

Interaction with local producers strengthens short chains and promotes economic synergies between tourism, agriculture and gastronomy. The project also plays an educational role for visitors, schools and residents, increasing knowledge about sustainable agriculture, wine history, biodiversity and preservation of the agricultural landscape.

Synergy with Agrifood and Mediterranean Diet

Fajã dos Padres is a living example of the interconnection between tourism, agriculture and traditional diets. The production of Malvasia Cândida, organic subtropical fruit and vegetables is integrated into the tourist and educational experience. The interpretative route shows traditional agricultural practices, historical irrigation systems and the connection of the territory to the local gastronomy.

The malvasia of local production - included in the Ark of Taste[1] - reinforces the Mediterranean identity of the offer, uniting history, landscape and flavours. The use of organic products in the restaurant reinforces the Mediterranean Diet, promoting health, seasonality and sustainability.

The visitor understands the origin of food, agricultural biodiversity and the role of productive landscapes in regional culture.

Sustainability, Circularity, and Green Transition Measures

The project incorporates environmental sustaina-

1. The Ark of Taste is a living catalog of delicious and distinctive foods facing extinction

bility practices at all stages:

- Dry bathroom reduces water consumption and turns waste into fertilizer.
- Rehabilitation of ruins avoids new construction and preserves existing heritage.
- Digitalisation of content reduces impressions and physical materials.
- Pedestrian routes promote gentle mobility and appreciation of nature.



- Certified organic farming enhances biodiversity and reduces chemicals.
- Efficient management of resources through digital content and contextual information.
- The living museum reinforces the environmental awareness of visitors and inspires regenerative practices.

Digitalisation, Data Use, and Replicability

The digital knowledge base is completely scalable and modular, allowing for continuous content growth. The use of conversational AI turns the traditional visit into an interactive and personalized experience.

The system can be replicated in:

- other historical sites;
- farms open to the public;
- open-air museums;
- cultural routes;
- Mediterranean destinations interested in integrating digitalisation with heritage.

The dry bathroom is also replicable in remote areas where water networks and sewers are limited.

The combination of heritage + digitalisation + agri-food makes the project a highly inspiring European model.

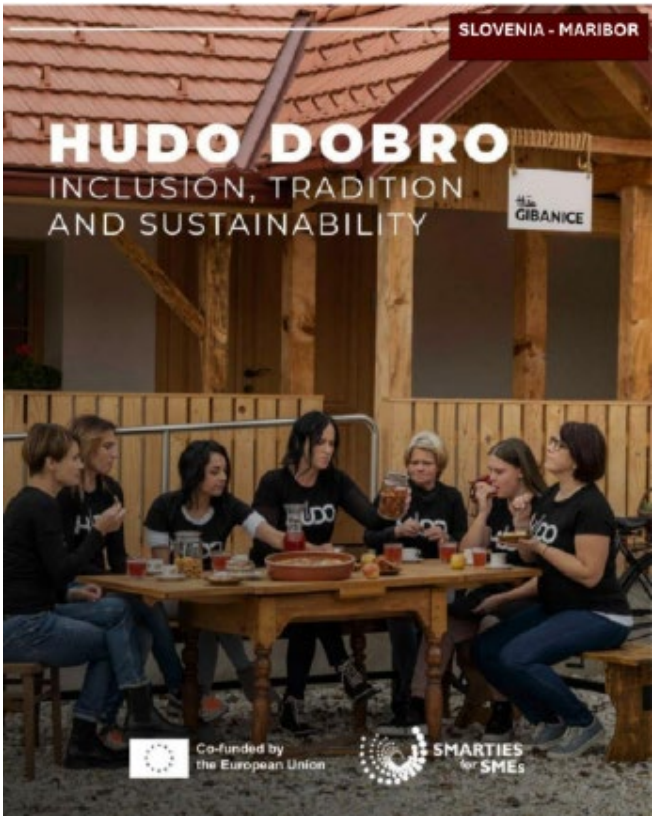
Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

The success of the Fajã dos Padres project results mainly from the combination of historical heritage, organic farming and digital innovation. The rehabilitation of Casa da Cisterna demonstrates that it is possible to value old buildings in a sustainable way, creating new tourism products without mischaracterizing the place. The authenticity of the property, an agricultural space with five centuries of history, is one of the main enabling factors, differentiating the experience and reinforcing the identity of the destination. The integration of technology, such as the digital knowledge base and the interaction bot, reveals that simple and scalable solutions can significantly improve the visitor experience, making it more accessible, educational and personalised. The implementation of the dry bathroom has proven to be an effective ecological solution for remote locations, reducing consumption and demonstrating the potential of circular practices.

The main lessons learned include: the importance of involving multidisciplinary teams, respecting the authenticity of the territory and investing in technological solutions that add real value to the visitor. The project shows that small businesses can lead replicable regenerative tourism models in other rural and Mediterranean destinations.

SLOVENIA - MARIBOR

Name of enterprise: Skupina Hudo Dobro, Project CANDIED TOMATO - Pomodoro Naturale



Location: Renkovci 8, 9224 Turnišče - Prekmurje
Core idea: The project aims to develop an innovative, high-value product made from surplus tomatoes using a new candying process. This approach reduces agricultural waste, increases the value of local crops and promotes social inclusion by employing vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. The initiative strengthens the agri-food sector while connecting production with tourism, offering visitors authentic experiences of Prekmurje's gastronomic heritage. It also incorporates the principles of regenerative tourism, the circular economy and the Mediterranean diet.

Key activities:

- Conducting a market analysis to identify target audiences and product demand
- Developing a marketing strategy and defining product placement
- Implementing innovative candying and dehydration technologies
- Product testing, quality assurance, and packaging design
- Launching the product at Hiša Gibanice and Luštna domačija to engage tourists and local consumers in these two culinary and agricultural visitor attractions.

This approach combines sustainability, community engagement, and cultural authenticity.

Type of Applicant / Partnership Structure

The project is built on a mixed partnership structure: Hudo Dobro, as the lead partner and food artisan,is responsible for production and community engagement; Zadruga Artmijemar oversees placement in the tourism market; and Paradajz d.o.o. supplies surplus tomatoes and retails the final product at Luštna domačija. This partnership model integrates SME collaboration, social inclusion, the use of local resources, and tourism promotion, ensuring a sustainable, well-coordinated, and community-focused approach.

Main Objectives and Target Groups

Specific objectives:

- Develop an innovative, high-value product from surplus tomatoes using a novel candying process.
- Reduce agricultural waste and promote circular-economy practices
- Support social inclusion by employing people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- Strengthen the competitiveness and collaboration of local SMEs.
- Enhance the tourist experience at Hiša Gibanice by introducing an authentic, locally produced specialty.

Targeted audiences:

- Tourists seeking authentic regional gastronomy experiences
- Local residents and food producers in the Pomurje region

- Socially vulnerable groups who benefit from employment and skills-development opportunities
- SMEs and food artisans interested in sustainable and innovative food production

Intended impacts:

- Generate local employment and promote social inclusion.
- Reduce food waste and optimize the use of agricultural resources.
- Reinforce short local supply chains and strengthen the regional agri-food sector.
- Enhance visitor engagement with Prekmurje's culinary heritage and sustainable practices.
- Create a replicable model that integrates innovative, circular food production with tourism and community development.

Alignment with the Identified Thematic Areas

Thematic Area	Brief Explanation
1. Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation	Enhances local gastronomy, reduces waste, fosters social inclusion and innovation.
3. Local Communities Wellbeing and Employment	Creates jobs, supports vulnerable groups and strengthens local community resilience.
6. Authenticity, Cultural Heritage and Mediterranean Diet	Promotes regional culinary traditions, local ingredients and Mediterranean diet principles.
9. Inclusive Services and Community-Based Tourism	Engages vulnerable groups, fosters social inclusion and connects tourism with community.

Thematic Areas Explained

Innovation and Regenerative Tourism Approach and Interactivity with visitors involvement

The project introduces innovation through the development of a new, value-added product made from surplus tomatoes in the Pomurje region, using an advanced candying process that has not previously been applied in this context. This technological innovation combines efficient dehydration with controlled candying, enabled by the introduction of a new vegetable dryer that improves product quality, increases production capacity, and ensures greater process precision. In addition to product innovation, the project adopts a modern business model that connects two local companies within the same municipality, fostering collaborative production, inclusive employment, and shared value creation.

The project reflects the principles of regenerative tourism by transforming local agricultural surpluses into a premium gastronomic product that enriches the region's culinary identity. By elevating traditional ingredients through innovative processing, it strengthens the cultural and gastronomic heritage of Prekmurje while providing tangible benefits to the local community. The engagement of socially vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, contributes to social regeneration and supports inclusive economic participation.

Environmental regeneration is promoted through the reduction of agricultural waste and the valorization of locally grown produce. By reintegrating these resources into a sustainable value chain,the project reduces environmental impact and advances circular-economy practices within the agri- food sector.

Visitor interactivity is enhanced by integrating the final product into the tourist offering at *Hiša Gibanice*, where guests can experience, taste, and learn about the transformation of local ingredients through innovative techniques. This approach enriches the visitor experience and strengthens their connection to the region's heritage, sustainability values, and community narratives.

Community Engagement, Local Employment, Skills Development, Participatory approach

The initiative is strongly rooted in community engagement and local value creation. Developed through close collaboration between two SMEs from the same municipality, the project strengthens local partnerships and supports the regional agri-food ecosystem. By sourcing surplus tomatoes directly from nearby producers, it reinforces short supply chains and ensures that local farmers benefit from additional, previously untapped revenue streams.

A key component of the initiative is the involvement of **Hudo Dobro**, a social-economy enterprise that employs people with disabilities from the local community. Their participation not only creates new employment opportunities but also promotes inclusive and socially responsible economic development. Through their work in dehydration, candying, and packaging, the project contributes to meaningful job creation and provides stable, community - based employment for vulnerable groups.

The initiative also promotes upskilling across multiple dimensions. Employees gain hands-on experience with newly introduced food-processing technologies, such as advanced dehydration equipment, which strengthens their digital and technical competencies. Project-related training supports the development of green skills by emphasizing waste reduction, circular-economy principles and the responsible use of local resources. Additionally, the transformation of regional ingredients into high-value gastronomic products helps deepen understanding of traditional culinary practices, local heritage and aspects of the Mediterranean diet.

Community participation is further enhanced through the inclusion of the final product in the *Hiša Gibanice* tourist experience, where visitors can learn about local food traditions and the project's social impact. This strengthens local identity, encourages knowledge exchange, and contributes to a more engaged and resilient community.

Synergy with Agrifood and Mediterranean Diet

The project creates strong synergies within the regional agri-food ecosystem by placing local gastronomy and sustainable food practices at its core. By transforming surplus tomatoes from nearby farms into a premium candied product, the initiative directly strengthens short food supply chains, ensuring that value remains within the community and that local farmers benefit from predictable, fair-market collaborations. This approach helps stabilize small-scale agricultural production, reduce waste and foster more resilient local food systems.

Although based in Prekmurje - a region at the crossroads of Central European and Mediterranean influences-the project reflects key principles of the Mediterranean diet, particularly its emphasis on plant-based ingredients, seasonality and resource efficiency. Using locally grown tomatoes combined with minimal and respectful processing methods aligns with the Mediterranean commitment to simplicity, natural flavors and nutritional awareness.

Collaboration with local producers extends beyond sourcing raw materials. By working with regional food artisans and integrating the product into the *Hiša Gibanice* tourist offering, the project fosters knowledge exchange around culinary heritage, traditional preparation techniques,

and contemporary sustainable gastronomy. This creates opportunities for co-creation with bakers, chefs, winemakers, and artisanal producers who are shaping a modern interpretation of Prekmurje's food culture.

Moreover, the use of advanced, energy-efficient dehydration technology supports organic and environmentally responsible production practices, reinforcing the project's alignment with green transition objectives. Through these synergies, the initiative not only strengthens the local agri-food sector but also enriches the region's gastronomic identity, offering visitors an authentic, regenerative and culturally meaningful experience.

Sustainability, Circularity, and Green Transition Measures

The project makes a significant contribution to environmental sustainability by transforming surplus regional tomatoes into a high-value product, directly reducing food waste and promoting the circular use of local agricultural resources. By integrating an energy-efficient dehydration system, the initiative minimizes energy consumption during processing while ensuring responsible use of raw materials. Local sourcing further reduces transportation needs, lowering the project's overall carbon footprint and reinforcing short, low-impact supply chains.

The production model embodies circular economy principles by converting produce that would otherwise be discarded into a long-lasting gastronomic ingredient, extending shelf life and alleviating pressure on local waste streams. Packaging solutions and processing steps are designed with resource efficiency in mind, emphasizing reduced inputs and environmentally conscious operations.

Through its integration into the sustainable tourism offering at *Hiša Gibanice*, the project promotes greener visitor experiences that highlight local biodiversity and seasonal crops. By valuing locally grown produce and minimizing waste, the initiative supports a regenerative, climate-aligned transition within the regional agri-food and tourism sectors.

Digitalisation, Data Use and Replicability

Digitalisation supports the project by enhancing production oversight, product traceability, and visitor storytelling. The new dehydration technology incorporates basic digital monitoring features that allow staff to track temperature, humidity, and processing times, ensuring consistent product



quality while simplifying employee training. This data-driven approach also optimizes energy use and streamlines workflow planning.
On the tourism side, the product will be integrated into the digital ecosystem of *Hiša Gibanice*, where visitors can access interactive content via QR codes on the packaging. These links provide short multimedia stories about the transformation of surplus tomatoes, the contributions of local farmers and the social impact achieved through the engagement of people with disabilities. This digital storytelling enhances transparency and deepens visitor engagement with sustainable practices.

The project is designed to be easily replicable. Its core model-valorizing surplus local produce through simple technological upgrades and community-based collaboration - can be adapted in other regions with similar agricultural characteristics. Mediterranean and EU territories with strong horticultural sectors could adopt this approach, combining circular food processing, social inclusion and tourism storytelling. With modest investment, the model can scale to networks of small producers, enabling shared processing facilities, regional branding, and broader social impact.

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Key success factors include strong collaboration between local SMEs, the integration of surplus agricultural resources, and the involvement of a social-economy enterprise employing people with disabilities. The combination of simple yet innovative technology, circular production principles and visitor-oriented digital storytelling proved essential. Close cooperation with local producers/farmers ensured a stable supply chain and reinforced community trust. For other regions, the main lessons are to start with locally abundant resources, invest in small-scale but efficient technology and connect production with tourism experiences. Replication is most effective when rooted in local identity, social inclusion and transparent communication with visitors and stakeholders.



CONCLUSION

Best Practices as Living Implementations of the Tourism Transition Pathway in the Mediterranean

The best practices analyzed in Greece (Xanthi), Italy (Sicily), Cyprus (Paphos), Portugal (Madeira) and Slovenia (Prekmurje) show that the objectives of the **Tourism Transition Pathway**, green transition, digital transition, resilience, skills and governance, are already operationalized on the ground through **regenerative tourism initiatives aligned with SMARTIES.** These cases confirm that the Mediterranean context, when mobilized through culture, food systems and community engagement, offers fertile ground for tourism models that regenerate ecosystems, empower SMEs and strengthen territorial identity.

In line with the **TTP's objective of transitioning from extractive to value-creating tourism models**, the practices strongly reflect the first thematic area of SMARTIES (Regenerative Tourism Development and Innovation). Initiatives such as cultural installations made from recycled materials in Xanthi, diversification of pescatourism in Sicily, immersive culinary heritage experiences in Cyprus, agro-museum tourism in Madeira, and circular food production in Slovenia illustrate how tourism can actively restore cultural meaning, biodiversity, and local economies. These practices directly contribute to the TTP's goal of increasing the positive environmental and social footprint of tourism while reducing reliance on volume-based growth.

The TTP's emphasis on improved governance, coordination and ecosystem-based approaches is clearly reflected **in the SMARTIES thematic area 2 (Synergies in Ecosystems and Collaborative Governance).** All cases show that regeneration is achieved through collaboration between tourism SMEs, farmers, fishers, cultural institutions, educational bodies and technology providers. This is in line with the Transition Pathway's call for integrated tourism ecosystems, where cross-sectoral collaboration enables resilient value chains and shared responsibility for destinations.

The central objective of the Tourism Transition Pathway is **to ensure that tourism contributes to quality employment and social resilience,** which is strongly reflected in the **SMARTIES thematic areas 3 and 9 (Well-being, Employment and Inclusive Community-Based Tourism)**. Best practices prioritize local employment, skills development and the inclusion of women, youth and vulnerable groups, particularly in rural and peripheral areas. Community participation, through workshops, co-creation and educational tourism, transforms tourism into a mechanism for social regeneration, directly supporting the Transition Pathway's ambition to strengthen local communities and social cohesion.

The green transition pillar of the TTP is operationalized through **thematic area 4 of SMARTIES (Green Aspects of Cultural Tourism and Proximity Systems)**. Practices such as circular use of materials, organic farming, waste reduction, renewable energy solutions, sustainable fisheries and short food supply chains translate the EU climate goals into action at the level of SMEs. These initiatives demonstrate how proximity-based cultural tourism and the Mediterranean diet can significantly reduce environmental pressures while increasing authenticity and value for visitors.

The digital transition objective of the TTP is strongly addressed through **thematic area 5** of SMARTIES (Digitalisation and data-driven services). In all cases, digital tools, AR menus, digital platforms, interactive guides and POS analytics are used to improve storytelling, accessibility and operational efficiency. It is crucial that digitalization supports regeneration by reducing resource use, extending visitor engagement beyond physical presence and strengthening the competitiveness of SMEs, in line with the vision of the Smart Tourism Destinations.

Mediterranean diet and cultural heritage, a central part of thematic area 6 of SMARTIES, is directly aligned with the TTP objective of protecting and valorizing European cultural assets. Food heritage is positioned not only as a tourist attraction, but also as a regenerative system that connects health, biodiversity, landscape management and cultural continuity. From wine, fish and fruit production to circular plant-based products, these practices demonstrate how gastronomy can anchor sustainable tourism value chains. The TTP's focus on skills, innovation and investment readiness is reflected in SMARTIES **thematic areas** 7, 8, 10 and 11. Acquiring green and digital skills, investing in resilient infrastructure, piloting innovative models and active networking ensure that best practices are scalable and transferable. These elements directly respond to the Pathway's call for experimentation, knowledge exchange and capacity building among SMEs.

In conclusion, the analyzed best practices confirm that the SMARTIES thematic areas function as practical implementation channels for the Tourism Transition Pathway. When regeneration, Mediterranean food systems, cultural heritage, digital tools and community participation come together, tourism becomes a driver of ecological restoration, social well-being and economic resilience. These cases show that the Mediterranean can decisively move from recovery to regeneration, offering a model for a European tourism transition based on place, people and purpose.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Advancing the Tourism Transition Pathway through Regenerative Mediterranean Best Practices

The best practices analyzed within the SMARTIES framework provide compelling evidence that the Tourism Transition Pathway (TTP) objectives can be effectively implemented at local and regional level when tourism is conceived as a regenerative system rather than a purely economic activity.

Across Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia, tourism SMEs and territorial ecosystems are already demonstrating how the green and digital transitions, social resilience, and cultural valorization can be integrated into coherent, place-based tourism models. These experiences offer concrete guidance for EU, national, and regional authorities seeking to operationalize the Pathway in diverse Mediterranean contexts.

Regenerative Tourism as a Strategic Direction for the Mediterranean

The analyzed initiatives confirm that regenerative tourism development and innovation (SMARTIES **thematic area 1**) directly respond to the TTP's call for a shift away from volume-driven growth toward value-based, resilient tourism models. Practices rooted in cultural heritage, the Mediterranean Diet, circular resource use, and experiential tourism demonstrate that regeneration can restore ecosystems, reinforce identity, and enhance SME competitiveness simultaneously. For policymakers, this implies the need to embed regenerative principles explicitly in tourism strategies, funding instruments, and evaluation criteria.

Strengthening Governance through Ecosystem Synergies

The TTP highlights the importance of coordinated governance and integrated ecosystems, a priority clearly reflected in SMARTIES **thematic area 2**. Best practices show that collaboration between tourism SMEs, agri-food producers, fishers, cultural institutions, educational bodies and digital innovators is essential for resilient tourism value chains. EU and regional authorities should therefore prioritize cross-sector governance mechanisms, support destination-level coordination platforms and encourage cultural

routes and networks as operational tools for territorial cohesion.

Delivering Social Value and Quality Employment

The Tourism Transition Pathway places strong emphasis on tourism's contribution to quality employment, social inclusion, and community well-being. This objective is consistently addressed through SMARTIES **thematic areas 3 and 9**. The best practices demonstrate how community-based tourism, skills development, and inclusive employment, particularly for youth, women and rural populations, can transform tourism into a driver of social regeneration. Policymakers are encouraged to link tourism funding to measurable social outcomes, ensuring that benefits are retained locally and equitably distributed.

Accelerating the Green Transition through Proximity and Circularity

Environmental sustainability emerges as a practical reality in initiatives aligned with SMARTIES Thematic Area 4, directly supporting the TTP's green transition objectives. Circular material use, organic agriculture, sustainable fisheries, waste reduction and short food supply chains demonstrate how proximity-based cultural tourism and the Mediterranean Diet reduce environmental pressure while enhancing authenticity. EU and regional authorities should reinforce these models by aligning tourism, agriculture, and environmental policies and by supporting SMEs in adopting circular and low-impact practices.

Digital Transition as an Enabler of Regeneration

The best practices illustrate how digitalisation and data-driven services (SMARTIES t**hematic area 5**) are essential enablers of regenerative tourism rather than stand-alone technological upgrades. Digital storytelling, immersive interpretation tools, online platforms, and data analytics improve accessibility, resource efficiency, and market reach. In line with the TTP, public authorities should ensure that digital transition policies explicitly support regenerative outcomes, particularly for SMEs and rural destinations.

Cultural Heritage and the Mediterranean Diet as Policy Anchors

SMARTIES Thematic Area 6 demonstrates how cultural heritage and the Mediterranean Diet align with the TTP objective of protecting and valorizing Europe's cultural assets. Food systems emerge as key connectors between health, biodiversity, landscape management, and tourism. Policymakers should recognize gastronomy and food heritage as strategic pillars of sustainable tourism, integrating them into destination branding, education, and innovation programmes.

Skills, Investment, Innovation, and Knowledge Sharing

Finally, the TTP's focus on skills, investment readiness, innovation, and networking is reflected in SMARTIES **thematic areas** 7, 8, 10 and 11. Best practices show that green and digital skills, resilient infrastructure, pilot projects and active knowledge exchange are critical for scaling regenerative tourism models. EU and regional authorities are encouraged to support experimentation, peer learning, and transnational cooperation, ensuring that successful initiatives can be replicated across Mediterranean regions.

Key Policy Message

The SMARTIES best practices demonstrate that regenerative tourism offers a concrete pathway to implement the Tourism Transition Pathway at territorial level. When culture, food systems, digital innovation and community participation are integrated, tourism becomes a driver of ecological restoration, social cohesion, and economic resilience. For EU and regional authorities, the priority is no longer whether to support this transition, but how to scale and embed it systematically through coherent policies, targeted funding and inclusive governance frameworks.

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*All the rest references are listed in the research background material

* Please take into account that all documents were retrieved in 2024/2025, so the links might not be available any more

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