



MED - Routes

"Enhancing MED sustainable cultural tourism

through the creation of eco-itineraries inside European Cultural Routes"

WP3 COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING PACKAGE

– A3.1 Creation of training materials for the dissemination of eco-itineraries



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1. INTRODUCTION

The MED-Routes Project aim is to promote sustainable and circular tourism in the Mediterranean by developing a local-based “slow tourism” model integrating the values rooted in the shared cultural heritage of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

Sustainable and Circular Tourism in the Mediterranean

The concept of **sustainable tourism** has evolved significantly since the **first International Summit on Sustainable Tourism in 1995**, where global organizations laid the foundation for responsible tourism development. As identified by researchers (Sharpley, 2000) sustainable tourism encompasses both an **economic activity and a broader sustainable policy framework**. Europe, as the world's largest destination region, saw 747 million international arrivals in 2024 (+1% above 2019 levels and 5% over 2023) supported by strong intraregional demand¹. Among the world's top five tourism earners were two MED countries, Spain (+36%) and Italy (+23%). The **Mediterranean region**, with 328.4 million arrivals in 2024.², heavily depends on tourism, contributing up to average 11.5% of total employment in Mediterranean countries. However, this rapid growth also influences **environmental degradation** and threatens the region's **diverse but fragile ecosystems**.

Recognizing these challenges, Mediterranean policymakers and organizations have embraced sustainability-focused strategies, such as the **Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (2016-2025)** and the **EU Green Deal**. The **European Parliament's 2021 EU strategy for sustainable tourism** further reinforces the transition towards a more **resilient, responsible, and circular tourism sector**. Circular tourism, as defined by Girard & Nocca (2017)³, **optimizes resource efficiency, reduces waste,**

¹ UNWTO data: <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-recovers-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024>

² Statista

[International tourist arrivals in Europe 2017-2024, by region](https://www.statista.com/statistics/261702/international-tourist-arrivals-in-europe-by-region/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20Southern%2FMediterranean%20Europe%20reported,328.4%20million%20arrivals%20in%202024.)

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/261702/international-tourist-arrivals-in-europe-by-region/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20Southern%2FMediterranean%20Europe%20reported,328.4%20million%20arrivals%20in%202024.>

³ Source: INCIRCLE Operational Model

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321878501_From_linear_to_circular_tourism_1

and encourages **eco-compatible business models**. Frameworks such as the **Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Circular Procurement Framework** and **McKinsey's ReSOLVE model**, guide businesses and policymakers in adopting circular economy principles.⁴

MED Routes Project used the transferable knowledge from the INCIRCLE Project which has emerged from these initiatives, emphasizing circular economy principles in tourism through strategies that optimize **waste management, energy use, water conservation, and mobility solutions**. Circular tourism goes beyond sustainability by prioritizing **cradle-to-cradle resource management**⁵, ensuring that tourism operations become more efficient and regenerative over time.

Given the **socioeconomic and environmental stakes**, it is imperative that sustainable tourism integrates **circular economy principles** while balancing **economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability**. The **MED-Routes Project**, which promotes **slow, cultural tourism** across Mediterranean Cultural Routes, embodies this approach by aligning its development with **sustainable tourism policies**.

Addressing Overtourism and Seasonality

The need for focused sustainability goals is being further confirmed by the recently published results of the regular WEF survey, the “**Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024**”⁶, which highlights ongoing sustainability and resilience challenges within the tourism sector, particularly in Europe and the Mediterranean region. Many of these challenges, including overtourism, seasonality, limited eco-itineraries, and uneven socioeconomic benefits, align directly with the issues that the MED-Routes Project seeks to address through its slow-tourism model. Considering the insights from the TTDI 2024, MED-Routes should strengthen its mission of developing localized, low-impact cultural

⁴ Source: INCIRCLE Operational Model

https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/publications/EllenMacArthurFoundation_Growth-Within_July15.pdf

⁵ Source: Sustainability Guide: <https://sustainabilityguide.eu/methods/cradle-to-cradle/> (accessed on 22 April 2025)

⁶ WEF Global Travel & Tourism Report 2024. Available online <https://www.weforum.org/publications/travel-tourism-development-index-2024/> (accessed on 29 January 2025).

tourism across the Mediterranean's four Cultural Routes, promoting environmental sustainability, economic inclusivity, and enhanced cultural experiences.

The **TTDI 2024** highlights the persistent challenges of overtourism and seasonality in Mediterranean destinations. Countries like Croatia, Greece, and Spain for example indicate excessive reliance on high-season tourism. MED-Routes responds to this trend by dispersing tourism flows across lesser-known areas and heritage sites through alternative eco-itineraries as part of the cultural routes like the Phoenicians' Route, Routes of the Olive Tree, European Route of Ceramics, and Destination Napoleon. By promoting year-round, community-driven tourism experiences, MED-

Routes fosters a balanced, sustainable tourism economy that reduces environmental strain on overburdened sites.

6.3 Europe and Eurasia

TABLE 3 TTDI 2024 scores for Europe and Eurasia

Economy	TTDI rank	Enabling Environment					T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions			Infrastructure and Services			T&T Resources			T&T Sustainability		
		Business Environment	Safety and Security	Health and Hygiene	Human Resources and Labour Market	ICT Readiness	Prioritization of T&T	Openness to T&T	Price Competitiveness	Air Transport Infrastructure	Ground and Port Infrastructure	Tourist Services and Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Cultural Resources	Non-Leisure Resources	Environmental Sustainability	T&T Socioeconomic Impact	T&T Demand Sustainability
Spain	2	4.92	6.14	5.99	4.75	6.05	5.73	5.01	3.60	6.06	4.92	5.46	4.95	6.64	4.81	5.39	4.25	3.34
Italy	9	4.89	5.79	5.88	4.68	5.85	5.23	4.80	3.15	5.24	4.79	4.60	5.00	6.74	4.23	5.37	3.46	3.53
Portugal	12	4.97	6.55	6.17	4.72	6.02	5.14	4.90	3.63	5.29	4.35	4.62	3.39	4.42	3.88	5.20	4.76	3.26
Greece	21	4.47	5.30	6.34	4.32	5.85	5.43	4.80	3.16	5.52	3.73	5.95	3.03	3.01	3.33	5.23	4.29	3.00
Türkiye	29	3.55	4.96	4.85	3.52	5.29	6.12	4.16	5.19	5.50	3.72	3.40	3.50	4.96	4.23	4.18	4.32	3.10
Cyprus	30	4.96	5.79	6.21	4.82	5.69	5.34	4.78	3.82	4.95	3.59	6.50	1.74	1.61	2.34	4.82	4.02	3.39
Malta	34	5.12	6.23	6.41	4.65	6.09	5.54	4.72	3.77	4.43	4.05	4.87	1.68	1.58	1.94	4.11	4.03	3.87
Croatia	46	4.27	6.25	6.01	4.17	5.67	4.84	4.70	2.96	3.68	3.85	5.17	3.54	2.25	1.67	5.22	3.44	2.61
Southern Europe		4.64	5.88	5.98	4.45	5.81	5.42	4.73	3.66	5.08	4.13	5.07	3.35	3.90	3.30	4.94	4.07	3.26

Source: Travel & Tourism Development Index 2024 INSIGHT REPORT MAY 2024⁷

Fostering Environmental Sustainability

Such results also highlight the urgent need for nature conservation and responsible consumption in tourism. Low natural resource preservation scores for the Mediterranean

⁷ WEF, Travel & Tourism Development Index 2024 INSIGHT REPORT MAY 2024:

https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Travel_and_Tourism_Development_Index_2024.pdf (accessed April 2025)

point out that eco-conscious strategies must be integrated into tourism infrastructure. MED-Routes project stresses circular economy principles by promoting local renewable energy, minimizing waste, and integrating low-impact tourism activities. Its initiatives align with EU sustainability policies, including the Farm-to-Fork Strategy and the Sustainable Mobility Strategy, ensuring regenerative tourism practices.

Promoting Socioeconomic Benefits and Inclusivity

Tourism's economic benefits are also unevenly distributed across the Mediterranean, with low T&T Socioeconomic Impact Index scores (3.44-4.25). Many communities face wage disparities, employment uncertainty, and limited tourism-generated wealth distribution. MED-Routes prioritizes local economic empowerment by fostering community-led tourism initiatives, supporting artisan economies, and enhancing cultural heritage-based tourism. Through capacity-building programs, the project introduces local stakeholders to the skills necessary to sustain economically viable and culturally authentic tourism models.

Enhancing Cultural and Heritage-Based Tourism

Despite Europe's robust TTDI 2024 ranking, certain Mediterranean countries underutilize their cultural resources. Malta, Cyprus, and Croatia have particularly low cultural scores, highlighting the need for better heritage tourism integration. TTDI namely, not only measures the availability of cultural resources, but also to an extent, it captures how cultural resources are promoted and developed rather than the actual existing cultural heritage of a country. In this sense MED-Routes Project's intention is to revitalize Mediterranean cultural heritage through experiential tourism, storytelling, and immersive community engagement. By integrating sustainable and circular tourism strategies, the project should ensure that cultural tourism remains economically viable, environmentally responsible, and socially enriching.

Finally various surveys⁸ and findings emphasize the need for a sustainable, inclusive, and balanced tourism model in the Mediterranean. Overtourism, environmental

⁸ PLAN BLEU report 2022 - Regional Activity Centre of UNEP/MAP: https://planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EN_VF_stateoftourism_PLANBLEU.pdf

concerns, and unequal economic benefits demand a shift toward slow, responsible tourism initiatives promoted by MED-Routes. By integrating circular economy principles, MED-Routes advances a regenerative tourism model that aligns with the EU Green Deal, INCIRCLE Project, and global sustainable tourism frameworks. This approach enhances the resilience of Mediterranean tourism and serves as a blueprint for global sustainable tourism strategies in the future.

This all is the reason why MED-Routes relies on previous projects and their achievements. A key approach of MED-Routes thus includes the transfer of successful outputs not only from the INCIRCLE but also from EMBLEMATIC project to design eco-itineraries within the already mentioned four Cultural Routes: the Phoenicians' Route, Routes of the Olive Tree, European Route of Ceramics, and Destination Napoleon. For that purpose a comprehensive catalogue has been prepared.

This comprehensive catalogue equally provides tools based on the INCIRCLE Replicating Package, as well as EMBLEMATIC Guidelines for creating eco-itineraries on the four cultural routes.

Such an approach offers an insight into technical and methodological design of MED Routes eco itineraries on cultural routes, serving as a valuable resource for stakeholders aiming to introduce circular tourism principles and sustainable tourism strategies in the MED region, as well as encouraging understanding and practical application of these innovative models and actionable methodologies.

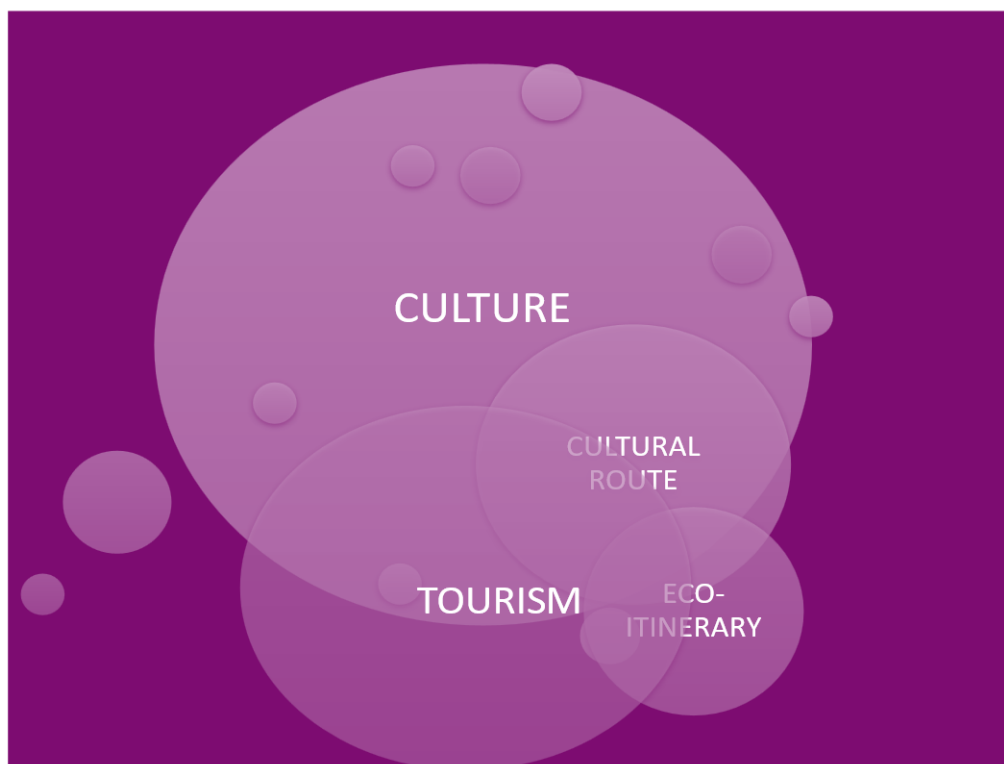
The aim of the training package is to present an in-depth understanding of the design, and implementation of eco-itineraries within the Mediterranean Cultural Routes. It builds on methodologies and technical tools developed through the INCIRCLE and EMBLEMATIC projects, offering a blend of theoretical insights and practical applications. The focus is on fostering sustainable tourism practices rooted in the rich heritage of the region, aligned with the principles of circular economy and cultural valorization.

2. BASIC PRINCIPLES AND DEFINITIONS

The MED-Routes initiative seeks to establish sustainable tourism practices through the development of eco-itineraries within the Mediterranean Cultural Routes. These eco-itineraries integrate the principles of circular economy with cultural and natural heritage preservation and tourism by transferring methodologies from projects like INCIRCLE and EMBLEMATIC addressing environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability.

Basic principles of the European cultural routes are included in the project through the Phoenicians' Route, Routes of the Olive Tree, European Route of Ceramics, and Destination Napoleon, applying those methodologies that already integrate sustainable tourism and circular economy.

INTER-RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURE, TOURISM, CULTURAL ROUTE, ECO-ITINERARY



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DEFINITIONS

Defining cultural routes:

European cultural route is a physical, tangible section/spot in space (but not necessarily a continuous path) defined by an inventory of tangible and intangible cultural and historical elements connected by a theme, concept or definition as well as by the identification of sites of existing cultural heritage linked in a dispersed, linear, spotted or regional structure creating a marked and interpreted continuous whole within the unified context of the route, aiming to preserve common European culture, heritage and diversified unique identities.⁹

Defining sustainable cultural tourism¹⁰

Sustainable cultural tourism is the integrated management of cultural heritage and tourism activities in conjunction with the local community, creating social, environmental and economic benefits for all stakeholders in order to achieve tangible and intangible cultural heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development.¹¹

Defining cultural tourism destination

As defined by UNWTO Tourism, “a destination is a **physical space** with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and **can network to form larger destinations**. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness.” As such a cultural route and eco-itinerary can be considered as a networked larger destination.¹²

⁹ Klaric, V. at other, Managing Visitors on Thematic Cultural Routes Handbook, <https://mint.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/arhiva/ManagingVisitors-CultRoutes.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1aeff746-2255-11ea-af81-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹¹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Sustainable cultural tourism – Executive summary*, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/148072>

¹² UNWTO Tourism Definitions: <http://www.unwto.org/global/publication/UNWTO-Tourism-definitions>

EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES	COMMON FIELDS for Cultural routes' ECO-ITINERARIES	
	INCIRCLE PRINCIPLES	
Cooperation in terms of research and development	INNOVATE – innovation needs cooperation in order to develop - seeks to unify and guide territories towards a common sustainable development	Incorporating innovative methods from Ncircle can enhance the research and development activities of Cultural Routes, making them more effective and sustainable.
Valorization & enhancement of memory, history and European heritage	RETHINK - Emphasize the impacts of decisions on resources, including cultural resources, across their lifecycle. Stresses management of heritage sites and cultural resources sustainably, ensuring they are preserved for future generations.	Stressing principles that advocate for a broad, inclusive approach that considers the impact on all stakeholders Implementing an inclusive process that involves all stakeholders from the beginning, ensuring a comprehensive and resilient plan.
Cultural and educational exchanges among the youngsters	REDUCE - Emphasizes education on sustainability practices, such as reducing waste and optimizing resource use in a participatory way. Incorporating sustainability education into cultural and educational exchanges	Stressing principles that involve education, active participation and engagement encouraging young people to engage in activities that promote both cultural understanding and environmental responsibility
Contemporary cultural and artistic practice	REGENERATE - Emphasizes innovative practices to regenerate resources and integrate sustainable tourism with local activities	Promoting synergies that that not only celebrate European heritage but also promote regeneration of heritage including sustainable and modern cultural practices
Cultural tourism and development of Sustainable and Responsible Tourism practices	REVALUE - Focuses on upcycling and other methods (storytelling) to enhance the value of (heritage) resources, turning them into higher quality or more functional products	Including aims that promote tourism that supports the maintenance and enhancement of cultural sites, thereby contributing to sustainable territorial development

Defining cultural tourism product

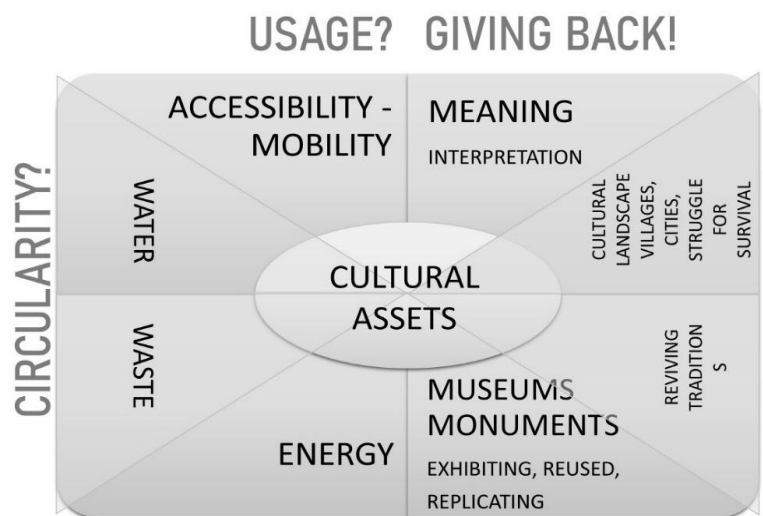
As defined by UN Tourism, a Tourism Product is "a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific centre of interest which represents the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels, and it has a life cycle".¹³ Tourism product consists of the attraction and services provided.

Defining Circular Tourism

Circular Tourism has been defined as "a model able to create a virtuous circle producing goals and services without wasting the limited resources of the planet that are raw materials, water and energy" (Girard & Nocca, 2017). Moreover, Circular Tourism proposes a model in which every tourism actor adopts an eco-compatible approach (Acampora et al., 2018). By applying the principles of a Circular Economy, hospitality and tourism companies can accelerate their own businesses and move forward in thinking and action to create a more sustainable experience for all stakeholders involved in the hospitality and tourism industry (Van Rheede, 2012). (The INCIRCLE Project)

Defining circular tourism in the context of cultural tourism and cultural routes

Circular tourism in the context of cultural tourism and cultural routes can be defined as a model that integrates the principles of the circular economy with tourism and the preservation of cultural heritage while creating eco-compatible cultural tourism experiences within the thematic area of each cultural route. It seeks to manage cultural routes and heritage sites responsibly by minimizing



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¹³ UNWTO: Product development, <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-development-products> (accessed January 2025)

resource waste, conserving tangible and intangible cultural assets, and fostering collaboration among all stakeholders: tourists, local communities, and tourism businesses. This approach combines sustainable cultural tourism's focus on community engagement and heritage conservation with the thematic unity of cultural routes, ensuring that tourism contributes to environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability.

FIELDS OF INTERVENTION - ON ECO ITINERARIES possibilities i.e.



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Olive Tree Route

STARTING POINTS

The design of European cultural routes associated with eco-itineraries requires a holistic methodology that integrates strategic planning, thematic coherence, and stakeholder collaboration. Synthesizing insights from the Council of Europe Cultural Routes creation principles, the INCIRCLE Operational Model framework, and the Emblematic Handbook, a unified approach can be established. Such a methodology aligns cultural and natural heritage preservation with sustainable and circular tourism practices, ensuring that eco-itineraries support local communities, enrich visitor experiences, and protect the environment.

In order to provide a common overview, all three models need to be integrated: the one used by the Council of Europe Cultural Routes, the INCIRCLE methodology including circular tourism postulates and the EMBLEMATIC approach for eco-itineraries.

3.1. EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES MODEL METHODOLOGY

Thematic coherence is vital for the success of cultural routes. The principles of cultural route creation emphasize the importance of defining a unifying theme that reflects European values and connects multiple countries. Themes should illustrate the memory, history, and diversity of European heritage, integrating both tangible and intangible elements.

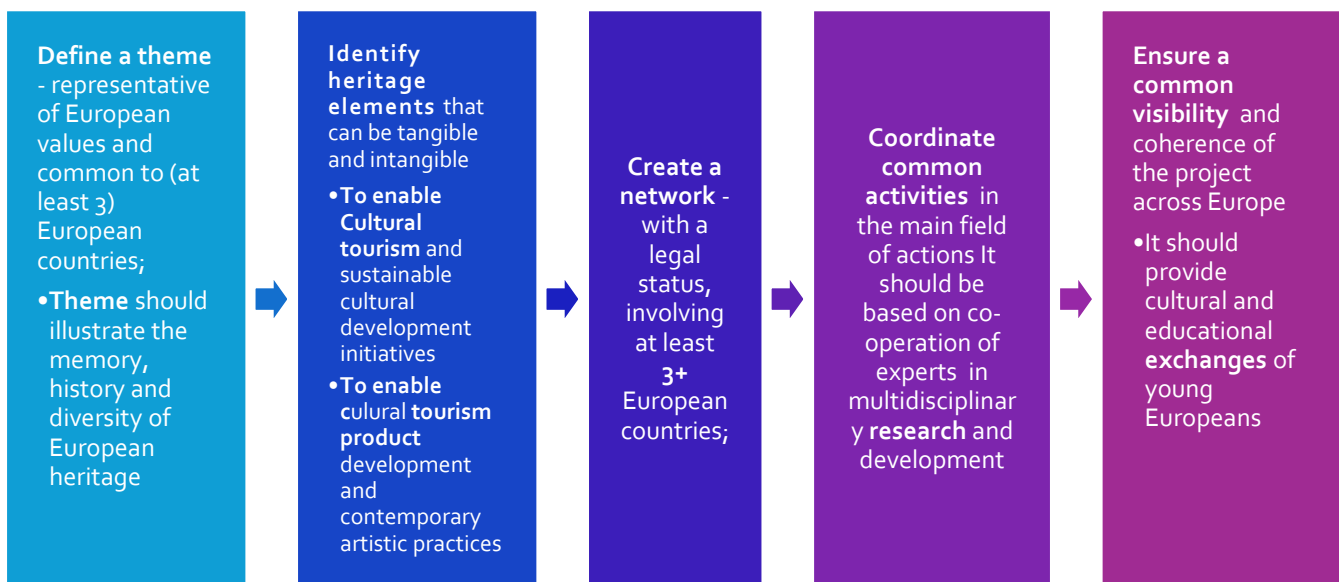
In this case routes like the **Phoenicians' Route** highlight Mediterranean cultural exchanges, while the **Routes of the Olive Tree** celebrate agricultural traditions. Themes like these resonate with visitors by showcasing shared histories and unique local identities.

This model fosters identifying heritage elements as a collaborative process that involves cataloguing historical sites, traditional practices, and contemporary artistic expressions. Tools such as GIS mapping can facilitate this inventory, while community engagement ensures that local knowledge and perspectives are included.

Creating a network of stakeholders across at least three European countries formalizes the structure of the cultural route. Such a network fosters cooperation in research, tourism promotion, and heritage preservation. Joint activities, such as exhibitions and educational programs, enhance the visibility and coherence of the route. Unified branding strategies further establish the route's identity, making it accessible and appealing to diverse audiences.

Cultural routes must also contribute to sustainable tourism and cultural development. Initiatives such as contemporary art installations, heritage-based workshops, and eco-friendly accommodations link tourism with local economies. Storytelling and interpretative strategies enrich the visitor experience, creating deeper connections to the route's cultural and environmental context.

Methodological approach to creation of cultural routes:



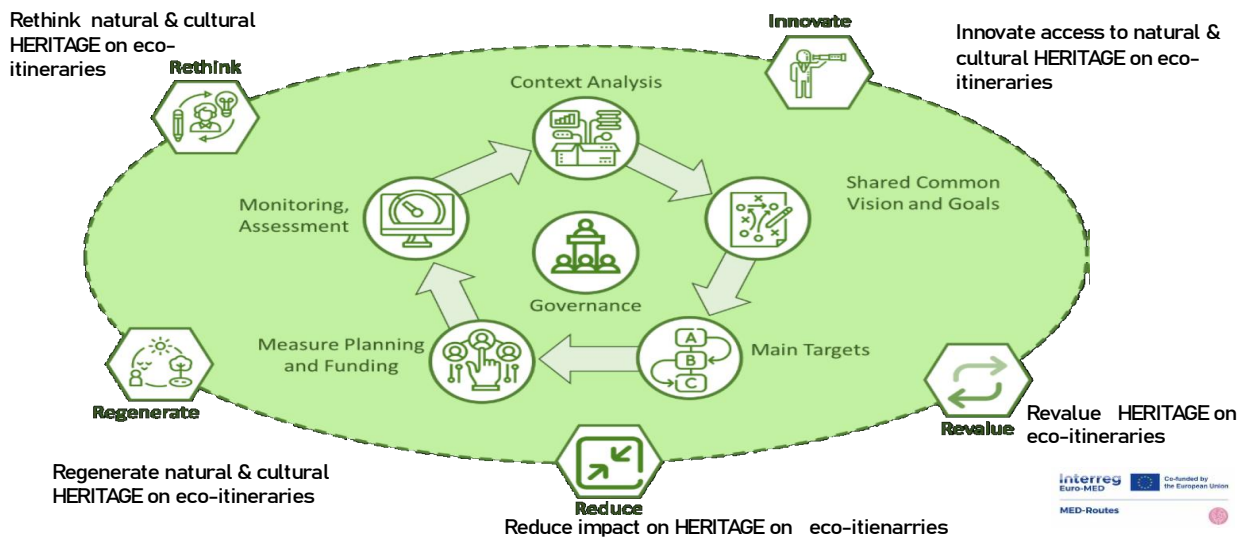
3.2. INCIRCLE MODEL METHODOLOGY

INCIRCLE OPERATIONAL MODEL provides a strategic framework for advancing circular tourism, beginning with definitions of sustainable and circular tourism. It relies on current approaches by the UNWTO, the ETIS, and the MED Programme Sustainable Tourism community, highlighting their methodologies and contributions. INCIRCLE's main areas of

action cover energy efficiency, water and waste management and mobility all presenting the foundation for creation of eco-itineraries. In line with that INCIRCLE basic principles: reduce, rethink, revalue, regenerate and innovate are highlighted and correspond to cultural routes postulates related to heritage. All of them refer equally to natural and cultural heritage on eco itineraries.

INCIRCLE OPERATIONAL MODEL ENHANCED::

METHODOLOGY: CIRCULAR OPERATIONAL MODEL

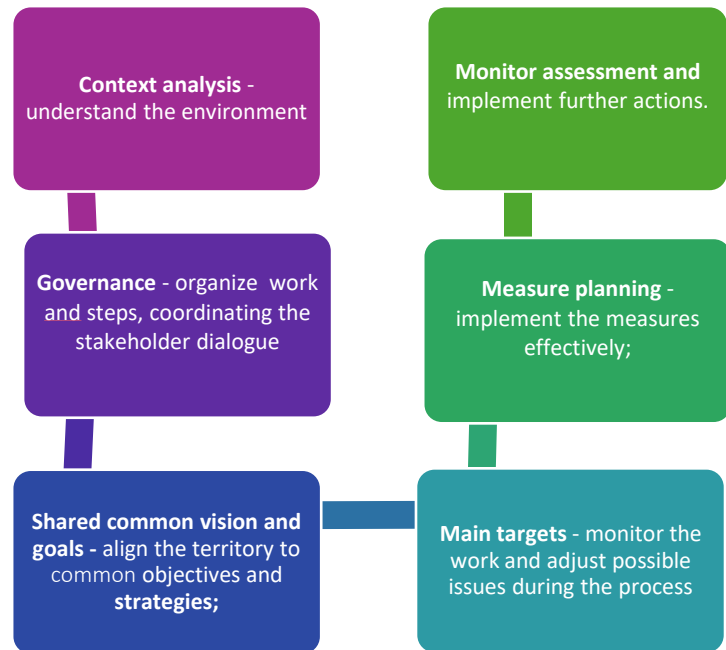


The methodology built on INCIRCLE strategic approach includes six interconnected phases all of them in relation to cultural and natural environment:

- Context analysis – with an aim of better understanding of the both: natural and cultural environment.
- Governance – with an aim to organize the work of all the steps, coordinating the stakeholder dialogue especially concerning the gap between heritage and tourism management.
- Strategic approach – with an aim to form a shared common vision and goals to align cultural and tourism to common objectives of the itineraries, territories and strategies;
- Main targets - with an aim of monitoring the work and adjusting possible issues during the process.

- Measure planning - with an aim to implement the measures effectively.
- Monitoring, assessment and sources for funding - with an aim to implement further actions.

These phases ensure a structured approach to designing, implementing, and sustaining eco-itineraries on cultural routes, emphasizing stakeholder collaboration, adaptability, and a focus on measurable outcomes, having in mind priority areas of cultural routes they are supporting



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Foundations for Eco-Itineraries

Such a robust strategic framework can be the cornerstone of eco-itineraries design. The six interconnected phases of the INCIRCLE methodology provide a structured approach to planning and implementation. These phases ensure that the design process is both comprehensive and adaptable, responding to the unique needs of each cultural route and its surrounding environment.

The process begins with **context analysis**, which involves evaluating the (cultural and natural) environment to identify opportunities and challenges. SWOT analyses and impact assessments help mapping the sustainability gaps, while tools like stakeholder surveys provide insights into local needs. This phase ensures that itineraries are grounded in a thorough understanding of their context.

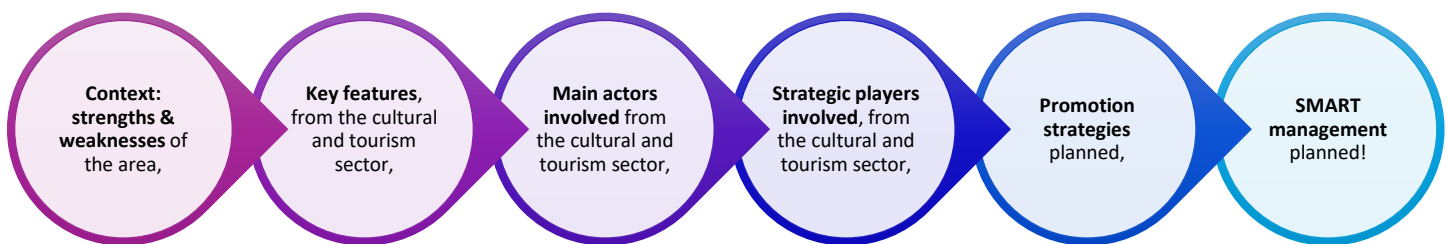
Governance plays a crucial role in bridging gaps between heritage and tourism management. Establishing a Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) fosters dialogue and collaboration among diverse actors, including local governments, businesses, and community organizations. By clearly defining roles and responsibilities, governance structures ensure that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed.

A **strategic approach** is essential for aligning the vision and goals of cultural routes with broader regional and territorial strategies. Co-creation with stakeholders ensures that these visions reflect local aspirations and European values. This phase integrates cultural narratives with sustainable tourism objectives, creating a cohesive direction for the itinerary.

To maintain momentum and adapt to evolving challenges, the **main targets** phase establishes performance indicators for monitoring progress. Regular evaluations identify bottlenecks and allow for adjustments. Meanwhile, **measure planning** translates strategic goals into actionable steps, focusing on areas like waste management, sustainable mobility, and renewable energy integration. Finally, the phase of **monitoring, assessment, and funding** ensures the sustainability of eco-itineraries. Diverse funding sources, such as EU grants and public-private partnerships, are identified, and adaptive management practices are implemented to refine strategies.

3.3. EMBLEMATIC MODEL METHODOLOGY CREATING ECO-ITINERARIES

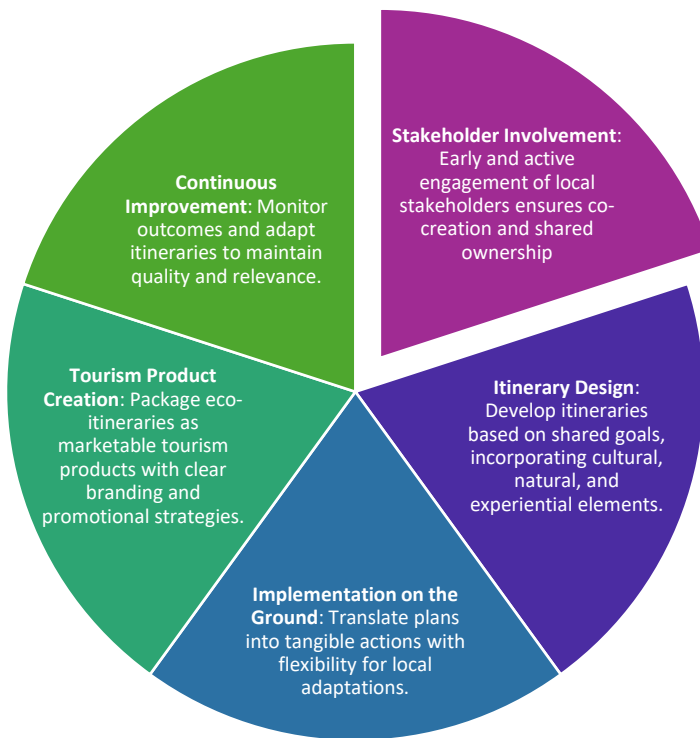
Eco – itineraries creation is observed from the point of view of the EMBLEMATIC PROJECT, but in the new context of being part of cultural routes. In this sense specific eco-itinerary development related to each cultural route should consider next elements:



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Emblematic Handbook methodological model

The Emblematic Handbook's **five-step methodology** offers practical guidance for implementing eco-itineraries. These steps emphasize inclusivity, adaptability, and sustainability, making them highly applicable to the design of cultural routes.



The first step, **stakeholder involvement**, corresponds to the GOVERNANCE phase from INCIRCLE. It ensures that local actors are actively engaged from the outset. Participatory workshops and consultations build trust and foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders. This collaboration is crucial for identifying shared goals and overcoming potential conflicts.

Itinerary design corresponds to STRATEGIC phase from INCIRCLE, and focuses on creating

routes that integrate cultural, natural, and experiential elements. Accessibility and inclusivity are prioritized, ensuring that itineraries cater to a wide range of visitors. By combining natural landscapes, historical landmarks, and community-driven experiences, these itineraries offer holistic and memorable journeys.

Implementation on the ground corresponds to TARGETING phase from INCIRCLE and translates strategic plans into tangible actions. Pilot projects test feasibility and allow for local adaptations, addressing specific challenges and opportunities. This phase emphasizes flexibility, ensuring that itineraries remain relevant and effective in diverse contexts.

The fourth step, **tourism product creation**, corresponds to the phase from INCIRCLE defining MEASURES, in this case defining packages for eco-itineraries as marketable

offerings. Clear branding, promotional strategies, and digital platforms are employed to attract eco-conscious travelers and cultural enthusiasts. These products often include guided tours, cultural festivals, and interactive workshops.

Finally, **continuous improvement** corresponds to the MONITORING phase from INCIRCLE, and ensures that eco-itineraries evolve over time. Monitoring systems track outcomes and gather feedback from visitors and stakeholders. Insights from these evaluations inform updates, enhancing the quality and sustainability of the itineraries.

3.4. COMMON FEATURES: LESSONS LEARNED

The crucial chosen methodologies for designing MED-Routes eco-itineraries combining INCIRCLE operational model with its six-phased strategic approach shares many commonalities with the broader methodologies for European Cultural Routes model and the Emblematic Handbook.

These shared features highlight their alignment in creating sustainable, inclusive, and culturally rich eco-itineraries including:

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration: All methodologies emphasize **active involvement of stakeholders**, including local communities, governments, businesses, and experts. Collaboration ensures that the development process is inclusive, addressing diverse perspectives and fostering shared ownership. Tools like participatory workshops, stakeholder working groups (SWGs), and consultations are integral to every approach.

Benefit: This collaborative engagement enhances decision-making, builds trust, and ensures long-term sustainability by aligning the interests of all parties involved.

Strategic and Structured Frameworks: Each methodology employs a **step-by-step approach** to ensure systematic planning and implementation. The INCIRCLE framework uses six interconnected phases, while the Emblematic Handbook employs a five-step

method. These frameworks ensure that objectives are clearly defined, resources are efficiently allocated, and progress is regularly monitored. Adaptive management practices are integral, allowing adjustments based on feedback and evolving circumstances. **Benefit:** This ensures that eco-itineraries are designed systematically, balancing cultural and environmental priorities while allowing for iterative improvements.

Thematic Coherence and Heritage Integration: A **shared thematic focus** forms the foundation of cultural routes. Themes align with European values and emphasize shared memory, history, and heritage. Integration of tangible and intangible heritage elements, such as historical sites, traditions, and natural landscapes, is prioritized. Cultural narratives are woven into itineraries, enriching visitor experiences and connecting diverse cultural and natural content. **Benefit:** This strengthens the identity of eco-itineraries, enhancing their cultural relevance and visitor appeal.

Integration of Cultural and Natural Assets: Each approach integrates **cultural heritage and natural landscapes** into itinerary design. INCIRCLE emphasizes the interplay between natural and cultural environments through strategic measures and thematic narratives, while COE cultural route methodologies incorporate tangible and intangible heritage elements, and the Emblematic Handbook combines cultural, natural, and experiential active components. **Benefit:** This provides a holistic experience that highlights the richness of local culture and ecology.

Sustainability as a Core Principle: All methodologies prioritize sustainable and circular tourism practices to minimize environmental impact and support long-term viability. Strategies include waste reduction, energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, and resource conservation. Efforts are made to balance cultural preservation with tourism development, avoiding overtourism and degradation of sensitive areas. **Benefit:** This ensures that eco-itineraries contribute positively to local environments and communities while providing meaningful experiences for visitors.

Focus on Measurable Outcomes. Performance indicators are central to these methodologies, ensuring that progress can be tracked and evaluated. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks assess both short-term achievements and long-term impacts. **Benefit:** Data-driven decision-making supports continuous improvement, enabling

refinements to align with goals. This ensures that itineraries remain relevant, resilient, and effective over time.

Localization, Flexibility and Adaptability: All approaches emphasize the importance of adapting strategies to local contexts and evolving needs. Pilot projects and local adaptations are common practices to test and refine methodologies. **Benefit:** Flexibility ensures that itineraries remain relevant, effective, and responsive to unforeseen challenges or opportunities.

Cross-Border and Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation: Cultural routes are inherently transnational, involving collaboration across more European countries. Networks of stakeholders work together to coordinate activities, share knowledge, and promote cultural and natural heritage on a broader scale. Joint branding and unified promotional efforts ensure visibility and coherence across regions. **Benefit:** This enhances the richness and diversity of the itineraries, promoting European unity through shared cultural narratives.

Education and Tourism Integration: All methodologies seek to combine tourism with **educational initiatives**, fostering awareness of cultural and environmental sustainability. Activities like cultural exchanges, workshops, and participatory events engage younger generations and promote learning. **Benefit:** This enhances the educational value of itineraries, promoting understanding and appreciation of cultural and environmental sustainability.

Emphasis on Creating Marketable Tourism Products: Tourism product development is central to these methodologies, ensuring that itineraries are economically viable and attract visitors. Efforts include branding, marketing strategies, and the development of guided tours events, and interactive experiences. Digital tools and platforms are used to enhance accessibility and promote itineraries to targeted audiences, including equally individual as well as organized visitors. **Benefit:** This makes itineraries economically viable while promoting cultural heritage and sustainability goals.

These shared features demonstrate that while the methodologies may vary in structure and emphasis, they converge on core principles that prioritize cultural preservation, sustainability, and stakeholder-driven development. Together, they form a cohesive framework for designing impactful and enduring eco-itineraries.

4. INCLUSIVE TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

The MED-Routes eco-itineraries represent a transformative approach to sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean.

Technical and methodological overview should serve as a foundation for stakeholders, policymakers, and practitioners to collaboratively design and implement eco-itineraries that embody the principles of circular economy and shared cultural heritage.

By adopting this structured approach, the MED-Routes initiative should lead the way in redefining sustainable cultural tourism practices across the region. Drawing on proven methodologies from INCIRCLE and EMBLEMATIC projects, stakeholders can create eco-itineraries that not only attract visitors but also enhance local resilience and community well-being.

The aim is integrating both methodological and technical approaches including context analyses, focused governance, strategic planning, and continuous monitoring, in order to align development of eco itineraries with sustainable tourism, environmental preservation and cultural enrichment.

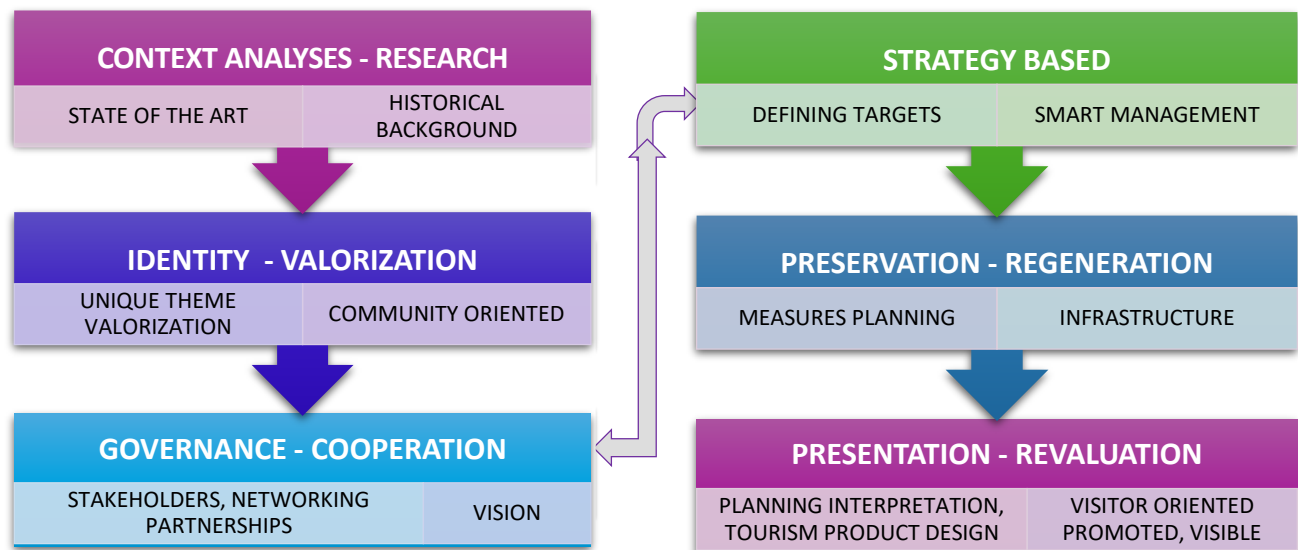
Key aspects to be covered:

Aspect	Common Methodological Overview	Common Technical Overview
Focus	Conceptual and procedural design	Physical and technical execution
Scope	Planning, principles, and frameworks	Infrastructure, tools, and practicalities
Primary Objective	Ensuring the cultural and ecological value	Delivering a functional and sustainable route
Output	Strategies for route eco-itineraries planning and evaluation	Guidelines for technical implementation

Technical and methodological overviews are complementary, ensuring the routes are both technically viable and aligned with cultural and ecological objectives. Together, they contribute to the holistic development of European cultural routes.

COMMON METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW INTRODUCTION

This overview emphasizes the conceptual and procedural frameworks that guide the planning and development of eco-itineraries.



The methodology focuses on:

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1. THE CONTEXT: is based on Cultural and Ecological Synergy

Laying theoretical foundations of cultural and sustainable eco-tourism relies on the **research, scientific and analytical** overview of the historical background and present state of art. It also encompasses identification of shared values and narratives that align culture with ecological stewardship.

2. IDENTITY VALORIZATION: Is culture and community oriented and implies community involvement in identifying cultural and environmental landmarks.

3. GOVERNANCE: Its design principles rely on methodologies that integrate cultural significance with ecological considerations.

4. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: Defines key **targets and actions in the route development process**. This includes goals and objectives, such as promoting

heritage and circular tourism as well as balancing cultural heritage preservation with eco-tourism sustainability.

5. PRESERVATION – REGENERATION: Is based on MEASURES PLANNING

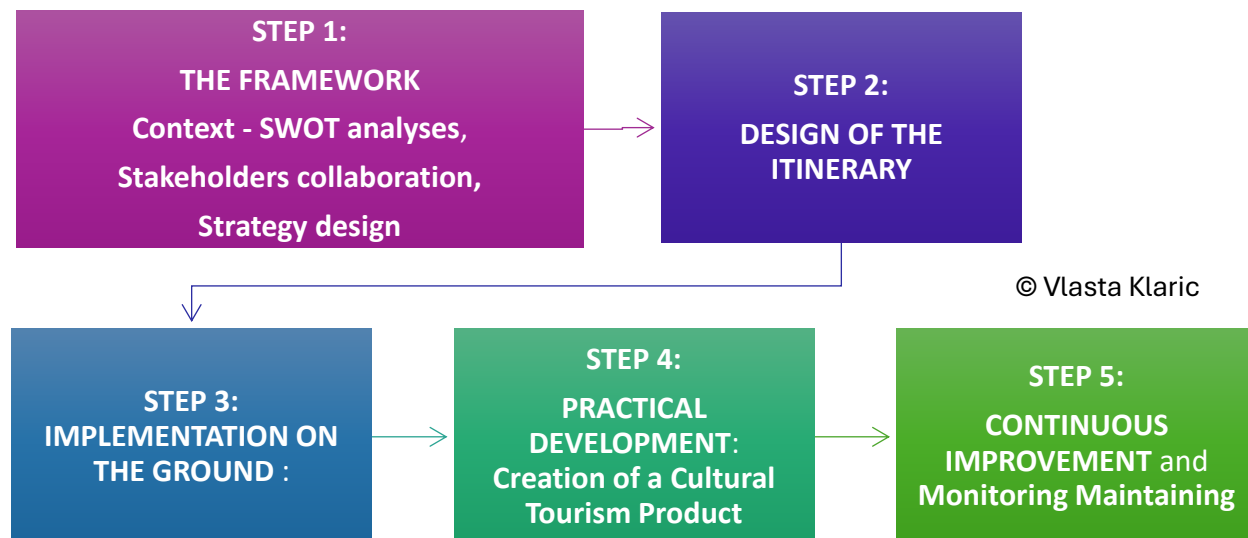
This includes step-by-step procedures for selecting sites, defining themes, and crafting itineraries. Equally, application of methodologies such as participatory design, ethnographic research, or ecological assessments and infrastructure design are part of the process.

6. PRESENTATION – REVALUATION, EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

This part includes tourism product design, interpretation, visitor-oriented services, visibility actions, and promotion. Tools and methods are also needed to assess the impact of routes (e.g. visitor surveys, environmental monitoring). Finally, frameworks for continuous improvement based on data and feedback must be put in place.

COMMON TECHNICAL OVERVIEW INTRODUCTION

This overview focuses on the practical and infrastructural aspects of the design and implementation of cultural routes. It is primarily concerned with next 5 steps:



STEP 1: THE FRAMEWORK : development of eco-itineraries on cultural routes aligns with the core principles of circular tourism and covers three key starting points:

➤ **Context analyses** resulting in an overview of the state of art based on SWOT analyses

- **Stakeholders' collaboration** development involves creating governance structures including interaction between local authorities, tourism and cultural organizations, and environmental agencies.
- **Strategy design**: The co-creation approach involving local stakeholders is central for strategy design.

STEP 2: DESIGN OF THE ITINERARY Thematically based eco-itineraries design involves thematically related **key features** from the cultural and tourism sector on **identity level**, **heritage level** and **tourism services level**.

STEP 3: IMPLEMENTATION ON THE GROUND Translating the itinerary from concept storyline to reality involves **planning the measures**, development of **infrastructure and facilities** development, **technological integration** and **environmental considerations**:

STEP 4: PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT: Creation of a Cultural Tourism Product is turning destinations and attractions on eco-itineraries into marketable tourism products through **packaging, promotion, marketing** and **research**

STEP 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT- Monitoring Maintaining the quality and spirit

Combined, the methodological and the technical overview are characterized by:

- **Strategic Planning**: Combined methodological phases provide a structured foundation for designing, implementing, and sustaining eco-itineraries. By emphasizing context analysis, governance, and adaptive management, this framework ensures that itineraries are both effective and resilient.
- **Thematic Coherence**: The principles of cultural route eco-itineraries creation highlight the importance of defining meaningful themes and integrating diverse heritage elements. These themes create a narrative thread that enhances the cultural and environmental significance of the itineraries.
- **Practical Implementation**: Insights from the Emblematic Handbook emphasize actionable steps, such as stakeholder engagement and continuous improvement. This practical focus ensures that strategies are translated into impactful on-the-ground actions.

5. COMMON METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

For the Design of European Cultural Routes Associated Eco-Itineraries

The unified methodology for designing European cultural routes associated with eco-itineraries reflects a balance of strategic vision, thematic richness, and practical adaptability. Through inclusivity, adaptability, and continuous improvement, the unified methodology provides a blueprint for creating eco-itineraries that are not only impactful but also resilient and forward-looking. This approach aims to celebrate Europe's shared heritage and to pave the way for a sustainable and interconnected future in cultural tourism.

5.1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

Context analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and natural environments that influence the eco-itinerary. It assesses the current tourism landscape, including policies, trends, and impacts, ensuring informed decision-making. Additionally, it evaluates existing scientific data and historical background.

The tourism ecosystem, comprising stakeholders such as governments, businesses, local communities, tourists, and environmental organizations, plays a crucial role in context analysis.

KEY PURPOSE

When developing a context analyses for the eco-itinerary the key purpose is to employ results of the SWOT analyses and mid-to-long-term projections to understand sustainability gaps, such as resource management (water, waste, mobility, and energy) and the pressures of seasonality.

A precise overview of the **tourism eco-system** is defined by DG GROW Annual Single Market Report:

CIRCULAR TOURISM ECOSYSTEM



Circular Economy and Value Creation in Tourism

Traditionally, business models in tourism have focused on generating financial value through direct transactions between service providers and customers. However, the circular economy expands this notion of value creation by incorporating environmental and social benefits alongside economic gains. In the context of eco-itineraries, value is generated through sustainable resource use, reduced waste, and enhanced cultural and natural heritage preservation. The adoption of circular business models ensures that tourism benefits not only businesses but also the planet and local communities, in alignment with the "people, planet, profit" (PPP) principles.

Tourism ecosystem as such has also been discussed closely related to circular economy and sustainability in the report published by Einarsson and Sorin (2020)¹⁴:

Tourism and travel ecosystem – key sectors

When referring to the tourism and travel ecosystem, this report refers to and makes a distinction between the following key sectors:

- Passenger air transport operators
- Ground Transport operators (private coach, private car/bike rental, train)
- Cruise operators (open sea and river cruise)
- Accommodation providers (hotels, vacation rentals)
- Ground Activities operators (museums, attractions, activities operators)
- Food and Beverages operators (restaurants, hotels)
- Event organizers (congress and events venues, meetings and event organizers)
- Distribution / Pure travel service players (tour operators, leisure travel agents, travel management companies, meeting and events planners, online travel agencies, online and offline resellers, travel technology companies)

These sectors are likely to exhibit some key differences in type and intensity of asset and material use (e.g. ranging from asset light to asset heavy), level of servitization, type of customer engagement etc. and thus type of circularity and circular business model potential.

“Identifying the appropriate Circular Economy organizational support for each business, demands a thorough examination of operators’ business models, value propositions and market contexts. Transitioning operators’ business models towards circularity is an equally challenging task and not without risks”¹⁵:

A thorough understanding of these factors enables a transition toward circular business models that enhance sustainability, economic viability, and social well-being. The tourism ecosystem plays a key role in ensuring that eco-itineraries create value beyond financial returns. The integration of circular economy (CE) principles within this system enables a regenerative approach that prioritizes environmental preservation, social responsibility, and economic resilience.

The Role of the Tourism Ecosystem in Circular Business Models: The tourism ecosystem is highly interconnected, involving multiple industries such as agriculture, transport, and construction. Each component of this system plays a vital role in fostering circularity. For

¹⁴ Einarsson S. and Sorin, F. “Circular Economy in travel and tourism: A conceptual framework for a sustainable, resilient and future proof industry transition” , CE360 Alliance, 2020

¹⁵ Einarsson S. and Sorin, F. “Circular Economy in travel and tourism: A conceptual framework for a sustainable, resilient and future proof industry transition” , CE360 Alliance, 2020

instance, hotels and accommodations can adopt circular principles by sourcing sustainable materials, reducing food waste, and implementing water conservation strategies. Transport providers can enhance sustainable mobility by offering low-emission travel options, while tour operators can design eco-friendly experiences that respect and preserve local ecosystems.

Local communities and policymakers are also integral to this transition. Governments and regulatory bodies influence the adoption of circular strategies through policies, incentives, and environmental regulations. Local communities contribute cultural knowledge and sustainable practices that enrich eco-itineraries while ensuring that tourism does not exploit or degrade local resources. Tourists, as end-users, play a crucial role in driving demand for sustainable travel options, encouraging businesses to adopt responsible tourism practices.

By incorporating circular economy strategies, tourism businesses can transform inefficiencies in the linear supply chain into opportunities for sustainable growth. This involves shifting towards resource-efficient operations, such as using renewable energy, promoting sustainable mobility, and designing eco-conscious accommodations and experiences. The creation of eco-itineraries must consider these elements to ensure long-term resilience and minimize negative environmental impacts.

Each component of the ecosystem contributes valuable insights into the cultural, economic, and environmental aspects shaping an eco-itinerary. Governments provide regulatory frameworks and policies, businesses offer market trends and operational challenges, while local communities share historical and cultural perspectives. Environmental organizations supply scientific data on biodiversity and conservation needs. By integrating these diverse inputs, context analysis ensures a holistic understanding of tourism dynamics, enabling sustainable development, responsible resource management, and enhanced visitor experiences.

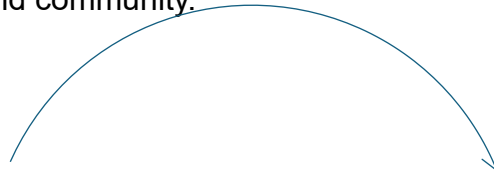
Challenges and Opportunities in Circular Tourism

Despite the benefits of circular business models, transitioning the tourism sector toward sustainability presents challenges. Businesses must evaluate their value propositions and operational structures to align with circular principles, which may require significant

investment and innovation. Additionally, market dynamics, regulatory environments, and geographic factors influence how different tourism operators implement circular strategies. However, those who adopt these practices early (driven by policy changes, environmental concerns, and evolving consumer preferences) can gain competitive advantages through brand differentiation, cost savings, and enhanced resilience.

Context analysis within the tourism ecosystem is essential for designing eco-itineraries that align with circular business models. Realizing the close interrelation of tourism with other industries, stakeholders can create sustainable travel experiences that generate value beyond profits. The transition to a circular tourism model promotes environmental stewardship, supports local communities, and ensures the long-term viability of the tourism sector. As the industry faces increasing regulatory and market pressures, integrating circular economy principles into eco-itinerary planning will be a key strategy for achieving a sustainable and regenerative tourism future.

Outcome: of the Context analyses should be a well-informed foundation for eco-itinerary planning on the cultural route, ensuring cultural relevance and sustainability of the environment, businesses and community.



Recommendations:

- Develop a standardized template for SWOT analysis to ensure consistency across different routes.
- Invest in GIS mapping and data visualization tools for better representation of cultural and natural assets.
- Incorporate regular updates to the context analysis to reflect changing conditions and emerging trends.

Lessons Learned:

- SWOT analysis reveals critical gaps, allowing targeted interventions for resource efficiency.
- Comprehensive analysis is essential to identify early opportunities and challenges for all involved.
- Including both scientific and community-based data ensures a balanced understanding.



5.2. IDENTITY VALORIZATION - THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT: CRAFTING THE NARRATIVE

Identity valorization is the starting point of each cultural route and takes place through the thematic development of the route. This is the way to craft the narrative of the route and its associated eco-itineraries.

By fostering a deeper connection to historical and environmental contexts, identity valorization ensures that eco-itineraries serve as powerful tools for education, conservation, and responsible tourism. A unique and recognizable cultural route theme enhances the narrative coherence of an itinerary, making it both meaningful and engaging for visitors.

As part of the successful cultural route, the eco-itinerary not only resonates with European memory, diversity, and shared history, but is also drawing attention to the elements such as agricultural traditions, artistic movements, and historical landmarks. Cultural routes emphasizing common heritage, including eco-itineraries create a transnational cultural experience, encouraging responsible visitors to explore the interconnected histories and landscapes that define European identity.

The process of identification and cataloguing of heritage elements is essential in order to strengthen this thematic structure of the eco-route. These elements may include visual memory, monuments, folklore, traditional crafts, natural landscapes, and local customs that embody the spirit of the itinerary. Documenting and preserving these aspects ensures that the intangible cultural heritage of local communities is celebrated and passed down to future generations. Moreover, it provides travellers with an authentic and immersive experience, deepening their appreciation of the places they visit. Unique visual identity connected to heritage on eco-itineraries is crucial for their visibility and recognition.

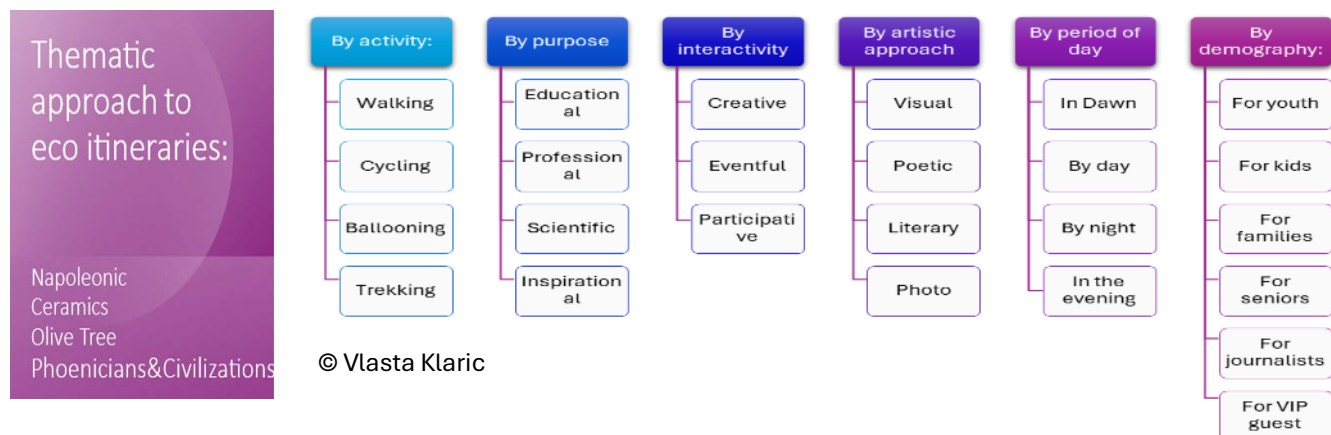
An equally important aspect of identity valorisation is the use of storytelling techniques to weave these elements into a compelling narrative together with environmental sustainability. Storytelling transforms a simple journey into an emotional and educational experience, allowing visitors to engage with the itinerary beyond just sightseeing. Thoughtfully crafted stories can bring history to life, provide insights into local traditions, and foster a sense of

belonging, curiosity and responsibility. Furthermore, storytelling plays a key role in raising awareness about sustainability and circular economy principles, helping travellers understand the importance of preserving cultural and natural resources.

For an eco-itinerary to be effective, it must strike a balance between local relevance and global appeal. The themes which are deeply rooted in local culture and traditions, ensure authenticity while also being accessible and interesting to international audiences engaged in responsible tourism. This dual approach helps attract diverse groups of visitors, promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding. By showcasing regional uniqueness within a broader European context, eco-itineraries become a bridge between local heritage and global tourism.

Finally, interpretation techniques play a crucial role in stimulating visitors to actively engage with the itinerary. Interpretative strategies, such as participative interpretation, interactive guiding, interactive exhibits, digital storytelling, or community-led experiences, help visitors appreciate local communities, their cultural significance, and their sustainable practices. Encouraging responsible behaviour through immersive and educational experiences ensures that tourism remains a positive force for both the environment and the people who call these destinations home.

Eco-itineraries can be explored and experienced through activity, purpose, interactivity, artistic approach, during various periods of the day and by diversified demographic categories:



Identity valorisation is a foundational element in the design of eco-itineraries. By respecting a strong theme, cataloguing heritage assets, stimulating circular actions at heritage sites, integrating storytelling, and enhancing interpretation, these itineraries create engaging, educational, and sustainable tourism experiences. Through this approach, eco-itineraries not only highlight Europe's rich cultural heritage but also promote responsible travel, community engagement, and environmental conservation through circular activities.

The purpose of identity valorisation is to:

- Support a unifying theme that reflects European values and integrates cultural and natural heritage
- Highlight **the theme** that resonates with European memory, diversity, and shared history (e.g., trade routes, agricultural heritage, artistic movements).
- Identify and catalogue heritage elements (e.g., monuments, folklore, traditional crafts, natural landscapes).
- Plan **storytelling techniques** to integrate the theme into a compelling narrative for the itinerary.
- Plan **storytelling techniques** to raise awareness and build circularity
- Ensure themes are both **locally relevant and globally appealing**, enabling them to attract diverse audiences.
- Stimulate visitors **through interpretation** to appreciate local communities, their culture sustaining meanings and sites and acting responsibly

Identity valorisation not only enriches the thematic development of eco-itineraries but also strengthens their positioning as a **quality brand** within the tourism market. A well-defined and distinctive identity enhances the credibility and attractiveness of a cultural route, establishing it as a recognizable and desirable travel experience. By consistently integrating cultural and natural heritage into the branding process, eco-itineraries create a **strong value proposition** for both travellers and stakeholders enhanced by the circularity principles. This sense of identity fosters trust and engagement, encouraging visitors to associate the itinerary with authenticity, sustainability, circularity and cultural depth. Furthermore, a clearly articulated identity allows for effective marketing strategies that highlight the unique aspects of the route, setting it apart from conventional tourism products. A **cohesive brand identity, reinforced through circularity elements, visual elements, storytelling**, and experiential

authenticity, elevates the eco-itinerary's visibility and ensures its long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive tourism landscape.

Outcome: A cohesive and engaging theme that unites cultural and natural elements into a meaningful visitor experience.

Recommendations:

Conduct workshops with local historians, artists, and communities to enrich the narrative with authentic insights.

Use multimedia tools, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), to enhance storytelling.

Design thematic itineraries that cater to specific target audiences (e.g., families, history enthusiasts, or eco-tourists).

Lessons Learned:

Themes that reflect shared European values resonate strongly with diverse audiences.

Storytelling creates deeper emotional connections and promotes sustainable behaviors among visitors.

Cataloging both tangible and intangible heritage ensures a holistic approach to valorization.



The European Route of Ceramics, Faenza

5.3. GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION: BUILDING OWNERSHIP

Effective **governance and stakeholder collaboration** are fundamental to the success of **cultural route eco-itineraries**, ensuring that tourism development is **sustainable and aligned with the needs of local communities**. Establishing an **inclusive governance framework** fosters **shared ownership, accountability, and long-term viability**, enabling tourism initiatives to serve as **drivers of cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience**.

A key enabler of every **successful circular and sustainability initiative** is **active collaboration and co-creation of value between tourism value chain actors**. The travel ecosystem consists of **value chains** that should be optimized through cooperation between public and private tourism stakeholders. Value co-creation should be the default approach for all tourism actors, ensuring that eco-itineraries provide mutual benefits for businesses, communities, and the environment.

Establishing Inclusive Stakeholder Partnerships

At the core of effective governance is the creation of a Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) that brings together local governments, cultural institutions, businesses, trade bodies, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), Destination Management Companies (DMCs), community organizations, and inbound tour operators

who are part of an eco-itinerary. These partnerships facilitate **collaborative decision-making, ensuring that all voices are represented in shaping eco-itineraries**. The involvement of diverse actors enables a balanced approach to tourism development, integrating cultural, economic, and environmental considerations into a cohesive strategy. Interests of each stakeholder should be researched, detected and respected.

Co-Creation for Sustainable and Circular Tourism

A systemic approach to eco-itinerary management is essential for safeguarding its long-term environmental,



societal, and cultural value. Proactive discussions between local communities, DMOs, (DMCs), and tourism operators should focus on product development opportunities within the eco-itineraries' social and environmental carrying capacity limits. By aligning tourism activities with sustainability and circularity principles, stakeholders can create diverse, resilient, and low-impact tourism offerings that enhance local economies while preserving heritage and natural assets.

Co-creation fosters the development of innovative and sustainable tourism products, strengthening regional identity and cultural exchange while reducing the negative social and environmental impacts of mass tourism. This ensures that eco-itineraries remain attractive and viable in the long run, reinforcing the destination's asset value and protecting its cultural and natural heritage.

Cross-Border Networks and Transnational Collaboration

Cultural routes are by default spanning through multiple countries, where cross-border collaboration is essential. Involving stakeholders from several European countries enhances the visibility and attractiveness of eco-itineraries while fostering regional identity and cultural continuity. Transnational cooperation strengthens the tourism ecosystem by encouraging shared strategies, knowledge exchange, and standardized best practices for sustainable tourism management within the circular tourism rules. Regular workshops and meetings should be planned providing in-depth communication.

Employing Digital Tools for Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

To facilitate collaboration and streamline communication, digital tools (such as Miro and Jamboard) can be integrated into the governance process. These platforms enable interactive discussions, real-time brainstorming, and efficient stakeholder coordination, even across different geographical locations. By leveraging technology, governance structures become more agile, inclusive, and adaptable, making it easier to manage complex, multi-stakeholder tourism projects.

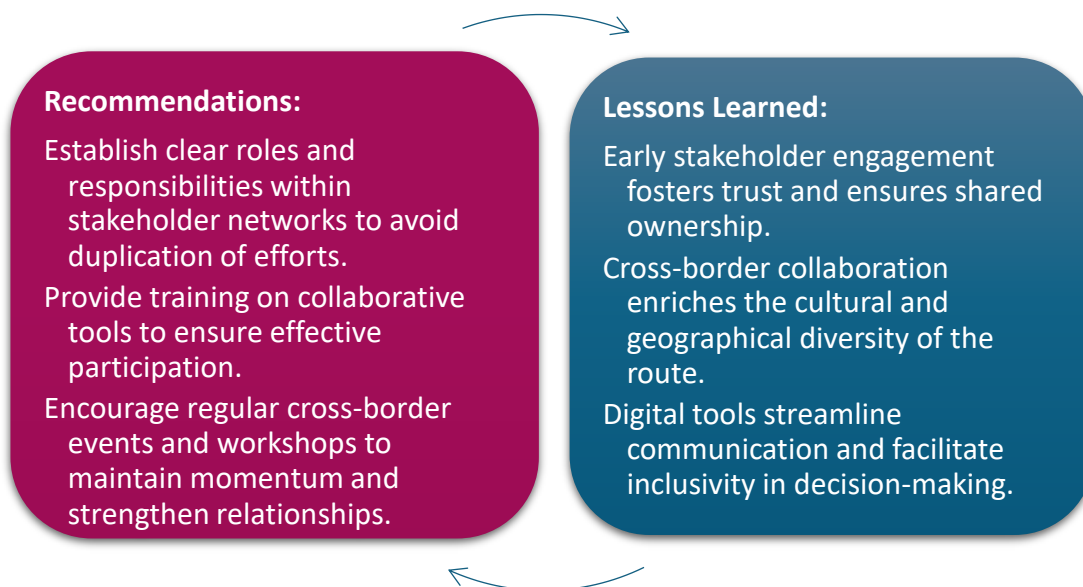
Strong governance and stakeholder collaboration are fundamental pillars in the development of cultural route eco-itineraries based on the circular tourism principles. By fostering inclusive governance, optimizing tourism value chains, enabling value co-creation, facilitating co-creation workshops, promoting transnational collaboration, and utilizing digital

tools, eco-itineraries can ensure sustainable tourism growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. This integrated and systemic approach not only enhances the long-term resilience of destinations but also positions tourism as a key enabler of circular economy principles and sustainable development.

Each cultural route eco-itinerary relies on good governance and stakeholder collaboration building ownership with the primary **purpose to:**

- **Foster inclusive and participatory governance** to ensure shared ownership and accountability.
- **Establish partnerships and networks** through a “Stakeholder Working Group” (SWG) representing entire tourism eco-system, local governments, cultural institutions, businesses, and community groups.
- **Plan co-creation workshops** to define common objectives and resolve conflicts.
- **Build cross-border networks** involving stakeholders from multiple European countries, encouraging transnational collaboration.
- Plan to **incorporate digital tools** (like Miro or Jamboard) for effective digital engagement.

Outcome: Strong stakeholder partnerships that enhance buy-in and support for the eco-itinerary.



5.4. STRATEGIC PLANNING: STRUCTURING THE ROUTE ECO-ITINERARY

Strategic planning is essential for ensuring that **cultural route eco-itineraries** effectively contribute to the **transition toward a circular economy** in tourism. **Strategically defining clear objectives, fostering stakeholder collaboration, setting measurable sustainability targets, and aligning with European policies**, eco-itineraries can become models for sustainable tourism that preserves cultural heritage while promoting environmental responsibility and economic resilience. The shift towards circular value creation in tourism is not only necessary but also presents a unique opportunity to transform the industry into a force for positive environmental and social change.

The travel and tourism industry faces an increasing urgency to adopt long-term, resilient, and sustainable development pathways that respect both natural ecosystems and local social and cultural structures.

Some key starting points for strategic planning include:

New Values	Establishing CIRCULAR TOURISM PRACTICES that enhance community engagement and competitiveness while integrating research and education to adapt to evolving tourism trends.
Smart Multi-Destinations	Asks for MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING: Developing multidisciplinary, capacity building, eco-friendly itineraries that connect diverse destinations, ensuring an accessible and networked travel experience.
Content Focus	QUALITY BRAND: Highlighting cultural differentiation by evaluating resources, identifying unique selling points, and prioritizing projects that strengthen the region's cultural identity.
Product Focus	TRANSFERABILITY: Fostering and orchestrating cooperation and hybrid design to create sustainable tourism products that merge cultural heritage with innovative experiences, ensuring destination longevity.
Users Focus	SLOW TOURISM MARKETING Addressing visitors' needs by promoting responsible travel, enhancing visibility, and implementing human-centered (H2H) strategies for meaningful tourism experiences.

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While stakeholders widely acknowledge the pressing sustainability challenges, implementing effective solutions remains a complex task due to the industry's

multidisciplinary nature and reliance on multiple value chains including also cultural sector. However, the **Circular Economy (CE) framework** is emerging as a transformative approach that can **optimize resource use, minimize environmental impact, and provide businesses with a competitive advantage**.

Traditionally, Circular Economy strategies have been driven by industries with significant production and waste streams, such as manufacturing. However, service-oriented industries like travel and tourism and culture also play a crucial role in transitioning toward circularity. By integrating circular value creation principles, the tourism industry can actively contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing sustainability, and improving economic resilience. Raising awareness of CE principles among travel, tourism and cultural operators is essential to fostering a collective approach that promotes sustainable consumption and production patterns within the sector.

A key component of this transition is strategic planning, which serves as the foundation for structuring cultural route eco-itineraries aligning regional sustainability goals and broader European policies.

Strategic planning **purpose is to:**

- Define the route's eco-itineraries' objectives, align them with regional strategies, and set measurable goals.
- Define shared visions, measurable goals, and specific measures to align territories with sustainable objectives.
- Develop a shared vision with stakeholders that balances cultural preservation, environmental protection, and economic growth.
- Plan measurable targets for visitor numbers, conservation efforts, and community benefits.
- Align the itinerary with broader **European policies** (e.g., sustainability goals, cultural preservation initiatives).

Defining Objectives and Aligning with Regional Strategies

Strategic planning begins with clearly defining the objectives of an eco-itinerary to ensure that it aligns with regional tourism strategies and sustainable development goals. This process involves identifying key sustainability challenges and opportunities, assessing the potential for circular economy integration, and setting a clear direction for the itinerary's development. By establishing well-defined objectives, eco-itineraries can become effective models for responsible tourism that support both cultural and environmental sustainability.

Developing a Shared Vision for Sustainability

A successful eco-itinerary must be built on a shared vision that reflects the values and aspirations of all stakeholders. This includes local governments, businesses, cultural institutions, and community groups. The goal is to balance all the needs. Establishing this shared vision ensures that all tourism development activities contribute to long-term sustainability rather than short-term economic gains.

Setting Measurable Goals and Targets

To track progress and ensure accountability, **measurable goals and targets** must be established for eco-itineraries. These should include:

- **Visitor management strategies** to prevent over-tourism and minimize ecological impact.
- **Conservation efforts** aimed at protecting both cultural and natural heritage sites.
- **Economic benefits for local communities**, ensuring that tourism revenue supports sustainable livelihoods.

By defining quantifiable sustainability indicators, stakeholders can regularly monitor the effectiveness of their initiatives and make necessary adjustments.

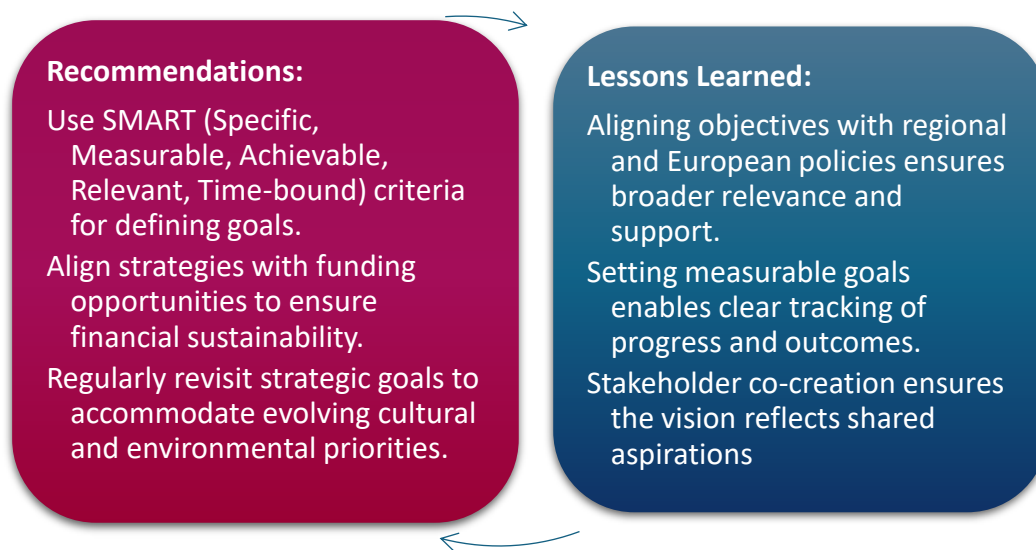
Aligning with European Sustainability Policies

For eco-itineraries to contribute meaningfully to global sustainability efforts, they must align with broader European policies such as:

- **The European Green Deal**, which promotes circularity across industries.
- **Sustainability goals outlined by the UN¹⁶, EU¹⁷ and UNESCO¹⁸**, emphasizing cultural heritage preservation and sustainable tourism¹⁹.
- **Regional conservation initiatives**, ensuring that tourism activities do not compromise biodiversity and ecological integrity.

By integrating policy-driven sustainability measures, cultural route eco-itineraries can set a benchmark for responsible tourism development in the Mediterranean and beyond.

Outcome: A clear roadmap that guides the implementation and future growth of the eco-itinerary.



¹⁶ UN 17 GOALS - Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (accessed April 21st 2025)

¹⁷ EU approach to SDGs implementation: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sdgs-implementation_en

¹⁸ UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/> (accessed April 21st 2025)

¹⁹ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> publications: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981> (accessed April 21st 2025)

5.5. PRESERVATION & REGENERATION: PLANNING THE MEASURES - TURNING PLANS INTO ACTION

Effective measure planning is crucial for ensuring the preservation and regeneration of both the territory and the local community. It serves as the bridge between strategic vision and tangible outcomes, making the transition from planning to implementation essential for the success of eco-itineraries. This process involves a comprehensive approach that balances environmental sustainability, cultural sustainability, community engagement, and operational flexibility.

A key aspect of measure planning is designing the eco-itinerary on the cultural route while maintaining adaptability to accommodate local needs and evolving circumstances. Flexibility ensures that destinations can respond to unforeseen challenges while preserving their cultural and natural heritage. Additionally, implementing concrete actions in waste management, sustainable mobility, and energy efficiency is vital at heritage sites on itineraries. These measures help minimize environmental impact while fostering a more responsible tourism industry.

To ensure long-term effectiveness, adaptive management practices must be integrated into the planning process. This involves using real-time feedback and data analysis to make continuous improvements, allowing the itinerary to evolve in response to environmental, social, and economic changes. Moreover, investing in training and capacity-building programs for local businesses and stakeholders strengthens community involvement and enhances the sustainability of tourism activities.

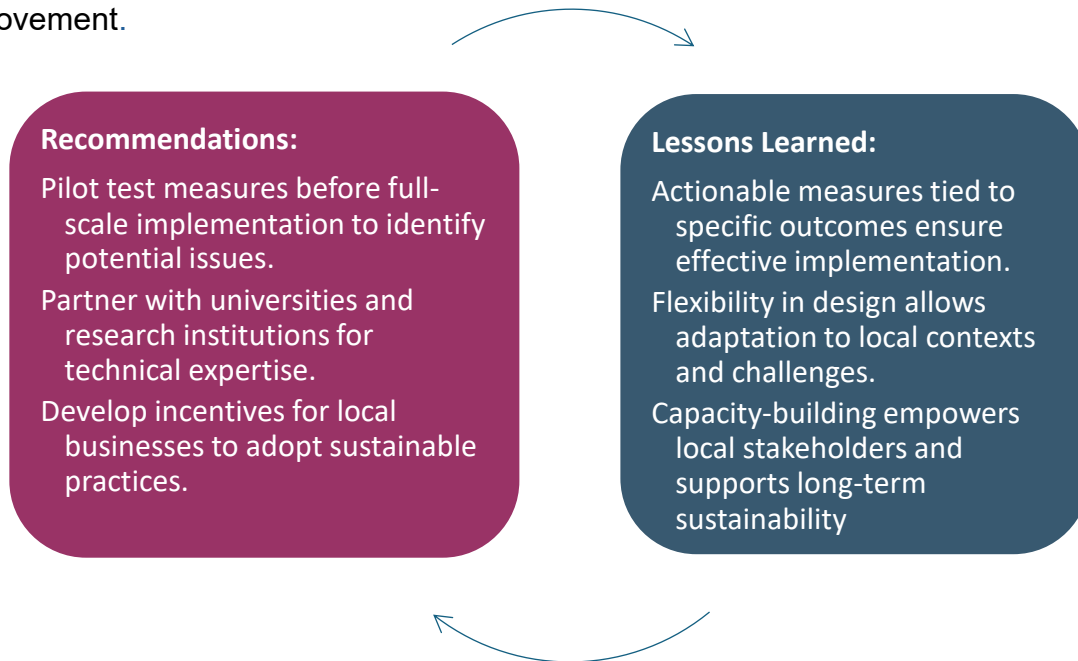
By implementing these structured measures, eco-itineraries can successfully balance conservation and development, fostering a tourism model that respects local ecosystems, empowers communities, and ensures long-term viability.

In short, measures planning consist of both preservation and regeneration of the territory and the community. In this process turning plans into action is essential and includes:

- Planning the eco-itinerary design while ensuring flexibility for local adaptations.

- Planning precise actionable measures for waste management, sustainable mobility, and energy efficiency.
- Planning to incorporate adaptive management practices to adjust plans based on real-time feedback and data.
- Planning training and capacity-building programs for local businesses and stakeholders.

Outcome: Tangible progress in implementing the itinerary, with mechanisms for ongoing improvement.



5.6. PRESENTATION & REVALUATION: CREATING MARKETABLE OFFER

The successful development of an eco-itinerary extends beyond its conceptualization and planning. It requires strategic presentation and continuous revaluation to ensure its appeal, sustainability, and economic viability. Creating a **marketable tourism product** involves carefully structuring the itinerary to not only attract and satisfy visitors but also to contribute positively to local economies. A well-designed eco-itinerary must provide engaging and participatory tourism experiences while maintaining a strong connection to cultural and natural heritage.

Purpose of planning and revaluation of creating marketable offerings would be:

- Planning the eco-itinerary as part of the tourism product that attracts and satisfies visitors while supporting local economies.
- Planning participatory tourism experiences that combine guided tours, workshops, festivals, and interactive activities along the eco-itineraries.
- Developing a branding and marketing strategy to promote the route across Europe and beyond.
- Planning digital platforms for promotion, including virtual tours and mobile apps.
- Collaboration with local artisans and businesses to create unique, sustainable souvenirs and services.
- Strengthening Quality Branding, Slow Tourism, and Local Development
- Slow Tourism Marketing: Increasing the Economic Impact of Eco-Sustainable Tourism

Developing a Marketable and Engaging products related to Eco-Itinerary

To ensure that eco-itineraries offer compelling experiences, it is essential to design tourism product combining content and activities on eco-itineraries that go beyond traditional sightseeing. Integrating thematic accommodation or food offer, thematic guided tours, interactive workshops, local festivals, and immersive activities creates a dynamic tourism offering that caters to diverse audiences. By involving visitors in hands-on experiences, such as traditional craft-making, culinary sessions, or storytelling events, inspiring for circular tourism actions, eco-itineraries foster a deeper connection between travellers and the destination, making their experience more memorable and meaningful.

Additionally, an effective branding and marketing strategy is crucial for enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of the route at both a European and international level. Strategic branding helps create a unique identity for the eco-itinerary, distinguishing it from other travel experiences. Digital platforms, including virtual tours, mobile apps, and social media campaigns, play a key role in promoting the itinerary and related tourism packages to a global audience. These tools not only increase awareness but also make travel planning more accessible for potential visitors.

Collaboration with Local Businesses and Artisans

A critical aspect of making eco-itineraries marketable is relating them to a cultural tourism product design that involves local businesses, artisans, and service providers. By collaborating with local craftspeople and entrepreneurs, eco-itineraries can offer visitors access to authentic, regionally, thematically inspired souvenirs and services. These sustainable and locally sourced products enhance the tourism experience while generating economic opportunities for local communities. Additionally, such collaborations reinforce the cultural identity of the itinerary, ensuring that travelers leave with a tangible connection to the region's heritage.

Ensuring a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism Product

A well-packaged tourism product must balance identity values, attractiveness, sustainability, and economic viability. To achieve this, it is essential to continuously evaluate and adapt the itinerary based on visitor feedback and emerging market trends.

Key recommendations:

- Invest in professional branding and design services to develop a polished and recognizable identity.
- Utilize data analytics to refine marketing strategies and effectively target potential visitors.
- Encourage user-generated content (such as reviews and traveler photos) to build trust, engagement, and organic promotion of the itinerary.

Lesson learned:

- Integrating local businesses and artisans to create authentic and economically beneficial experiences.
- Using digital platforms to expand the itinerary's reach and accessibility.
- Developing clear and professional branding to enhance visibility and marketability.

By implementing these strategies, eco-itineraries can evolve into highly attractive, sustainable, and economically viable tourism offerings. Their success not only benefits the local cultures and communities involved but also contributes to a broader vision of responsible and meaningful travel across Europe and beyond.

Strengthening Quality Branding, Slow Tourism, and Local Development

Quality Brand: Strengthening Interaction Among MED Itineraries

To build a recognizable and high-value brand, it is essential to foster strong connections among Mediterranean (MED) itineraries. This interconnected approach ensures that eco-itineraries are not isolated projects but part of a larger, cohesive network of cultural and sustainable routes. By aligning with other MED routes, eco-itineraries benefit from shared marketing strategies, thematic synergies, and cross-promotion opportunities. A strong quality brand emphasizes authenticity, sustainability, and cultural value, making these itineraries more competitive on the international market.

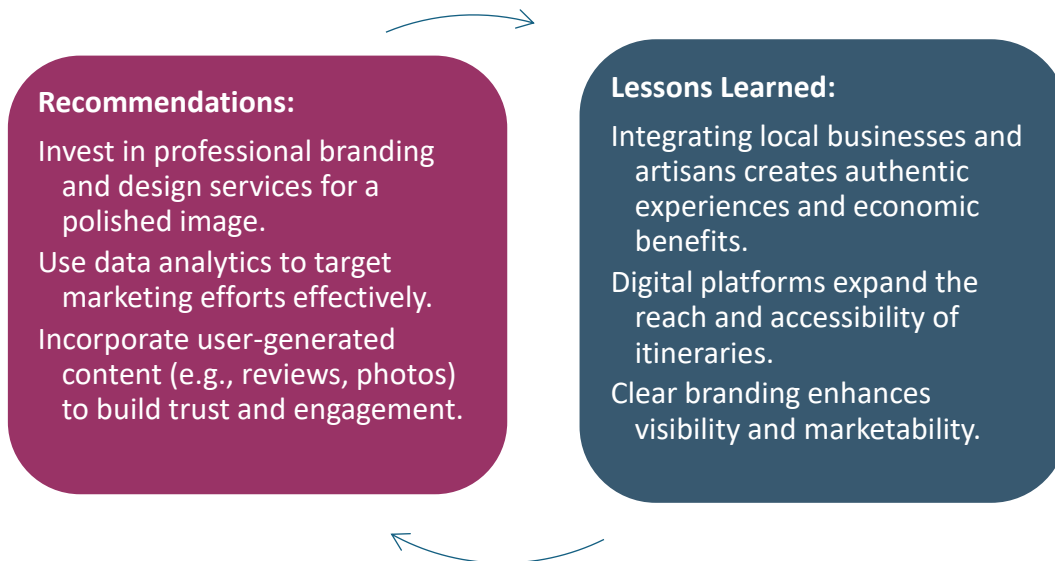
Slow Tourism Marketing: Increasing the Economic Impact of Eco-Sustainable Tourism

Eco-itineraries naturally align with slow tourism, which prioritizes meaningful, immersive experiences over mass tourism. Slow tourism strategies emphasize longer stays, deeper cultural engagement, and lower environmental impact, all of which contribute to higher economic returns for local communities. By promoting off-season travel, local craftsmanship, and sustainable accommodations, eco-itineraries help diversify income streams while preserving destinations from overtourism. A dedicated slow tourism marketing approach ensures that eco-itineraries attract travellers who seek authenticity and are willing to invest in high-quality, sustainable experiences.

Multiple Stakeholders Mapping, Activation & Capacity-Building

A crucial element in the success of eco-itineraries is the involvement of diverse stakeholders. Stakeholder mapping ensures that all relevant actors are identified and engaged in the development process. Activation strategies focus on fostering collaboration, encouraging co-creation, and ensuring shared governance models. Additionally, capacity-building programs equip local communities with the skills and resources needed to manage, promote, and sustain eco-itineraries effectively. This multi-stakeholder approach enhances both the resilience and long-term viability of eco-tourism initiatives.

Outcome: A well-packaged tourism product built around a sustainable eco-itinerary that reinforces regional identity, drives economic growth, preserves cultural and environmental heritage, and advances responsible tourism through strategic branding and multi-stakeholder collaboration.



5.7. MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: ENSURING LONGEVITY

The long-term success of eco-itineraries depends on an effective system of monitoring and continuous improvement to maintain relevance, quality, and sustainability. As tourism trends, environmental conditions, and visitor expectations evolve, eco-itineraries must remain adaptable and responsive. A structured monitoring framework allows for regular evaluation and enhancement, ensuring that these initiatives continue to deliver cultural, environmental, and economic benefits.

Thus makes its crucial **purpose is to:**

- Maintain the relevance and quality of the itinerary through regular evaluation and adaptation.
- Establish performance indicators to monitor cultural, environmental-circular, and economic impacts.
- Collect and analyse feedback from visitors, stakeholders, and local communities.
- Use insights to refine itineraries, enhance visitor satisfaction, and address emerging challenges.
- To explore new funding opportunities, such as EU grants and public-private partnerships, to sustain and expand the initiative.

A key aspect of this process involves establishing **performance indicators** to assess the effectiveness of eco-itineraries. These indicators measure cultural impact by evaluating the preservation of heritage sites and local traditions, environmental sustainability by tracking waste reduction, energy efficiency, and circular economy practices, and economic contributions by analysing how tourism supports local businesses and job creation. By systematically tracking these factors, stakeholders can identify strengths and address areas for improvement, leading to more **data-driven decision-making**.

Gathering feedback from key stakeholders is another crucial element in the continuous improvement process. Engaging with visitors allows for an understanding of their experiences, expectations, and potential areas for enhancement. Local communities also play a significant role, ensuring that tourism initiatives align with their values and provide tangible benefits. Additionally, businesses and tourism operators contribute insights into **market trends and operational challenges** that help refine the itineraries. By collecting this information through **surveys, digital reviews, interviews, and community discussions**, stakeholders can make informed adjustments to enhance visitor satisfaction while ensuring the long-term viability of the eco-itinerary.

With a steady flow of insights and data, eco-itineraries must undergo **regular refinements** to stay relevant and effective. This may involve modifying routes or attractions to manage visitor flow and prevent overcrowding, improving accessibility and infrastructure to create a smoother tourism experience, or enhancing storytelling and interpretative techniques to deepen visitor engagement with cultural and natural heritage. Through these refinements, eco-itineraries can maintain their **authenticity and appeal** while reinforcing **best practices in sustainable tourism**.

Sustaining and expanding these eco-itineraries requires a **diverse and stable funding model**. Securing financial support through **EU grants and cultural heritage funding** ensures that sustainable and circular tourism and regional development remain a priority. Public-private partnerships provide opportunities for **innovation and investment**, allowing businesses and investors to contribute to the long-term success of the itineraries. Local and national tourism funds further reinforce their economic viability, ensuring that they continue to operate, evolve, and serve as models for **responsible and regenerative tourism**.

Monitoring and continuous improvement are essential for maintaining the long-term sustainability, circularity, relevance, and impact of eco-itineraries. By implementing regular evaluations, gathering and analyzing feedback, refining experiences based on insights, and securing long-term financial support, these itineraries can evolve with changing demands while preserving cultural and natural heritage. A well-monitored eco-itinerary not only enhances visitor experiences but also strengthens local communities and fosters environmental stewardship, ensuring its role as a sustainable slow tourism model for the future.

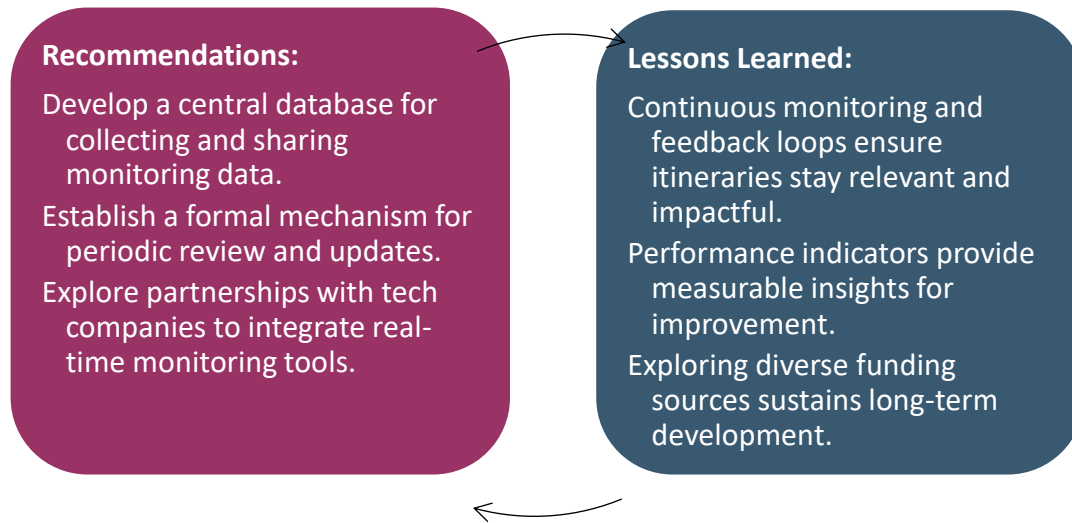
Integrating Sustainable Tourism into Local Development Agendas - Eco-Itineraries' Transferability

For eco-itineraries to have a lasting impact, their transferability is to be ensured, allowing them to be incorporated into regional and local development strategies. This means working with policymakers, destination management organizations (DMOs), and local authorities to recognize eco-itineraries as valuable economic and cultural assets. By embedding these routes into sustainable tourism policies and urban/rural planning initiatives, eco-itineraries can become long-term development tools, fostering investment in infrastructure, conservation, and community-driven tourism projects.

Core Principles Embedded in the Methodology related to circular economy:

1. **Sustainability- REDUCE:** Prioritize practices that reduce environmental impact, support local economies, and preserve cultural heritage.
2. **Inclusivity:** Engage diverse stakeholders to ensure equitable representation and shared benefits for communities - **REGENERATE.**
3. **Thematic Coherence:** Design routes that tell a unified story, connecting cultural and natural heritage with European values - **REVALUE.**
4. **Flexibility:** Allow for local adaptations to address unique contexts and challenges - **RETHINK.**
5. **Collaboration:** Foster cross-border partnerships to enhance the cultural and geographical diversity of the route - **INNOVATE**

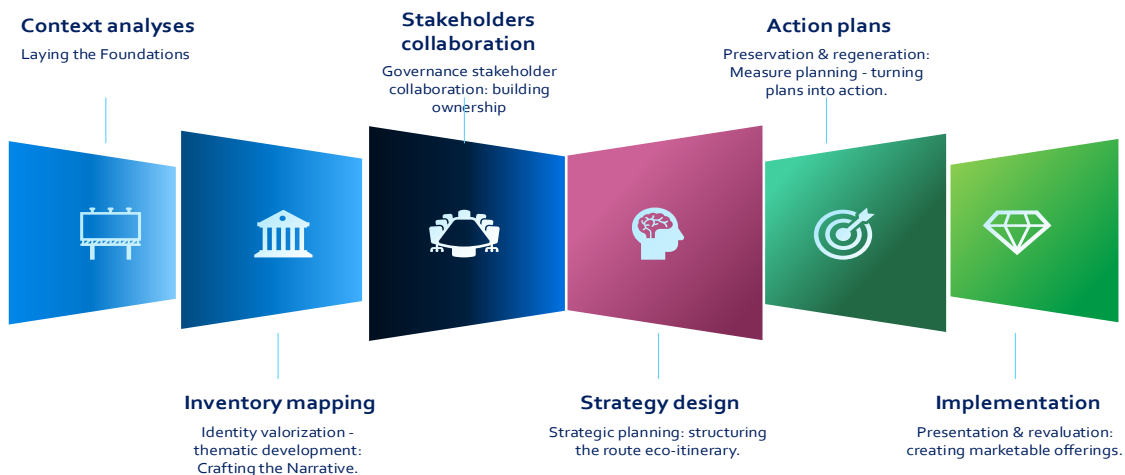
Outcome: A dynamic and resilient eco-itinerary that evolves with changing conditions and needs.



The success of eco-itineraries relies on collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. As eco-itineraries evolve, they not only enhance visitor experiences but also contribute to the resilience of local communities and ecosystems. This unified methodology serves as a blueprint for creating cultural routes that celebrate Europe's shared heritage while paving the way for a sustainable tourism future.

COMMON METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

For the Design of European Cultural Routes Associated Eco -Itineraries



6. COMMON TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

Of the Design of European Cultural Routes Associated Eco-Itineraries

The technical design of eco-itineraries within European cultural routes focuses on developing sustainable tourism practices that integrate environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and economic viability. Below, a detailed technical overview is structured to highlight the key elements incorporating infrastructure, methodologies, stakeholder engagement, and best practices.

6.1. STEP 1: FRAMEWORK FOR THE ECO-ITINERARIES DESIGN

The development of eco-itineraries on cultural routes encompasses several operational comprehensive phases and is composed of 3 main actions: context analyses, stakeholder collaboration and strategy design

Context Analysis – a starting point for the eco-itinerary design

The development of an eco-itinerary begins with a thorough context analysis, which serves as the foundation for strategic planning and sustainable tourism management. This phase involves a detailed assessment of tourism and heritage resources, ensuring that eco-itineraries balance visitor experiences with conservation priorities while supporting local communities and economic growth.

A key component of context analysis is the **SWOT analysis**, which identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to tourism and heritage management. Understanding these factors enables stakeholders to use existing assets, address challenges, and anticipate potential risks that could impact the success of an eco-itinerary.

In addition to SWOT analysis, it is essential to assess the carrying capacity of heritage sites and natural areas. This evaluation ensures that visitor flows do not exceed sustainable limits, preventing environmental degradation and overcrowding while maintaining a high-quality tourism experience. Sustainable site management also requires the identification of **under-utilized areas** that have the potential to be developed responsibly, reducing pressure on heavily visited destinations and promoting a **more balanced tourism distribution**.

To support effective decision-making, context analysis may also incorporate tools such as environmental impact assessment tools (EIA) and Geographic information systems (GIS) mapping. Such tools allow for the systematic cataloguing of both tangible and intangible heritage assets, helping planners visualize spatial relationships, identify key cultural and natural landmarks and focal points, and develop data-driven conservation strategies. The integration of inventory design systems and heritage mapping provides a structured approach to organizing tourism assets, ensuring that eco-itineraries are designed in a way that preserves heritage while enhancing visitor engagement.

For a **holistic and inclusive approach**, context analysis should not rely solely on technical evaluations. Incorporating **community feedback** ensures that local perspectives, traditions, and needs are reflected in the development process. Engaging with residents, businesses, and cultural organizations fosters a sense of ownership and participation, leading to more sustainable and community-driven tourism initiatives.

Ultimately, context analysis establishes the groundwork for responsible eco-itinerary design, guiding the development of tourism experiences that are sustainable, culturally meaningful, and economically beneficial. By combining strategic evaluations, spatial analysis, and local insights, this process ensures that eco-itineraries contribute to both heritage preservation and regional development, creating enriching experiences for visitors while safeguarding cultural and natural resources for future generations.

Comprehensive assessments uncover hidden opportunities and potential risks.

Including GIS mapping enhances data visualization and decision-making.

Regular updates ensure continued relevance.

Technical implementation:

- Conduct **SWOT analyses** to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to tourism and heritage management.
- Assess the **carrying capacity** of sites to balance visitor impact with conservation needs. Identify under-utilized areas that can be developed sustainably.
- Use tools such as environmental impact assessments and GIS mapping to catalog heritage assets (tangible and intangible).

Stakeholder Collaboration - Forming Governance Structures for Sustainable Eco-Itineraries

Effective stakeholder collaboration is essential for the successful development and governance of eco-itineraries. Establishing inclusive and participatory governance structures ensures that tourism initiatives are not only well-managed but also aligned with the needs of local communities, businesses, cultural institutions, and policymakers. By fostering dialogue, engagement, and shared decision-making, stakeholder collaboration creates long-term support and resilience within eco-itinerary projects.

A fundamental step in this process is the creation of a working group involving key stakeholders, which serves as a coordinating body to facilitate cooperation among public and private tourism stakeholders. This group helps ensure that different perspectives are considered, balancing economic interests, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. By involving representatives from local governments, tourism operators, conservationists, and community organizations, the SWG plays a crucial role in shaping the strategic direction and implementation of the eco-itinerary.

To strengthen governance, it is essential to actively engage local communities in the planning process. Conducting awareness raising sessions, surveys, focus groups, and public consultations allows for the integration of community insights, cultural traditions, and socio-economic needs into the eco-itinerary design. Ensuring that tourism development respects and benefits local populations, particularly marginalized groups, is a key factor in fostering inclusive and equitable tourism. Sustainable tourism should not only generate economic growth but also contribute to social well-being, cultural preservation, circular economy and environmental stewardship.

A well-structured governance model must also strive to balance the welfare of both residents and tourists while addressing the unique characteristics of urban, rural, and natural environments. Sustainable tourism development requires careful planning to mitigate the risks of over-tourism in popular destinations while stimulating tourism in underutilized areas.

By **mapping multiple stakeholders** and understanding their roles, expectations, and potential contributions, governance structures can be designed to ensure **effective coordination, capacity-building, and long-term sustainability**. One of the key lessons

learned in stakeholder collaboration is that **early engagement fosters stronger commitment and long-term support.**

When stakeholders are involved from the initial stages, they are more likely to advocate for and actively contribute to the success of the project. Furthermore, transparent communication is critical in building trust among stakeholders. Open dialogue and regular updates ensure that all parties remain aligned, conflicts are minimized, and decision-making processes are inclusive.

To ensure continuous engagement, regular workshops and collaborative meetings should be conducted. These sessions help reinforce shared objectives, address emerging challenges, and adapt strategies based on real-time feedback. Additionally, using digital participatory tools such as Miro, Jamboard, and Mentimeter enhances stakeholder analysis, engagement, and decision-making, making collaboration more efficient, interactive, and accessible.

In conclusion, stakeholder collaboration is a cornerstone of effective governance for eco-itineraries. By establishing inclusive governance structures, engaging local communities, ensuring equitable benefits, balancing environmental and social needs, and using digital tools, eco-itineraries can achieve long-term sustainability and shared ownership. A well-coordinated stakeholder network not only enhances the resilience and adaptability of tourism initiatives but also ensures that they remain culturally authentic, economically viable, and environmentally responsible over time.

Technical implementation:

1. Establish a model for the joint Working Group of Stakeholders (SWG) to facilitate collaboration among tourism stakeholders.
2. Engage local communities through surveys and focus groups to incorporate their perspectives and priorities.
3. Ensure that tourism benefits are equitably distributed among stakeholders, including marginalized groups.
4. Focus on balancing the welfare of residents and tourists, addressing urban, rural, and natural environments.
5. Focus on Multiple Stakeholders Mapping, Activation & Capacity-Building

Strategy Design: Structuring a Coherent and Sustainable Approach to Eco-Itineraries

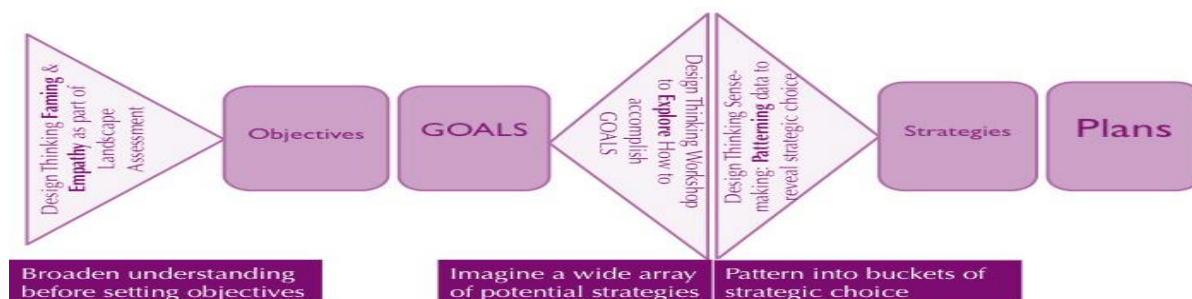
The design of a well-defined strategy is crucial for the successful development and implementation of eco-itineraries.

A fundamental aspect of strategy design is the use of templates for defining strategic objectives, output indicators, and implementation plans. These templates serve as guiding frameworks that help stakeholders outline measurable goals, **key performance indicators (KPIs)**, and **actionable steps** for developing and sustaining eco-itineraries. By establishing clear objectives, stakeholders can ensure that the itinerary remains impact-driven, adaptable, and aligned with sustainable tourism principles.

To create a strong and meaningful identity for eco-itineraries, it is essential to integrate cultural and environmental narratives into their design. Cultural narratives help preserve and showcase heritage, traditions, and historical significance, while environmental narratives emphasize ecological conservation and sustainability practices. By merging these elements into the itinerary's core storytelling, eco-itineraries become immersive, educational, and engaging experiences that resonate with visitors. This cohesion makes itineraries more recognizable and impactful in the broader tourism landscape.

²⁰One of the key lessons learned in strategy design is that thematic cohesion plays a crucial role in reinforcing the **identity uniqueness** of an eco-itinerary. When cultural and environmental narratives are seamlessly integrated, the itinerary becomes a more

Strategic Design Thinking



Cindy Tripp & Company, LLC. 2016



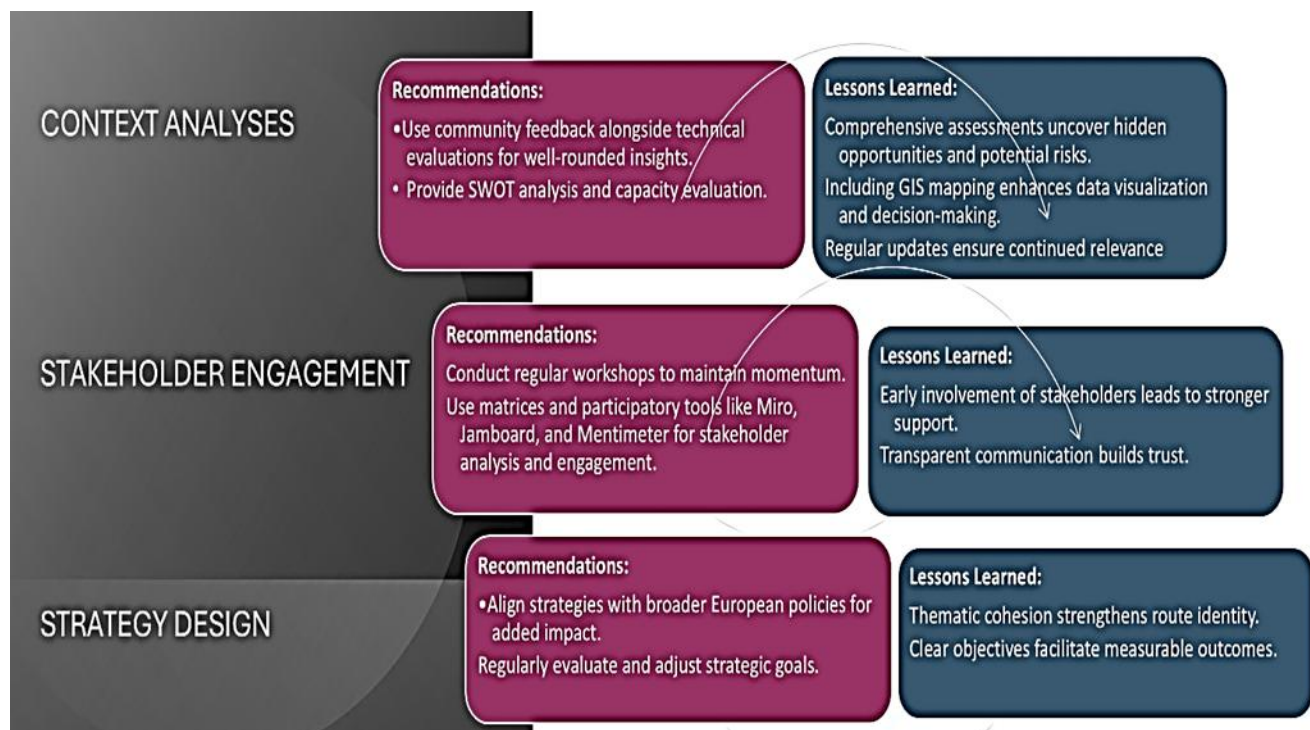
²⁰Tripp, Cindy, Strategic Design Thinking Tools: <https://cindytripp.com/2016/02/15/is-design-thinking-strategic-or-tactical-yes/>

compelling and authentic experience, attracting visitors who seek meaningful and responsible travel. Additionally, having clearly defined objectives facilitates measurable outcomes, allowing stakeholders to track progress, evaluate impact, and make necessary adjustments to enhance effectiveness.

Connecting eco-itineraries to EU cultural heritage initiatives, sustainability goals, and circular economy principles enhances their credibility and opens opportunities for funding, partnerships, and cross-border collaboration. Moreover, to ensure the longevity and adaptability of the strategy, it is essential to regularly evaluate and adjust strategic goals based on performance data, visitor feedback, and evolving market trends.

Technical implementation points:

- Provide templates for defining strategic objectives, output indicators, and implementation plans.
- Incorporate cultural and environmental narratives into the itineraries to enhance their thematic cohesion.



6.2. STEP 2: DESIGN OF THE ITINERARY

The design of an eco-itinerary is a crucial step in structuring a cohesive and engaging travel experience that aligns with cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability principles. A well-designed itinerary integrates thematic connections, heritage preservation, and tourism services, ensuring that visitors have a meaningful and immersive experience while supporting local economies.

Itinerary design involves mapping together thematically related **key features** from the cultural and tourism sector:

Thematic support consists of 3 levels

- identity level is crucial in later cultural tourism product design, while
- tangible heritage level involves mapping of the sites on eco-itineraries
- tourism level involves mapping all services available on the ground

At the core of itinerary design is **thematic mapping**, which involves organizing culturally and historically significant elements into a structured travel route. This thematic framework operates at three linked levels. The **identity level** is essential in cultural tourism product design, as it establishes a strong narrative foundation that reflects regional heritage, traditions, and values. The **tangible heritage level** focuses on mapping physical cultural assets, such as historical landmarks, museums, and heritage sites, to create a visually and experientially rich itinerary. Lastly, the **tourism services level** involves identifying and integrating key travel-related services, such as accommodation, transport, guided tours, and activity providers, ensuring a seamless and accessible travel experience for visitors.

IDENTITY VALORIZATION: As has already been said, critical aspect of itinerary design is identity valorization. This approach ensures that eco-itineraries are designed in a unique way that minimizes environmental impact, and maximizes motivation and resource efficiency, and promotes local economic sustainability.

MAPPING MODEL: To support this, a mapping model must be developed to organize and visualize focal cultural and service points along the itinerary, ensuring a balanced distribution of attractions and tourism infrastructure.

Incorporating a **comprehensive travel inventory system** is also essential for effective itinerary management. The travel inventory consists of a broad range of travel-related products and services, including cultural attractions, accommodation options, various transport modes (such as trains, buses, and rental services), and organized tours and activities. Travel agencies and tour operators manage these inventory components through static or dynamic content management systems, ensuring that the itinerary remains flexible, adaptable, and up-to-date. The integration of inventory management modules with booking systems, pricing engines, and digital mapping tools further enhances the efficiency and accessibility of the eco-itinerary.

“Inventory system¹in travel refers to a set of elements basically stemming from tourism eco-system, forming micro travel-related services composed into a product sold by their providers or distributors such as wholesalers, travel agencies, or tour operators. Travel inventory may include cultural attractions, transport, accommodation (hotel rooms, apartments, **vacation rentals**, or any other kind of lodging), **bike, boat, segway, balloon, car and other rentals, tours and activities**, and other kinds of transportation, e.g., rail or bus tickets, etc.

For a travel agency, inventory management is one of the core **back-office** activities that involves sourcing inventory and managing content. The main workflows of inventory management include: creating an inventory database of static and dynamic content.

content management (creating attractive design, managing descriptions, adding pictures, etc.), **localization**, and **mapping**; and

static and **dynamic packaging** of travel products.

It's also crucial to integrate an inventory management module of a **travel agency software system** to other IT solutions (such as a pricing module, **booking engine**, accounting tool, etc.) to establish seamless data exchange.”

Source: <https://www.altexsoft.com/blog/ota-inventory-system/> (accessed March 2025)

A well-structured itinerary design enhances visitor engagement by creating meaningful thematic connections between cultural heritage and tourism services. A thorough mapping process ensures the inclusivity of diverse attractions, local experiences, and sustainable tourism practices, making the eco-itinerary both culturally enriching and environmentally responsible.

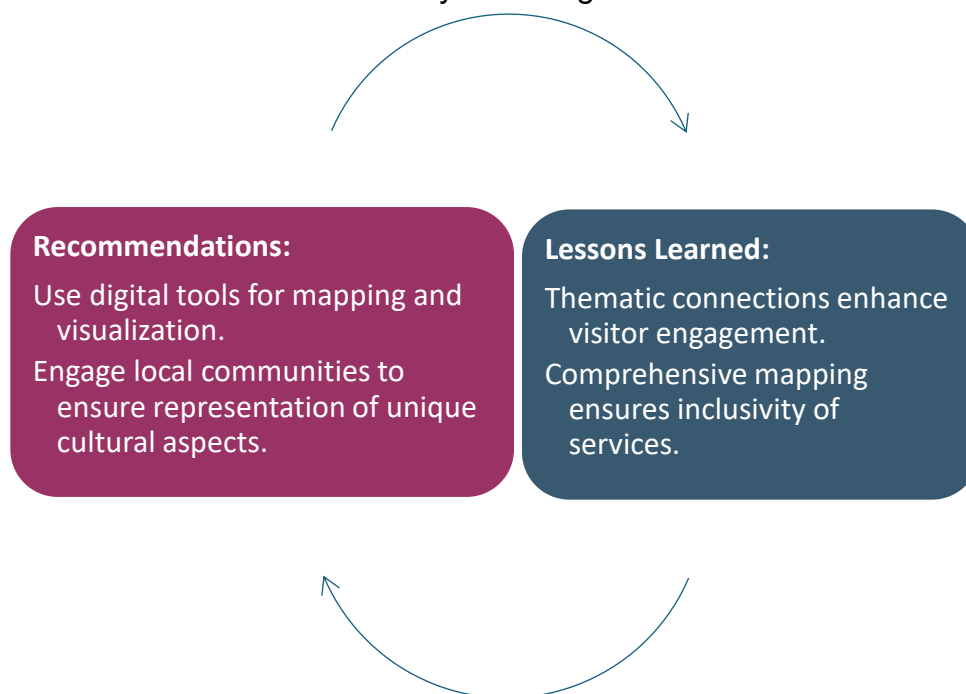
For improved implementation, the use of digital tools for mapping and visualization is highly recommended. Geographic Information Systems (GIS), interactive maps, and augmented

reality applications allow for better planning, route optimization, and visitor navigation. Additionally, engaging local communities in the mapping and itinerary development process ensures that unique cultural aspects are authentically represented, reinforcing the eco-itinerary's sense of place and connection to local heritage.

Technical Implementation of the Itinerary Design:

- Map thematically related key features from cultural and tourism sectors.
- Develop three levels of support: identity, tangible heritage, and tourism services.
- Prepare models for mapping cultural and service points in line with circular economy principles.

Outcome: A well-structured itinerary that integrates diverse elements.



6.3. STEP 3: IMPLEMENTATION ON THE GROUND

The successful transformation of an eco-itinerary from a conceptual framework into a **tangible, functioning tourism experience** requires a structured approach to implementation. This process involves planning concrete measures, developing infrastructure and facilities, integrating technology, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Thoughtful execution is crucial in making eco-itineraries not only operational but also resilient, sustainable, and beneficial to both visitors and local communities.

Translating the itinerary from concept storyline to reality asks for planning measures, infrastructure and facilities development, technological integration and environmental considerations:

- ? Where and how to start?
- ? How to initiate this circular transition?
- ? How to implement the Circular Economy framework?

DESIGNING IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Measure planning – measure is an action able to address the identified territorial problems, contributing to meet one or more strategy goals.

A well-planned measure implementation strategy is essential to ensure that actions effectively address territorial challenges while contributing to broader sustainability and tourism development goals. Measures should be carefully designed to align with the identified needs of the region, ensuring they have a clear purpose, impact, and feasibility.

Key stakeholders play a pivotal role in shortlisting, defining, and approving measures. Their involvement guarantees that solutions are practical, relevant, and supported by those responsible for implementation. When stakeholders, including local authorities, businesses, and community representatives, are engaged early, they provide valuable insights that lead to more effective and widely accepted solutions.

Technical implementation:

For each shortlisted **measure**, a **set of relevant information** is to be provided, able to convey:

- What goals the measure is pursuing
- How the measure will be implemented
- Who will benefit from it
- Who and HOW will contribute to its implementation
- Which resources and skills are required
- How much will the measure cost (including setting up and operation/maintenance costs)
- When it will be implemented
- How its progress and performance will be monitored

Be sure to:

- Identify actionable goals for eco-itineraries, such as reducing single-use plastics, enhancing public transport, and incorporating renewable energy.

- Involve all key stakeholders to ensure measures are impactful and achievable.
- Prepare a short-term wins and long-term goals to ensure consistent progress.

By involving local businesses, municipalities, tourism boards, and environmental groups, the implementation process becomes more adaptable, and context-sensitive. Furthermore, short-term achievements should be designed to complement and build toward long-term strategic goals, ensuring continuous development rather than isolated improvements.

To enhance effectiveness, it is recommended to pilot test projects before full-scale implementation. Small-scale trials allow stakeholders to evaluate feasibility, make necessary adjustments, and optimize resources before committing to a large investment. Additionally, regular training programs for stakeholders ensure that all involved parties possess the necessary skills and knowledge to sustain and manage the eco-itinerary over time.

Recommendations:

Pilot projects to test feasibility before full-scale implementation.
Include regular training programs for stakeholders.

Lessons Learned:

Stakeholder involvement ensures measures are practical.
Long-term goals must complement short-term wins.

MEASURES RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

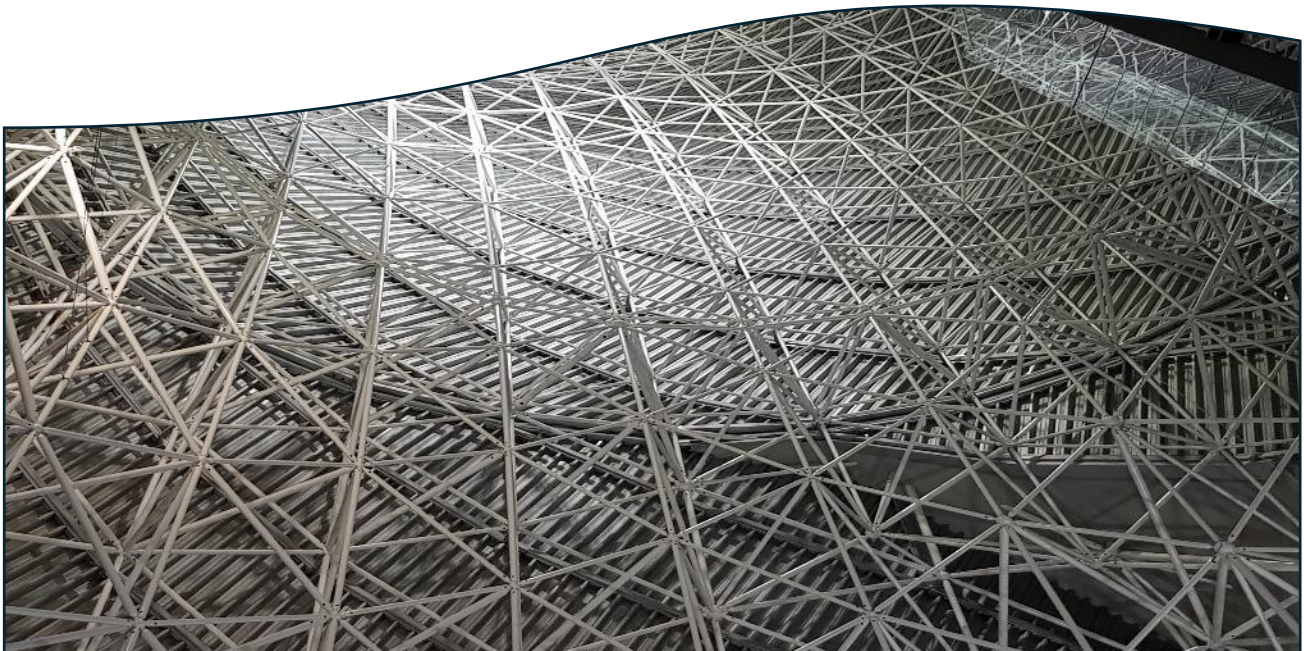
The development of infrastructure and facilities plays a crucial role in ensuring that eco-itineraries are functional and accessible. Thoughtful planning and investment in infrastructure contributes not only to preserving tangible heritage but also to enhancing visitor experiences and supporting local economies. By integrating sustainable tourism principles into infrastructure development, eco-itineraries can achieve the desired balance between cultural and natural preservation and economic viability.

A well-designed eco-itinerary must include key technical elements that facilitate smooth visitor access while still protecting cultural and natural assets. These elements include

archaeological sites, museums, galleries, pathways, signage, transportation links, and accessibility improvements. Developing sustainable tourism facilities, such as eco-friendly visitor centers, accommodations, and transportation hubs, further strengthens the environmental integrity of tourism destinations. Additionally, the construction and maintenance of eco-itineraries ensures that routes remain safe, visually appealing, and in harmony with the surrounding environment. Implementing eco-friendly infrastructure standards, such as cycling tracks, pedestrian pathways, and energy-efficient public spaces, helps reduce the carbon footprint of tourism activities while promoting responsible travel.

Technical implementation related to **tangible heritage** and **tourism services**:

- Physical elements like archaeological sites, museums, galleries, pathways, signage, transportation links, and accessibility.
- Integration of sustainable tourism facilities.
- Construction and maintenance of the eco-itineraries on the routes.
- Standards for eco-friendly infrastructure (e.g., cycling tracks, pedestrian paths).



INFRASTRUCTURE – POSSIBLE MEASURES - KEY TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Sustainable Heritage Facilities	Promote preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage. Conservation and preservation of historical sites	Promote integration of eco-friendly architectural designs	Promote eco-friendly architecture: construction and infrastructure designed to minimize environmental impact.
Promote construction and utilization of buildings with zero-net energy consumption	Promote Green Events and Initiatives: Hosting events / initiatives with minimal environmental impact, or events that promote sustainability.	Promote Local Sourcing & Local Artisans: Promotion of local products and services.	Provide support for local artisans and craftsmen.
Social Sustainability	Promote Community Engagement & Community-Based Tourism: Active involvement and benefit-sharing with local communities	. Promotion of tourism initiatives that directly benefit or engage local communities.	Promote Local Employment Opportunities: Creation of job opportunities for local residents.
Promote Health and Safety Standards: Adherence to high health and safety standards for tourists and employers.	Promote Accessible Tourism: Facilities and services catering to people with disabilities.	Promote Inclusive Tourism / Cultural Sensitivity Training: Inclusion of marginalized communities in tourism initiatives, working process..	Training programs for tourism staff or tourists to be culturally sensitive and tolerant
Sustainable Mobility	Emphasize the development of cycling and hiking routes, electric vehicle infrastructure, and public transport enhancements.	Promote reduced reliance on private vehicles through car-sharing schemes and soft mobility networks.	Develop seamless connections between modes of transport to facilitate ease of travel for tourists.
Energy Efficiency	Promote the installation of energy-efficient lighting and renewable energy systems at heritage sites.	Recommend retrofitting municipal /related to heritage/ buildings to meet green standards, incorporating solar panels and smart grids.	Introduce energy management systems to optimize resource use and reduce costs.
Water Management	Introduce water-saving systems such as low-flow fixtures, recycled water reuse, and desalination for small settlements.	Promote drought-resistant landscaping and telemetry to monitor water use.	Encourage rainwater harvesting and community-based water conservation programs.
Waste Management	Promote recycling systems, prohibiting single-use plastics, and encouraging the use of reusable materials.	Engage local communities in waste management programs, upcycling initiatives, and composting systems.	Promote zero-waste initiatives at tourist hotspots and cultural sites.

KEY INSIGHTS

Experience has demonstrated that well-maintained infrastructure significantly enhances visitor satisfaction. Tourists are more likely to engage with a destination, stay longer, and contribute to the local economy when they encounter high-quality facilities that blend comfort with sustainability. Furthermore, integrating energy efficiency measures into tourism infrastructure has proven to reduce costs and minimize environmental impact, making it a financially and ecologically beneficial strategy for long-term sustainability.

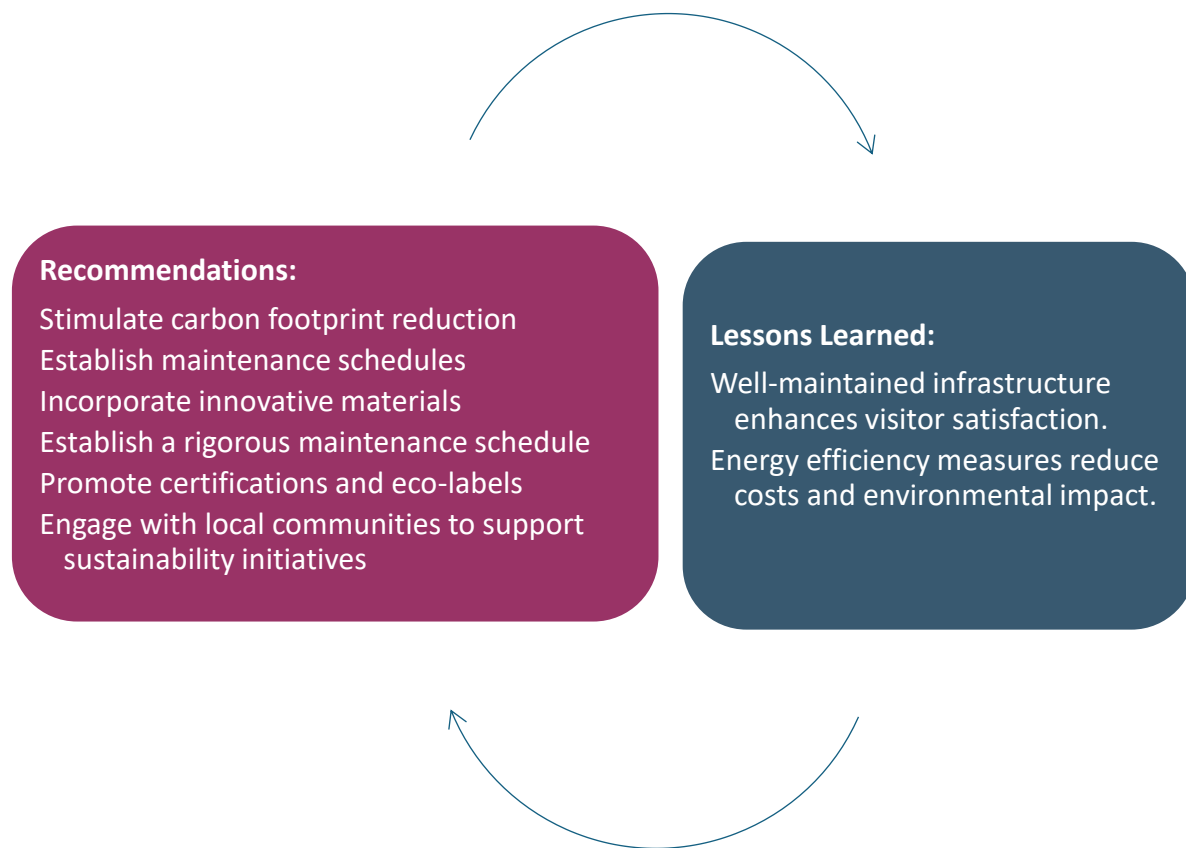
Strategic Recommendations for Sustainable Infrastructure Development

To strengthen eco-itineraries and their infrastructure, several strategic measures can be implemented:

1. **Stimulating Carbon Footprint Reduction** – Incorporating nature-based solutions, such as planting trees along eco-itineraries, helps offset carbon emissions, improve air quality, and enhance biodiversity in tourism areas.
2. **Establishing Rigorous Maintenance Schedules** – Regular monitoring, repair, and conservation efforts are essential to ensuring the longevity and functionality of sustainable infrastructure. A structured maintenance plan prevents degradation and unnecessary resource consumption.
3. **Incorporating Innovative and Sustainable Materials** – Using recyclable, durable, and energy-efficient materials in infrastructure development minimizes environmental impact while enhancing resilience to climate conditions.
4. **Promoting Certifications and Eco-Labels** – Adopting recognized sustainability certifications (such as Green Label) for infrastructure projects not only demonstrates a commitment to sustainability but also enhances credibility and accountability.
5. **Engaging Local Communities and Organizations** – Involving residents, businesses, and environmental organizations in the design, implementation, and maintenance of eco-

friendly infrastructure ensures community ownership, support, and long-term sustainability.

A well-planned and sustainable infrastructure framework is essential for the success of eco-itineraries. By integrating eco-friendly design, maintaining high-quality facilities, reducing environmental impact, and engaging local communities, eco-itineraries can offer enriching, responsible, and memorable tourism experiences. The long-term viability of these initiatives depends on **continuous investment in sustainable infrastructure**, ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved, natural landscapes are protected, and visitors enjoy meaningful, low-impact travel experiences.



MEASURES RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental Considerations in Eco-Itineraries: Ensuring Sustainability and Compliance

For eco-itineraries to be truly sustainable, they must minimize environmental impact while adhering to EU regulations and safety standards. Ensuring that tourism activities align with conservation principles, responsible resource management, and climate resilience is essential for preserving natural ecosystems and maintaining the long-term viability of cultural routes. Sustainable tourism must not only protect the environment but also actively contribute to its restoration and enhancement.

A key measure in this effort is the **restoration and conservation of local ecosystems**. Protecting native flora and fauna, restoring degraded landscapes, and preserving natural habitats surrounding touristic areas are fundamental to ensuring that eco-itineraries remain ecologically sound. Encouraging the responsible use of natural resources and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, such as permaculture principles, further strengthens the ecological integrity of tourism destinations.

Another critical aspect of sustainable eco-itineraries is **environmental education**. Raising awareness among visitors through educational programs, training workshops, information centers, digital content, and visual materials ensures that travelers understand the cultural and environmental significance of their destinations. By integrating conservation education into eco-itineraries, tourism can become a tool for advocacy, fostering a sense of responsibility and respect for natural and cultural heritage.

Collaboration with **eco-organizations and sustainability initiatives** is also essential. Establishing strong partnerships with environmental groups, conservation agencies, and sustainability-focused institutions enhances the effectiveness of conservation efforts while fostering innovative, community-driven solutions. Additionally, promoting certifications and eco-labeling schemes provides a standardized way to assess and communicate sustainability efforts. Developing a **green label system for eco-itineraries** ensures transparency in sustainable tourism practices while encouraging stakeholders to continuously improve their environmental performance.

The long-term sustainability of eco-itineraries also requires **climate resilience planning**. Preparing destinations for climate change impacts and natural disasters is an essential step in ensuring that tourism remains viable despite environmental challenges. Implementing adaptive management strategies, reinforcing infrastructure resilience, and integrating early warning and emergency response mechanisms help mitigate climate-related risks.

Incorporating **circular economy principles** into environmental management further enhances the sustainability of eco-itineraries. Establishing circular indicators for water and waste management, sustainable mobility, conservation efforts, and renewable energy use allows for continuous monitoring and improvement. Reducing resource intensity by using public-private partnerships and EU funding programs ensures that sustainability efforts receive the necessary investment and support. Addressing seasonal tourism imbalances by promoting lesser-known destinations and off-season travel helps distribute visitor flows more evenly, reducing pressure on over-visited sites.

A key challenge in implementing sustainable eco-itineraries is coordinating multiple stakeholders and balancing the interests of local communities, conservation organizations, and tourism businesses. Establishing a **multi-level governance system** with clearly defined roles and responsibilities ensures efficient decision-making and accountability. Managing visitor access through technology and management plans also helps protect sensitive areas while maintaining visitor engagement. Ensuring that tourism initiatives respect local traditions and cultural practices strengthens their authenticity and community acceptance, while promoting cross-border cooperation reinforces the shared cultural and environmental values of transnational routes.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of environmental measures within eco-itineraries depends on a well-integrated approach that combines ecosystem conservation, sustainable resource management, stakeholder collaboration, and policy alignment. By developing certification systems, fostering eco-partnerships, and engaging local communities, eco-itineraries can become models of responsible tourism that not only protect the environment but also enhance visitor experiences and support regional development.

Technical implementation:

- **Promote Local Ecosystem Restoration & Conservation:** Protect and conserve local flora and fauna. Promote initiatives focused on restoring and preserving the local ecosystems and natural habitat. Stimulate preservation of natural habitats in and around the touristic area. Encourage responsible use and conservation of natural resources. Promote or implement sustainable agriculture practices such as implementation of permaculture principles.
- **Promote Environmental Education Programs:** Offer educational programs on local culture, environment, and sustainability. Establish centers providing information on environmental conservation. Examples are educational training, video, poster, articles.
- **Promote Eco Partnerships:** Collaborate with eco organizations and initiatives
- **Promote Certifications & Eco-labelling:** Adopt of common green label to certify and communicate the sustainability of tourist facilities. Monitor and report on progress.
- **Promote Climate Resilience:** Implement measures to enhance the destination's resilience to climate change impacts. Prepare plans for natural disasters.

Setting Circular indicators (for water and waste management, mobility, conservation efforts, and renewable energy along eco-itineraries) should indicate:

- **Resource Intensity:** Requires significant funding and human resources. Solutions include applying public-private partnerships and EU funding programs.
- **Seasonality balance:** Seasonal tourism pressures are addressed by diversifying attractions and promoting off-season visits to lesser known attractions , off the beaten track eco-itineraries.
- **Coordination Complexities:** Insurance of multi-level governance through well-defined stakeholder roles and responsibilities.
- **Balancing Preservation and Access:** Uses technology and management plans to control visitor flows and protect sensitive areas.
- **Cultural Integration:** Aligns tourism initiatives with local traditions and practices to enhance authenticity and community acceptance.

- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** Enhances eco-itineraries on transnational routes to celebrate shared cultural and natural heritage.
- **Green Certifications:** promotes developing a certification system for eco-itineraries to recognize and incentivize sustainable practices.

Recommendations:

Develop climate-resilient, low-impact infrastructure. Prioritize green buildings, renewable energy, and waste reduction. Integrate circular economy principles. Expand partnerships for innovation. Engage stakeholders in green certifications ... Integrate environmental education. Develop interactive programs, digital guides, and community-led initiatives to promote sustainability.

Lessons Learned:

Circular tourism supports ecosystem restoration and long-term resilience of eco-itineraries. Sustainable infrastructure, eco-friendly design, green mobility, and resource efficiency improve tourism resilience. Education fosters responsible tourism. Partnering with eco-organizations and adopting certifications enhances credibility and effectiveness.

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THE TENTATIVE LIST HAS BEEN CREATED TO OPEN THE WAY FOR MONITORING ACTIONS:

Assessment of the sustainability level for MED Routes	
INDICATORS (Criteria)	Description and Examples
Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy Sources	Implementation of energy-efficient technologies and practices. Use of solar, wind, or other renewable energy sources.
Water Conservation	Efficient water management systems and conservation practices.
Waste Reduction & Circular Economy Practices	Waste reduction programs and recycling initiatives. Programs converting waste into energy resources. Reduction or elimination of single-use plastics. Implementation of circular economy principles to minimize waste and promote recycling.
Low-Impact and green Infrastructure, Eco-friendly Architecture	Construction and infrastructure designed to minimize environmental impact. Integration of eco-friendly architectural designs. Development of green spaces and eco-friendly infrastructure within the tourist area -parks, picnic area and etc. Construction and utilization of buildings with zero-net energy consumption. Measures to minimize noise and light pollution. Promote or offer Eco-friendly Accommodation.
Sustainable Mobility and Transportation	Promotion of sustainable and low-emission modes of transportation. Encouragement of sustainable transportation options for tourists and employees, use of public transportation.
Carbon Footprint Reduction & Carbon Neutrality	Efforts to offset or minimize carbon emissions. Efforts to reduce the overall carbon footprint of the tourist destination. Example is planting trees in the area.
Digital Sustainability	Implementation of digital solutions to improve the sustainability - reduce paper, improve accessibility, disseminate sustainable solutions. Has a website or an application with useful information.
Climate Resilience & Natural Disaster Preparedness	Implementation of measures to enhance the destination's resilience to climate change impacts. Preparedness plans for natural disasters.
Certifications & Eco-labelling	Compliance with recognized sustainability certifications (e.g., LEED, Green Key). Adoption of eco-labelling to certify and promote sustainability of tourist facilities
Sustainable report	Published Sustainable / ESG report
Local Ecosystem Restoration & Conservation	Protection and conservation of local flora and fauna. Initiatives for restoring and preserving the local ecosystems and natural habitat. Preservation of natural habitats in and around the touristic area. Integration of nature-based solutions to enhance resilience and biodiversity. Promotion of sustainable fishing practices, Promotion of wildlife tourism with ethical and sustainable practices. Responsible use and conservation of natural resources. Promote or implement sustainable agriculture practices such as implementation of permaculture principles.
Local Sourcing & Artisan Support	Promotion of local products and services. Support for local artisans and craftsmen.
Local Employment Opportunities	Creation of job opportunities for local residents.
Health and Safety Standards	Adherence to high health and safety standards for tourists and employers.
Accessible Tourism	Facilities and services catering to people with disabilities.
Environmental Education Programs	Offering educational programs on local culture, environment, and sustainability. Centres providing information on environmental conservation. Example is educational training, video, poster, articles.
Cultural & Historical Site Preservation	Preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage. Conservation and preservation of historical sites
Community Engagement & Community-Based Tourism	Active involvement and benefit-sharing with local communities. Promotion of tourism initiatives that directly benefit or engage local communities.
Inclusive Tourism / Cultural Sensitivity Training	Inclusion of marginalized communities in tourism initiatives, working process. Training programs for tourism staff or tourists to be culturally sensitive and tolerant.
Green Events and Initiatives	Hosting events / initiatives with minimal environmental impact, or events that promote sustainability.
Eco Partnerships	Collaboration with eco organizations and initiatives

MEASURES RELATED TO TECHNOLOGICAL INTEGRATION

Technological Integration in Eco-Itineraries: Enhancing Sustainability and Visitor Experience

The integration of advanced digital technologies plays a crucial role in improving the sustainability, accessibility, and overall visitor experience of eco-itineraries. By incorporating innovative digital tools, eco-itineraries can provide interactive, informative, and immersive experiences while reducing physical strain on cultural sites and natural landscapes. Technology also facilitates efficient tourism management, allowing for real-time monitoring and data-driven decision-making.

One of the most transformative technological advancements in tourism is the use of digital platforms, including augmented reality (AR on site) and virtual reality (VR before visit). These tools allow visitors to engage with cultural heritage sites in a more immersive way, offering historical reconstructions, guided virtual tours, and interactive storytelling, but still not neglecting or avoiding tangible info boards. By using AR and VR, travelers can experience historical landmarks or cultural artifacts without direct physical interaction, thereby minimizing wear and tear on fragile sites while maintaining high levels of engagement.

In addition to AR and VR, the integration of mobile applications, GIS mapping, and interactive digital guides enhances the navigation, interpretation, and accessibility of eco-itineraries. Digital maps provide visitors with real-time location services, suggested routes, and historical insights, ensuring a seamless and educational travel experience. These tools improve convenience for tourists and contribute to the promotion and visibility of lesser-known cultural sites and eco-friendly routes.

Beyond enhancing visitor experiences, digital solutions play a key role in promoting sustainability. The shift toward paperless tourism, through digital brochures, e-tickets, and mobile applications, reduces waste and environmental impact. Furthermore, well-designed digital platforms allow for the dissemination of sustainable travel practices, offering guidance on eco-friendly accommodations, responsible tourism behaviours, and conservation efforts. The development of a centralized website or application that consolidates useful information, travel tips, cultural insights, and sustainability initiatives ensures that visitors have easy access to essential resources.

The concept of smart tourism solutions further enhances the management and sustainability of eco-itineraries. By using the Internet of Things (IoT), stakeholders can monitor tourist flows, assess environmental impact, and optimize infrastructure management in real-time. Sensor-based data collection allows authorities to track visitor density, adjust entry

restrictions, and prevent overcrowding, ensuring a more balanced and enjoyable tourism experience. Additionally, IoT-powered systems facilitate energy efficiency measures, such as smart lighting, automated waste management, and water conservation technologies, reinforcing the commitment to environmentally responsible tourism.

By integrating technological innovations, eco-itineraries can offer an enhanced, educational, and sustainable travel experience. Digital tools not only provide dynamic and interactive engagement for visitors but also support sustainable tourism development by optimizing resource use and minimizing environmental impact. As eco-itineraries continue to evolve, embracing smart technologies will be essential in ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved, tourism is responsibly managed, and visitors enjoy meaningful, high-quality experiences.

Technical implementation:

- **Digital Platforms:** Plan augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) usage to enhance the visitor experience without increasing physical strain on cultural sites. Utilize digital tools like mobile apps, GIS mapping, and interactive guides. Benefit from technologies for route navigation, historical information, and visitor engagement.
- **Implement digital solutions to improve sustainability** - reduce paper, improve accessibility, disseminate sustainable solutions. Prepare a website or an application with useful information.
- **Smart Tourism Solutions:** Apply IoT (Internet of Things) to monitor tourist flows and environmental impact in real-time.

Recommendations:

Adopt digital sustainability solutions. Implement smart energy use, and real-time monitoring.
Enhance visitor experiences with technology. Utilize AR, VR, and interactive guides to deepen cultural and environmental connections.
Leverage IoT for adaptive management. Use data-driven insights to optimize crowd control, conservation, and infrastructure.

Lessons Learned:

Digital tools optimize resource use, reduce waste, and improve efficiency.
Interactivity boosts visitor engagement.
AR, VR, and mobile apps create immersive and educational experiences.
Real-time data improves management.
IoT and GIS tracking help monitor tourist flows and environmental impact.

6.4. STEP 4: PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT - CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

Firm distinction should be made between an eco-itinerary and a cultural tourism product on the eco- itinerary. Let us get back to the definition of the UNWTO: Cultural tourism product consists of the attraction and services provided. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels and it has a life-cycle.²¹ In this sense eco-itinerary is an attraction (and a complex networked destination), and its components may be considered to be the core ingredient of the cultural tourism product.

The successful implementation of eco-itineraries requires a strategic approach to **cultural tourism product design**, ensuring that services, attractions, and experiences are effectively packaged to appeal to visitors while remaining sustainable, engaging, and beneficial to local communities. Creating marketable tourism products on eco-itineraries involves a holistic approach that considers product diversification, visitor experience management and strategic marketing. By integrating diverse cultural assets, interactive experiences, and sustainable practices into a product, eco-itineraries can open the way to a distinctive tourism product that contributes to both economic growth and heritage conservation.

To establish a compelling and competitive cultural tourism product around the eco-itinerary, it is essential to structure and package tourism services in a way that highlights local identity, heritage, and environmental responsibility. This requires a complex model that includes selected and focused thematic historical sites, local traditions, artisanal craftsmanship, and immersive activities, ensuring a rich and meaningful experience for visitors. Managing the overall mood and engagement of tourists through storytelling, interactive exhibits, and personalized itineraries further enhances the appeal and memorability of the experience.

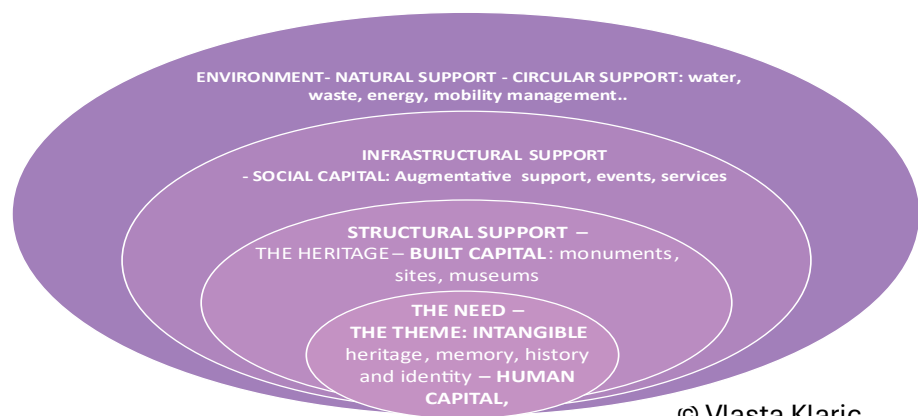
Promotion and marketing play a crucial role in raising awareness and increasing the attractiveness of eco-itineraries. A well-planned marketing strategy ensures that these itineraries are visible and accessible to target audiences while emphasizing their unique cultural and environmental value. Using digital marketing tools, social media engagement,

²¹ UNWTO definitions: [HTTPS://www.unwto.org/tourism-development-products](https://www.unwto.org/tourism-development-products)

and destination branding helps cultural tourism products on eco-itineraries reach a broader international audience while maintaining local authenticity. Research and continuous market analysis further support this process by identifying emerging tourism trends, visitor expectations, and potential growth opportunities. Through data-driven decision-making, stakeholders can refine product offerings and promotional strategies to align with the evolving needs of travellers.

A fundamental aspect of cultural tourism product design is the active involvement of local communities and stakeholders. Ensuring community participation throughout the planning and implementation process fosters a sense of ownership and long-term commitment to the eco-itinerary. This can be achieved through workshops and training programs that educate local businesses, guides, and tourism operators on the principles of circular and sustainable tourism. Providing capacity-building opportunities enables stakeholders to enhance their skills, adapt to industry changes, and contribute to the long-term success of the itinerary.

Innovative co-creation methodologies, such as the European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW)²², allow stakeholders to collaborate on strategic planning and decision-making, ensuring that eco-itineraries reflect local priorities, values, and sustainability goals. Engaging youth in cultural and environmental education programs is also essential, as it installs a sense of responsibility and encourages future generations to actively contribute to tourism sustainability. Continuous feedback loops, visitor surveys, and community discussions help monitor the impact and effectiveness of eco-itineraries, allowing for adaptive improvements based on real-time input. By integrating thoughtful product design, strategic marketing, and active community participation, eco-itineraries can develop marketable, sustainable, and culturally enriching tourism products. Such



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²² European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW) <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0afce6d2-f559-48be-a1f8-24e140409fbd/language-en>

AUa multi-modal approach ensures that cultural tourism not only enhances visitor experiences but also supports local economies, preserves heritage, and fosters long-term environmental and social sustainability.

Levels of Cultural Tourism Product Design and User Involvement

In the core of cultural tourism product is the need of the visitor, answered by the structural and infrastructural support.

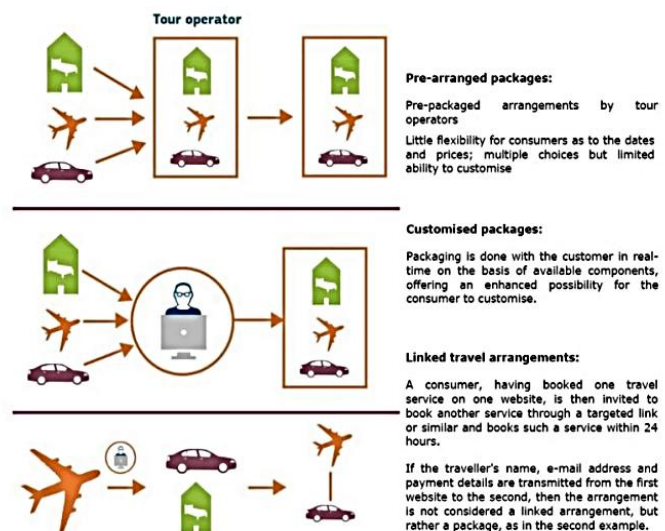
Today cultural tourism product design operates on multiple levels, ranging from basic offerings to highly customized and interactive experiences. These levels determine the degree of user involvement, co-production, adaptability, business collaboration, and digital integration within the tourism ecosystem. Various levels of visitor's involvement take shape of new niche products often also connected to creative tourism (Greg Richards)²³.

Emerging new forms of travel arrangements: Travelers often use online platforms or travel portals that provide tools and options to select and book different travel services individually. These platforms typically offer a range of options and prices for each component, giving travelers the flexibility to choose what suits them best.²⁴

Basic Cultural Tourism Product (Passive User Experience)

At the foundational level, cultural tourism products consist of predefined, standardized offerings such as guided tours, museum visits, and historical site excursions combined with the offer of food, accommodation or transport.

Figure 1: Differences between LTAs and pre-arranged packages



Source: European Commission, 2014.

²³ Richards, Greg. "Creativity and tourism: The state of the art." *Annals of tourism research* 38.4 (2011): 1225-1253. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241854896_Creativity_and_Tourism_The_State_of_the_Art

²⁴ The performance of the Package Travel Directive and broader consumer protection issues in the implementation of passenger rights, European Parliament, Authors: Annette CERULLI-HARMS, Alessandra INNESTI, Nessa GORMAN, Pietro PALUMBO, Cristina PONCIBO, Jelena VITIC PE 740.097, September 2023
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740097/IPOL_STU\(2023\)740097_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740097/IPOL_STU(2023)740097_EN.pdf)

These products are static, supplier-driven, and offer limited customization.

User Involvement: The tourist plays a **passive role**, simply consuming the experience without actively shaping it.

Co-Production: User involvement is minimal; the experience is designed by tourism providers without user input.

Business Partnerships: implies simple collaborations, such as agreements between tour operators and cultural sites.

Digital Collaboration: implies basic online booking systems; limited real-time adaptation.

Flexibility: Low; the product is standardized and lacks personalization options.

Example: A pre-scheduled walking tour along the eco-itinerary, with a fixed itinerary and no option for modification.

Interactive Cultural Tourism Product (User Participation & Customization)

At this level, cultural tourism products start integrating **user preferences and interactive elements**, allowing for some degree of personalization.

User Involvement: Visitors can **choose between different themes, durations, or routes**, making their experience more tailored.

Co-Production: Moderate; travellers may select from predefined options or **customize minor elements** of the experience.

Dynamic Packaging²⁵: is a method of creating deals or packages based upon the components selected by the customer. Basic adaptation here is based on **visitor interests and availability** (e.g., choosing between cultural sites or events).

Business Partnerships: Stronger collaboration among tourism providers, such as combined cultural and culinary experiences.

Digital Collaboration: Interactive websites and mobile apps allow users to modify their plans before booking.

Flexibility: Moderate; structured yet adaptable experiences allow for **limited customization**.

²⁵ “Dynamic packaging is a technique that empowers tour operators, travel agents, and online travel agencies to blend diverse travel components, such as dynamically priced options, package tours, tour operator services and cruise packages. This is achieved through web-based software, resulting in tailor-made holidays.”

<https://www.traveltek.com/dynamic-packaging/> ;

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740097/IPOL_STU\(2023\)740097_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740097/IPOL_STU(2023)740097_EN.pdf)

Example: A city pass that allows tourists to choose from a list of museums, historic sites, and cultural performances.

Co-Created Cultural Tourism Product (Active User Participation & Dynamic Customization)

This level involves **tourist engagement in the creation and modification of their experience** in real-time. The traveller actively co-produces the experience by making selections based on personal preferences, time constraints, and interests.

User Involvement: High: tourists influence the itinerary based on their needs and interests.

Co-Production: The experience is shaped through **real-time decision-making** (e.g., selecting activities while on the trip).

Dynamic Packaging: High-level adaptation and customization based on individual tourist preferences.

Business Partnerships: Strong integration among various cultural and tourism service providers, allowing seamless coordination.

Digital Collaboration: Cloud-based platforms, mobile applications, and AI-driven itinerary builders help travellers adjust their experiences dynamically.

Flexibility: High; real-time itinerary modifications based on availability, preferences, and external conditions.

Example: Mapped content available for visitors enabling them to make their own choices and create product alone or with the help of a digital travel assistant that suggests alternative routes or activities based on weather, time, or tourist preferences, allowing instant modifications.

Smart and Negotiated Cultural Tourism Product (Dynamic Market Adaptation & Business Coordination)

At this level, cultural tourism product design performed by the user, goes beyond customization to **negotiate and coordinate among multiple business partners** to provide a seamless, integrated experience.

User Involvement: Users can negotiate **prices, activities, and experiences** dynamically, making tourism more flexible.

Co-Production: **AI-driven algorithms** or **real-time negotiations** allow users to refine their itinerary based on changing conditions.

Dynamic Packaging: A **highly personalized experience** that **adjusts prices, availability, and services** based on real-time negotiations.

Business Partnerships: Tourism providers, local businesses, and hospitality services **collaborate in a shared digital environment**.

Digital Collaboration: **AI, and IoT (Internet of Things)** facilitate seamless transactions and itinerary adjustments.

Flexibility: Maximum adaptability; products evolve based on real-time demand and market trends.

Example: Visitor books an eco-itinerary where hotels, transport, and activities adjust dynamically based on demand, user preferences, and real-time pricing models.

Future-Oriented Cultural Tourism Product (Predictive & Proactive Customization)

At the highest level, cultural tourism products leverage **big data, predictive analytics, and AI-driven automation** to anticipate and meet future tourist needs.

User Involvement: Users **passively engage**, as AI suggests or books **preference-based experiences** before they request them.

Co-Production: **AI-powered systems** curate **personalized itineraries based on past behaviour, interests, and emerging travel trends**.

Dynamic Packaging: Products are automatically **optimized for cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and traveller satisfaction**.

Business Partnerships: implies **global integration** of tourism providers, allowing data-driven decision-making at all levels.

Digital Collaboration: implies **machine learning, and predictive analytics** support **seamless, automated interactions** between travellers and service providers.

Flexibility: The highest level of flexibility: tourism products constantly evolve **before and during** the traveller's experience.

Example: A smart cultural travel app that suggests and books eco-tours, events, or dining experiences based on a tourist's previous behaviour and sustainability preferences.

Cultural tourism product design evolves from static, pre-packaged experiences to highly dynamic, co-created, and intelligent tourism offerings.

At lower levels, users follow predefined routes with minimal input. At intermediate levels, tourists customize elements of their journey through interactive tools. At higher levels, AI, digital collaboration, and real-time business coordination allow travellers to co-create and negotiate their experiences.

Future cultural tourism products will integrate big data, AI, and predictive customization to offer hyper-personalized, sustainable, and adaptive travel experiences. This evolution not only enhances visitor satisfaction but also optimizes tourism sustainability, strengthens local economies, and fosters deeper cultural engagement.

Technical implementation:

Turning implemented eco-itineraries offer on the routes into marketable tourism products asks for:

Participatory Approach - A critical aspect of eco-itineraries is the inclusion of local communities and stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation process of product development. The methodologies that can be used include:

- **Workshops and Training:** Engages participants in capacity-building programs to understand circular tourism applied at the level of cultural tourism product development.
- **Scenario Workshops:** Employs tools like the European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW) to co-design strategies with stakeholders.
- **Youth Engagement:** Involves younger generations in cultural and environmental education to foster long-term sustainability.
- **Feedback Loops:** Implements regular surveys and focus groups to adapt initiatives to community and tourist needs.

Packaging services and attractions into cultural tourism product (holistic approach, product diversification models, mood management) - Foster collaboration with local businesses and cultural institutions and stimulate user participation. Strengthen partnerships with hospitality providers, artisans, and heritage organizations, while integrating interactive experiences such as hands-on workshops, community-led storytelling, and visitor contribution platforms.

Promotion and marketing - Develop an integrated branding and interactive promotion strategy. Use compelling narratives, virtual tours, gamification, and digital campaigns to enhance visibility and visitor engagement with eco-itineraries.

Research and surveys of the tourism trends and potential markets - Continuously assess market trends, visitor preferences, and digital interaction patterns. Conduct regular surveys, AI-driven data analysis, and behavioural tracking to adapt tourism products to evolving traveller expectations, sustainability goals, and technology advancements.

A well-structured and interactive tourism product enhances visitor engagement. Designing eco-itineraries with thematic coherence, immersive storytelling, and hands-on experiences fosters deeper emotional connections, making them more memorable and attractive to travellers. Active user involvement and community participation strengthens sustainability. Engaging local stakeholders, artisans, and tourism operators, along with co-creation opportunities for visitors, ensures authenticity, fosters economic benefits, and enhances long-term commitment. Strategic marketing and digital interactivity expand reach and visibility. Leveraging social media engagement, interactive digital tools, and user-generated content helps attract responsible travellers while supporting sustainable tourism growth.

Recommendations:

Develop an interactive cultural tourism product, integrated branding and flexible promotion strategy. Use virtual tours, gamification, and digital campaigns to enhance visibility and visitor engagement with eco-itineraries.

Strengthen partnerships with artisans, and heritage organizations, while integrating interactivity such as hands-on workshops, community-led storytelling, and visitor contribution platforms.

Continuously assess market trends, visitor preferences, and digital interaction patterns.



Lessons Learned:

A well-structured and interactive tourism product enhances visitor engagement.

Active user involvement, cultural product design and community participation strengthen sustainability.

Strategic marketing and digital interactivity expand reach and visibility.

6.5. STEP 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND MONITORING

Continuous Improvement and Monitoring: Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability of Eco-Itineraries

For eco-itineraries to remain relevant, effective, and sustainable, a structured approach to monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement is essential. Regular assessment ensures that strategies align with sustainability goals, visitor expectations, and evolving environmental conditions. Implementing comprehensive monitoring plans with clear indicators, stakeholders can systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their initiatives, identifying areas for enhancement and ensuring that eco-itineraries continue to provide high-quality, meaningful experiences.

An integral part of this process is the establishment of regular feedback mechanisms, allowing input from visitors, local communities, and tourism operators to shape future improvements. Combining qualitative insights with quantitative data-driven approaches, such as visitor behaviour analysis and environmental impact assessments, enables informed decision-making. Consistently refining itineraries, tourism managers can enhance visitor satisfaction, optimize resource use, and minimize ecological impact.

To maintain the long-term viability of eco-itineraries, securing stable funding sources is crucial. Identifying potential funding opportunities, including EU grants, local government support, and private sector investments, ensures that these projects remain financially sustainable. Designating responsible teams for strategy execution and ongoing monitoring strengthens accountability and facilitates efficient project management.

A key aspect of continuous improvement is the utilizing adaptive management strategies, which allow for flexibility in response to changing conditions, stakeholder input, and new opportunities. Encouraging public-private partnerships fosters innovation, enhances financial sustainability, and expands the reach of eco-itineraries. Using the expertise and resources of both public institutions and private enterprises, eco-itineraries can benefit from technological advancements, improved infrastructure, and enhanced promotional efforts.

Through rigorous monitoring, adaptive management, and collaborative funding strategies, eco-itineraries can evolve into resilient, sustainable, and economically viable tourism models. This approach not only strengthens environmental conservation and cultural preservation but also ensures that eco-itineraries remain engaging, relevant, and beneficial for local communities and visitors alike.

Technical implementation:

- Developing monitoring plans with indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
- Including regular feedback mechanisms and funding strategies to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Utilizing data-driven approaches to refine itineraries based on visitor behavior and environmental impact assessments.
- Identifying potential funding sources and designates responsible teams for strategy execution and monitoring.
- Utilizing adaptive management to refine processes based on outcomes and stakeholder input.
- Promoting public-private partnerships to foster innovation and financial sustainability.

Recommendations:

Implement dynamic monitoring systems.
Utilize real-time data analytics, visitor tracking, and environmental assessments
Designate teams responsible for strategy execution, stakeholder coordination, and funding acquisition
Promote adaptive and flexible management.
Encourage a proactive approach to evolving trends, sustainability challenges, and policy changes,

Lessons Learned:

Regular feedback and data analysis enhance adaptability.
Multiple funding streams, including EU grants, public funding, and private sector investment, reduces financial vulnerability.
Public-private partnerships drive innovation and resource-sharing, technology adoption, and long-term financial stability.

Advancing Sustainable Eco-Itineraries Through Strategic Implementation

The Common Technical Overview and its structured implementation provide a comprehensive roadmap for developing, executing, and sustaining eco-itineraries within cultural routes. Each phase, from initial framework design to continuous improvement, plays a crucial role in ensuring that eco-itineraries remain environmentally sustainable, culturally enriching, and economically viable.

The **first step**, establishing a framework for eco-itinerary design, lays the foundation by integrating sustainability principles, stakeholder collaboration, and territorial analysis. This ensures that itineraries are developed in a responsible and strategic manner, aligning with circular economy principles while enhancing local cultural and natural assets.

In the **second step**, the design of the itinerary focuses on structuring thematic connections between cultural identity, tangible heritage, and tourism services. A well-mapped itinerary that incorporates sustainable tourism infrastructure and smart technologies creates a seamless and engaging experience for visitors while preserving local heritage and ecosystems.

The **third step**, implementation on the ground, transforms these plans into reality through the development of infrastructure, technological integration, and environmental safeguards. By ensuring that facilities are eco-friendly, accessible, and well-maintained, eco-itineraries can accommodate responsible tourism while reducing ecological impact.

The **fourth step**, practical development, focuses on designing marketable cultural tourism products on eco-itineraries. This involves packaging services, enhancing visitor engagement, and leveraging digital marketing and branding strategies to attract sustainability-conscious travelers. A participatory approach that involves local communities, businesses, and institutions ensures authenticity, inclusivity, and economic benefits for all stakeholders.

Finally, **the fifth step**, continuous improvement and monitoring, secures the long-term success of eco-itineraries. By implementing data-driven performance evaluation, adaptive management, and sustainable funding models, stakeholders can ensure that these

itineraries remain resilient, innovative, and aligned with evolving environmental and tourism trends.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of eco-itineraries requires a balance between strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, sustainable infrastructure, and technological innovation. By following a structured, interactive approach, eco-itineraries become not only valuable tourism assets but also models of responsible travel that protect cultural and natural heritage while supporting regional development. Through collaborative governance, continuous adaptation, and commitment to sustainability, these itineraries can set a new standard for circular and regenerative tourism in the Mediterranean and beyond.

Finally , the technical overview emphasizes a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to designing eco-itineraries. By integrating sustainable practices into infrastructure, governance, and community engagement, these itineraries not only preserve Europe's cultural heritage but also set a benchmark for responsible tourism. Continued collaboration, innovative practices, and adaptive strategies will ensure the long-term success and scalability of these initiatives. Expanding on these foundations, future eco-itineraries have the potential to redefine sustainable tourism by balancing ecological integrity, cultural authenticity, and visitor satisfaction.



7. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS - KEY ACTIONS PROPOSED

7.1. HOW TO LAY THE FOUNDATIONS?

As already said CONTEXT ANALYSIS is the foundational step in the development of eco-itineraries. It involves a thorough examination of the current tourism landscape to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). This step ensures that strategies are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the territory.

Understanding the territorial and tourism landscape is critical for the design of eco-itineraries. This phase involves assessing existing policies, identifying sustainability gaps, and evaluating the cultural and natural assets of the region.

Pafos, Cyprus

For instance, context analyses in coastal Mediterranean areas often reveals issues like overtourism during peak seasons and underutilized resources in rural hinterlands. Addressing these challenges involves promoting balanced visitor distribution and enhancing lesser-known attractions.

Context Analyses indicates:

- **Analysing the territory** to understand sustainability gaps in terms of heritage management and tourism in terms of mobility, accessibility, energy, waste, and water management;
- **Analysing social environment, demographics, employment** to understand sustainability gaps in terms of community involvement and tourism
- **Measurement of the seasonality pressure** - difference of tourism pressure on the destination and heritage sites can dramatically influence scarcely inhabited regions.
- **Evaluation of the impact of past actions** to the territory, for further investment or redistribution of interest to different areas or actions.
- **Identification of strong points to implement**, in order to make the territory of the cultural route and eco-itineraries more attractive from a touristic point of view: green policies as a touristic use.

Describe: the location, the area where the itinerary is planned. Is there a map of itinerary? Where does the itinerary start and end? How long is it?

Describe population: Are they dominantly young or old population, families. What is there detected attitude to tourism? Are there employment issues?

Number of enterprises in tourism and culture? What is the capacity of heritage attractions, cultural assets?

Are there overcrowded spaces? Are there any unused, lesser known, uninterpreted assets?

Where are your strong points, hidden values?

KEY ACTIONS

Policy Review: Analyse relevant EU, national, and local policies that influence sustainable tourism and cultural heritage.

Tourism Trends: Evaluate current features such as visitor demographics, seasonality, and tourism flows. Use tools like surveys to gauge visitor satisfaction and economic impact.

Carrying capacity: Assess the carrying capacity of sites to balance tourism with conservation needs. Utilize tools like environmental impact assessments and stakeholder surveys.

Heritage Analysis: How is sustainability treated in areas such as accessibility, presentation, equipment, interpretation, preservation and conservation

Environmental Analysis: Measure sustainability gaps in areas such as mobility, energy efficiency, waste management, and water usage.

Social environment Analyses: Measure sustainability gaps in areas of employment possibilities, community inclusion etc.

SWOT Analysis: Conduct detailed assessments to identify areas of improvement and leverage strengths.

Tools: Utilize templates like SWOT and PESTLE matrices for structured analysis.

Priority Areas: Analyse seasonality pressures, heritage preservation challenges, and potential for eco-tourism integration.

KEY QUESTIONS :

TOURISM TRENDS

What is tourism volume in the country, in the region, in destinations and sites on the eco-itinerary?

Who are your visitors? Individual / groups? Percentage? How are they served? Who do you want to have? How do they feel? What are your receipts per destination?

CARRYING CAPACITY

Number of nights spent. Average length of stay in the region?
Receipts per destination?

HERITAGE

How many heritage sites are included?

Are they all accessible?

What interpretation models do they use?

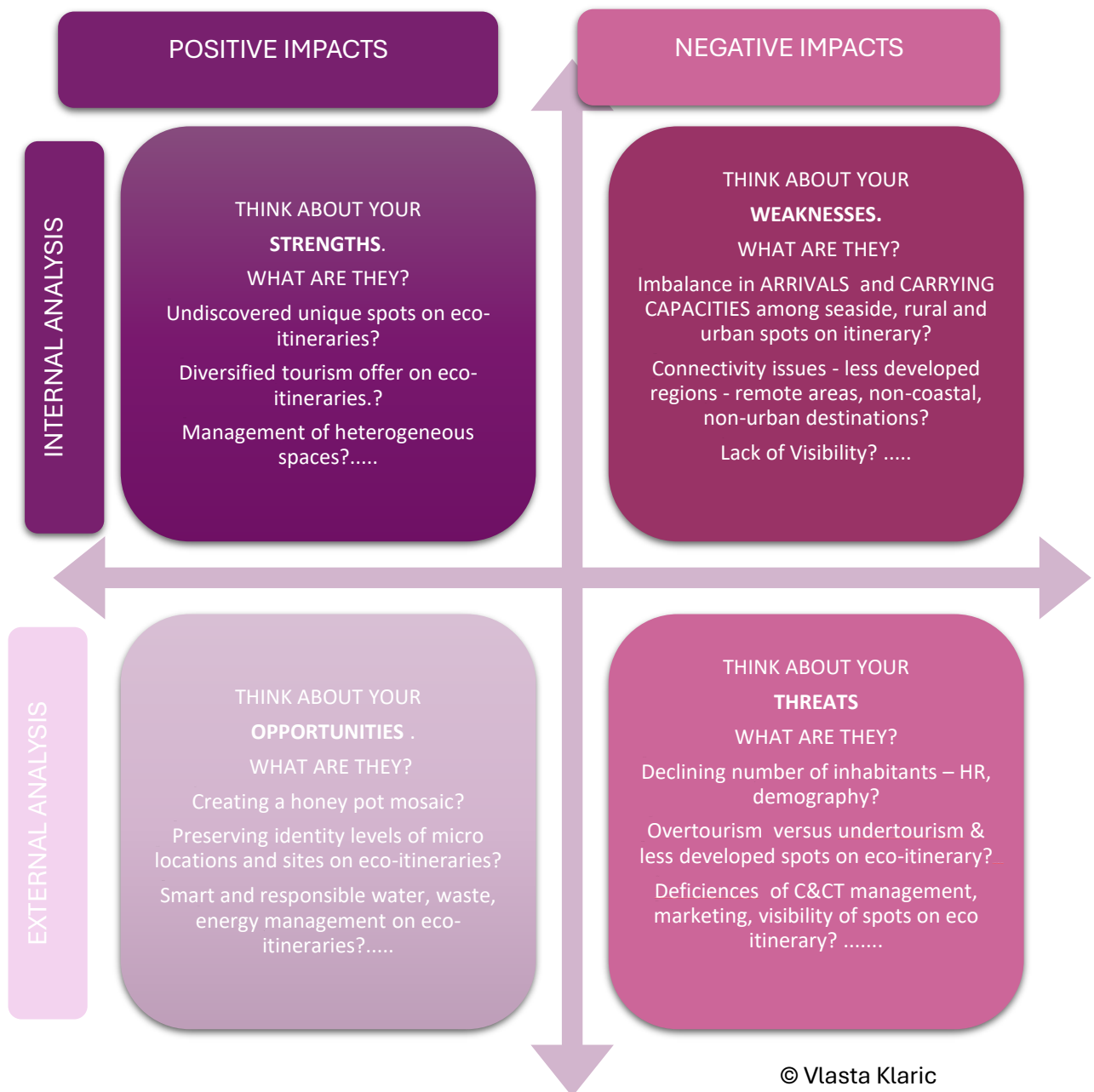
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSES

Sustainability measures existing? (mobility – biking, workshops – social sustainability and circularity, How do you use water, waste, energy?

OBJECTIVE: Gain a deep understanding of the cultural and natural environment.

HOW TO APPLY SWOT ANALYSE FOR ECO-ITINERARIES DEVELOPMENT

Tools like **SWOT** analysis provides a structured approach to identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By analyzing seasonal tourism flows, infrastructure, and environmental impacts, stakeholders can identify areas for improvement and innovation.



HOW TO APPLY PESTLE ANALYSIS FOR ECO-ITINERARIES DEVELOPMENT

A **PESTLE analysis** (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental) provides a structured framework to evaluate external factors affecting the development of eco-itineraries within cultural routes. By assessing these six key dimensions, stakeholders can anticipate challenges, leverage opportunities, and ensure that eco-itineraries are strategically aligned with sustainability goals.

1. Political Factors

The policy landscape significantly influences eco-itineraries. EU, national, and local policies on sustainable tourism, environmental conservation, and cultural heritage preservation dictate how eco-itineraries can be developed and managed. Green policies, such as EU sustainability frameworks and circular economy initiatives, create opportunities for funding and regulatory support. However, policy inconsistencies, bureaucratic obstacles, and lack of enforcement can pose challenges. Additionally, the degree of government support and cross-border cooperation among Mediterranean countries affects the feasibility of transnational cultural routes.

2. Economic Factors

The financial sustainability of eco-itineraries depends on tourism-driven revenues, investment opportunities, and public-private partnerships. Economic fluctuations, inflation, and seasonality pressures impact funding availability and visitor spending. A key challenge in many Mediterranean destinations is overtourism in urban hubs versus economic stagnation in rural areas, highlighting the need for balanced visitor distribution. Investments in green infrastructure, accessibility, and local businesses create new employment opportunities while enhancing the appeal of lesser-known destinations. However, reliance on public funding or short-term projects without long-term financial strategies can undermine sustainability.

3. Social Factors

Tourism directly affects local communities, employment rates, and social inclusion. Eco-itineraries must align with community needs, ensuring that local residents benefit from tourism without experiencing cultural disruption or displacement. Social sustainability challenges include unbalanced economic distribution, demographic shifts, and the risk of tourism dependency. However, fostering community-led tourism, participatory decision-

making, and skills development strengthens local engagement. Seasonal tourism patterns also create labor market fluctuations, requiring adaptive workforce strategies and long-term employment solutions.

4. Technological Factors

The integration of digital tools and smart tourism solutions enhances the efficiency and attractiveness of eco-itineraries. Augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), GIS mapping, IoT (Internet of Things), and AI-driven visitor management improve accessibility, interpretation, and real-time data monitoring. Digitalization also supports eco-friendly initiatives, such as paperless ticketing, smart waste management, and energy-efficient technologies. However, limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, technological costs, and the digital divide among different user groups may delay widespread adoption.

5. Legal Factors

Regulatory frameworks play a vital role in ensuring compliance with environmental protection laws, cultural heritage conservation regulations, and tourism licensing requirements. Strict EU directives on mobility, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and water conservation set high sustainability standards for eco-itineraries. However, variations in legal requirements across different countries can create regulatory barriers, particularly for transnational cultural routes. Additionally, legal complexities regarding land use, intellectual property rights for cultural assets, and taxation policies can influence how eco-itineraries operate and attract investment.

6. Environmental Factors

Eco-itineraries must prioritize environmental sustainability, resource efficiency, and climate resilience. Key considerations include water conservation, energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, and circular waste management. Seasonal tourism pressures lead to overcrowding, resource exhaustion, and environmental degradation, making it essential to implement carrying capacity assessments and impact improvement strategies. Climate change poses additional risks, such as rising temperatures, biodiversity loss, and extreme weather events, requiring adaptive tourism planning and green infrastructure investment.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR A PESTLE ANALYSIS FOR ECO-ITINERARIES

In order to conduct a comprehensive PESTLE analysis, it is essential to ask targeted questions in each category to assess the external factors influencing the development, implementation, and sustainability of eco-itineraries. Asking critical questions in each PESTLE category helps stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of the external influences affecting eco-itineraries.

Political Factors	<p>What are the current policies and regulations related to sustainable tourism, cultural heritage preservation, and environmental conservation at the EU, national, and local levels?</p> <p>How supportive are government bodies in providing funding, incentives, and regulatory frameworks for eco-itineraries?</p> <p>Are there any political risks (e.g., policy changes, unstable governance, cross-border cooperation challenges) that could impact the project?</p> <p>What level of public-sector-private-sector collaboration exists for promoting sustainable tourism?</p> <p>How do green policies and circular economy strategies influence the development of eco-itineraries?</p>
Economic Factors	<p>What are the main sources of funding for eco-itineraries (e.g., EU grants, public-private partnerships, tourism revenues)?</p> <p>How does seasonality affect the economic viability of eco-itineraries, and what strategies can be used to balance tourism flows?</p> <p>What are the economic benefits of eco-itineraries for local communities (e.g., job creation, support for local businesses, tourism revenues)?</p> <p>What are the potential economic barriers to implementing sustainable infrastructure and technological integration?</p> <p>How do current market trends and traveler spending behaviors impact the demand for eco-friendly tourism?</p>
Social Factors	<p>How do local communities perceive tourism, and how can they be actively engaged in the development and management of eco-itineraries?</p> <p>What are the demographic and employment trends in the region, and how can eco-itineraries contribute to social sustainability?</p> <p>How does tourism impact community well-being, cultural identity, and traditional livelihoods?</p> <p>What educational programs or awareness campaigns are needed to encourage responsible tourism and visitor behavior?</p> <p>How can the tourism industry create inclusive opportunities for marginalized or underrepresented groups?</p>
Technological Factors	<p>What digital tools and smart technologies (e.g., AR, VR, GIS mapping, IoT) can enhance visitor experiences and sustainability efforts?</p> <p>How accessible is high-speed internet and digital infrastructure in the region, particularly in rural areas?</p> <p>What barriers exist for implementing technology-driven sustainability solutions, such as smart waste management, energy-efficient infrastructure, and visitor tracking systems?</p> <p>How can data analytics and AI-driven insights be used to monitor visitor flows and environmental impact?</p> <p>What cybersecurity and data privacy considerations should be taken into account when implementing digital solutions?</p>
Legal Factors	<p>What environmental laws and heritage protection regulations must be followed when developing eco-itineraries?</p> <p>Are there any land use restrictions or zoning laws that impact the development of tourism infrastructure?</p> <p>How do licensing and compliance requirements affect tourism businesses and eco-itinerary operators?</p> <p>What intellectual property or copyright laws must be considered when promoting cultural heritage through digital and physical media?</p> <p>How do international agreements and cross-border regulations impact transnational cultural routes?</p>
Environmental Factors	<p>What are the main sustainability challenges in the region, including waste management, water use, and energy consumption?</p> <p>How can eco-itineraries mitigate their environmental impact while enhancing conservation efforts?</p> <p>What measures can be implemented to ensure climate resilience and disaster preparedness in tourism areas?</p> <p>How does biodiversity and ecosystem health affect tourism, and what conservation initiatives can be integrated into eco-itineraries?</p> <p>How can sustainable mobility solutions (e.g., cycling paths, electric public transport, car-free zones) be encouraged to reduce tourism-related emissions?</p>

By addressing these factors systematically, stakeholders can develop clear strategies that ensure economic viability, social inclusivity, technological innovation, legal compliance, and environmental sustainability in cultural tourism development.

A PESTLE analysis provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities shaping the development of eco-itineraries. Political support, economic investment, social inclusivity, technological innovation, legal compliance, and environmental responsibility must be harmonized to create resilient and sustainable cultural tourism routes. Using structured analysis tools and aligning strategies with regional and global sustainability frameworks, stakeholders can ensure that eco-itineraries not only preserve cultural and natural heritage but also drive long-term socio-economic growth and environmental regeneration.

HOW TO USE CAME ANALYSIS FOR ECO-ITINERARIES DEVELOPMENT

A CAME analysis (Correct, Adapt, Maintain, and Explore) is a strategic tool that builds upon SWOT/ PESTLE analyses by providing actionable responses to Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It helps transform insights from context analysis into a practical implementation plan. In the case of eco-itineraries, CAME analysis can ensure that sustainability, cultural heritage preservation, and stakeholder engagement are effectively integrated into long-term strategies.

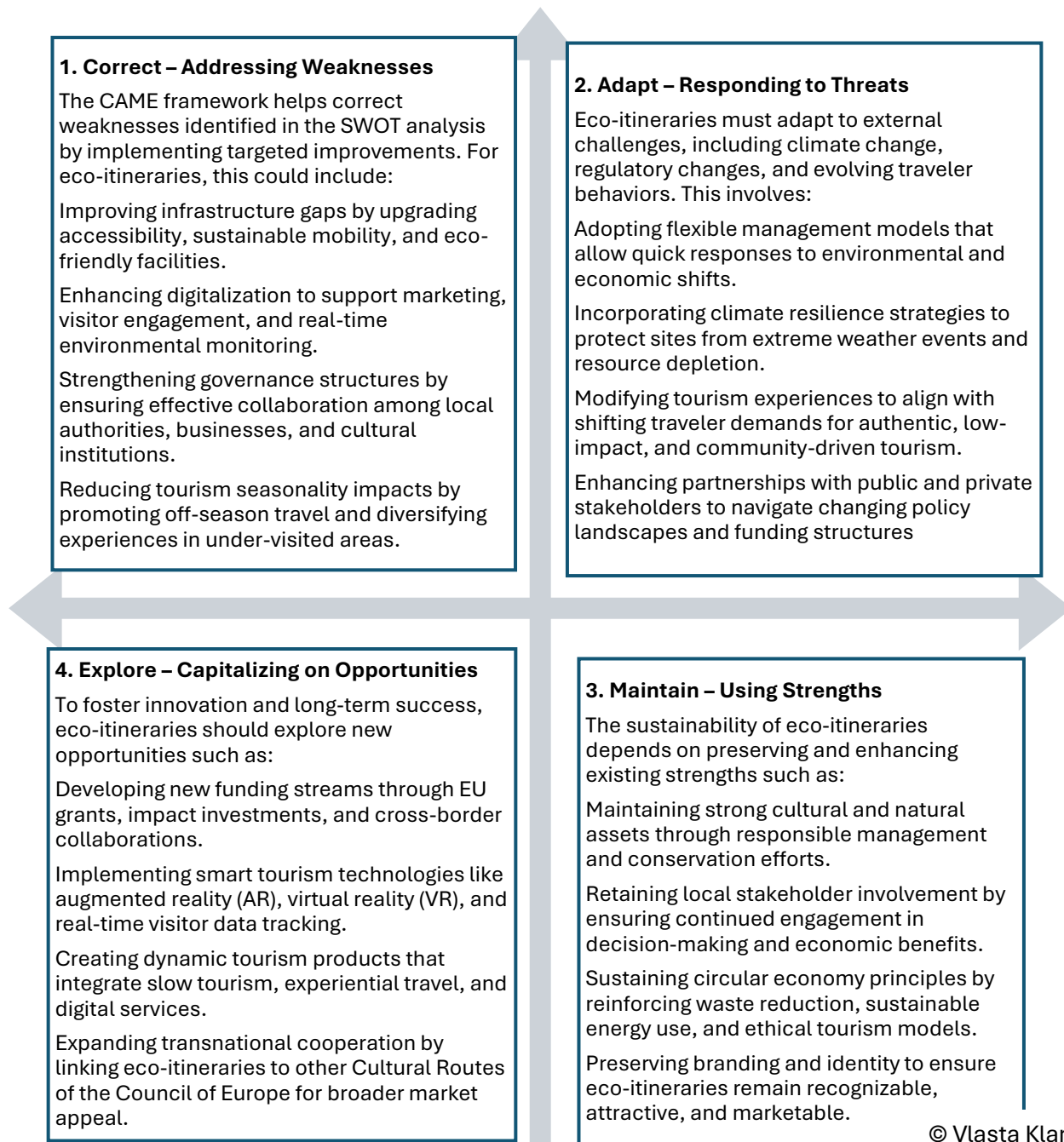
KEY QUESTIONS FOR A CAME ANALYSIS

When preparing a CAME analysis for eco-itineraries, asking the right questions in each category ensures that sustainability, cultural heritage preservation, and tourism management strategies are well-defined and effectively implemented.

Correct – Addressing Weaknesses	What are the main weaknesses identified in the context analysis, and how do they impact the eco-itineraries?
	How can infrastructure deficiencies (e.g., accessibility, mobility, sustainable facilities) be improved?
	What measures can be taken to reduce tourism seasonality and better distribute visitor flows throughout the year?
	How can digitalization and smart tourism solutions be improved to enhance visitor experience and environmental monitoring?
	What governance or management issues need to be corrected to ensure better stakeholder coordination and policy alignment?
Adapt – Responding to Threats	What external threats (e.g., climate change, policy changes, economic instability) could impact the eco-itineraries?
	How can climate resilience be integrated into tourism planning to mitigate risks like extreme weather or resource depletion?
	What strategies can help eco-itineraries adjust to shifting traveler preferences toward more sustainable and experiential tourism?
	How can adaptive management models be used to respond quickly to regulatory changes or funding shifts?
	What partnerships (public-private, cross-border) can be strengthened to mitigate potential external risks?
Maintain – Leveraging Strengths	What existing strengths make the eco-itineraries unique and competitive?
	How can the cultural and natural assets be further protected and enhanced for long-term sustainability?
	What measures ensure that local community engagement and participation remain strong?
	How can circular economy principles be maintained and reinforced in tourism operations?
	How can eco-itineraries continue to align with global and European sustainability initiatives?
Explore – Capitalizing on Opportunities	What new funding opportunities (e.g., EU grants, green investment programs) can be explored to support eco-itineraries?
	How can emerging technologies (AR, VR, IoT, GIS mapping) be used to enhance visitor engagement and sustainability?
	What new cultural tourism trends (e.g., slow tourism, regenerative travel) can be integrated into eco-itinerary design?
	How can eco-itineraries expand their reach through cross-border cooperation and partnerships with other cultural routes?
	What new market segments (e.g., digital nomads, eco-conscious travelers) can be targeted to increase eco-itinerary visibility and demand?

Asking these key questions during the CAME analysis ensures that eco-itineraries are resilient, innovative, and strategically positioned for long-term success. By correcting weaknesses, adapting to threats, maintaining strengths, and exploring opportunities, eco-itineraries can create a sustainable, inclusive, and high-quality tourism experience while preserving cultural and natural heritage.

HOW TO APPLY CAME ANALYSIS TO ECO-ITINERARIES



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Using CAME analysis, eco-itineraries can transform SWOT insights into concrete strategies, ensuring resilience,

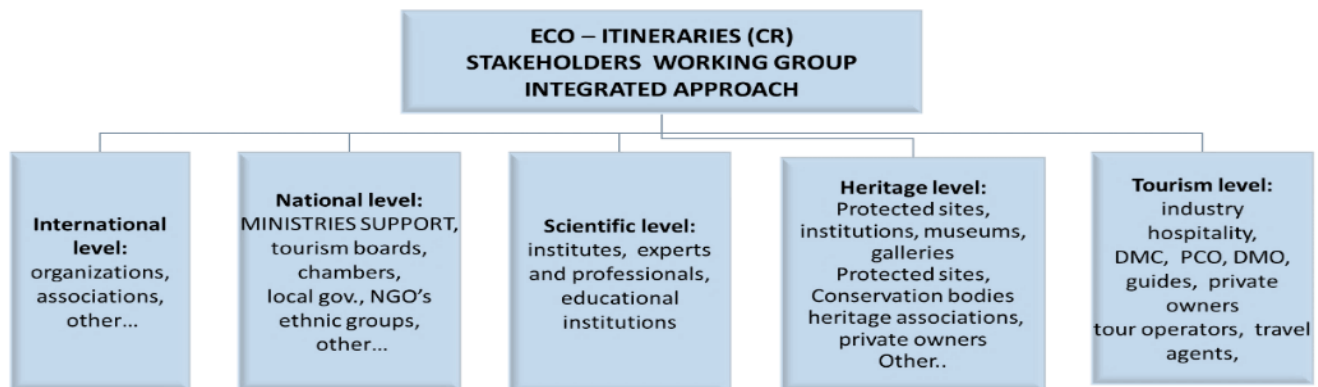
sustainability, and long-term growth. The

correction of weaknesses, adaptation to threats, maintenance of strengths, and exploration of new opportunities together create a balanced approach that enhances the impact and viability of eco-itineraries within the Mediterranean and beyond.

7.2. HOW TO BUILD OWNERSHIP? GOVERNANCE?

GOVERNANCE: MOBILIZING THE LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS IN PARTNERSHIPS

The success of eco-itineraries depends on effective governance structures. These include the establishment of a Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) involving representatives from tourism, heritage, and sustainability sectors. The SWG facilitates collaboration and decision-making, ensuring diverse perspectives are considered.



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Effective governance structures are crucial for the successful implementation of eco-itineraries. This involves establishing collaborative frameworks that include all relevant stakeholders.

Objective: Establish a legal and operational framework ready for cross-border collaboration and circular tourism.

The development of eco-itineraries is shaped by a multi-layered network of influences that span international, national, scientific, heritage, and tourism sectors. At the international level, organizations and associations play a key role by providing financing and global visibility. Their

funding initiatives and promotional efforts help secure the necessary resources and elevate the profile of eco-itineraries on a worldwide stage, thereby attracting additional investment and collaborative opportunities.

Map of Influences for Eco-Itineraries Development

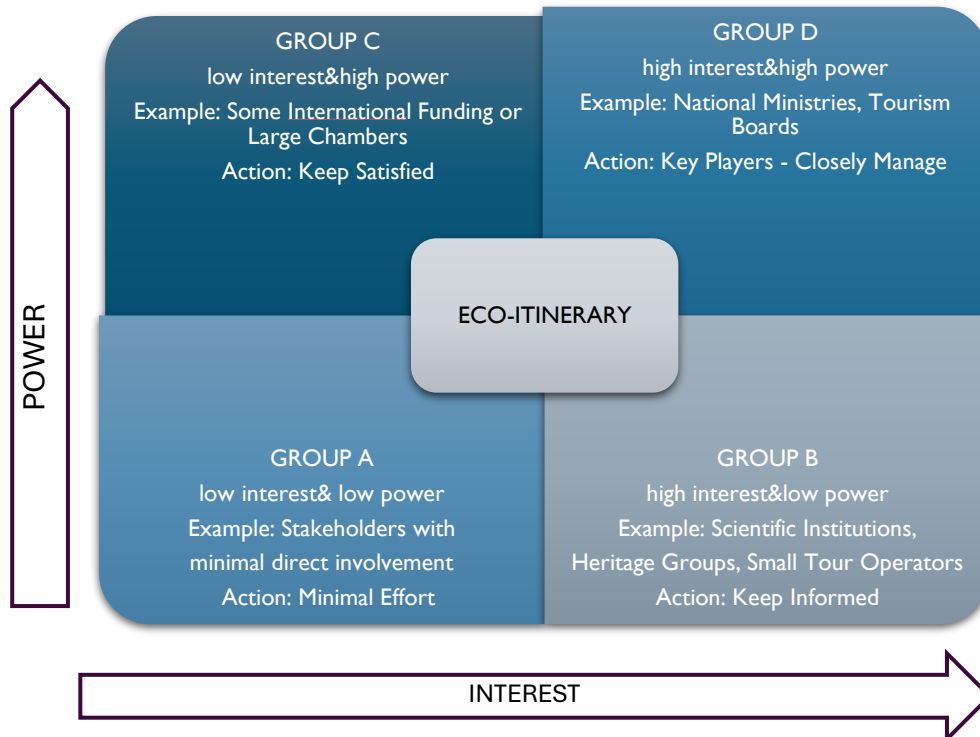
At **the national level**, various institutions work together to establish a robust regulatory framework that governs tourism and heritage preservation. Ministries set policies that ensure sustainability, while tourism boards contribute critical visibility and strategic direction. Chambers of commerce further support this framework by offering business support and enabling networking among industry stakeholders, ensuring that eco-itineraries are both compliant with regulations and economically viable.

The scientific level of influence comes from research institutions that drive innovation and development. Through research, development, and technological advancement, these entities provide the knowledge and innovative solutions required to optimize eco-itinerary design. Their work on environmental impact assessments, heritage preservation and interpretation, mapping and sustainable resource management informs strategic decisions and emphasizes the technical aspects of eco-itinerary planning.

At **the heritage level**, specialized institutions contribute through research, protection, education, and increased visibility of cultural assets. These organizations work to conserve tangible and intangible heritage, ensuring that cultural narratives are preserved and promoted effectively. By integrating their findings and expertise into eco-itinerary planning, they help create a route that is both culturally rich and sustainable, fostering a deep connection between visitors and local heritage.

Finally, at **the tourism level**, local stakeholders, including businesses, tour operators, destination managers and community groups, drive the operational and economic aspects of eco-itineraries. Their direct involvement ensures that the tourism product is commercially viable, engaging, and responsive to market needs. These stakeholders contribute to profit generation, sustainable business practices, and day-to-day management, making eco-itineraries dynamic

and resilient. Their collaborative efforts ensure that visitor experiences are enhanced while local communities benefit economically.

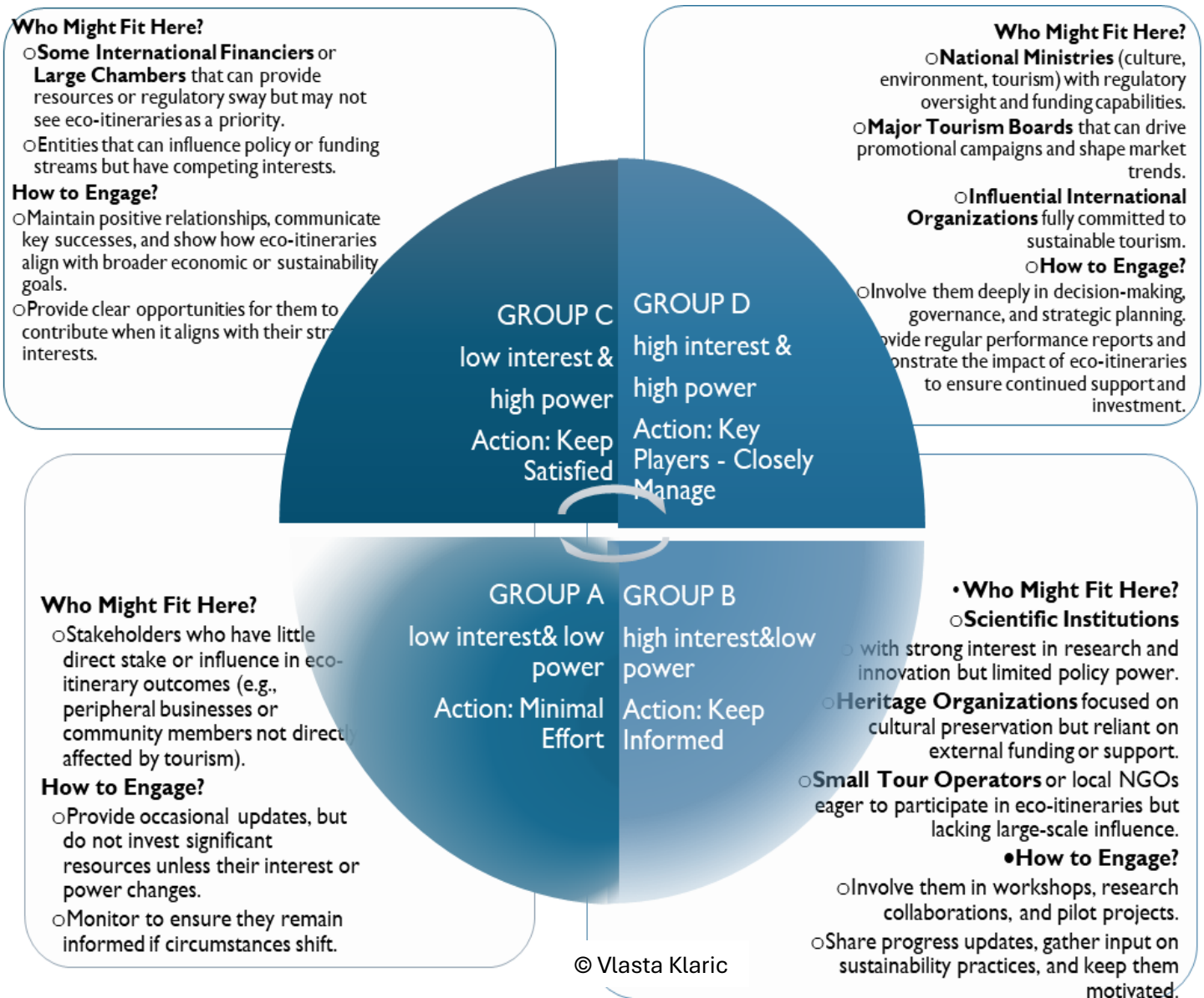


Integrated map of influences demonstrates that the success of eco-itineraries depends on synergistic collaboration across various levels. International financiers and promoters secure the necessary resources and global reach; national institutions ensure a supportive policy and regulatory environment; scientific research and innovation provide technical excellence; heritage organizations safeguard and promote cultural narratives; and tourism stakeholders drive economic sustainability and operational success. Together, these layers of influence create a comprehensive and adaptive ecosystem.

Stakeholder influence-interest matrix summarizes how various entities might relate to the development of eco-itineraries. The vertical axis represents **power or influence**, while the horizontal axis represents **interest** in eco-itineraries.

Further on is a brief description of how each stakeholder group might fit into the matrix, along with typical actions to manage them:

By mapping stakeholders according to interest and power, project leaders can tailor engagement strategies for each group. This approach ensures efficient resource allocation, targeted communication, and effective collaboration, ultimately fostering a governance environment where eco-itineraries can thrive.



KEY ACTIONS

Stakeholder Identification: Identify the scope of stakeholders to be involved - key players in tourism, cultural heritage, and sustainability (circularity) sectors.

Stakeholder Working Group (SWG): Form a networking diagram and a collaborative group to facilitate decision-making and ensure inclusive participation.

Develop shared governance models and communication strategies

Governance Frameworks: Develop clear roles and responsibilities, ensuring accountability especially in terms of circular tourism activities. Build trust and establish long-term partnerships. Define the map of influences, the role of involvement of each stakeholder and governance principles

Capacity Building: Train stakeholders in cultural tourism, in cultural routes and in **circular tourism principles** and tools to build shared competencies.

Participatory approach: Organize joint events, exhibitions, and educational programs to promote cultural tourism while preserving local identities.

Priority Areas: Foster cooperation in research, cultural exchange, and tourism promotion.

Stakeholder Identification: Criteria for Stakeholder Selection

Identifying the right stakeholders is essential for ensuring inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable eco-itinerary development. This process outlines who should be involved, their level of influence, interests, and potential contributions.

Criteria – selecting stakeholders	Why It Matters
Relevance to the Project	Direct connection to tourism, cultural heritage, or sustainability sectors.
Influence & Decision-Making Power	Ability to shape policies, provide funding, or regulate tourism activities.
Expertise & Knowledge	Contribution of specialized knowledge in tourism planning, conservation, or sustainability.
Community Representation	Ensuring local voices are included for fair and inclusive tourism development.
Commitment & Willingness to Engage	Active interest and availability to participate in working groups and initiatives.
Financial & Logistical Support	Ability to provide funding, infrastructure, or promotional assistance.
Cross-Sector Collaboration Potential	Stakeholders willing to work across industries (e.g., culture, environment, and tourism).

Further on we are listing the key questions and selection criteria listed to determine the scope of stakeholders across tourism, cultural heritage, and sustainability sectors. Effective stakeholder identification ensures that eco-itineraries are developed with broad-based support, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term sustainability. Do not forget: Stakeholders **lack time**, make it easier for them to meet.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION :

By asking the right questions and applying clear selection criteria, project leaders can build a balanced and inclusive stakeholder network that enhances cultural, environmental, and economic outcomes of the eco-itinerary initiative.

General Identification	Who are the main stakeholders directly or indirectly affected by the development of eco-itineraries?
	Which government agencies, private sector actors, NGOs, and local communities should be involved?
	Are there existing networks, cultural routes, or sustainability initiatives that can be integrated?
Influence and Decision-Making Power	Who holds regulatory authority over tourism, heritage conservation, and environmental policies?
	What organizations or individuals can provide funding, technical expertise, or governance support?
	Who are the most active voices in local tourism and cultural sectors, and how can they be engaged?
Economic and Tourism Sector Engagement	Which tourism businesses, hotels, tour operators, and service providers can contribute to eco-itinerary success?
	How can small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and local artisans benefit from participation?
	What financial or infrastructural support can investors, travel agencies, and tourism boards provide?
Cultural and Heritage Preservation Stakeholders	Which museums, cultural institutions, and heritage organizations can offer expertise in preservation and storytelling?
	What local traditions, folklore, and crafts need representation in eco-itineraries?
	How can academic and research institutions contribute to documenting, interpreting, and promoting heritage assets?
Sustainability and Environmental Protection	Who are the key players in environmental conservation, waste management, and circular economy initiatives?
	Which local or international NGOs and sustainability organizations should be engaged?
	How can eco-itineraries promote biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilience?
Community Involvement and Social Sustainability	How can local communities be included in decision-making and tourism operations?
	What social groups (e.g., youth, indigenous groups, marginalized communities) should be involved to ensure inclusivity?
	How can cultural tourism strengthen local identity, employment, and quality of life?
Cross-Border and International Cooperation	What transnational stakeholders or networks (e.g., Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe) can support eco-itineraries?
	How can partnerships be formed between different regions and countries to enhance eco-itineraries' visibility and reach?
	Which international tourism bodies or EU funding programs align with the objectives of the project?

KEY QUESTIONS ASSESSING STAKEHOLDERS' INTEREST, NEEDS, AND INFLUENCE

To detect stakeholders' interests, needs, and expectations and understand how they can best influence eco-itinerary development, it is essential to engage them through targeted questions. These questions should assess their level of interest, priorities, and potential contributions while identifying opportunities for collaboration and areas of concern.

Stakeholder Interest and Motivation	What is each stakeholder's primary interest in the development of eco-itineraries?
	How do they see eco-itineraries benefiting their organization, community, or sector?
	What specific themes, cultural aspects, or sustainability initiatives do they believe should be prioritized?
	How would they actively contribute to the design, promotion, or management of eco-itineraries?
Stakeholder Needs and Expectations from Eco-Itineraries	What challenges or gaps in the current tourism model should eco-itineraries address?
	What are their expectations regarding economic, environmental, and social benefits of eco-itineraries?
	What type of support, resources, or capacity-building programs would motivate them to get engaged in eco-itinerary development?
Stakeholder Influence and Contribution	What role do they currently play in cultural heritage, tourism, or sustainability initiatives?
	Can they contribute to policy development, funding, promotion, or governance of eco-itineraries?
	What expertise or resources (financial, logistical, technical) can they bring to support eco-itinerary planning and implementation?
	How would they like to collaborate with other stakeholders (local authorities, tourism businesses, NGOs, research institutions)?
Governance and Decision-Making Involvement	What type of governance structure would ensure fair and effective stakeholder participation?
	How should decision-making processes be structured to reflect stakeholder input?
	How can trust and long-term partnerships be built between stakeholders to strengthen collaboration?
	What mechanisms (meetings, digital platforms, working groups) would they prefer for ongoing communication and cooperation?
Local Community and Economic Development Considerations	How can eco-itineraries support local businesses, artisans, and service providers?
	What initiatives should be implemented to ensure community benefits and minimize negative tourism impacts?
	What cultural, social, or economic barriers need to be addressed to increase local participation in tourism development?
	How can eco-itineraries foster inclusive tourism that benefits marginalized or underrepresented groups?

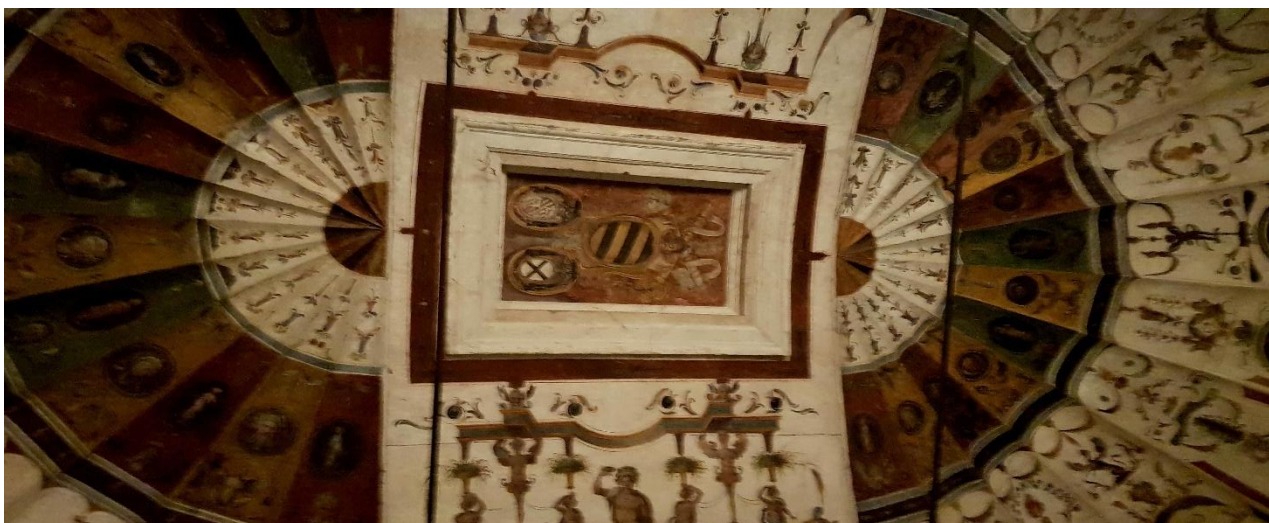
These questions help stakeholders define their role, expectations, and contributions to the development of eco-itineraries. They also identify challenges, collaboration opportunities, and governance structures that ensure eco-itineraries are developed in a way that aligns with stakeholder interests while promoting sustainability, cultural preservation, and responsible tourism. By collecting and analyzing stakeholder responses, project leaders can design tailored strategies that maximize engagement and long-term success.

Tools and Templates:

The INCIRCLE stakeholder analysis matrix model and the Emblematic Handbook's stakeholder engagement strategies provide structured methods for fostering collaboration, as using the matrix below:

Stakeholder name	Interest in the eco-itinerary design (high/medium/low)	Influence on realization (high/medium/low)	Needs (What is important to the stakeholder?)	Expectations from the stakeholder
Stakeholder 1				
Stakeholder 2				
Stakeholder 3				
...				

Governance also involves capacity building to enhance stakeholders' understanding of circular tourism principles. INCIRCLE's stakeholder matrix is a valuable tool for identifying interests, expectations, and strategies for engagement. Strong governance frameworks ensure accountability, resource efficiency, and alignment with project goals.



7.3. HOW TO SET CLEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIC TARGETS?

Crafting a strategic plan requires a unified vision and well-defined goals. This phase begins with documenting the current state of the region and identifying key challenges.

KEY ACTIONS

BASELINE ASSESSMENT as to earlier SWOT/PESTLE:

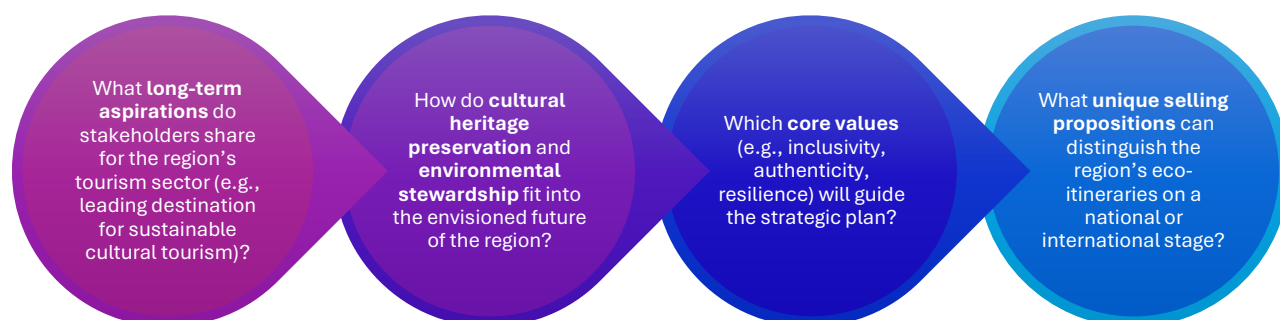
- Describe the current state of the art and set the baseline against which change will be measured
- Establish a starting point by documenting current practices and challenges.
- Define the main challenges the territory wants to tackle.
- Use local resources and expertise to ensure successful implementation.
- Adapt strategies to local contexts, addressing specific challenges and opportunities.
- Set the goals and targets

VISION STATEMENT:

- Develop a shared vision that reflects the goals of all stakeholders.
- Define a shared common vision of where the eco –itinerary wants to go in terms of cultural tourism and circular touristic destination.

Stakeholders collaborate to develop a shared vision, such as positioning the region as a leading destination for sustainable and culturally enriching tourism.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR VISION STATEMENT



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STRATEGIC GOALS SETTING

Define SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals. SMART objectives guide the strategy, ensuring clarity and focus. For example, an eco-itinerary might aim to reduce waste production by 20% within five years while increasing local community engagement in cultural or creative tourism activities.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR SETTING THE GOALS

Setting clear goals we need to know:

What specific, measurable targets should be established (e.g., reducing environmental impact, increasing visitor satisfaction, boosting local revenue)?

How can success be quantified and monitored (e.g., number of visitors in off-peak seasons, community satisfaction indices)?

Which key performance indicators (KPIs) will be used to track progress toward the shared vision?

How can goals be prioritized to address the most pressing challenges while using existing strengths?

Adapting Strategies to Local Contexts we need to know:

Which local resources and expertise can be mobilized to ensure successful implementation?

How can strategies be customized to address specific cultural, environmental, and socio-economic contexts?

What collaborative approaches (e.g., public-private partnerships, cross-border initiatives) will maximize local impact?

How can stakeholder feedback loops be integrated into the plan for continuous adaptation and improvement?

Ensuring Long-Term Commitment we need to know:

What institutional frameworks (e.g., working groups, committees, governance models) will maintain momentum after initial planning?

How will capacity-building (e.g., training, knowledge-sharing) support stakeholders in executing the plan?

Which funding mechanisms (EU grants, private investments, local budgets) are most viable for sustaining long-term initiatives?

How will monitoring and evaluation processes ensure the strategy remains relevant and responsive to emerging trends?

Addressing these questions can help stakeholders develop a strong strategic plan that captures the current state, key challenges, and a unified vision. This provides clear objectives to guide the development of eco-itineraries, resulting in a sustainable and culturally enriching tourism model tailored to the region's unique context.

Tools and Frameworks:

Templates for setting strategic objectives, defining indicators, and establishing targets are essential. The INCIRCLE toolkit provides practical resources for this phase.

Name of the strategy's objective	
Short description of the objective	
Related strategic indicator	
Baseline indicator (current trend)	
Target value	

Future Scenarios: Create projections to anticipate challenges and adapt strategies accordingly.

Applications:

A shared vision for “green and inclusive tourism” in EMBLEMATIC has led to cohesive actions among stakeholders, improving resource efficiency and visitor satisfaction.

STRATEGIC TARGETS

Targets provide measurable benchmarks to assess progress. These include both qualitative and quantitative indicators, such as visitor satisfaction scores, reductions in water and energy consumption, and increases in local employment rates.

Monitoring these targets allows stakeholders to make data-driven adjustments. For instance, if a target to increase off-season tourism is not met, marketing strategies can be revised to attract more visitors during quieter months.

Setting and monitoring specific targets ensures that strategies remain focused and measurable.



KEY ACTIONS

INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT

- o Identify strategic outcome indicators for the strategy's main objectives.
- o Define your qualitative and quantitative indicators in line with the objectives.
- o Develop a small number of easily measurable and understandable qualitative and quantitative indicators that are clearly linked to each of the objectives to be achieved

TARGET MONITORING Regularly assess progress using established benchmarks.

TARGETS must define what needs to be achieved compared to the current situation

ADJUSTMENTS - refine objectives based on feedback and new trends.

Applications: INCIRCLE's indicators, such as waste production per tourist night or water consumption comparisons, provided actionable metrics for assessing sustainability improvements.



7.4. HOW TO TURN PLANS INTO ACTIONS?

Translating strategies into actionable steps involves meticulous planning. This includes defining measures to achieve goals, allocating resources, and establishing timelines. Stakeholder involvement ensures local knowledge and expertise. It ensures also that planned measures are feasible and aligned with local needs.

Planning effective measures translates strategies into actionable initiatives. This phase involves prioritizing interventions and detailing implementation processes.

Key stakeholders have to be involved in the short listing, definition and approval of

KEY ACTIONS

Measure Definition: Define clear actions to address identified challenges.

Resource Allocation: Identify the resources and skills required for each measure.

Timeline Creation: Develop detailed schedules for implementation.

Stakeholder Involvement: Engage stakeholders in planning to ensure feasibility.

measures.

For each shortlisted measure, a set of relevant information is to be provided, able to convey.

KEY QUESTIONS DEFINING MEASURES

:

WHAT goals the measure is pursuing

HOW the measure will be implemented

WHO will benefit from it

WHO and HOW will contribute to its implementation

WHICH resources and skills are required

HOW MUCH will the measure cost (including setting up and operation/maintenance costs)

WHEN it will be implemented

HOW its progress and performance will be monitored

7.5. HOW TO DESIGN AN ECO-ITINERARY ON THE ROUTE?

Eco itinerary is part of the cultural route! It has to respect the principles guiding the creation of cultural routes. The creation of cultural routes is guided by principles that emphasize European values, shared heritage, and cultural diversity. These same principles provide the thematic foundation for eco-itinerary development.

Objective: Follow the unifying concept that reflects European values and connects multiple countries. Incorporate cultural, natural and human assets into the itineraries.

KEY ACTIONS

Respect the cultural route theme

Identify key focal points (5-10) – heritage/sites that respect the chosen cultural route theme **and** respect the circularity processes.

Ensure themes resonate with tangible and intangible heritage elements, such as historical sites, traditional crafts, and folklore

Identify Heritage Elements

Conduct inventories of (5-10) focal points - heritage sites, local traditions, and contemporary artistic practices, how they support the topic and respect circularity.

Engage local communities to help you identify and document heritage elements.

Integrate natural landscapes, historical sites, and cultural experiences into the eco-itinerary on the route.

Integrate tourism businesses with circular tourism practices around the heritage focal points.

Prioritize accessibility and inclusivity in design.

Create a network of stakeholders on the route respecting the theme and circularity processes

Coordinate common activities

Ensure **circularity**

Ensure **visibility**

KEY QUESTIONS: ORCHESTRATION

Priority Areas: Ensure itineraries reflect local identities and ecological contexts.

Define multidisciplinary levels of management of the eco-itinerary

WHO will be the project leader (at local and transnational level)?

WHO will provide scientific support at thematic level and support project idea

WHO will provide scientific sites assessment

WHO will provide structural support (heritage preservation, presentation, events, exhibitions, ...)

WHO will provide infrastructural and services support – providing business and infrastructure cooperation

WHO will provide technical support including technical coordination and management

WHO will take care of product design and visibility (marketing and promotion)

Who will provide financial management

WHO will provide monitoring and sustainability of the eco-itinerary

WHO will provide financial management

HOW will financial sustainability of the eco-itinerary be provided

HOW will technical support include product design coordination and management

WHO will take care of product design and visibility (marketing and promotion)

Tools: Use templates for detailing the purpose, beneficiaries, implementation process, and costs of each measure. Collaborate with cultural institutions for expert input.

Applications: Concrete actions might include installing energy-efficient lighting at heritage sites, developing public transport routes to improve accessibility, and hosting workshops on sustainable tourism practices. Each measure should specify objectives, beneficiaries, costs, and monitoring mechanisms.

Examples include integrating energy-efficient lighting in cultural sites and promoting public transport for route accessibility, or use of GIS tools to map tangible and intangible heritage along the route.

7.6. HOW TO CREATE A CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT?

Objective: Each eco itinerary should develop marketable tourism products with strong branding.

Priority Areas: Support small businesses and artisans along the route

Cultural tourism product design has a key role in **Enhancing Cultural Tourism** with the purpose to enable sustainable tourism development linked to cultural and artistic initiatives.

Let us not forget:

Distinction should be made between an eco-itinerary **and a cultural tourism product on the eco- itinerary.**

UNWTO: Cultural tourism product consists of the attraction and services provided. A tourism product is priced and sold through (open and flexible) distribution channels and it has a life-cycle.¹

In this sense **eco-itinerary is an attraction**, and its focal points are the core ingredients which **enriched by services** become the cultural **tourism product**.

Development of cultural tourism package and products integrates local contemporary art, local crafts, and traditional performances to tourism services not neglecting their circularity performances. Cultural tourism products come to life by **packaging the resources** along eco-itineraries into cohesive offerings, such as guided tours, workshops, and cultural festivals. **Adding research based, high quality interpretation and storytelling** on eco-itineraries can enrich visitor experiences and highlight local heritage. This involves the use of structured interpretation prepared for digital platforms for marketing and visitor engagement. All this will work better if promoted to eco-conscious travellers and cultural enthusiasts.

Some of next listed **actions and questions** can bridge the gap between eco-itinerary design and market-ready cultural tourism products, ensuring that tourism development remains meaningful, sustainable, and economically viable.

KEY ACTIONS

Conduct In-Depth Market Research - Objective: Understand demand, market trends, and visitor expectations to create relevant products.

Key Components:

- **Visitor profiling with eco-focus:** Identify key demographics, interests, behaviors, and travel motivations of tourists seeking low-impact, ethical, and immersive travel experiences.
- **Trend analysis:** Monitor shifts in cultural, eco-conscious, experiential and slow tourism trends.
- **Segment identification:** Pinpoint niche markets (e.g., cultural heritage enthusiasts, eco-tourists, slow travellers).
- **Sustainability demand mapping:** Explore interest in eco-labels, green certifications, and locally sourced products.
- **Feedback collection:** Use surveys, interviews, and social listening tools to understand visitor satisfaction and gaps.
- **Benchmarking:** Analyze competing destinations and similar products for inspiration and differentiation.

Align Products with Local Identity and Circularity - Objective: Ensure that the tourism product authentically reflects the region and respects environmental and social sustainability.

Key Components:

- **Asset mapping:** Identify and catalogue cultural, natural, and human assets along the eco-itinerary connect them to emotional settings, bring rhythm, colour, and composition of context.
- **Thematic coherence:** Select a strong cultural or historical theme that ties the experience together with strong focal points of interest.
- **Circularity integration:** Embed sustainable infrastructure (energy, water, waste) and low-impact activities.
- **Cultural integrity:** Ensure research based, relevant data and sources and representation of local traditions, languages, and practices without commodification.
- **Local sourcing:** Prioritize local food, materials, and crafts to minimize transport emissions and boost local economy.
- **Circular economy linkages:** Create tourism supply chains that reuse, recycle, and regenerate resources (e.g., refillable amenities, compostable packaging).
- **Regulatory compliance:** Align with national tourism and conservation policies.

Engage and Empower Local Stakeholders - Objective: Build ownership and long-term support by involving those directly affected by or contributing to tourism development.

Key Components:

- **Stakeholder mapping:** Identify public authorities, NGOs, community leaders, artists, entrepreneurs, and tourism operators.
- **Inclusive governance:** Set up a local Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) or advisory panel
- **Capacity building:** Provide training in tourism services, digital tools, storytelling, and sustainable practices. Promote local skills in green building, sustainable gastronomy, and waste upcycling

KEY ACTIONS

Engage and Empower Local Stakeholders - Key Components:

- **Green entrepreneurship support:** Provide microgrants or support for circular tourism initiatives (e.g., eco-café, sustainable mobility).
- **Waste minimization partnerships:** Engage communities in local recycling, composting, or renewable energy cooperatives.
- **Economic opportunity creation:** Ensure local employment and benefit-sharing mechanisms.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** Facilitate two-way communication between planners and stakeholders.

Design Immersive and Diversified Visitor Experiences - create memorable, engaging, and varied activities that satisfy the intangible needs of tourists.

Key Components:

- **Enable experience flexible packaging:** Allow open and diversified thematic combinations of attractions with services (accommodation, food, transport) into bookable products.
- **Eco-conscious itinerary design:** Optimize distances, encourage walking/cycling, and promote off-season travel to reduce pressure.
- **Interactive formats:** Develop workshops, guided tours, live demonstrations, or storytelling walks.
- **Educational components:** Include circular tourism principles in tours (e.g., "zero-waste cooking class", "green craft workshops").
- **Itinerary flow:** Ensure logical, well-paced route structure with rest points and interpretation materials.
- **Regenerative activities:** Incorporate nature restoration, volunteering, or learning exchanges.
- **Slow tourism integration:** Offer slower-paced, longer-stay packages that reduce turnover and encourage deep local engagement.
- **Accessibility:** Include signage, multilingual guides, and universal design features.
- **Emotional engagement:** Use art, music, cuisine, and local narratives to create deeper connection.

Build Strategic Promotion and Digital Visibility - Objective: Ensure visibility, differentiation, and appeal to target audiences through clear messaging and strong branding.

Key Components:

- **Destination green branding:** Craft a compelling identity around the eco-itinerary (story, logo, tagline, visuals). Highlight circular values: reuse, regenerate, reduce as part of destination identity.
- **Online presence:** Develop a website, social media profiles, and listings on tourism platforms.
- **Content strategy:** Use research based, high-quality storytelling, video, and imagery to convey values and experience.
- **Transparency in impact:** Show metrics (CO₂ savings, water use reduction, local economic impact) to build trust.
- **Marketing partnerships:** Collaborate with national tourism boards, influencers, travel agencies, and DMOs.
- **Data-driven optimization:** Use analytics to track visitor engagement and adjust promotion accordingly.



KEY QUESTIONS: CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

Thematic Focus & Authenticity	What is the central cultural route theme of your eco-itinerary, and how is it rooted in local cultural and natural heritage?
	Are you clearly communicating the uniqueness of this theme across the entire visitor journey?
	How can underrepresented stories or local voices connected to this theme be highlighted ?
	What story can be built around the heritage asset on the itinerary?
	How can you emphasize its otherness, uniqueness, authenticity?
Visitor needs & Emotional Engagement	What actions can make visitors experience participatory?
	What intangible needs of our visitors do we wish to fulfill (e.g., learning, connection, well-being)?
	How do our current experiences satisfy these needs beyond sightseeing?
	Are we designing products that create meaningful emotional or intellectual engagement?
	What authentic experiences can you provide?
Interpretation & Infrastructure	What are the benefits for the tourist in the cultural tourism product?
	How are you telling your story: through signage, guides, performances, digital tools...?
	What makes the experience relevant for the visitors?
	How can visitors be associated with the heritage?
	Is our infrastructure both accessible and eco-friendly, allowing visitors to explore comfortably and responsibly?
Flexibility & Co-Creation	How are we making the intangible tangible for our visitors?
	Are your products designed to accommodate both individual travellers and organized groups?
	Can visitors personalize or co-create aspects of their experience (e.g., choose their route, interact with artisans)?
	How can we integrate feedback loops to adapt our offerings continuously?
	What are the benefits for the tourist in the cultural tourism product?
Circularity & Local Benefit	Is it flexible and adaptable?
	What benefits does the cultural-tourism product bring to the tourism sector, small local enterprises and community?
	What benefits does it bring to heritage?
	How are we reducing waste, water, and energy use across the tourism value chain?
	Are local communities truly benefiting: economically, culturally, and socially?
	What practices ensure that our tourism product contributes to regeneration?

CONCLUSION

Cultural tourism products built upon eco-itineraries offer a unique opportunity to harmonize heritage, sustainability, and visitor engagement. At the heart of these products lie *thematic attractions*: such as those featured on the Olive Tree Route, Phoenicians' Route, Ceramics Route, or Napoleon's Route, which serve as the core around which immersive experiences are crafted. These attractions provide more than just points of interest; they embody the deep cultural narratives and local identities that form the foundation of meaningful tourism.



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Crucially, the true pull factor for visitors is not merely the attraction itself, but the *intangible needs* these experiences fulfil, such as the desire for knowledge, peace, beauty, and authentic connection. Designing cultural tourism products on eco-itineraries therefore requires an understanding of these inner motivations and a commitment to creating encounters that resonate on a personal and emotional level.

Interpretation and infrastructure play a pivotal role in shaping these relationships. Thoughtful interpretation, through storytelling, guides, signage, and digital media, translates the physical into the meaningful, allowing visitors to engage deeply with the cultural and environmental context. Infrastructure, meanwhile, ensures accessibility and comfort without compromising the integrity of the environment, thus supporting a sustainable and inclusive experience.

The design of cultural tourism products must also remain *flexible and inclusive*, enabling *co-creation* with both organized groups and individual travellers. This adaptability allows for a dynamic product lifecycle, one that evolves based on visitor feedback, emerging trends, and local input. By involving communities and travellers alike in shaping the offer, these products foster a shared sense of ownership and value.

Highlighting this entire approach are the *principles of circular tourism*, maximizing local benefits, minimizing environmental impacts, and encouraging regenerative practices. When eco-itineraries are planned with circularity at their core, they not only attract visitors, but also support long-term cultural preservation, economic resilience, and ecological balance.

In sum, cultural tourism products on thematic eco-itineraries represent a forward-thinking model where heritage meets innovation, and where the needs of visitors, communities, and the environment are held in thoughtful balance.

7.7. WHAT NEXT? MONITORING, ASSESMENT AND FUNDING...

MONITORING, ASSESMENT AND FUNDING: Continuous monitoring and assessment ensure that eco-itineraries remain effective and aligned with their objectives. This phase includes establishing responsible teams, defining milestones, and using indicators to measure outcomes. Funding is a critical component, and potential sources include EU grants, public-private partnerships, and local government budgets.

Monitoring and assessment ensure that the eco-itineraries remain effective and aligned with their objectives. Identifying funding sources guarantees the sustainability of these initiatives.

KEY ACTIONS

Monitoring Plans: Establish processes for tracking progress, including responsible teams and milestones.

- **Designate a person/team** responsible for the monitoring process: determine who will be in charge of every step/ milestone during the development of the strategy.

Assessment Tools: Use indicators and metrics to evaluate outcomes.

- **Define the milestones** to evaluate along the Strategy life span, along with indicators and source of data to evaluate every defined milestone.
- **Define the critical points** which could have a determinant impact. Identify actions to be taken in case the critical events take place
- **Establish a calendar** including the previous elements.

Funding Opportunities: Explore grants, public-private partnerships, and other funding mechanisms.

- Identify potential sources of funding.
- Determine the actions to be taken to secure funding.
- Design the person/entity in charge for the agreed measures.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR MONITORING, ASSESMENT AND FUNDING...

Monitoring	Who will be responsible for monitoring and ensuring each milestone is achieved?
Assessment	<p>What specific indicators and data sources will be used to measure success and progress?</p> <p>What are the critical risks or turning points in our strategy, and how can we respond to them?</p> <p>How often will you assess progress, and what will be your timeline for evaluation and reporting?</p>
Funding	<p>What funding sources are available, and who will be responsible for securing and managing them?</p> <p>Who will monitor the funding sources availability?</p>

Tools and Resources:

The Emblematic Handbook emphasizes continuous improvement through monitoring and provides insights into sustainable funding strategies.

For example, the Emblematic Handbook highlights the importance of monitoring visitor impacts and resource use. By securing funding for initiatives like renewable energy installations and community-led tourism programs, regions can ensure the long-term viability of their eco-itineraries.

Applications:

Regions using circular economy principles can secure EU funding to enhance eco-itineraries, ensuring long-term viability.



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8. PROJECT PARTNER SPECIFIC CHAPTERS

THE FRAMEWORK

The principal goal of MED-Routes is to develop and promote a localized, low-impact model of sustainable tourism across Cultural Routes in the Mediterranean (MED) region. Specifically, it aims to establish a distinctive Mediterranean approach to "slow tourism," rooted in the shared heritage of four Cultural Routes recognized by the Council of Europe: **The Phoenicians' Route, The Routes of the Olive Tree, The European Route of Ceramics, and Destination Napoleon.**

Cultural Routes encompass a variety of tangible and intangible cultural and historical elements unified under a common theme. These elements—often represented by cultural heritage sites—are interpreted collectively, regardless of their spatial distribution (linear, dispersed, or concentrated). Each route functions as a widespread destination offering visitors a cohesive and enriched experience through a series of itineraries.

However, cultural tourism in the Mediterranean faces two key challenges, overtourism in mainstream destinations and undertourism in neglected areas. This means that tourism flows are predominantly directed toward mainstream destinations, resulting in overcrowding during peak seasons. To address these challenges, MED-Routes aimed to establish a sustainable, slow-tourism model by creating small-scale cultural eco-itineraries within the above-mentioned Council of Europe routes. These eco-itineraries focus on cultural heritage attractions while integrating supportive infrastructure and complementary offers that adhere to the principles of circularity: **reduce, rethink, revalue, regenerate, and innovate.** The development of new eco-itineraries aims to enhance the capacities of key stakeholders in the local tourism sector, promote circular tourism principles, and increase awareness and knowledge among institutions, operators and businesses within the tourism sector.

Next project partners specific chapters are dedicated to each of the four Cultural Routes affiliated eco-itineraries. These chapters outline **the key features** of the developed **eco-itineraries**, including the primary actors involved, identified strengths and weaknesses, strategic partners, and promotion strategies.

Moreover, the new eco-itineraries are predicted to serve as exemplary models, providing inspiration and guidance for the creation of additional micro-itineraries along the Cultural Routes. *Each Project Partner has developed a chapter on eco-itineraries development to support the capacity-building activities targeted at two main groups: Institutions from the cultural, political, and socioeconomic realms and operators and businesses in the local tourism sector, with the aim to mobilize the main actors involved to actively contribute to the eco-itinerary itself.* Ultimately, all tailored chapters are offering a complete and practical resource to support sustainable tourism practices across the Mediterranean region.



DESTINATION NAPOLEON CULTURAL ROUTE ECO- ITINERARIES, PORTUGAL





CULTURAL ROUTE TITLE	CULTURAL ROUTE OF NAPOLEON DESTINATION
ECO ITINERARY TITLE:	<p>ITINERARY 1: FIT AND GREEN – “GO FIT WHERE HISTORY GOES GREENER”</p> <p>ITINERARY 2: BISTROT SPREE – “THE ULTIMATE PALAIS EXPERIENCE”</p>
COUNTRY, AREA:	<p>PORTUGAL</p> <p>The micro-itineraries will be part of the Rota Histórica das Linhas de Torres (RHLT), a key historical and cultural route located in the Portuguese Lisbon and Leiria District.</p> <p>This route passes through eight municipalities, each contributing to the historical significance of the region. The municipalities included in the Eco-itineraries are Arruda dos Vinhos, Bombarral, Loures, Lourinhã, Mafra, Sobral de Monte Agraço, Torres Vedras, and Vila Franca de Xira.</p>
CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?	
STATE OF THE ART	The itinerary runs through the municipalities of the Rota Histórica das Linhas de Torres (RHLT), blending urban and rural landscapes with historic Napoleonic landmarks. The route includes forts, forests, river and hills near Lisbon and the Atlantic coast.
CONTEXT	
Area and location description	Located in the Lisbon and Leiria districts, the itinerary covers rural and urban areas of municipalities within the RHLT. Visitors explore markets, farms, wineries, restaurants, trails and historic sites through a multi-sensory journey rooted in the Napoleonic era.
DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION	The region has a mixed population of families, adults, and seniors, with active communities that engage in outdoor and cultural activities. There is a strong appreciation for local products, traditions, and heritage, alongside a growing eco-consciousness that supports sustainable practices and strengthens community involvement in circular tourism initiatives.
TOURISM VISION	The tourism vision is to promote sustainable, authentic, and educational experiences, valuing local heritage, strengthening the circular economy, and attracting conscious visitors interested in culture, nature, and well-being.
TOURISM VOLUME	In 2023, the number of arrivals of non-resident tourists in Portugal is estimated to have reached 26.5 million, representing an increase of 19.2%

compared to 2022 (INE, 2024). Regarding the region of the eco-itinerary, there's no clear data on the volume of tourists that visited these localities either on the sites selected.

Most tourist accommodation establishments recorded increases; at the national level, there were 85.1 million overnight stays, with an average of 2.62 nights per stay. Regarding the region (Lisboa e Vale do Tejo NUTS II), we have data that shows an increase of 18,2% in the number of stays compared with the previous year. (INE, Tourism Statistics, 2024).

VISITORS:

Itinerary 1: Fit and Green

Visitors include families, young adults, seniors, and athletes—mainly domestic but also international, especially from Destination Napoleon countries. They seek nature, sustainability, and active tourism. Experiences are self-guided or organized. We aim to attract eco-conscious travelers who feel inspired, healthy, and engaged with cultural and natural heritage.

Itinerary 2: Bistrot Spree

Targeting adults and seniors (35–70) with medium-high income, both domestic and international. Visitors value culture, gastronomy, and sustainability. They seek slow, authentic experiences. Activities include tastings, historical visits, and community engagement. We aim to serve curious, mindful travelers who feel enriched by local traditions and responsible tourism.

SWOT

Strengths:

Rich historical and cultural heritage, diverse natural landscape (Natural Reserve), strong community identity, and alignment with sustainable and slow tourism trends.

Weaknesses:

Limited accessibility in rural areas, low international recognition, and fragmented tourism services.

Opportunities:

Growing demand for eco-friendly tourism, potential for international partnerships via the Destination Napoleon route, and promotion of lesser-known areas.

Threats:

Risk of underinvestment, seasonality of demand, and possible lack of stakeholder coordination.

**CHALLENGES**

Challenges: Depopulation, aging population, limited infrastructure, low international visibility, lack of investment, seasonality, and balancing tourism growth with sustainability.

**LESSONS LEARNED –
ADVICE**

Get involved in promoted initiatives regarding sustainable cultural tourism to learn more and get to know other stakeholders that face the same paths

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

Cross-municipal workshops, participatory heritage cooking events, sustainability-focused culinary festivals, and storytelling seminars.

Workshops on circular tourism; participatory planning with sports and tourism stakeholders; case studies on eco-tourism models integrated into sports events.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS**MAIN ACTORS -
GOVERNANCE**

Stakeholders: Public administration (museums, forts, cultural sites), private entities (accommodation, restaurants, tour operators), third-sector organizations (local associations).

Role: Public administration manages heritage sites; private entities offer tourism services; third sector supports local communities.

Benefit: Economic growth, sustainable tourism, cultural preservation.

Communication/Collaboration: Digital platforms, newsletters, partnerships for coordinated efforts.

Challenges: Balancing sustainability with tourism growth, ensuring circular practices, and addressing resource limitations.

**VISION AND STRATEGIC
GOALS**

Specific Targets for the Eco-Itinerary:

Environmental Awareness: Raise awareness on sustainable practices, such as using reusable water bottles and reducing waste during sports events.

Eco-Conscious Tourism: Attract eco-conscious tourists through sustainable dining and circular economy initiatives.

Local Economic Development: Boost local businesses by linking tourism activities with local gastronomy and products.

Shared Vision and Goals:

Cultural and Circular Tourism: Promote the cultural heritage of RHLT while focusing on sustainability through eco-tourism.

Local Employment: Increase employment opportunities through the promotion of sustainable tourism practices in the region.

Visitor Satisfaction: Enhance the tourist experience with a focus on sustainable, educational, and culturally immersive activities.

CHALLENGES

Limited resources, stakeholder coordination, ensuring circular practices, raising environmental awareness, and balancing tourism growth with heritage preservation and sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

Culinary heritage offers a powerful platform for circular economic promotion.

Strong partnerships between institutions and communities drive successful eco-tourism.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Cross- - municipal workshops, participatory heritage cooking events, sustainability focused culinary festivals, and storytelling seminars.

Round tables with stakeholders, case studies of heritage-led sport tourism, and co-creation workshops.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

São Vicente Fort (Torres Vedras) - One of the largest and best-preserved forts in the Lines. It has interpretive trails and information panels made from recyclable materials. The structure promotes visits with a focus on energy sustainability and heritage conservation through energy efficiency projects in lighting and responsible waste management.

Zambujal Fort (Mafra) An example of sustainable restoration of military heritage. It is set in a preserved natural space with pedestrian access and ecological signage. The site avoids tourist congestion and offers immersive experience in direct contact with the original military defense landscape.

Interpretation Center of the Lines of Torres Vedras (Arruda dos Vinhos) - A museum and educational space that combines interactive technology with historical content, promoting the involvement of local communities and sustainable practices, such as the reuse of materials in temporary exhibitions and environmental education actions.

Interpretation Center of Forte da Casa (Vila Franca de Xira) - Located next to the historical monument of the same name, it enhances the memory of the Lines of Torres Vedras through educational exhibitions and interactive workshops. It implements good practices such as the efficient use of energy, the production of interpretive materials with recycled paper, and the

promotion of educational events on heritage and sustainability in partnership with local schools and associations.

Interpretation Center of the Battle of Vimeiro (Lourinhã) - Combines historical narrative with educational workshops, promoting knowledge of the Luso-British resistance to the French invasions. It uses renewable energy and educational programs focused on good environmental and community practices.

These sites avoid saturated tourist destinations and promote a balanced relationship between heritage preservation, local identity, and sustainable practices through storytelling, community inclusion, and the promotion of circular values.

CHALLENGES

Preserving sites while accommodating sports usage.

Balancing authenticity with modern eco-certification standards.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is essential to show how heritage can be activated sustainably. The link between circularity, local identity, and community involvement is key to developing resilient and inclusive tourist itineraries.

ACTIVITIES

The eco-itineraries include visitor activities fully aligned with circularity measures and heritage preservation.

Fit & Green itinerary:

Paths with History – Promotes physical activity (walking) while enhancing the historical heritage of the municipality.

Trail Encostas de Xira – A mountain and trail running event along the Historical Route.

Night Walks – 8 km circular walks under the full moon with interactive performances.

MTB Trails – Family-friendly Mountain biking tour exploring natural beauty and Napoleonic landmarks.

Botanical Trail – Walks led by biologists to observe and help conserve native flora.

Bistrot Spree itinerary:

Brunch at Alqueidão – Participants prepare healthy dishes using fresh, local ingredients.

Live Nature – Outdoor painting workshop using pigments from plants.

Picnic Club – Picnic with traditional and vegan menus made from organic ingredients.

Planting Peace on War Fields – Eco-educational workshop with biodegradable pots and seeds.

At the Table with Generals – Restaurants recreate historical recipes with sustainable methods.

CHALLENGES

Event organization costs and trail maintenance.

Higher costs for sustainable food events.

LESSONS LEARNED

The main lesson learned was that the success of eco-itineraries depends on the active involvement of the local community, combined with the appreciation of heritage and the practical application of circularity principles.

SERVICES

Each municipality along the Historical Route of the Lines of Torres maintains a local tourism services catalogue, including accommodation, restaurants, local producers, and cultural events. Clear signage and maps mark key sites, water refill stations, recycling bins, electric chargers, and bike rental points. Informative brochures highlight sustainability and circularity practices along the route. Best practices include traditional craft workshops using natural materials, interpretive trails guided by trained local experts in sustainable tourism, seasonal food fairs, and community concerts held at heritage sites. All activities promote resource efficiency, reinforce local identity, and encourage active visitor participation in environmentally responsible practices.

CHALLENGES

Limited digital resources and uniformity across municipalities.

LESSONS LEARNED - ADVICE

Valuing heritage through local identity and actively engaging the community are essential factors in creating sustainable, attractive eco-itineraries aligned with circularity principles and long-term territorial impact.

TOURISM FACILITIES

Each Municipality that integrates the itineraries is equipped with a Public Tourism Office, which holds a detailed list of tourism service providers, including those selected for the eco-itineraries.

Local accommodation includes eco-lodges and traditional homes using water- and energy-saving systems. Food providers offer organic, seasonal menus, and sustainable picnic takeaway options. Local markets and

producers are integrated into the itineraries, allowing visitors to meet artisans and farmers and purchase local goods.

The offer includes heritage restaurants serving period recipes with local ingredients, B&Bs that reflect traditional architecture while applying sustainable waste and energy practices. Workshops and events such as cooking demonstrations and craft fairs are organized with local stakeholders, enhancing circularity and local identity.

All services will be supported by brochures and maps identifying eco-points (e.g. water refill stations, recycling bins, electric chargers), ensuring visibility and access to sustainable tourism.

VISITORS & COMMUNICATION

The Historical Route of the Lines of Torres includes several circuits with clear visual information on cultural heritage and site significance. The eco-itinerary will reinforce responsible behavior by highlighting circularity measures such as waste sorting and water conservation.

Storytelling panels and QR codes offer historical and environmental interpretation. Inclusive materials are available in various formats. Visitors can engage in interactive experiences like guided tastings, craft workshops, and educational walks.

Local interaction is fostered through markets, cooking events, and cultural activities. The itinerary promotes community-based tourism through active visitor participation and shared heritage and sustainability values.

CHALLENGES

Ensuring multilingual and inclusive content across platforms.

Reaching international audiences with multilingual material.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned is that integrating cultural heritage with circular practices and community participation creates meaningful, resilient tourism experiences that benefit both local identity and environmental sustainability.

ACCESSIBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

The eco-itineraries are accessible by train, regional buses, and local roads, with signage supporting arrival by sustainable means. Cycling and walking routes are promoted through dedicated paths and maps. Visitors are encouraged to reduce their carbon footprint by carpooling, using public transport, or renting bikes.

Public information panels and brochures include tips on eco-friendly travel and voluntary carbon offsetting options. Workshops and interpretation materials raise awareness about the environmental impact of travel and promote sustainable choices.

The integration of green mobility infrastructure supports inclusive, low-impact access to the sites, reinforcing the circularity values of the itinerary.

VISIBILITY- PROMOTION STRATEGIES

The promotion strategy for the micro-itineraries includes a strong digital presence via social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, alongside email marketing through municipal and partner newsletters.

A dedicated website spot with interactive maps and booking options will promote the itineraries. Printed materials, including brochures and maps, will be distributed at tourism offices and hotels.

Press features in national and international travel magazines will boost visibility. Interpretation materials are available in both local languages and English, ensuring accessibility for all visitors.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The capacity building module included interactive workshops using a participatory approach, where local stakeholders co-designed solutions for eco-itinerary development. Activities featured hands-on sessions on sustainable tourism planning, circular gastronomy, and heritage interpretation. Case studies of successful circular economy initiatives from other European cultural routes were analyzed, helping participants understand how to apply theory to practice. Best practices in energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community-led tourism were explored. Storytelling techniques and co-creation dynamics fostered collaboration across municipalities. The learning process empowered participants to adapt and replicate circular models within their local context, strengthening ownership, cultural identity, and long-term sustainability.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?

CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN –

Example1:

A one-day eco-tourism package focusing on outdoor sports and wellness could begin with a morning trail run along the Serra do Olmeiro, showcasing the natural beauty of the area while learning about its historical significance. Afterward, visitors could participate in a yoga session in Sobral de Monte Agraço, aimed at relaxation and connecting with the natural environment. In the afternoon, guests would enjoy a locally sourced lunch, emphasizing organic and circular food practices, followed by a guided historical walk around the iconic forts, promoting sustainable tourism and heritage preservation.



Example2:

A two-day itinerary focusing on wellness and local traditions could start with a hike through the historical Forte do Alqueidão, followed by a guided historical storytelling hike at Serra do Olmeiro. The evening would feature a traditional dinner showcasing local, sustainable produce. On day two, the itinerary includes a visit to a local eco-lodge for a farm-to-table brunch, followed by a community-led workshop on circular food practices and sustainability in farming, promoting active participation and eco-conscious living.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

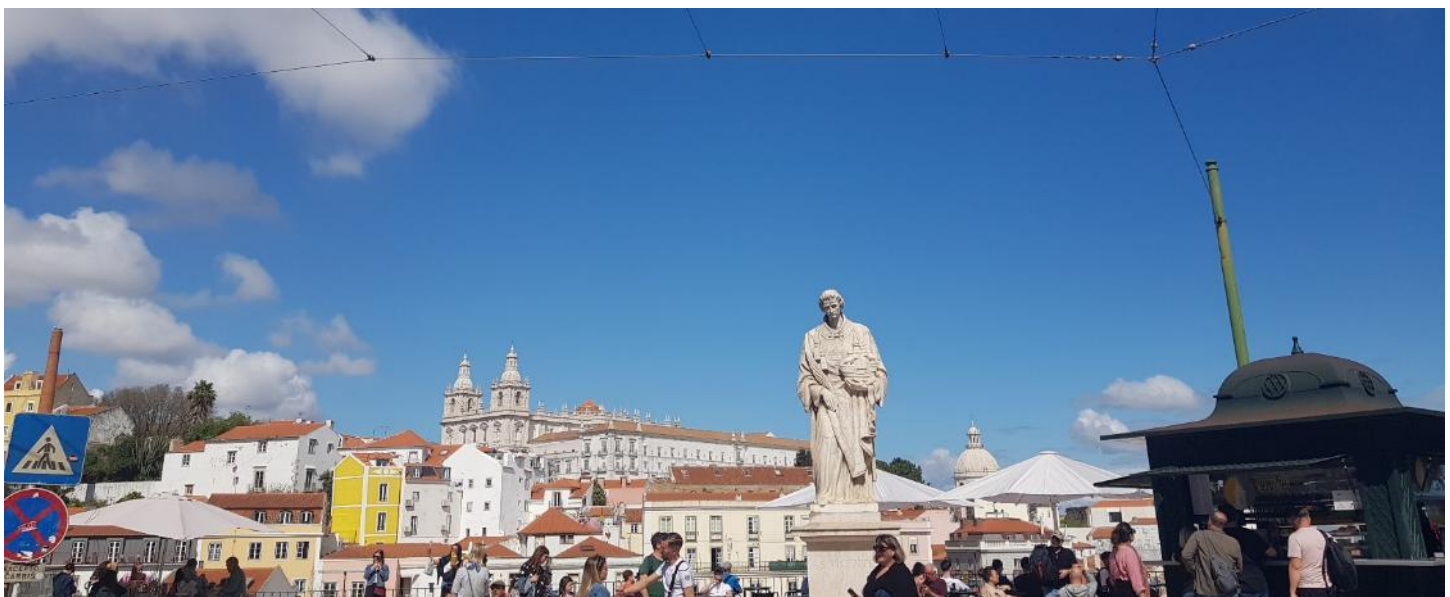
To optimize the use of the eco-itinerary, specific capacity-building activities were implemented, including participatory planning sessions, interactive learning modules, and storytelling workshops. Real-world case studies of circular economy in tourism helped participants visualize how to integrate sustainable practices into cultural routes. Activities focused on creating visitor-centered experiences, improving local engagement, and promoting eco-conscious services. These sessions encouraged cooperation among municipalities and inspired innovative approaches tailored to the region's identity and heritage.

CHALLENGES AND SOULTIONS

Coordinating multiple municipalities, ensuring consistent circular practices, engaging local communities, and securing ongoing funding for sustainable maintenance and promotion.

LESSONS LEARNED

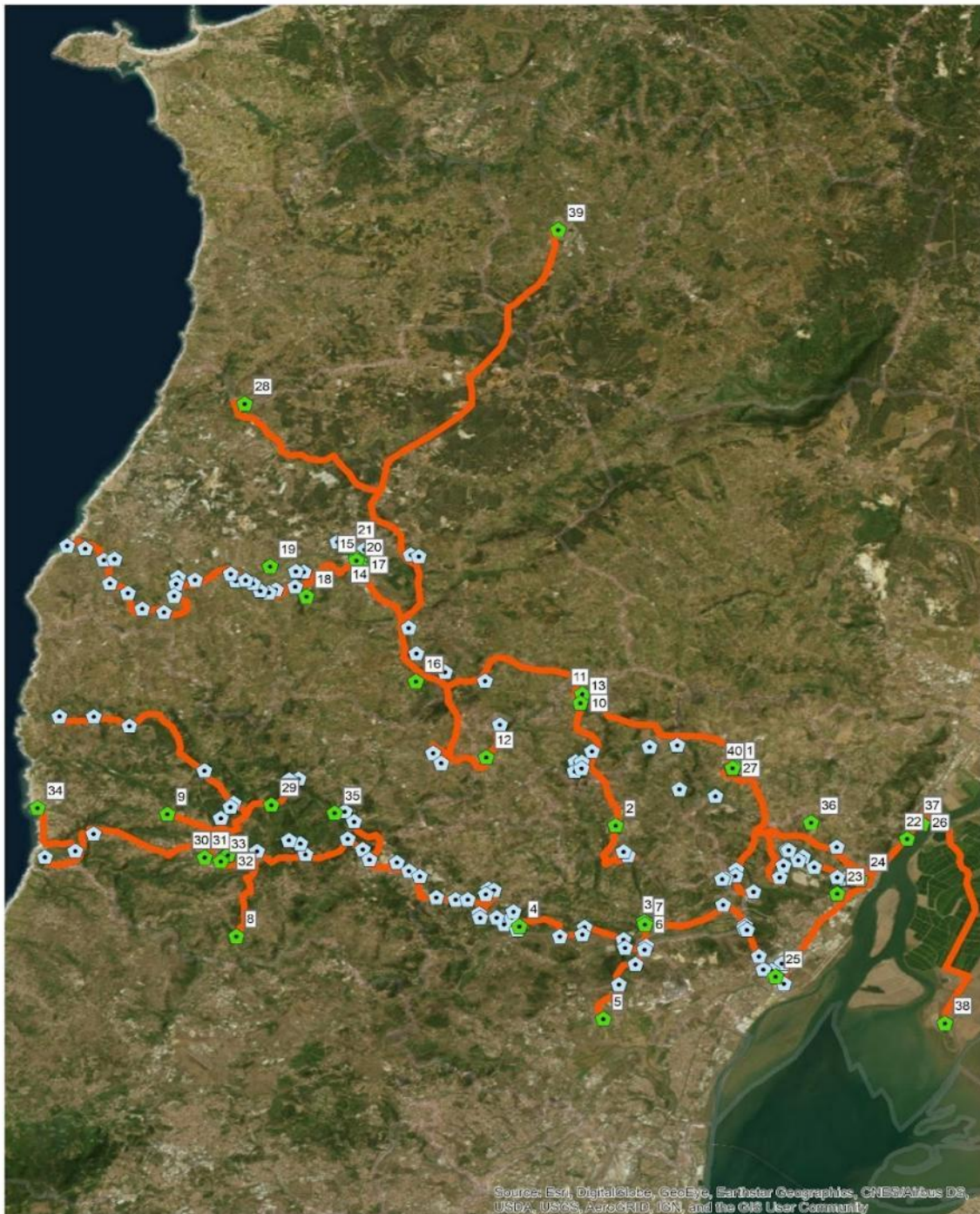
The key lesson learned is that cross-sector collaboration and early community involvement are vital to creating sustainable, culturally rich eco-itineraries that deliver lasting environmental, social, and economic benefits.



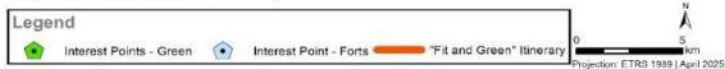


Cultural Route Destination Napoleon, European Federation of Napoleonic Cities (FECN), Municipality of Vila Franca de xira (CMVFX) Portugal

Micro itinerary 1 - Fit and Green: “Go fit where history goes greener”



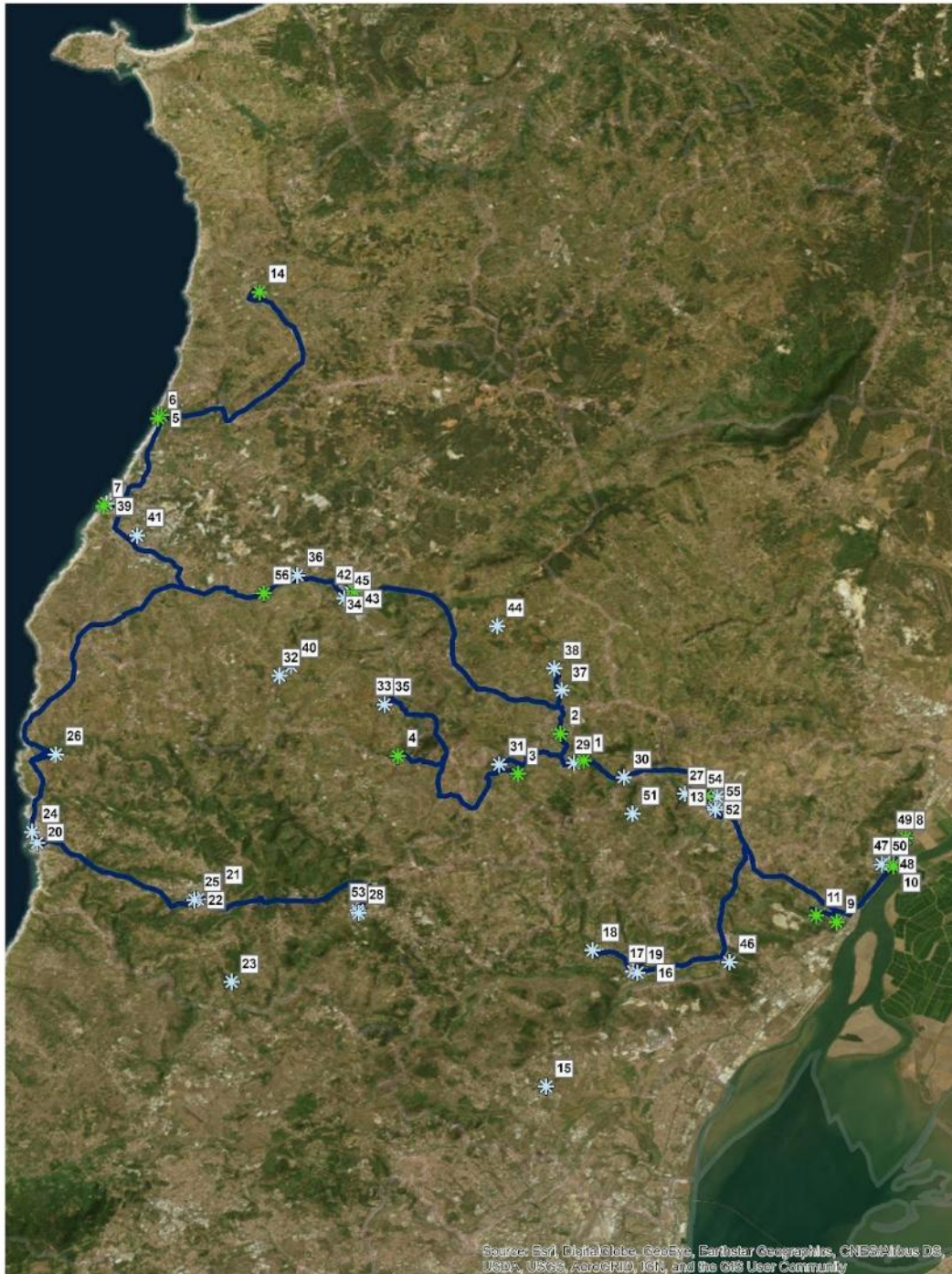
Map: "Fit and Green" Itinerary





Cultural Route Destination Napoleon, European Federation of Napoleonic Cities (FECN), Municipality of Vila Franca de xira (CMVFX) Portugal

Micro-itinerary 2 - Bistrot Spree: “The ultimate *palais* experience”



Map: "Bistro Spree" Itinerary





EUROPEAN ROUTE OF CERAMICS ECO-ITINERARIES SPAIN

CASTELLON DE LA PLANA

**CULTURAL ROUTE****TITLE****ECO ITINERARY TITLE****COUNTRY, AREA****EUROPEAN ROUTE OF CERAMICS****FROM CLAY TO ART: A CERAMIC ECO-ITINERARY IN CASTELLÓN****SPAIN, CASTELLÓN DE LA PLANA (VALENCIAN REGION)****CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?****STATE OF THE ART
CONTEXT**

The Eco-Itinerary of the Castellón has a map to guide visitors along the way. The itinerary starts at the Universitat Jaume I (UJI), passes through the historic center of Castelló, and ends at the Grao. It covers a total distance of 10 kilometers and has been designed to be completed flexibly: on foot, by bicycle (using the cycle lanes and the public bike rental system), or by public transport (taking advantage of the TRAM, a frequent and convenient tram service that connects the main points along the route). The itinerary can be completed in one go or divided into three sections for a more relaxed visit, depending on visitors' interests.

**DEMOGRAPHIC
SITUATION,
DESCRIBE
POPULATION**

Castellón has around 170,000 inhabitants and a density of 1,600 people/km². Its population is diverse, with young people, families, seniors, and a significant proportion of immigrants, mainly from Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. National tourism predominates and is generally seen by locals as a driver of sustainable development.

**TOURISM VISION OF
THE AREA?**

Until now, the ceramic heritage of Castellón has not been exploited as a significant tourist attraction, being more of local interest. Although there are numerous cultural assets, tourism in the city has historically been focused on the coast and sun-and-beach tourism. Despite some recent efforts to promote the ceramic heritage, its potential as a tourism driver has yet to be fully realized. This project aims to change this trend, promoting the city as a cultural destination beyond the high season and mass tourism.

TOURISM VOLUME

In 2024, Spain welcomed over 85 million international tourists, consolidating its position as one of the world's top travel destinations. Within the Valencian Community, approximately 10 million visitors were recorded, highlighting the region's growing appeal. Specifically, Castellón de la Plana received around 300,000 visitors throughout the year. The average length of stay in the region was approximately 4.5 nights, reflecting a preference

for more relaxed and immersive travel experiences. Looking ahead, the city expects a steady increase in tourist arrivals, driven by the growing demand for sustainable, authentic, and culturally distinctive tourism initiatives.

VISITORS:

Currently, most visitors are national tourists, primarily attracted by the beach and music festivals. Individual travelers, families, and small groups dominate, with about 60% aged between 35 and 65. Youth tourism is growing. We aim to attract more eco-conscious visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences, feeling welcomed, inspired, and connected.

SWOT

Castellón de la Plana stands out for its ceramic heritage, Mediterranean climate, and sustainable transport network. However, it faces challenges such as seasonal tourism and limited international cultural visibility. The growing demand for sustainable tourism presents a major opportunity, although competition from more established destinations remains strong. The eco-itinerary "From clay to art: a ceramic eco-itinerary in Castellón" leverages local strengths, diversifies the tourism offer, promotes year-round visits, and strengthens cultural identity, offering visitors an authentic, responsible, and distinctive experience.

CHALLENGES

Tourism seasonality, competition from established destinations, rural depopulation, aging population, low international visibility, and risk of summer overtourism.

**LESSONS LEARNED –
ADVICE**

Investing in sustainable, authentic tourism strengthens cultural identity, extends the tourist season, diversifies the economy, and attracts eco-conscious visitors. Promoting local heritage creates long-term value for both community and travelers.

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

To complement this eco-itinerary, innovative and participatory activities have been designed to experience Castellón's culture in a creative way. Urban labs will be organized, where citizens, tourists, and tourism and cultural professionals will co-create eco-cultural routes inspired by ceramics, sustainability, and Mediterranean life. Inspiration capsules will analyze real-world examples of successful circular tourism initiatives from Spain and Europe, adapting them to the local identity. Finally, active walks and knowledge-sharing workshops will take place at sustainable tourism sites, promoting mutual learning and a strong sense of community.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS

MAIN ACTORS - GOVERNANCE

The main stakeholders involved are the Castellón City Council, cultural organizations, ceramic artisans' associations, tourism operators, local businesses, and universities like Universitat Jaume I. Their roles include coordinating efforts, promoting the eco-itinerary, enriching the visitor experience, and ensuring sustainability standards. Their benefits are greater cultural visibility, economic growth, enhanced community engagement, and increased tourism diversification. Communication and management models are based on public-private collaboration, participatory planning, and multi-level governance. Circularity criteria are applied through the promotion of local crafts, sustainable mobility, resource efficiency, and heritage preservation, fostering a resilient and authentic destination.

VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The shared vision is to position Castellón as a benchmark in cultural and circular tourism. The objectives are to enhance the city's artistic and cultural heritage, increase visitor satisfaction by offering different alternatives, reduce resource consumption, boost local artisanal employment, and reduce tourism seasonality. The eco-itinerary aims to combine sustainability, cultural identity, and community well-being into an authentic experience.

CHALLENGES

Managing seasonality, improving cultural visibility, reducing low-quality tourism, addressing citizen fatigue, boosting sustainable businesses, and strengthening collaboration among strategic local actors.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

The key lesson learned is that the Ceramic Route was initially promoted only by public authorities, without involving citizens, operators, or visitors, resulting in limited visibility. To succeed, it is essential to actively engage all stakeholders in its development and promotion.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Specific activities include participatory workshops where strategic players (public authorities, tourism sector, citizens, and cultural actors) identify roles and synergies. Interactive learning sessions, governance simulation exercises, and analysis of best practice case studies from successful circular destinations will also be organized. These activities will help participants visualize how to apply real participation and effective coordination, inspiring the development of a sustainable and shared tourism model for Castellón, based on the active involvement of all key stakeholders.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

1. Universitat Jaume I (UJI) – Ebrickhouse and Instituto de Tecnología Cerámica (ITC)

The UJI campus, with landmarks like Ebrickhouse and the ITC, exemplifies how research and education drive circularity. Ebrickhouse uses sustainable materials and energy-efficient technologies, while the ITC develops eco-innovations in ceramics, fostering responsible production and environmental stewardship, and reinforcing Castellón's global leadership in ceramic sustainability.

2. Museo de Bellas Artes de Castellón

The Fine Arts Museum integrates ceramic heritage within a broader historical narrative. It applies circular measures by optimizing energy use, implementing water-saving technologies, and promoting local artisan exhibitions. It showcases how cultural identity and sustainability goals align through education and community engagement.

3. Antigua Fábrica Diago (Old Ceramic Factory)

This former industrial site has been repurposed as a public cultural space. Its adaptive reuse conserves built heritage, reduces construction waste, and revitalizes local identity. The Diago Factory highlights industrial traditions while applying circular economy principles through restoration, reinterpretation, and public accessibility.

4. Matèria Col·lectiva (Contemporary Ceramic Workshop)

This modern workshop represents living intangible heritage. It fosters craft traditions while embracing sustainable production methods, like low-energy kilns and recycling clay waste. Workshops engage locals and visitors, strengthening the link between tradition, innovation, and environmental responsibility.

5. Moll de Costa (Ceramic Murals)

Located in the maritime district, this area creatively integrates contemporary ceramic murals that celebrate the city's seafaring history. Sustainable lighting systems and waste reduction measures in the port area demonstrate how heritage sites can embrace circularity while enhancing public spaces.

The itinerary intentionally avoids oversaturated points like major beaches, focusing instead on underappreciated cultural gems. Through storytelling, participatory interpretation, and heritage

conservation, it promotes authentic local traditions while respecting environmental limits.

CHALLENGES

Key challenges include integrating sustainability, engaging stakeholders, avoiding saturation, managing resources, balancing innovation with authenticity, and ensuring long-term cultural and economic impact.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned is that successful eco-itineraries are built by combining sustainability, authentic local heritage, active community participation, and innovative storytelling to create lasting cultural and environmental value.

ACTIVITIES

The eco-itinerary offers visitors activities that combine heritage, sustainability, and active participation. Castellón can be explored by bicycle or via the ecological TRAM system, minimizing emissions. Workshops in various artisanal ceramic studios allow visitors to learn sustainable ceramic techniques, reusing clay and employing low-energy kilns. Additionally, visitors can enjoy farm-to-table gastronomy in several restaurants included in the route, supporting local and responsible consumption. At Universitat Jaume I, guided tours of spaces like the Institute of Ceramic Technology (ITC) showcase research into new sustainable ceramic materials, bringing innovation closer to the public. Throughout the itinerary, best practices in water, energy, and waste management are applied, strengthening the commitment to heritage preservation, local identity, and the circular economy.

CHALLENGES

Implementation costs, stakeholder coordination, sustainability training, real community involvement, and ensuring long-term economic viability are the most demanding challenges

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned is that involving all stakeholders early, integrating sustainability, and enhancing local identity are essential to successfully designing an authentic and resilient eco-itinerary.

SERVICES

This eco-itinerary features a catalogue of cultural spaces, artisanal workshops, and sustainable points of interest, available through digital maps and printed brochures (also accessible via QR codes along the route). The city offers an extensive network of bike lanes, various public bike rental stations, pedestrian-friendly

and accessible areas with shaded spots, rest areas, public restrooms at different locations, and recycling bins. Although these facilities near the main eco-itinerary points are not yet fully signposted, their location will facilitate a more sustainable journey and enhance the visitor experience. Best practices supporting sustainability and circularity include traditional ceramic workshops using recycled materials (present in all workshops integrated into the route), local gastronomy restaurants promoting regional products, cycling routes through the eco-itinerary, and guided walking tours that foster eco-mobility and cultural interpretation. All services aim to integrate sustainability, heritage, and innovation into Castellón's tourism experience.

CHALLENGES

High implementation costs, stakeholder coordination, real community involvement, sustainability training, effective storytelling, balancing authenticity with innovation, and ensuring long-term economic and environmental impact.

**LESSONS LEARNED -
ADVICE**

The most important lesson learned is that early stakeholder engagement, clear integration of sustainability principles, and strong local identity are essential to successfully designing, implementing, and maintaining an authentic and resilient eco-itinerary.

TOURISM FACILITIES

Currently, Castellón does not have an official list or a detailed description of tourism service providers fully aligned with the principles of social sustainability and circular economy. Until now, sustainable tourism related to the city's ceramic heritage had not been a priority. However, through this eco-itinerary, a network of providers committed to these values is beginning to take shape.

Visitors can meet local ceramic artisans and purchase handcrafted products directly from workshops and shops integrated into the route. The local gastronomic offer is centered around markets such as the Mercat Central, Mercat de Sant Antoni, Mercat de la Taronja, and Mercat del Dilluns, all located in the city center.

In addition, restaurants participating in the "Castellón Ruta de Sabor" initiative, and integrated into the eco-itinerary, offer authentic cuisine made with local products. Best practice examples include: restaurants like ¡A Taula! Gastrobar, Anheló Restaurant, and Alessandro Maino; ceramic workshops such as

Cave Artis, Matèria Col·lectiva, and Ximo Riba's Espai Ceràmic; historic spaces like the Mercado Central; and tourism experience companies such as Bambando.

VISITORS & COMMUNICATION

The Ceramic Route of Castellón provides clear and visual information through digital maps, on-site signage, and online platforms (<https://rutasceramicas.castello.es/es/>). Although tourist responsibility is promoted through the encouragement of sustainable transportation (on foot, by bike, or via the ecological TRAM system) and respect for heritage, there are currently no specific signs or indications about responsible visitor behavior. However, to date, issues of tourist overcrowding in the city and along the route have not arisen.

In terms of inclusivity, the route is accessible to all types of visitors, including those with reduced mobility and visual impairments (with the option to take the route accompanied by a guide and an audio device to enhance the experience). Participation is encouraged through ceramic workshops and museum visits. Interpretation is enriched with exhibitions and murals. Interaction with the local community is essential: artisans, restaurateurs, and artists actively participate, along with residents of the public spaces decorated with ceramics that are integrated into the route.

CHALLENGES

Lack of sustainable tourism structure, limited provider coordination, low awareness of circular practices, absence of responsible tourism signage, emerging local network.

LESSONS LEARNED

The creation of the eco-itinerary has highlighted the need to promote a sustainable tourism network in Castellón, strengthening local identity and fostering responsible tourism.

ACCESSIBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

The eco-itinerary takes place within a compact area of less than 10 km, fully accessible on foot, with safe pathways, proper lighting, and available maps. There is an extensive network of bike lanes covering the entire route, complemented by a public bike rental service (Bicicas). Additionally, the itinerary follows the path of the TRAM, an electric tramway that connects the west, center, and east of the city with high frequency and reliability. Although there is currently no specific information on voluntary carbon footprint offsetting, the itinerary actively promotes the use of sustainable transportation.

VISIBILITY- PROMOTION STRATEGIES

Currently, all interpretation materials are available only in Spanish and Valencian (the two official local languages). A dedicated website highlights the main points of the eco-itinerary,

although it does not yet cover the full eco-itinerary, which is broader, more sustainable, and more attractive. Promotion strategies mainly focus on local visibility through the municipal tourism website, social media, and cultural tourism networks. Expanding materials to English and other languages is identified as a key future action to enhance international accessibility and promotion.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Specific activities to support this chapter included participatory workshops where stakeholders collaboratively defined key features for the eco-itinerary. Interactive learning sessions were organized, allowing participants to apply concepts directly to real site planning. Case studies and best practices of successful circular economy initiatives were analyzed, helping visualize practical applications. Field visits and hands-on exercises reinforced understanding of sustainability principles. These activities strengthened local capacity to design eco-itineraries aligned with environmental, cultural, and social sustainability goals.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE OF THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?

CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

Example no 1. One-day ceramic experience: urban heritage and hands-on creativity.

This one-day tourism product invites visitors to discover Castellón's ceramic heritage in a sustainable and immersive way. The day begins with a guided walking tour through the historic center, visiting spaces such as Parque Ribalta, Plaza de la Independencia, and the Fine Arts Museum. Each stop offers interpretation through storytelling techniques that connect history, tradition, and sustainability. After a farm-to-table lunch at a restaurant affiliated with "Castellón Ruta de Sabor," participants attend a practical workshop at Matèria Col·lectiva or Espai Ceràmic Ximo Riba, where they learn traditional and contemporary ceramic techniques incorporating circular practices (such as clay recycling and low-energy kilns).

All transportation is done on foot, by public bike (Bicicas), or using the electric TRAM, avoiding private vehicle use.

A guide on good sustainability practices and voluntary carbon footprint offsetting is provided.

This package combines heritage, craftsmanship, local gastronomy, and responsible tourism into a compact, accessible, and authentic experience.

Example no 2. Mediterranean ceramic journey: city and sea in two days

This two-day itinerary offers a deeper immersion into Castellón's ceramic identity and its sustainable Mediterranean lifestyle.

Day 1: The experience begins with a guided walking tour of the Historic Center, visiting key ceramic landmarks such as Parque Ribalta, Plaza de la Independencia, Casa de las Cigüeñas, the Allegory of Ceramics mural, and the Callejón del Ecce-Homo. The day concludes with a visit to the Fine Arts Museum of Castellón, where the evolution of ceramic art is explored through exhibitions and storytelling focused on local heritage and sustainability.

Day 2: The itinerary moves to the maritime district of El Grao. Visitors enjoy a guided bike or TRAM tour along the Moll de Costa, Paseo Buenavista, the Fishermen's Market, and the Church of San Pedro. Ceramic murals and maritime traditions are interpreted through participatory techniques. Lunch is served at a sustainable "Ruta de Sabor" restaurant featuring local seafood. Throughout the itinerary, mobility is completely sustainable, using bicycles, TRAM, and pedestrian routes. Workshops at Cave Artis and responsible shopping at local markets further connect visitors to craftsmanship and community.

The package blends urban culture, coastal tradition, and green mobility, positioning Castellón as a leading destination for slow and authentic tourism.

Example no 3. Mediterranean ceramic innovation and tradition: three-day journey

This three-day itinerary offers a complete immersion into Castellón's ceramic tradition, innovation, and sustainable lifestyle.

Day 1: Innovation and sustainability at the UJI

The experience starts with a guided visit to the Universitat Jaume I (UJI), focusing on sustainable ceramic innovation. Visitors tour the Ebrickhouse, the Institute of Ceramic Technology (ITC), and meet research groups working on eco-friendly ceramic materials and circular economy initiatives. A discussion with researchers highlights how tradition and innovation merge in Castellón's ceramic sector.

Day 2: Historic center and ceramic heritage

The second day explores Castellón's historic center, visiting Parque Ribalta, Plaza de la Independencia, Casa de las Cigüeñas, the Allegory of Ceramics mural, Callejón del Ecce-Homo, and the Fine Arts Museum. Guided storytelling focuses on local ceramic traditions, heritage conservation, and sustainability. Lunch features local gastronomy in a "Ruta de Sabor" restaurant.

Day 3: Maritime district and coastal traditions

The third day takes visitors to the maritime district of El Grao. A guided bike or TRAM tour connects the Moll de Costa, Paseo Buenavista, the Fishermen's Market, and the Church of San Pedro, showcasing the relationship between ceramics and maritime life. Workshops at Cave Artis and sustainable shopping experiences close the journey.

All transport is sustainable. The itinerary blends research, tradition, coast, and community, promoting Castellón as a benchmark for slow, authentic, and circular tourism.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Organization of participatory workshops with local authorities, artisans, tourism operators, and universities to co-create and improve the eco-itinerary. Interactive learning sessions allowed the direct application of circular economy principles to tourism planning. Real-world case studies of best practices in sustainable destinations were analyzed to inspire project development. In addition, visits to ceramic workshops and sustainable gastronomy routes were carried out, offering practical experiences. These activities have strengthened local capacities to design authentic, sustainable, and circular tourism models.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Main challenges: designing attractive package tours, involving local providers, ensuring sustainable mobility, promoting authentic experiences, and improving multilingual promotion.

LESSONS LEARNED

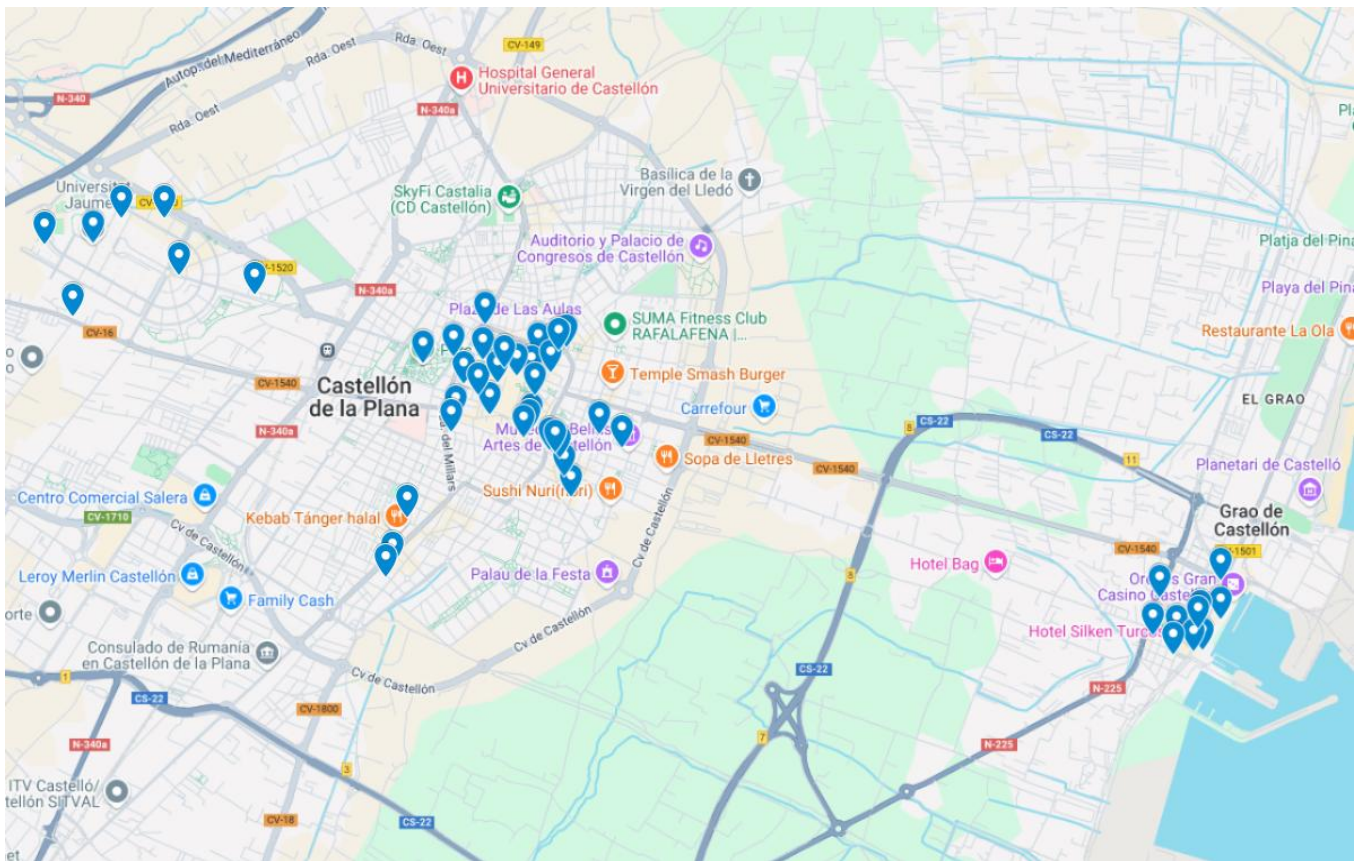
The most important lesson learned is that designing integrated, participatory, and sustainable tourism products strengthens local identity, enhances visitor satisfaction, and promotes Castellón as a model for circular cultural tourism.





European Route of Ceramics Castellon de la Plana, Spain eco itinerary

From clay to art: a ceramic eco-itinerary in Castellón de la Plana





EUROPEAN ROUTE OF CERAMICS ECO-ITINERARIES, ITALY FAENZA

**CULTURAL ROUTE TITLE****EUROPEAN ROUTE OF CERAMICS****ECO ITINERARY TITLE****GREEN AND CULTURAL ROUTES IN FAENZA LANDSCAPE****COUNTRY, AREA**

Italy, Romagna Faentina Union (Municipalities of Faenza, Brisighella, Riolo Terme, Casola Valsenio, Castel Bolognese, Solarolo)

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?**STATE OF THE ART**

The eco-itinerary develops within the area of the Union of Romagna Faentina, in Emilia-Romagna (Italy), connecting Faenza, Brisighella, Riolo Terme, Casola Valsenio, Castel Bolognese, and Solarolo. It has a hub-and-spoke structure, with a main itinerary and three variants. The main itinerary is approximately 42 km long; the variants are about 12 km (Castel Bolognese - Solarolo), 19 km (Riolo Terme), and 35 km (Casola Valsenio). The duration is modular based on the selected variants. The itinerary is recommended for weekends or short break.

CONTEXT**DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION**

URF has about 90,000 inhabitants, with a population density of 148.4 hab/km². Its old-age index is 189 (regional average is 182.4). Families are about 42.000.

The demographic data suggests a trend toward depopulation that particularly affects the hilly areas, largest part of the territory.

TOURISM VISION OF THE AREA

URF's goal is developing slow tourism, protecting culture heritage and landscape.

There are about n. 140 accommodation facilities, more than 350 bars and restaurants, 27 museums.

TOURISM VOLUME

Italy 2023: 133,6 million arrivals and 447,2 million presences; average presence index = 3,34.

Region Emilia-Romagna: 14,5 million arrivals and 62 million presences; average presence index = 4,27.

URF: 77.330 arrivals and 241.069 presences; average presence index = 3,11.

In 2023 there was a huge flood in URF territory, so the tourist flow recovery -after COVID period- has partially stopped.

VISITORS

Most of the visitors are Italian. Foreign tourists are about the 25%, and match about the 30% of night spend. Many experiences offered -bike, hike, speleology, wine tasting - mainly attract couple and group of friends, while the thermal and gastronomic proposals attract especially seniors. The goal is to reach visitors interested in slow and sustainable travel, especially young people.

SWOT**Strengths:**

High cultural (ceramics, craftsmanship) and natural (UNESCO Vena del Gesso Romagnola) value
Authentic rural landscapes and vibrant local traditions

Presence of cycling routes and soft mobility infrastructure

Weaknesses:

Sometimes fragmented internal connections

Low international recognition of the smaller area

Extreme weather events (e.g., 2023 flood)

The eco-itinerary integrates as an innovative model of regenerative tourism, expanding the areas sustainable tourism offer and enhancing the connection between cultural heritage, nature, and local communities sustainably.

CHALLENGES

Depopulation of rural areas, low international visibility of small towns, extreme weather events, weak culture-nature-tourism link, competition with mature Romagna destinations.

LESSONS LEARNED –advice

The participatory development of the eco-itinerary showed that actively involving local operators enhances sustainability practices and strengthens the territorial network, creating new opportunities for shared promotion.

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

Capacity-building activities should be based on a participatory approach that encourages the direct involvement of local cultural, tourism, and agricultural stakeholders.

It is essential to offer interactive training sessions on topics such as sustainable tourism, circular economy applied to local supply chains, and soft mobility. The use of real-life examples and case studies of existing good practices helps participants visualize practical applications and draw inspiration for improving their own tourism offerings.

Workshops focused on local identity storytelling and experiential marketing can complete the training process, promoting an integrated approach to territorial promotion.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS

**MAIN ACTORS -
GOVERNANCE**

The main stakeholders are the Union of Romagna Faentina (governance), local tourism and cultural operators, and agricultural and artisanal businesses. Their role is to enhance culture, sustainability, and community. They benefit from increased visibility and territorial development. The applied model is based on participatory collaboration, sharing of good practices, and circular economy principles.

The main challenges identified are resistance to change, the difficulty to create a unified strategy, and limited infrastructure to support sustainable choices.

**VISION AND STRATEGIC
GOALS**

The eco-itinerary aims to:

increase visitor satisfaction and their average length of stay

enhance the international visibility of Romagna Faentina as a cultural and sustainable destination

promote soft mobility and the adoption of circular economy practices among local operators

CHALLENGES

Key challenges include building an integrated regenerative tourism offer, strengthening collaboration among operators, improving sustainable mobility, and differentiating and enhancing the visibility of Romagna Faentina at regional, national, and international levels.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

Active participation of local operators and communities is essential to create an authentic, sustainable eco-itinerary capable of generating shared value.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Capacity-building activities to support this eco-itinerary should be based on a participatory approach and interactive learning methods.

It is essential to directly engage local operators through practical workshops, real case study analyses related to the circular economy, and discussions on already implemented good practices. From one side, the goal is to help participants visualize the concrete application of theoretical concepts and draw inspiration to integrate sustainability and regeneration principles into their tourism offerings. From the other, the goal is to show operators how to properly promote the eco-itinerary and attract eco-conscious tourists.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

The eco-itinerary integrates several cultural and natural sites that represent local excellence in terms of enhancement, sustainability, and connection to territorial identity:

International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza (MIC)

A symbolic inclusion: the leading European museum institution dedicated to ceramics. It promotes artisanal heritage and adopts sustainable museum management practices. It supports the identity of the European Route of Ceramics.

Historic Center of Brisighella

An architectural and landscape heritage site, preserved through sustainable restoration interventions. It promotes a slow tourism model, as an alternative to the overcrowded flows of major cities.

Herb Garden of Casola Valsenio

A center for the conservation of biodiversity and traditions linked to herbalism. It promotes agricultural practices that respect biodiversity and water resources.

Vena del Gesso Romagnola (UNESCO Global Geopark)

A protected natural area that combines geological enhancement with environmental protection strategies, education, and low-impact tourism.

All of these sites promote a model of slow, experiential, and environmentally respectful tourism. Interpretation and storytelling activities are entrusted to local guides, workshops, themed events, and narrative paths that combine tradition,

innovation, and environmental awareness. The itinerary avoids crowded tourist hotspots, distributing the flow of visitors to villages and rural areas, encouraging the discovery of lesser-known places that hold high identity value.

CHALLENGES

Engage minor cultural heritage, promote sustainable management models, integrate local identity into a shared narrative, and combine cultural offerings with natural ones.

LESSONS LEARNED

Integrating cultural heritage, local communities, and sustainable practices is essential to enhance territorial identity and build an authentic regenerative eco-itinerary.

ACTIVITIES

The itinerary promotes forms of sustainable mobility and encourages direct contact with communities engaged in the protection of the environment and local cultural heritage. Specific points have been identified and marked where experiences aligned with environmental sustainability and circularity principles can be carried out. Among the proposed activities: cycling tourism and hiking on gentle paths, visits to ceramic artisan workshops, tastings at local farms focused on water and energy conservation, environmental education workshops and biodiversity enhancement at the Giardino delle Erbe of Casola Valsenio, and experiences of discovery and protection of the natural landscapes of the Vena del Gesso Romagnola.

CHALLENGES

Managing the costs of implementing sustainable practices, encouraging operators to invest in new circular economy practices and energy impact reduction, maintaining and improving collaboration between the public and private sectors.

LESSONS LEARNED

A collaborative approach between institutions and local operators is essential to create an accessible, effective, and sustainable offering capable of generating shared value.

SERVICES

Along the eco-itinerary, a catalog of operators and points of interest offering sustainable and authentic experiences has been created. A digital map highlights cycling routes, train stations, bike rentals, and public transport connections. Among the best examples: bike rentals and guided nature tours, local wine tastings and winery visits, workshops on medicinal herbs, rural hospitality in sustainable agritourisms, and ceramic artisan workshops in Faenza, with energy-saving practices and protection of tradition.

CHALLENGES

Coordinating existing services, improving information on sustainability points along the itinerary, and promoting integration among the various operators involved.

LESSONS LEARNED - advice

Mapping and integrating the offer of eco-friendly services enhances the sustainable accessibility of the itinerary and strengthens the regenerative identity of the area.

TOURISM FACILITIES

Along the eco-itinerary, a catalog of operators offering tourism services aligned with environmental and social sustainability is available. Among the best practices: agritourisms offering rural hospitality in traditional buildings and farm-to-table cuisine, wineries providing sustainable tastings and direct sales of local products, ceramic workshops in Faenza that preserve artisanal heritage with responsible methods. Along the route, it is possible to organize take-away picnics at farms and purchase locally sourced products, encouraging local consumption and reducing environmental impact.

VISITORS & COMMUNICATION

The eco-itinerary integrates clear and visual communication tools through an accessible digital map, highlighting points of interest and promoting responsible visitor behavior. Participatory activities such as workshops, tastings, and guided tours are encouraged to foster interaction between visitors and local communities. The experience is designed to be inclusive, adaptable, and oriented towards authentic encounters with the area.

The eco-itinerary will be promoted on the new URF tourism portal and on the website of the European Route of Ceramics. A social media campaign will be developed as well.

CHALLENGES

Ensuring accessible communication for all target groups, actively engaging visitors.

LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging visitors through participatory experiences promotes responsible behavior, enhances local heritage, and creates a lasting bond with the territory.

ACCESSIBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

The eco-itinerary is designed to be fully accessible by bicycle, on real cycle paths and on hybrid paths. In addition, there is an extensive network of footpaths in the URF territory that intertwine with the eco-itinerary.

The eco-itinerary is accessible via public transportation: national and regional trains with stops in Faenza, Brisighella, Castel Bolognese, and Solarolo, as well as inter-municipal bus connections. Informational material encourages the use of sustainable mobility and suggests responsible behaviors to reduce environmental impact.

VISIBILITY- PROMOTION STRATEGIES

The promotion of the eco-itinerary is based on an integrated strategy that combines digital, traditional channels, and partnerships. Actions will include social media campaigns (Instagram, Facebook) with targeted campaigns and experiential storytelling, a dedicated landing page on the Romagna Faentina tourism portal, content marketing activities (blog, newsletter), and collaborations with influencers specialized in sustainable tourism. The informational material will be available in both Italian and English and will include thematic maps, brochures, and media kits for operators. Participation in trade fairs and sector events is planned, along with collaboration with tourism operators and cultural associations to increase visibility and integrate the eco-itinerary into the local offering.

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

Capacity-building activities should be based on a participatory approach, through practical workshops, simulations, and case study analyses of circular economy applied to tourism. It is important to integrate moments of training on storytelling, sustainable marketing, responsible resource management, and network creation among local operators. The goal is to allow participants to visualize concrete examples, draw inspiration, and replicate effective solutions in their own contexts.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE OF THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?**CULTURAL TOURISM
PRODUCT DESIGN****Regenerative Weekend on the European Ceramic Route**

A two-day package starting in Faenza with a guided tour of the International Museum of Ceramics and practical ceramic workshops. A cycling route to Brisighella along the main itinerary, with a gastronomic stop at a sustainable winery. Overnight stay at an eco-friendly agritourism. On the second day, a slow exploration of the village of Brisighella and the natural paths of the Vena del Gesso, with storytelling about rural traditions and tasting of local products.

Short Break Between Nature, Communities, and Traditions**Four-Day Package Combining the Main Itinerary and Two Deviations**

Day 1: Arrival in Faenza, guided tour of the historic center, and ceramic workshop.

Day 2: Cycling route towards Tebano with a detour to Castel Bolognese and Solarolo, including visits to the Mulino Scodellino and tasting of forgotten fruits.

Day 3: Itinerary towards Villa Vezzano with a detour to Riolo Terme, including a stop at the thermal baths and visit to the Rocca.

Day 4: Exploration of the Vena del Gesso and local farms, with a sustainable picnic.

The experience integrates cycling tourism, wellness, food and wine, and encounters with local communities.

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

Capacity-building activities should include practical workshops on co-designing sustainable tourism packages, analysis of case studies on European regenerative tourism, and simulations of creating integrated experiences between culture, nature, and local communities. The goal is to provide concrete tools to operators for designing modular and circular offerings, capable of enhancing local identity and meeting the needs of conscious travelers. The approach should be interactive, based on active participation and the promotion of existing best practices.

**CHALLENGES AND
SOULTIONS**

Designing modular tourism products that integrate cultural and environmental experiences while respecting sustainability principles, enhancing the specific identity of Romagna Faentina, and promoting collaboration among operators from different sectors.

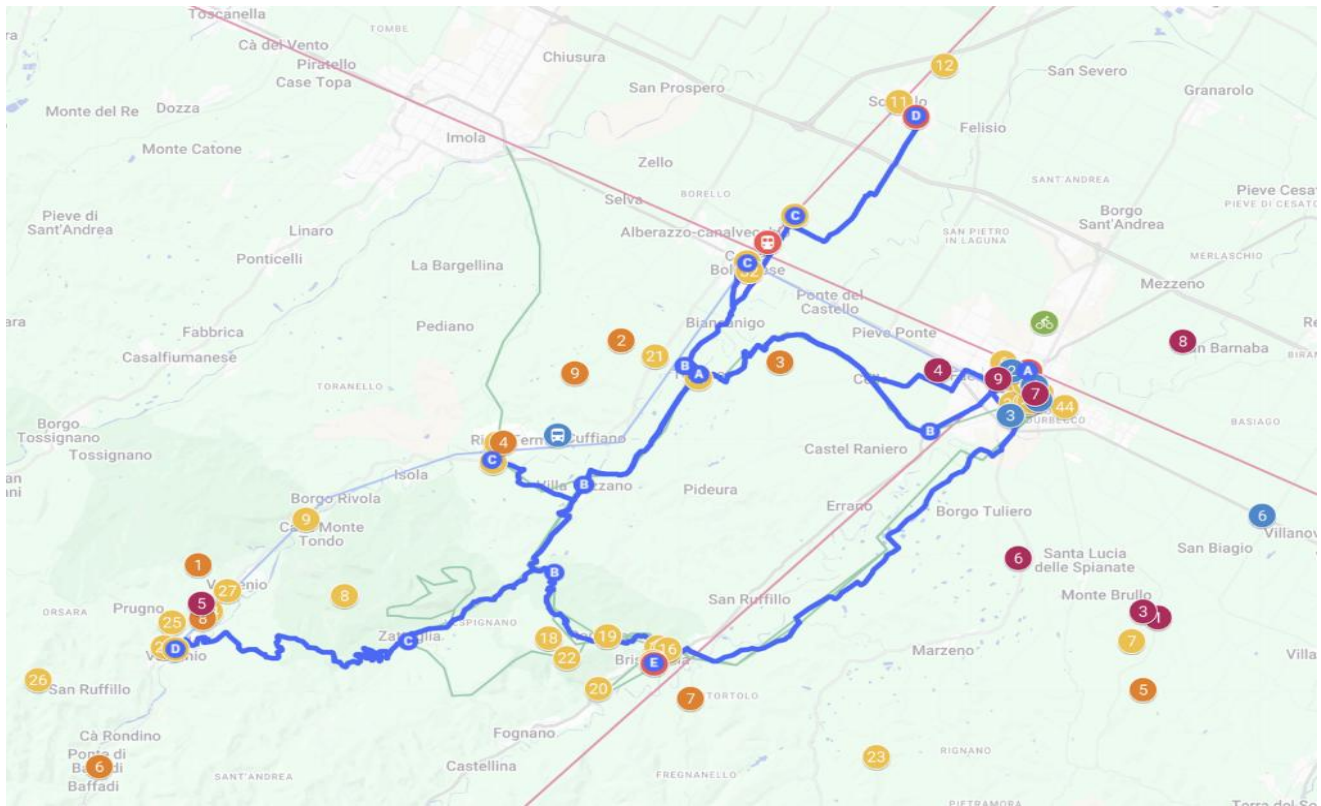
LESSONS LEARNED

Involving operators and communities in the co-design of tourism packages fosters authentic, sustainable offerings that align with the tourism identity of Romagna Faentina.



European Route of Ceramics, Unione dei Comuni della Romagna Faentina, Italy

Eco-itinerary: Green and Cultural Routes in Faenza Landscape





MED-Routes

Interreg
Euro-MED



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OLIVE TREE CULTURAL ROUTES ECO-ITINERARIES CROATIA DUBROVNIK COUNTY

CULTURAL ROUTE TITLE ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE**ECO ITINERARY TITLE****COUNTRY, AREA****FROM WARRIORS TO GUARDIANS: THE ADRIATIC'S LEGACY OF RESILIENCE**

Croatia - Islands of Korčula and Lastovo and the Pelješac peninsula, Dubrovnik-Neretva County

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?**STATE OF THE ART**

The project area covers the islands of Korčula and Lastovo and the Pelješac peninsula, covering a total of 9 municipalities (Ston, Janjina, Trpanj, Orebić, Lumbarda, Smokvica, Blato, Vela Luka and Lastovo) and the town of Korčula. In order to offer the visitors the best possible experience, within MED Routes project we created 3 one-day (designed for visitors coming to Pelješac, Lastovo, or Korčula for a weekend trip), three-day (for those who wish to experience all three destinations in a single trip) and five-day (for those seeking a deeper insight into ecological and sustainable practices, along with a rich and authentic experience of the local traditional way of life) itineraries. Maps of all itineraries can be found at the following links:

CONTEXT

[Pelješac - one-day](#)

[Korčula - one-day](#)

[Lastovo - one-day](#)

[Three-day](#)

[Five-day](#)

DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION,

According to the 2021 census, the population of this area was 22,743, of which 3,125 were children under 14, 13,521 were working-age people aged 15 to 65, and 6,097 were over 65. The average age of the population is around 46 years. The population is mainly engaged in tourism, fishing, and agriculture, with the greatest importance being the cultivation of vines and olives. Lastovo has the lowest population density of 16 inhabitants per square meter, Pelješac 21.2, while Korčula has a slightly higher population density of 52.3 inhabitants per square meter.

TOURISM VISION OF THE AREA

By 2027, Dubrovnik-Neretva County seeks to achieve better strategic tourism management, to encourage "green and smart" tourism, shifting focus on less developed tourist areas, developing selective forms of tourism such as health, cultural and nautical tourism, and further extending the tourist season and fostering innovation.

TOURISM VOLUME

Croatia: More than 21.3 million arrivals and over 108.7 million overnight stays in 2024.

Dubrovnik-Neretva county (DNŽ):

Arrivals: 2,195,968, Over-night stays: 8,823,306

Geographic origin (arrivals): 1. UK: 300,148; 2. US: 236,086; 3. Croatia: 177,957; 4. Germany: 153,649; France: 145,298 + other countries

Age: 0-5 - 52,100; 6-11 - 84,822; 12-17 - 119,453; 18-24 - 191,873; 25-34 - 381,394; 35-44 - 336,397; 45-54 - 366,591; 55-64 - 357,011; 65-120 - 306,327

Organization of arrival: 1,517,564 individual tourists, and 678,404 through agencies

Average length of stay: domestic 3.65, foreign 4.05, total 4.02

Lastovo: 9,021, av. length of stay 5.6 days, mostly individuals.

Pelješac: 204,976 arrivals, av. length of stay 6.7 days.

Korčula: 176,243 arrivals, av. length of stay 7.3 days, mostly individuals

VISITORS

Existing visitors mostly foreign individual tourists but partly also those using agency services. Expected visitors: both genders, 40+, higher revenues, domestic and foreign tourists, eco-conscious travelers, cultural and natural heritage lovers, adventure seekers and foodies, both occasional travelers, regular travelers.

SWOT

Strengths: rich cultural and natural heritage, extended tourist season, quality accommodation, excellent conditions for development of selective forms of tourism, accumulated knowledge and experience of tourism actors.

Weaknesses: overly high dependency of economy on tourism, poorly developed selective forms of tourism, tourism labor shortage, imbalances in the development of tourism within the region, still rather high seasonality.

Opportunities: enhanced transport-related connections (especially after the construction of the Pelješac bridge), EU funds availability, new ICT solutions for digital transformation and entrepreneurial competitiveness.

Threats: skilled people brain drain, climate change, political instability in neighboring countries, inflexible government incentives for entrepreneurs.

CHALLENGES

Regulatory barriers, inefficient transport, short-term high-impact tourism, loss of tradition, insufficient knowledge on sustainable practices, aging population, seasonality, underdeveloped eco-tourism infrastructure.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

In order to strengthen sustainable tourism, it is essential to support local providers with training and digital tools, improve eco-tourism infrastructure and green mobility, and promote off-season activities. Greater use of data, mapping, and EU funding can help guide strategic and inclusive eco-tourism development.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

The principles of the circular economy are most present on family farms, where sustainability is integrated into everyday life (rainwater collection, solar energy, biodynamic production, permaculture, etc.). Traditional practices, such as the construction and maintenance of dry-stone walls (listed on UNESCO Heritage List) help prevent soil erosion. A sharing economy is also evident, as neighbors gift surplus fruit from their orchards to neighbor producers who then create organic products. This not only prevents food waste but also strengthens social ties. These good practice examples should be shared within capacity-building activities as they are not widely presented to the public. Therefore, it is essential to train and educate stakeholders to effectively present, interpret, and market their products, as well as to attract visitors. Increasing visibility will draw more guests, raise the value of local products and services and help preserve traditional practices that form the foundation of eco-conscious rural tourism.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS

MAIN ACTORS – GOVERNANCE

The main stakeholders of the eco-itinerary are family farms, tour operators, development agencies, wineries, eco-accommodation providers, municipalities, cultural and heritage institutions, cultural organizations, monasteries, NGOs, restaurants and nature parks. Many of these stakeholders benefit from promotion, sharing of good practices, visibility and sales. Cultural and heritage institutions face difficulties in preserving and showcasing traditions, while restaurants lack traditional offerings and operate seasonally. Tourists and locals struggle with limited transport and access to attractions. These challenges point to the need for better coordination, improved

infrastructure, and targeted support to enable inclusive and sustainable eco-tourism development.

VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The eco-itinerary will raise awareness among stakeholders (family farms, NGOs, cultural institutions, traditional artisans) about the importance of sustainable practices and a circular economy rooted in olive heritage. By promoting traditional local knowledge and the sustainable use of resources, the itinerary will attract eco-conscious visitors seeking authentic, meaningful experiences rooted in local culture and nature, empower local actors, and strongly integrate tradition, circularity, and ecology into the tourism offer. This will strengthen local identity, enhance economic sustainability, and help reverse depopulation trends. By offering year-round content such as workshops, tastings, guided tours, and heritage interpretation, the itinerary will help extend the tourist season.

CHALLENGES

The main challenges include the lack of an integrated eco-tourism offer, weak communication between key stakeholders, limited human capacities, underdeveloped and poorly promoted tourism products that are not related to sun-and-sea tourism, inadequate balance between general development and sustainability, and inadequate transport connectivity.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

Greater promotion of traditional products and offerings, along with the emphasis on all forms of traditional circular production and practices is needed. It is essential to connect these offers into a coherent and visible whole, and to strengthen collaboration and communication between tourism boards, local authorities, and service providers.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Capacity building can be achieved through interactive learning methods and a participatory approach that actively involves local stakeholders. It is important to identify best practices from the field and showcase them as successful examples (in circular economy, waste management, promotion, workshop design, etc.). A successful example is the strongest motivation for other stakeholders. Ongoing communication between all actors is also essential, along with monitoring guest satisfaction and regularly reviewing and updating practices to align with market trends.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

The Dobre Dobričević Association on Lastovo contributes to sustainability through a series of workshops and other activities that promote ecological awareness, cultural heritage preservation, and engagement of both locals and visitors. Activities include permaculture workshops focusing on planting native Lastovo herbs, creative recycling workshops, and heritage-focused activities such as traditional music workshops and research into local history. These practices strengthen the connection between people, place, and tradition while encouraging sustainable living.

The Ston Saltworks is one of the oldest still functioning saltworks in the world. Salt is produced using natural processes (sun, wind, and seawater) without chemicals or machines. This method exemplifies ecological production and circular economy principles in heritage-based industries. The saltworks operates with almost no waste, minimal energy consumption, and a strong emphasis on education, serving also as an interpretive center where visitors learn about natural resource conservation and traditional salt-making techniques.

The Moreška Cultural and Artistic Society preserves intangible heritage through the inter-generational transmission of skills, choreography, and storytelling elements of the traditional Moreška sword dance. Regular performances, especially during the tourist season position Moreška as a living heritage practice that supports sustainable cultural tourism.

Rumarinka family farm offers workshops rooted in sustainability, circularity, and heritage like dry-stone wall workshops, traditional cooking sessions, and permaculture education. Through workshops, visitors gain insight into Korčula's local customs, circular and ecological practices. In addition, family farm utilizes adaptive reuse of traditional objects for workshops and other sustainable activities.

The Vela Luka Cultural Center promotes sustainability and heritage preservation through workshops that revive traditional island crafts and skills. These activities support the interpretation of local identity while encouraging responsible resource use.

These sites were selected as best-practice examples because they successfully combine heritage preservation and interpretation with circular economy principles and ecological sustainability while at the same time move away from the most saturated tourist attractions.

CHALLENGES

The risk of losing tradition due to mass tourism, low visibility and promotion of local eco-products and sustainable practices, and the lack of a comprehensive waste management model (locals manage their own waste privately, with no formal system in place).

LESSONS LEARNED

The key lesson is the importance of establishing a strong connection between traditional practices and the tourism offer to create authentic experiences rooted in local heritage. Equally important is proactive and continuous communication among service providers, which is essential for developing a coherent and integrated offer that adds value to the destination, enhances visibility, and encourages collaboration rather than competition.

ACTIVITIES

Tangible heritage preservation is best reflected in the preservation of the Ston walls, while intangible heritage preservation is present but left to individual NGOs or cultural institutions/organizations (e.g. traditional dances, the art of stonewalling, local gastronomy, etc.). Family farms play an important role in promoting sustainability and circular economy practices by offering educational workshops that help preserve intangible cultural heritage. These include workshops such as traditional dry-stone wall building, permaculture rooted in local tradition, and the production of traditional organic goods (food, delicacies, and medicinal preparations), water management workshops etc. In addition to agricultural activities, some family farms and local NGOs organize recreational and community events such as hiking and cycling tours, clean-up campaigns and olive harvesting. Local second-hand initiatives are enabling the donation and exchange of clothing reducing waste and promoting a culture of reuse. All mentioned offer interactive content through workshops, which is particularly important for eco-conscious tourists.

CHALLENGES

Farms and producers are overburdened with bureaucracy, inadequate public transportation between providers, some services (restaurants, accommodation, entertainment, workshops) are unavailable during the off-season, difficulties in involving locals in the activities.

LESSONS LEARNED

Connect cultural heritage with ecological content (such as workshops on sustainable practices, eco-friendly accommodation, etc.), clearly highlight all available eco-tourism opportunities in the area for visitors, develop strategies to expand the offer during the off-season, and actively involve the local population and their sustainable and circular skills in tourism activities.

SERVICES

The itinerary features various stakeholders who exemplify the implementation of circular and sustainable practices and offer them to tourists. They are marked on the maps, which include basic information about each location and the activities they provide. The maps are open-source and can be continuously enriched with new eco-friendly providers, services, workshops, and similar offerings. The itinerary is intended for both business users (to learn from best practices and apply them) and individual users (tourists seeking to enhance their experience with sustainable practices). Locations such as water refill stations, waste sorting points, bicycle charging stations, and others are not yet fully marked, but will be included as the itinerary gains recognition among its target audiences.

CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges include high initial costs for systematically marking eco-tourism offers (signs, boards, route marking, etc.), as well as the risk of over-commercialization, which could lead to a loss of authenticity and sustainability. An increase in visitor numbers may result in higher traffic volumes, which must be managed in a sustainable way, through the use of public transportation, electric vehicles, and similar solutions.

LESSONS LEARNED - ADVICE

It is recommended that providers clearly mark and showcase all sustainable practices they implement in a unified and consistent manner, and to provide potential guests with clear instructions on how to reach their location using sustainable transportation.

TOURISM FACILITIES

All stakeholders included in the eco-itinerary practice sustainability and/or circularity. Most of them provide one-to-one experiences with possibilities to consume/purchase their own products/services.

Eko škoj applies principles of permaculture, collects and uses rainwater, composts organic waste, and nurtures biodynamic farming practices. It offers educational activities on sustainable olive cultivation and promotes local, seasonal food enriched with high-quality olive oil. Visitors can participate in hands-on workshops such as dry-stone wall restoration and enjoy guided tours tailored to their interests and pace. Guests are served meals prepared with ingredients from the estate's own organic gardens and have the opportunity to purchase locally produced eco-products.

Gastro mare kobaš provides immersive culinary experiences, including education on preparing traditional dalmatian dishes. Visitors can also participate in oyster harvesting, with the freshly gathered oysters prepared and served on-site.

The dobre dobričević association organizes numerous workshops on ecological and sustainable practices and promotes the preservation of island heritage through various initiatives.

VISITORS & COMMUNICATION

Service providers through oral transfer inform their guests and encourage responsible behavior during the stay. Such behavior is especially important within the Lastovo Nature Park, which directs visitors to follow strict guidelines aimed at preserving its natural environment. Tourist interaction and participation is encouraged through various workshops, and locals are also actively involved in activities with visitors. For example, certain family farms involve local experts with specific knowledge to lead workshops on sustainable practices.

CHALLENGES

Risk of excessive adaptation of cultural and ecological practices to meet tourists' expectations potentially leading to the loss of local authenticity. An overreliance on volunteer engagement can be limiting if not supported by professionalization. Additionally, residents may show reduced motivation for off-season activities due to uncertain tourist demand.

LESSONS LEARNED

Involving local experts in sustainable practices strengthens sustainability within the local community itself, independently of tourism, and helps ensure the preservation of tradition.

ACCESSIBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Public intercity transportation is limited and less frequent during the off-season, particularly when it comes to connections between the islands and the mainland. However, low-carbon transport options are sufficient as there are many e-bike rental providers available. Cultural heritage sites near towns are mostly accessible on foot, making transportation unnecessary. Towns on Korčula, Lastovo, and the Pelješac Peninsula are small and easily walkable.

VISIBILITY-PROMOTION STRATEGIES

Promotion relies on digital channels and official websites but mostly in Croatian. Storytelling, visual content, collaborations with travel bloggers, influencers and event announcements are insufficient. Word-of-mouth and return guests play a strong role in the promotion of offerings. Seasonal festivals, workshops, and local food events serve as effective promotional tools by generating organic publicity. By empowering stakeholders, their visibility will be increased, and they will promote the entire itinerary as a unified and comprehensive offer. Tourist boards will promote the itinerary through their own channels.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Capacity building is focused on participatory approach in educating stakeholders about the most important aspects of eco-tourism development, including increasing visibility, integrating sustainable practices into all areas of operation, and learning effective ways to share experiences through interpretation and storytelling. It also emphasizes the importance of synergy with other providers to create a complementary offer. Stakeholders will be presented with best practice examples to inspire improvements across all aspects of their businesses.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE OF THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?

CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

The eco-itinerary packages include 1-day, 3-day, and 5-day tours of Lastovo, Pelješac, and Korčula.

Example no 1.

The single-day eco-itinerary offers a choice of experiences on Pelješac, Lastovo, or Korčula. Each location features sustainable travel through e-bike rides, local food, cultural heritage, eco-

farming, and hands-on educational workshops. Visitors engage in traditional practices, promoting low-impact tourism and preserving natural and cultural island values.

Example no 2.

This three-day eco-itinerary explores Pelješac, Korčula and Lastovo through sustainable activities like windsurfing, olive oil tasting, biodynamic farming, hiking historic trails, dry-stone architecture, and local gastronomy. Visitors engage with nature, heritage, and circular farming practices while supporting local families, eco-tourism, and environmental education rooted in centuries-old island lifestyles.

Example no 3.

This five-day eco-itinerary offers a deep, immersive journey through Pelješac, Korčula, and Lastovo. It blends natural beauty, local gastronomy, traditional craftsmanship, and sustainable practices. From oyster farming, biodynamic olive groves, and windsurfing, to ancient dry-stone walls, sword dances, and Carnival workshops, each day invites travelers to actively connect with heritage, ecology, and community. Through e-biking, hiking, and slow food experiences, participants gain intimate insights into island life while minimizing their environmental footprint.

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

A strong participatory approach is advised, encouraging collaboration between local communities, tourists, and stakeholders. Interactive learning is fostered through hands-on workshops such as dry-stone wall restoration, olive cultivation, and sustainable gastronomy which allow participants to actively engage with circular economy principles. These activities are not only educational but also empower local actors to take the initiative in spreading sustainable practices. Real-world case studies, such as eco-agritourism initiatives and community-led programs, serve as model examples of circular economy in action.

**CHALLENGES AND
SOLUTIONS**

Challenges are related to the effective engagement of the local community. Without a sense of ownership and participation from local stakeholders the initiative risks losing its authenticity and impact. Many local providers possess strong expertise in their specific crafts or services but they often lack the necessary competencies in areas such as interpretation, storytelling, marketing, and guest communication. This limits their ability to

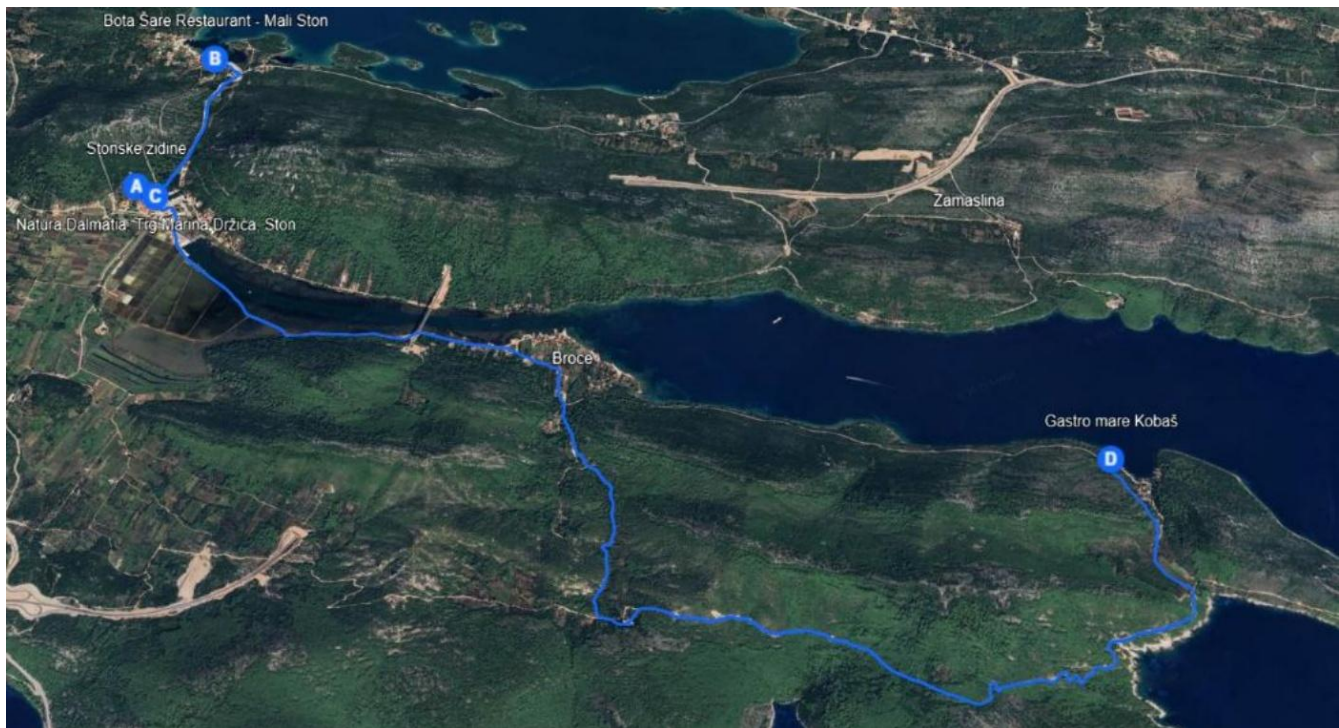
fully connect with visitors and present their sustainable practices in an appealing and professional way. Strengthening these skills is essential for cohesive and high-quality eco-tourism experience.

LESSONS LEARNED

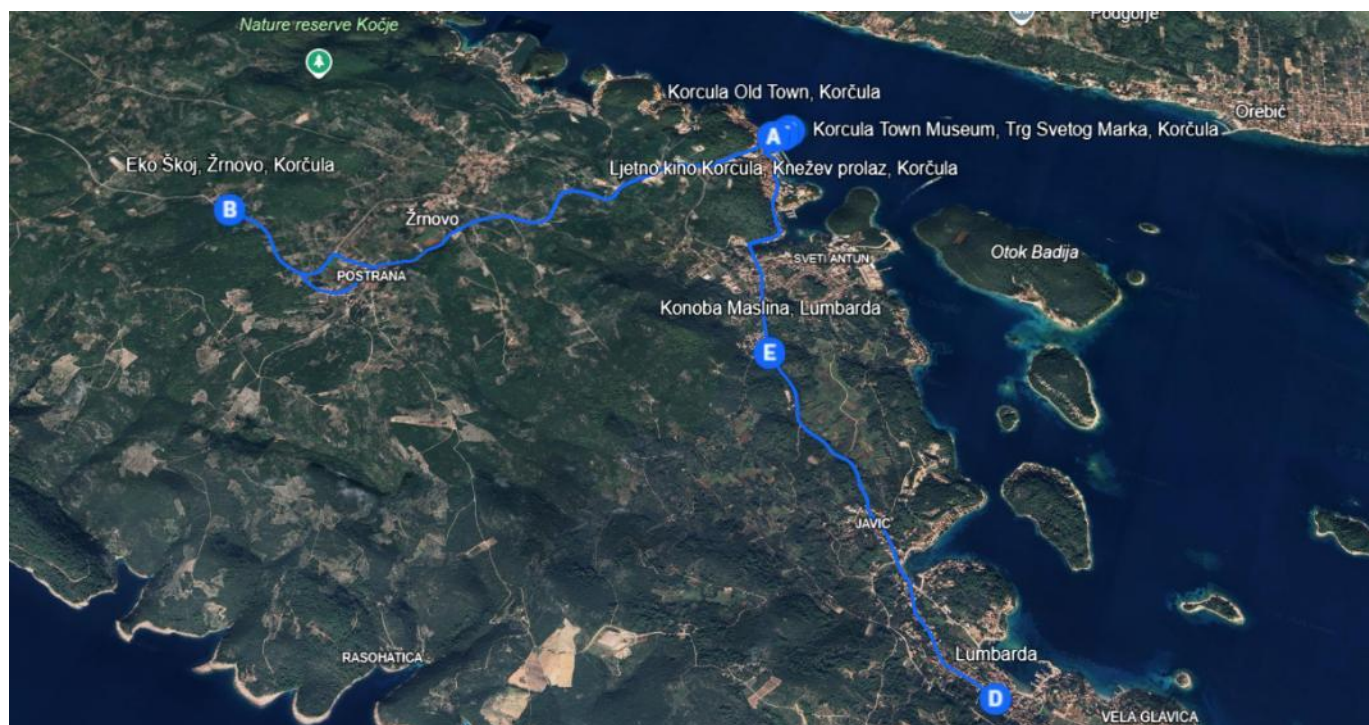
The most important lesson is the need to create a comprehensive, integrated, and year-round offer that actively involves the entire community (family farms, cultural institutions, workshops, local experts and residents). This approach will empower the community while providing visitors with a fully immersive experience in a sustainable and eco-friendly way of life.

The Olive Tree Routes - Pelješac, Korčula and Lastovo, Croatia

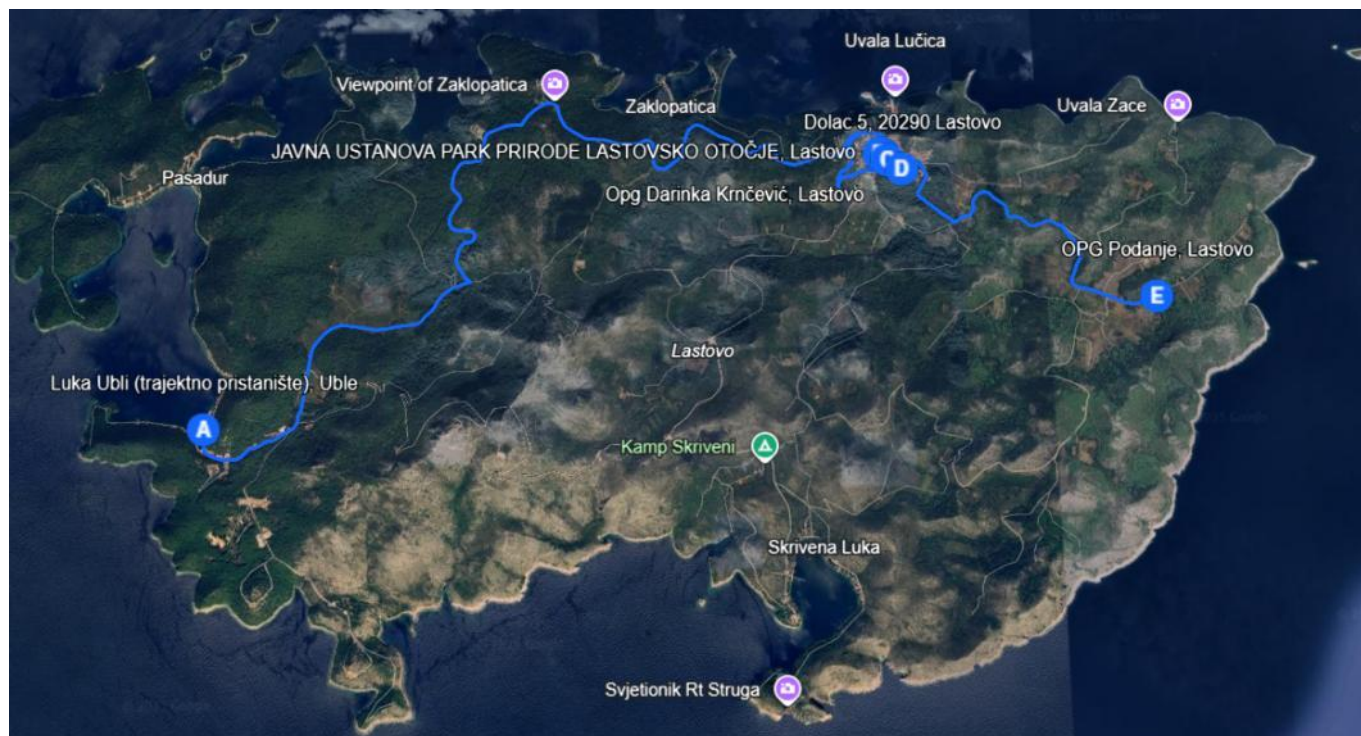
Croatia, Pelješac Walls and Wine eco-itinerary



Croatia, Korčula – Where the olive tree meets a sword dance eco-itinerary



Croatia, Lastovo – Explore, experience and preserve untouched nature eco-itinerary





OLIVE TREE CULTURAL ROUTES ECO-ITINERARIES, GREECE MESSINIA

**CULTURAL ROUTE TITLE ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE****ECO ITINERARY TITLE****COUNTRY, AREA****MESSINIA OLIVE TREE ECO-ITINERARY****GREECE, REGION OF MESSINIA (PELOPONNESE)****CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?****STATE OF THE ART**

The itinerary is located in Messinia, Greece, spanning Kalamata and surrounding villages like Methoni, Androusa, Stoupa, and Sterna. It consists of circular routes grouped in three areas: Kalamata, Western Mani, and Pylos. Due to dispersed sites and limited public transport, the itinerary is not linear but modular and as the longest distance between points is approximately 60 km, there is no single route map due to the dispersed locations. The full itinerary is flexible, with starting/ending points depending on the chosen area, and total length varies based on combinations selected by the visitor.

CONTEXT**DEMOGRAPHIC
SITUATION,**

Messinia has a population density of approximately 41 residents/km². The demographic leans towards an aging population, with many young adults migrating to urban centers. Families are prevalent in rural areas. The local attitude towards tourism is positive, recognizing its economic benefits, though there's a growing emphasis on sustainable practices to preserve the region's character.

TOURISM VISION

Messinia aims to promote sustainable tourism by leveraging its rich cultural heritage, including ancient sites, traditional villages, and olive oil production. The region encourages eco-friendly activities and supports local enterprises. The vision includes enhancing infrastructure to accommodate tourists while preserving the natural and cultural environment.

TOURISM VOLUME

In 2023, Greece welcomed over 30 million visitors. Messinia hosted hundreds of thousands, with Kalamata among key hubs. The average length of stay in the region was 4-6 nights with receipts contributing to the national tourism revenue of €20.5 billion. Visitors are both domestic and international, with increasing interest in sustainable experiences.

VISITORS

Current visitors to Messinia include individual travelers, families, and small groups, predominantly from Germany, France, the UK, and the USA. The region caters to diverse age groups, offering cultural, historical, and eco-tourism experiences. Future strategies aim to attract more eco-conscious travelers seeking authentic and sustainable experiences.

SWOT

Messinia offers rich cultural heritage, authentic gastronomy (PDO products), and stunning landscapes. The eco-itinerary highlights sustainable rural tourism, connecting local farms, olive mills, and artisans. However, weaknesses include poor transport infrastructure, scattered locations, and an aging, shrinking population. The eco-itinerary aligns with the region's tourism vision by promoting low-impact, experience-based travel that supports local economies and preserves traditions. It offers an alternative to mass tourism, attracting mindful visitors while addressing seasonality and economic imbalance in less-visited areas.

Weaknesses: scattered locations, lack of connectivity, and infrastructure.

CHALLENGES

Depopulation, aging population, limited transport, infrastructure gaps, low digitalization, seasonality, weak local coordination, youth outmigration, climate resilience.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

Empowering local communities and focusing on authentic, sustainable experiences enhances visitor satisfaction, preserves cultural identity, and diversifies income sources—crucial for long-term regional resilience and inclusive rural tourism development.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Proposed: Participants engage in EASW workshops to co-create future tourism scenarios based on circular economy values. Case studies like Art Farm and KLIMIS show the value of zero-waste and agro-creative tourism. Phillips 66 brainstorming is used to identify circular benefits for Messinia. Miro boards help visualize sustainable tourism pathways. E-learning modules provide core theory on circular tourism, while real-time Mentimeter polls gather perceptions of tourism impact. These suggested activities could help clarify why sustainable itineraries are essential.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS

MAIN ACTORS - GOVERNANCE

Key stakeholders include local municipalities, regional tourism boards, agro-cooperatives, olive oil mills, eco-farms, cultural associations, and transport providers. They support planning, promotion, and operation. Their benefits include increased visibility, income, and sustainable development. Collaboration is informal, with sporadic meetings and ad hoc projects. Challenges include coordination gaps, funding limitations, and alignment with circularity criteria like reducing resource use and promoting sustainable practices across dispersed stakeholders.

VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The eco-itinerary aims to boost sustainable tourism, increase employment, reduce seasonal fluctuations, and raise visitor satisfaction. Strategic goals include improved circularity (reduced waste and water use), extended tourism season, cultural preservation, and local economic benefits. The shared vision embraces authentic experiences that engage visitors and sustain rural livelihoods through responsible tourism.

Vision: position Messinia as a flagship sustainable cultural tourism hub.

CHALLENGES

Weak coordination among scattered stakeholders, aging population, low funding, poor transport, infrastructure gaps, lack of digital tools, insufficient stakeholder training, and fragmented promotion.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

Cross-sector collaboration, building strong local partnerships and aligning tourism with community values ensures ownership, long-term success, and enhances both visitor experiences and the sustainability of cultural and natural resources.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Proposed/suggested: SWG (Stakeholder Working Group) sessions use 1-2-4-All to identify and map local actors like olive oil mills, cooperatives, and eco-farms. Case studies conducted /highlighted by the cultural foundation "routes of the olive tree", such as the kontopoulos olive mill and agros, highlight the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation. A Jamboard exercise enables participants to cluster actors by role and potential impact. Ice-breaking games initiate dialogue among municipalities, entrepreneurs, and NGOs. Online sessions via Zoom ensure wide access. Participants also draft a stakeholder engagement plan, mentored by experts who've led similar initiatives in other communities.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

1.Kalamata Agricultural Cooperative & KLIMIS – Highlighting PDO Kalamata olives and traditional olive processing. Circularity: waste reuse (olive pits), sustainable farming. KLIMIS in particular is a family business producing eco charcoal from olive pits reducing agricultural waste, and offering tours showcasing sustainable product transformation.

2.Kontopoulos Olive Oil Mill (Androussa) – Offers organized minibus tours including tastings and eco-education and cold-pressed organic olive oil production with eco-waste treatment.

Implements circularity via water recycling, energy-efficient machinery, and waste reuse for soap-making.

3.Art Farm Megali Mantinea – A creative cultural hub in nature, hosting workshops (music, theatre, crafts). Reuses rainwater, composts organic waste, uses solar panels, preserving rural tradition through agro-tourism and organic farming.

4.BLAUEL Olive Mill – Family business with sustainable production and biodiversity awareness.

5. AGROS Farm (Methoni) – Combines agro-tourism with heritage preservation. Visitors experience traditional farming, and engage in hands-on eco-practices like composting and crop rotation.

These locations support circularity via ecological farming, sustainable waste management, and low-impact visitor interaction. Intangible heritage—stories, rituals, olive harvest festivals—is also preserved. Interpretation methods include guided tastings, workshops, storytelling, and producer-led experiences rooted in values of sustainability and identity protection.

CHALLENGES

Dispersed locations and limited visitor mobility hinder coherent experience; need for unified narrative and transport solutions. Also digital gaps.

LESSONS LEARNED

Focusing on experiential learning (harvesting, tastings) and local participation enhances cultural appreciation and tourist satisfaction / Small-scale heritage sites thrive when supported by community engagement, strong narratives, and circular practices that ensure both preservation and meaningful visitor interaction.

ACTIVITIES

Available eco-activities include olive harvesting, olive oil tasting, organic farming tours, and permaculture workshops. Visitors can bike through parts of Kalamata, participate in sustainable cooking classes, or join seasonal olive festivals.

In particular:

Olive oil tasting and soap-making workshops (waste reuse, water-conscious).

Hiking and biking near Methoni and Stoupa using marked trails, avoiding high-traffic roads, promoting non-motorized mobility.

Fruit picking and seasonal harvesting at AGROS and local farms—focusing on organic methods, composting, and community sharing models.

AGROS Experience also offers guided cultural tours.

Art and craft workshops using recycled materials at Art Farm. Farms like Green Land Co-farming and Art Farm promote zero-waste farming. All align with circularity principles—reducing waste, saving energy, organic inputs, local energy use and encouraging low-impact leisure.

CHALLENGES

High costs for eco-certification, volunteer shortages, safety concerns, climate unpredictability, lack of coordination at the local level regarding promotional activities and difficulty accessing rural areas without private vehicles.

LESSONS LEARNED

Activities tied to local traditions and eco-values create lasting impressions and community benefits, ensuring sustainability beyond tourism trends. Also nature-based, low-tech, hands-on activities offer enriching experiences and environmental education—boosting visitor loyalty while enhancing local resource protection and community pride.

SERVICES

Some brochures highlight sustainability practices, though coverage is uneven. Electric chargers exist in Kalamata and in few big hotel units but are not mapped. Few maps indicate bike paths or eco-spots. No QR-coded signs
Signage exists but needs enhancement. Maps are available but lack interactive features. Some of the eco-itinerary points of interest (Klimis, Kontopoulos) offer brochures on sustainability. Selective bins and water taps are available at select points, but not consistently. No best practice to report.

CHALLENGES

Lack of unified service directories, minimal signage, poor digital visibility, low awareness of circularity, and limited coordination across tourism providers.

LESSONS LEARNED - ADVICE

Digital and multilingual materials improve accessibility and visitor behavior; education fosters respect for heritage and eco-practices while creating economic incentives for local providers to maintain circular, community-based offers.

TOURISM FACILITIES

Accommodation includes small eco-lodges, restored village houses, and agro-tourism B&Bs. Farm-to-table restaurants source locally. Many producers offer product sales (e.g., olive oil, soap). Picnic kits with sustainable packaging are offered by AGROS. Energy-efficient lighting and water-saving systems are used by some mills.

Best practices include:

BEN Olive Mill and Green Land Co-farming: allow visitors to meet producers, join tastings, and buy seasonal, zero-waste products.

Local accommodations like eco-guesthouses in Stoupa and Methoni built with natural materials, using solar energy and water-saving tech.

AGROS Farm: offers picnic baskets with local products in reusable containers, promoting waste-free experiences.

Food experiences feature traditional gastronomy using seasonal ingredients, with some venues composting food scraps and using greywater systems.

Visitors are encouraged to support local producers via on-site purchases and interactions, strengthening rural economies and sustainable food chains.

VISITORS & COMMUNICATION

Visual signage at selected sites promotes responsible behavior and cultural sensitivity but these are scattered and very limited.

Best practices include:

In most of the itinerary's locations, clear and visually understandable information is provided at key points through signage. In some sites, accessibility for people with disabilities has been taken into account, while the available informational material is written in simplified language to ensure it is easily comprehensible.

The presentation of the sites is based on scientifically validated information, brought to life through vivid storytelling that connects with local heritage and personal experience.

Interaction is enhanced through participatory activities and guided tours that foster connections between visitors and the owners of the points of interest. In this way, an authentic experience is cultivated, which is also a prerequisite for the sustainability of the route.

Overall, the communication strategy of the proposed points of the itinerary aims to create an inclusive, educational, and meaningful experience, with respect for both the visitor and the local culture and environment.

CHALLENGES

Inclusivity is a bit limited; more work needed for multilingual and accessible material.

Limited multilingual signage and lack of interactive digital tools.

LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging locals as storytellers and promoting participatory activities enhances visitor connection and responsible behavior.

More work needed for multilingual and accessible material.

Future strategies should increase community interaction through local ambassador schemes and participatory events.

ACCESSIBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Most points are not reachable by public transport. Some offer bike or minibus access. Info on carbon offsetting is minimal. Infrastructure includes eco-parking and waste points, but lacks coherence. There is a need for coordinated transport solutions and visitor carbon awareness tools. Only a few destinations (e.g., Kalamata, Androusa) are reachable via bus.

Best practices:

Kontopoulos Mill provides shared private group minibuses.

Promotion of local consumption and sustainable products: In collaboration with local producers and businesses, low carbon footprint products (e.g., organic, locally produced, seasonal) are promoted through labeling, awareness-raising activities, and incentives for visitors.

This is linked to sustainable mobility and CO₂ emissions, as it reduces transportation needs and strengthens the circular economy at the destination.

Signage at some locations indicates carbon reduction tips (e.g., walking paths, biking).

There is no formal carbon offset program.

Infrastructure gaps remain (e.g., no bike-sharing systems or EV chargers).

Recommendations include a shared transport scheme between providers and the creation of a carbon-conscious visitor passport.

VISIBILITY- PROMOTION STRATEGIES

Promotion relies on local networks, social media, and regional tourism platforms.

Best practices:

Art Farm and KLIMIS use social media effectively. Cross-promotion via producers' websites and festivals helps reach niche audiences.

Some brochures and banners available in Greek and English.

Missing are unified visual identity, consistent branding, and updated digital storytelling.

Interpretation is available in English at a few sites; more multilingual content is needed.

Enhanced collaboration between actors can boost visibility and attract eco-conscious tourists while promoting responsible behavior and cultural appreciation.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Suggested activities: Participants analyze best practices like olive oil tastings with zero-waste policies or eco-friendly workshops including construction of accommodation

(treehouses) using 100% environmentally friendly, recyclable materials at Art Farm. A site-matching exercise on Miro connects eco-activities with circularity principles. In break-out rooms, they develop mini-itineraries using Phillips 66 to co-design routes around features like the Ancient Olive Tree or Methoni agro-experiences. An expert-led e-learning module explains linking attractions, services, and transport for impact. Visual mapping through Jamboard illustrates how features contribute to sustainability and local identity.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE OF THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?

CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

Example no 1.

A two-day tour package from Kalamata: Day 1 – visit to the Kalamata Cooperative, cycling to Art Farm with an organic lunch and participatory storytelling. Day 2 – guided tour to Kontopoulos Olive Mill, hands-on olive oil pressing, and tasting + Visit to the Olive and Olive Oil Museum in Sparta. Transportation by minibus.

Example no 2.

Weekend agro-tourism retreat: Arrival at Green Land Co-farming, overnight stay, circular economy workshop, visit to Ben Olive Mill, tasting, and tour, visit to the Palace of Nestor in Chora. Local dinner with storytelling night. Target group: eco-tourists and educational groups.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

Proposed/suggested activities: A participatory session uses the EASW method to explore innovative tools: visitor passports, eco-challenges, or storytelling apps. Case studies like the interactive QR storytelling at KLIMIS inspire digital innovation. Participants co-create prototypes via Miro: signage, maps, and inclusive interpretation. Mentimeter surveys identify visitor needs. A scenario-based exercise simulates tourist use of the itinerary and highlights infrastructure and communication gaps. Breakout discussions align communication tools with visitor profiles and accessibility goals, fostering effective use and circular tourism promotion.

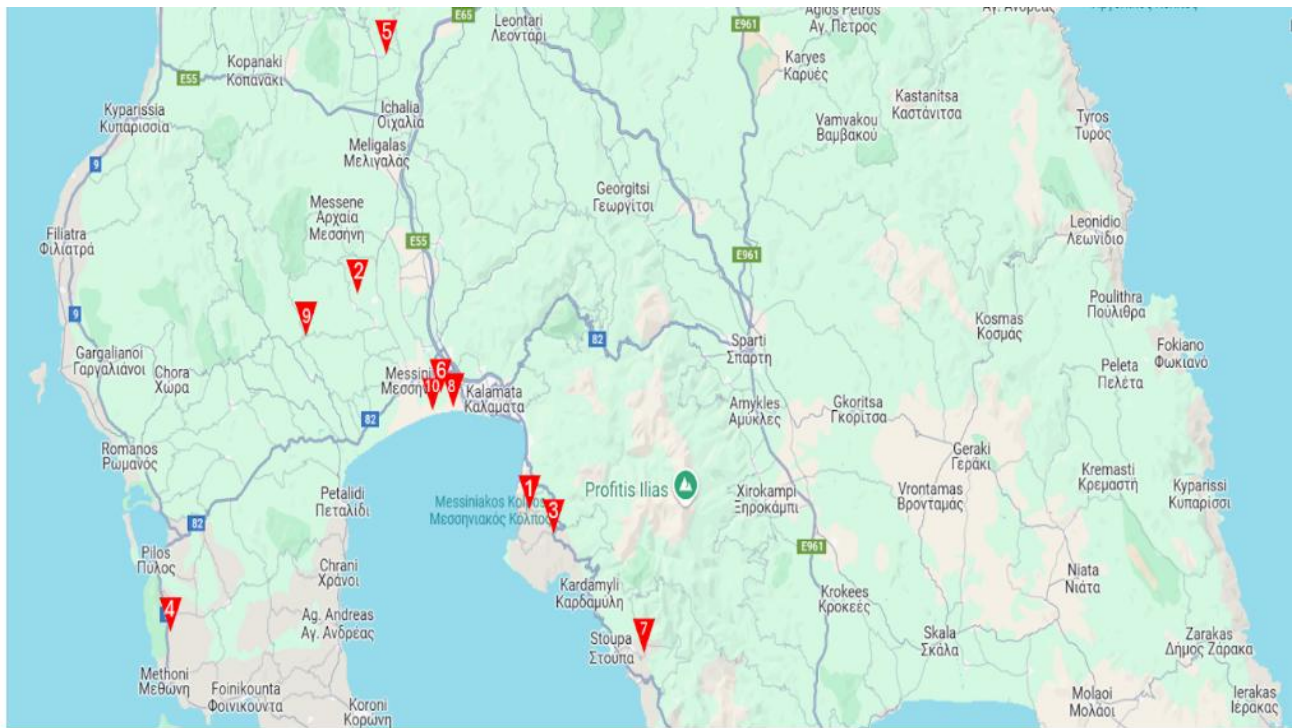
CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Seasonal availability of experiences and lack of comprehensive transport packages.

LESSONS LEARNED

Designing modular, story-driven, circular economy-based tourism packages increases flexibility, supports small enterprises, and appeals to diverse visitor profiles.

The Olive Tree Route, Messinia Olive Tree eco-itinerary, Greece





PHOENICIAN'S CULTURAL ROUTE ECO-ITINERARIES, CYPRUS PAFOS REGION

CULTURAL ROUTE TITLE PHOENICIANS' ROUTE

ECO ITINERARY TITLE

COUNTRY, AREA

**SHOWCASING THE HIDDEN CULTURAL AND NATURAL
BEAUTIES OF THE AKAMAS PENINSULAR AND THE LAONA
PLATEAU AT THE WESTERN SITE OF PAFOS REGION**

CYPRUS – PAFOS REGION

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

STATE OF THE ART

This micro itinerary offers a captivating journey through the diverse landscapes of the northwestern Pafos District, seamlessly blending the wild coastal beauty of the Akamas Peninsula with the cultural richness of the Laona Plateau. Beginning at the UNESCO-listed Archaeological Park of Pafos and stretching inland through heritage villages like Arodes, Kathikas, Innia, and Droushia, the route showcases a vibrant mix of nature reserves, eco-museums, and traditional life. From exploring geological and paleontological treasures to engaging with local biodiversity and crafts, visitors are immersed in both environmental education and authentic Cypriot culture. Ideal for nature lovers and cultural explorers alike, the itinerary promotes sustainable tourism and offers opportunities for hiking, birdwatching, and meaningful interaction with local communities.

CONTEXT

**DEMOGRAPHIC
SITUATION,**

Demographic and Tourism Profile: Pafos, Peyia, Polis Municipalities and the Akamas Peninsula & Laona Plateau Region

Regional Overview

The northwestern Pafos District of Cyprus, encompassing the Akamas Peninsula and Laona Plateau, includes the villages of Arodes, Kathikas, Innia (Ineia), and Droushia, as well as the municipalities of Pafos, Peyia, and Polis. This document presents consolidated demographic, economic, and tourism-related data for the area.

Key Demographic Indicators (Average Values)

Population Density: ~49 residents per km² (rural villages range 7–21/km²; municipalities 130–975/km²)

Youth (<15 years): ~14%

Working-age (15–64 years): ~63%

Elderly (65+ years): ~23%

Population Trend (2011–2021): Average increase of ~19%, driven mainly by growth in municipalities (Pafos +15.5%, Peyia +75%, Polis +27%) and selective village stabilization (e.g., Droushia +17%).

Foreign Nationals (% of local population): ~43% average across all areas (ranging from 17% in Inia to 65% in Peyia).

Age and Population Composition

The rural villages (Arodes, Kathikas, Inia) are characterized by aging populations and low birth rates, with seniors comprising 27–41% and children less than 12%. Droushia is an exception with 21% under 15, indicating more young families. In contrast, municipalities like Pafos and Polis have more balanced age structures due to internal and foreign migration.

Employment Sectors

Rural Villages (Arodes, Kathikas, Inia, Droushia):

Primary sectors: agriculture (vineyards, olives, livestock), handicrafts (e.g., weaving, basketry)

Secondary sectors: agrotourism, hospitality, local commerce

Limited employment opportunities drive youth out-migration

Municipalities (Pafos, Peyia, Polis):

Dominated by tourism and services (hotels, restaurants, public administration)

Significant employment in construction and real estate (especially Peyia)

Pafos hosts cultural and historical tourism while Peyia and Polis offer beach/marina tourism

Attitudes Toward Tourism

Villages: Generally supportive of sustainable, low-impact tourism. Residents favor small-scale initiatives that align with local culture and environmental conservation. Positive sentiment toward agrotourism and thematic museums.

Municipalities: Strongly pro-tourism, with active investment in infrastructure and digital transformation. Tourism is seen as a major economic engine.

Seasonal Trends & Population Shifts

Villages: Seasonal tourism brings modest increases in visitors during summer, but permanent populations remain low. Expat retirees help stabilize year-round residency.

Municipalities: Sharp seasonal fluctuations in population due to tourism, especially in Peyia and Polis. Efforts are underway to promote year-round tourism.

Conclusion

This region represents a blend of aging, traditional rural communities and dynamic, fast-growing coastal municipalities. Tourism, particularly agrotourism, cultural tourism, and eco-tourism, offers a pathway to economic sustainability and population retention. Strategic, community-led development with an emphasis on environmental stewardship is essential for balanced growth.

TOURISM VISION OF THE AREA

Our vision:

The Pafos region to become:

“A premium holiday destination that will offer the visitor a wide range of experiences, ensures sustainability in development with respect to the environment and cultural heritage ”

TOURISM VOLUME

2023, Cyprus welcomed 3,845,652 tourist arrivals, marking a strong recovery with a 20.1% increase over 2022. The Pafos District stood out as the leading destination, attracting 34.2% of all tourists, more than any other region, surpassing Ayia Napa (16.4%), Larnaca (13.4%), Limassol (12.0%), and Paralimni/Protaras (11.2%).

Visitors to Cyprus stayed an average of 8.6 nights, amounting to an estimated 33 million overnight stays across the country. The Pafos region alone accounted for over 5.3 million overnight stays, positioning it as a premier location for extended holidays. Its scenic coastlines, historical landmarks, and cultural assets make it a preferred base for exploration.

Tourism receipts in 2023 reached an estimated €2.99 billion, reflecting a 22.6% increase compared to 2022. Tourists spent an average of €777.68 per trip. While spending in Pafos was slightly lower (€716.70 per visitor), the district still generated approximately €900 million in total tourism revenue due to its high visitor share.

The visitor base remained primarily European, with 82% of tourists arriving from Europe and 40.8% from EU countries. The United Kingdom led all markets, contributing 33.9% of total arrivals, followed by Israel (10.7%), Poland (7.1%), Germany (5.5%), Greece (4.9%), and Sweden (3.8%).

Early indicators for 2024 show continued momentum: from January to September, Cyprus recorded 3.27 million arrivals, up 4.2% year-on-year and slightly surpassing 2019's figures. Expectations are optimistic for the full year, supported by increasing off-season travel and diversification of markets. Tourism stakeholders in Pafos reported summer 2024 arrivals on par with pre-pandemic highs and a growing preference for non-hotel accommodations such as private rentals.

Domestic tourism has also strengthened, with local Cypriot residents increasingly vacationing within the island. Compared to 2019, domestic overnight stays rose by 33.9%, especially in rural and agrotourism accommodations, helping to sustain year-round tourism and supporting the broader regional economy.

Cyprus, and particularly the Pafos region, has thus reaffirmed its position as a top Mediterranean destination, combining cultural richness, natural beauty, and increasingly resilient tourism infrastructure.

VISITORS

Cyprus welcomes a diverse range of visitors, with the majority being independent travelers and couples (approximately 45–50%), followed by families with children (25–30%), seniors and long-stay retirees (15–20%), and a smaller but growing segment of youth and students (5–7%). Most tourists arrive from the UK, EU countries, and Israel, seeking a mix of beach relaxation, cultural exploration, and nature activities. While group tours remain common among some markets, particularly older and religious travelers, independent tourism is dominant, supported by online bookings, car rentals, and flexible itineraries. Families are catered to with hotels and holiday resorts and kid-friendly attractions, while seniors benefit from accessible accommodations and mild winters. Youth are increasingly drawn to Cyprus for affordable coastal holidays, sports, and nightlife. Looking ahead, Cyprus expects continued growth in experiential and off-season tourism, with a steady rise in senior, eco-conscious, and family travelers.

SWOT

The eco-itinerary in the Pafos and Akamas region is strongly anchored in the area's distinct strengths, capitalizing on its rich cultural and natural heritage, including UNESCO-listed sites like

the Pafos Archaeological Park and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, as well as the biodiversity of Akamas National Park and Pafos Forest. The region's ability to offer a blend of gastronomy, festivals, outdoor recreation, and authentic village experiences positions it ideally within the growing global demand for sustainable and experiential tourism. Furthermore, the established network of agritourism operators, local museums, wineries, and hospitality providers creates fertile ground for delivering an integrated, eco-friendly tourism product. However, the eco-itinerary also faces challenges reflective of broader regional weaknesses, such as fragmented communication, insufficient infrastructure (e.g., cycling paths, charging stations), and bureaucratic hurdles limiting innovation. These issues hinder coordination and the adoption of sustainable practices. Despite these obstacles, the eco-itinerary fits well into the current tourism context, offering a strategic response to the seasonality, environmental pressures, and demand for slow and circular tourism. It represents a meaningful opportunity to strengthen collaboration, enhance digital access to tourism experiences, and support local economies through low-impact, culturally rich travel.

CHALLENGES

Enhanced collaboration between operators and municipalities/policymakers is essential, particularly in light of the intense competition within the Mediterranean tourism sector. Additionally, there is a rising demand for improved digital accessibility and information, empowering visitors to independently explore the area as a cohesive regional tourism offering of Pafos region.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

A key lesson learned from the development of the Pafos eco-itineraries is that collaborative governance and stakeholder inclusion are essential for building a successful and resilient sustainable tourism model. The most significant benefit achieved was the consensus on establishing a centralized communication and coordination system, which will streamline information sharing, improve visibility, and strengthen partnerships between tourism operators, municipalities, and local businesses. My advice is to prioritize ongoing engagement with local stakeholders through incentives, training, and recognition, ensuring that sustainability becomes both a shared value and a practical opportunity. Additionally, implementing unified sustainability standards and a coordinated digital

marketing strategy will not only enhance the region's competitiveness but also secure long-term growth by appealing to eco-conscious travelers who seek meaningful, low-impact experiences.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

This capacity building module aims to empower local stakeholders in the Pafos region to co-create and implement sustainable eco-tourism through a participatory, hands-on approach. Key activities included interactive stakeholder workshops to co-develop integrated eco-itineraries and align on communication strategies, ensuring active engagement from tourism operators, municipalities, and local businesses. Training sessions on sustainability standards and certifications combined theoretical input with real-world case studies, such as the Slovenian Green Scheme, which successfully unified operators under a national eco-label and increased off-season tourism. Best practice showcases highlighted successful circular economy initiatives, such as Trentino, Italy's "Zero Waste Tourism" model, which integrated composting, resource-sharing apps, and refill stations into mountain tourism. Field visits and peer learning exchanges within the region demonstrated compostable packaging use, doggy bag adoption in tavernas, and solar-powered bike stations. Additional modules focused on digital marketing strategies, featuring simulations and content planning for social media, and collaborative product design, participants co-created cultural and gastronomic packages for different target groups. Throughout, the module emphasizes inclusive learning, capacity building, and knowledge transfer to enable stakeholders to deliver consistent, high-quality, and eco-conscious tourism services.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS

MAIN ACTORS - GOVERNANCE

The development of eco-itineraries and the broader transition toward sustainable tourism in the Pafos region is driven by a diverse network of strategic players, each contributing unique value to the process. Local stakeholders including service providers such as hotels, agro-tourism guesthouses, wineries, restaurants, mobility services, and cultural institutions play a direct role in delivering authentic and eco-conscious visitor experiences. Their benefit lies in increased visibility, access to sustainability certifications, and inclusion in integrated marketing campaigns, which can boost revenue and visitor satisfaction. Community councils and cultural sector

representatives ensure that local identity and traditions are preserved and meaningfully embedded into the tourism offer, while local businesses benefit from collaborative product development and shared promotional platforms that reduce individual marketing burdens. Museums, archaeological parks, and heritage centers provide the core narrative and experiential content for the eco-itineraries, gaining increased footfall and engagement opportunities. The Pafos Regional Board of Tourism (PRBT) and Deputy Ministry of Tourism act as key facilitators, offering coordination, strategic guidance, and access to funding and national networks. Their role includes developing common sustainability criteria, overseeing infrastructure planning (e.g., e-bike stations, refill points), and ensuring quality standards across stakeholders. While each actor stands to gain from enhanced reputation, economic resilience, and resource-sharing, challenges include limited capacity, resistance to change, and the need for clearer communication and coordination structures. Embedding circular economy principles such as waste reduction, soft mobility, and resource efficiency requires commitment, training, and mutual trust. However, with aligned goals and participatory governance, these strategic players can collectively transform the Pafos region into a model of sustainable and circular tourism.)

VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The shared vision for the Pafos eco-itinerary is to establish the region as a leading cultural and circular tourism destination that celebrates its rich heritage, empowers local communities, and protects its natural environment. Specific strategic goals include increasing visitor satisfaction by delivering immersive, story-driven, and participatory experiences; reducing environmental impact through the integration of circular practices such as minimizing waste, promoting water conservation, and encouraging low-emission mobility; and boosting local employment by supporting small-scale producers, agrotourism enterprises, and heritage-based services. The initiative aims to achieve measurable outcomes such as a 20% increase in visitor satisfaction scores, a 15% reduction in single-use plastic and water consumption at partner sites, and a 25% increase in income generation for rural tourism operators within five years. This strategy not only enhances the visitor experience but also aligns with broader sustainable development objectives,

ensuring that Pafos evolves into a resilient and inclusive eco-cultural destination.

CHALLENGES

Key challenges to achieving the strategic vision of the Pafos eco-itinerary include maintaining long-term stakeholder engagement, bridging governance gaps between rural and urban areas, and securing stable funding for infrastructure and sustainability initiatives. Difficulties also arise in standardizing circular tourism practices across varied operators, addressing seasonality in tourism-related employment, and improving digital accessibility in remote communities. Furthermore, encouraging behavior change among both visitors and providers—particularly in areas like waste management, energy use, and mobility—remains a significant hurdle. These challenges call for inclusive planning, targeted training, and strong policy coordination to ensure lasting impact.

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

One of the most important lessons learned through the development of eco-itineraries in the MED-ROUTES project is that human relationships and trust among stakeholders are the cornerstone of sustainable tourism. The process highlighted that meaningful collaboration between local communities, businesses, tourism operators, authorities, and visitors is essential for shaping experiences that are not only environmentally responsible but also socially inclusive and economically viable. Building a shared vision takes time, dialogue, and mutual respect, reinforcing that sustainability is a gradual, adaptive process rather than a one-time solution. Moreover, while digital tools and infrastructure gaps initially posed challenges, they ultimately became catalysts for creativity, enabling smarter promotion, better coordination, and more personalized eco-tourism experiences. My advice is to invest continuously in relationship-building and capacity development at the local level, as the most enduring benefit is the creation of empowered communities that co-own the tourism experience and are motivated to safeguard their natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

As part of the Capacity Building Module for the MED-Routes eco-itineraries, a strong emphasis was placed on participatory approaches and interactive learning to ensure broad stakeholder engagement and effective knowledge transfer. Workshops and labs actively involved tourism operators, local authorities, cultural organizations, SMEs, and community representatives,

fostering co-creation of sustainable solutions. Specific activities included hands-on design sessions for eco-itineraries, sustainability training workshops led by experts, and moderated group discussions to map regional assets. Participants engaged with real-world case studies from the EMbleMatiC and INCIRCLE projects, showcasing successful circular economy applications in Mediterranean mountain regions such as Canigó and Sainte Victoire. These examples provided practical insights into renewable energy use, sustainable mobility systems, and waste management solutions. Role-playing, brainstorming, and scenario analysis exercises enabled participants to apply these models to the context of the Pafos region. Interactive mapping tools, guided field visits, and heritage interpretation exercises were also employed to strengthen understanding. This capacity-building process not only improved technical skills but also reinforced collaborative governance and empowered local actors to take ownership of the eco-itinerary implementation.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

The eco-itinerary in the Pafos region highlights five emblematic heritage points that embody the region's cultural identity and actively support sustainability and circular economy principles. Each point has been selected not only for its cultural significance but also for its efforts in preservation, interpretation, community engagement, and low-impact visitor experiences, in line with the MED-Routes vision.

1. Pafos Archaeological Park (UNESCO World Heritage Site) + Archaeological Museum of Pafos

Why Included: As a cornerstone of the UNESCO-listed heritage in Cyprus and focal point of the Phoenicians' Route, this site preserves the legacy of ancient Nea Pafos through extensive Roman mosaics, villas, and monuments.

How it Supports the Topic:

- It directly ties to the intercultural dialogue promoted by the Phoenicians' Route, representing centuries of Mediterranean exchange.
- Circularity is integrated through solar-powered lighting, digital ticketing, and augmented reality storytelling via the "UNESCO Archaeological Park App" to reduce paper usage and enhance the low-impact visitor experience.

- A shared ticketing model with the nearby Pafos Archaeological Museum promotes clustering and reduces redundant travel.

Presentation & Interpretation:

- AR-enabled panels and multilingual audio guides reduce printed materials while improving accessibility.
- Community-trained guides incorporate local folklore and storytelling techniques that revitalize oral traditions.

2. Akamas Regional Museum Cluster (Inia-Droushia-Arodes-Kathikas)

Why Included: This cluster includes the Inia Turtle Museum, Akamas Geology and Paleontology Centre, the Avifauna and Flora Visitor Centre in Kathikas, and the Rural Life & Craft Museum in Droushia.

How it Supports the Topic:

- These smaller museums preserve intangible heritage like weaving, olive oil production, and biodiversity awareness while promoting distributed tourism—avoiding saturated hotspots by encouraging exploration of rural Akamas.
- Circularity is embraced through the use of local materials in renovations, recycled furniture, and waste reduction strategies during live craft demonstrations.
- Museum programming includes intergenerational workshops that revive endangered crafts such as silk weaving and gourd painting.

Presentation & Interpretation:

- Interactive exhibits simulate ecosystems and traditional lifestyles using natural dioramas and touchable materials, ensuring multi-sensory and inclusive storytelling.

3. Baths of Aphrodite + Myth of Aphrodite App (AR/QR Integration)

Why Included: A mythological anchor of the Phoenicians' Route, this site symbolizes the connection between heritage, nature, and legend.

How it Supports the Topic:

- Interpretation focuses on myths and legends through augmented reality (AR) that overlays storytelling without physical infrastructure, minimizing landscape disruption.
- Visitor flow is regulated using smart signage and mapped itineraries that disperse visitors away from the highly sensitive bathing pool area.

- Water conservation measures include restricted access, “look but don’t touch” zones, and refill stations to eliminate single-use plastics.

Presentation & Interpretation:

- The “Myth of Aphrodite” app provides immersive narration and environmental facts that link mythology to the surrounding Natura 2000 landscape and marine protection.

4. Fyti Weaving Museum + Local Handicraft Demonstrations

Why Included: A key site for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage linked to traditional weaving techniques, particularly the Fythkiotika patterns.

How it Supports the Topic:

- Supports circular economy through the use of natural dyes, upcycled fabrics, and the zero-waste model in live demonstrations.
- The museum is located in a restored traditional house using natural ventilation and solar lighting, reducing its environmental footprint.
- Community women operate the center, reinforcing local employment and female-led cultural preservation.

Presentation & Interpretation:

- Participatory storytelling: visitors co-create small woven items and learn oral histories tied to each pattern.
- Local school partnerships ensure continuity of skills and intergenerational engagement.

5. St. Paul’s Pillar & Panagia Chrysopolitissa + Digital Interpretation Integration

Why Included: This religious complex is a major point on the Saint Paul Route and an exemplary case of religious and intercultural heritage preservation.

How it Supports the Topic:

- Energy-efficient LED lighting with timers reduces nighttime energy use.
- Interpretive content is delivered through QR codes and mobile-friendly digital content, reducing signage clutter and maintenance needs.
- Water-efficient landscaping ensures conservation in the surrounding gardens.

Presentation & Interpretation:

- Storytelling ties biblical narratives to broader Mediterranean religious heritage using immersive voice guides and curated faith-based trails.
- Seasonal liturgical events are integrated into eco-itineraries to ensure respectful and sustainable access.

Each of these five heritage points is a best practice example for how cultural heritage can be safeguarded and interpreted through modern, inclusive, and sustainable practices. The itinerary design intentionally avoids overcrowded areas by redirecting attention to smaller museums, craft centers, and interactive apps, encouraging decentralized visitor flow and enhancing the authenticity of local experiences. These examples demonstrate how heritage, circularity, and slow tourism can be successfully integrated to strengthen both community resilience and visitor satisfaction.

CHALLENGES

Creating an effective eco-itinerary in the Pafos region presents several interlinked challenges that must be addressed through targeted capacity-building efforts. A primary barrier is the fragmentation of stakeholders and the lack of coordinated communication networks, which hinders collective planning and the sharing of resources. Seasonality of tourism continues to strain infrastructure during peak months while leaving rural areas underutilized during the off-season. Resistance to innovation and bureaucracy, particularly among smaller operators, slows down the adoption of sustainable and circular economy practices. There is also a shortage of digital infrastructure, including smart signage, mapping tools, and multilingual promotional content, limiting accessibility for international eco-tourists. Additionally, insufficient training in sustainability standards and a lack of clear circularity guidelines for tourism providers reduce the effectiveness of environmentally conscious initiatives. Finally, the geographic dispersion of assets, especially in the Akamas-Laona region, poses logistical difficulties in integrating natural, cultural.

LESSONS LEARNED

The MED-Routes experience in the Pafos region demonstrated that the foundation of a successful eco-itinerary lies in co-creation, trust-building, and local ownership. Engaging a diverse mix of stakeholders—from archaeologists to agrotourism operators, cultural institutions, and environmental centers—proved essential for crafting itineraries that are not only authentic

and multidimensional but also rooted in sustainability and circularity principles. The integration of real-world best practices, such as the establishment of refillable water stations, reuse of treated wastewater in green areas, and storytelling through interactive visitor centers, confirmed that small, locally tailored actions can generate significant environmental and social impact. Furthermore, combining natural and cultural heritage with experiential learning fosters deeper visitor engagement while revitalizing rural economies.

ACTIVITIES

The eco-itinerary developed for the Pafos region offers a diverse range of immersive, eco-friendly activities aligned with circular economy and sustainability principles—blending environmental responsibility with cultural preservation and community engagement. Among the best practices is the hiking and cycling network that spans the Akamas Peninsula and the Laona Plateau, offering low-impact, carbon-light exploration of Natura 2000 sites. These routes are supported by e-bike charging stations, signposted trails, and rest points with refillable water stations, reducing single-use plastics and promoting sustainable mobility. In Kathikas, Droushia, and Inia, visitors can engage in hands-on traditional workshops, such as basket weaving, pottery making, and olive pressing, hosted by local artisans. These workshops not only preserve intangible heritage and support the local economy, but also incorporate reuse and waste minimization practices by using natural, locally sourced materials and compostable packaging.

Seasonal agricultural activities like grape and olive harvesting, fruit picking, and wine- and oil-making demonstrations at certified sustainable wineries and olive mills, allow visitors to experience regenerative land-use practices. These agrotourism sites often use solar panels, water-efficient systems, and organic composting techniques, offering an authentic, circular model of production and consumption. Additionally, eco-volunteer programs invite tourists to participate in coastal cleanups, tree planting drives, and swamp restoration activities, contributing directly to biodiversity conservation and climate resilience efforts.

CHALLENGES

One of the most demanding challenges in creating and sustaining an eco-itinerary lies in the high initial investment costs for infrastructure upgrades such as e-bike charging stations, water refill points, renewable energy installations, and waste

management systems. Additionally, limited financial and human resources within small rural communities can hinder the implementation of circularity practices and stakeholder training. Resistance to change from traditional operators, bureaucratic delays, and lack of digital capacity also pose barriers, particularly in adopting innovative interpretation tools and sustainability certifications. Ensuring ongoing stakeholder engagement and maintaining quality standards across diverse service providers further complicate the process.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned from the capacity building process is that genuine co-creation with local stakeholders rooted in mutual trust, shared values, and clear sustainability goals is the key to designing authentic eco-itineraries that are both environmentally responsible and economically viable; when communities are empowered and actively involved, the resulting tourism experiences are more meaningful, resilient, and widely supported.

SERVICES

A well-developed catalogue of existing services and infrastructure supports the eco-itinerary across the Pafos region, providing visitors with a holistic and sustainable experience that integrates cultural heritage, circular economy practices, and modern amenities. This catalogue includes accommodation facilities, local restaurants and wineries, transport options (public buses, e-bikes, car-sharing), nature and cultural attractions, and eco-infrastructure such as bike rentals, electric charging stations, and water refill points. Detailed maps and signposting systems, both physical and digital, highlight key locations and sustainability features—including QR-coded info boards at archaeological parks, nature reserves, and craft centres, offering interpretative content in multiple languages. Apps like the Myth of Aphrodite and UNESCO Park App enhance the visitor journey by integrating Augmented Reality (AR) and audio guides that also promote eco-awareness.

Best practices are visible in craft revival workshops in Droushia and Fyti, where artisans teach traditional weaving, basketry, and embroidery using sustainable materials, while also practicing waste minimisation and reuse. In Inia, the Turtle Museum and the Akamas Geology Centre combine modern, interactive displays with environmental education, promoting biodiversity conservation and resource responsibility. Events like the Pafos Aphrodite Festival, Rural Life Fairs, and open-air concerts

incorporate eco-measures such as compostable utensils, solar lighting, plastic-free protocols, and waste separation stations. Trekking and cycling routes—especially those through the Akamas Peninsula and Laona Plateau—are clearly signposted and supported by eco-friendly rest stops equipped with sustainable infrastructure. Additionally, visitor brochures and guides educate tourists on eco-routes, circularity goals, and responsible behaviour, reinforcing the region’s commitment to sustainable tourism and providing a model for others seeking to build eco-itineraries grounded in circular economy principles.

CHALLENGES

Establishing a sustainable and inclusive eco-itinerary requires close collaboration between institutions, local authorities, and tourism operators to ensure long-term value creation. However, several significant challenges arise in this process—most notably, the high costs of implementation, the complexity of coordinating multiple stakeholders, and the need for continuous training on sustainability practices. Equally important is securing genuine community participation and developing financially viable models that endure over time. Aligning environmental priorities with economic interests remains a key difficulty that must be addressed through strategic planning and consistent stakeholder engagement.

LESSONS LEARNED - ADVICE

The key lesson learned is that involving stakeholders from the outset, embedding sustainability principles, and highlighting local identity are fundamental to creating a meaningful and lasting eco-itinerary. Carefully mapping and integrating eco-friendly services not only improves the route’s sustainable accessibility but also reinforces the regenerative and authentic character of the destination.

TOURISM FACILITIES

The Pafos region offers a rich and diverse array of tourism facilities that embody both social sustainability and circular economy principles. A curated network of tourism service providers has been mapped across the Akamas Peninsula and Laona Plateau, highlighting best practice examples in accommodation, gastronomy, and experiential tourism. Accommodation options include traditional agrotourism guesthouses such as those found in Droushia, Kathikas, and Ineia where visitors can stay in restored stone-built homes that retain the charm of Cypriot architecture while incorporating water-saving fixtures, solar energy systems, and composting solutions. Many of these accommodations also partner with

local producers, offering guests locally sourced breakfasts and access to handmade goods. In gastronomy, restaurants and taverns such as those in Kathikas and Droushia serve regional dishes prepared with seasonal ingredients sourced directly from surrounding vineyards, olive oil mills (e.g., Kyriakos Koupparis Olive Factory), and organic farms. Several establishments promote the use of doggy bags, biodegradable packaging, and refillable water bottle stations. Furthermore, wine producers like Vasilikon and Sterna

VISITORS & COMMUNICATION

The Pafos region exemplifies best practices in visitor engagement and communication, seamlessly integrating clear, inclusive, and interactive information systems across its eco-itinerary. Visitors are welcomed with multilingual signage and QR-coded panels at key sites, such as the UNESCO-listed Pafos Archaeological Park and the Akamas Peninsula, providing real-time information on site significance, sustainability measures, and responsible behaviors. Digital tools, including the "Myth of Aphrodite" augmented reality app, offer immersive storytelling experiences that enrich understanding while minimizing environmental impact. Inclusivity is prioritized through accessible pathways, tactile exhibits, and audio guides catering to diverse needs. Community interaction is fostered via participatory workshops in villages like Fyti and Droushia, where visitors engage in traditional crafts, promoting cultural exchange and supporting local economies. These initiatives collectively enhance the visitor experience, promote sustainable practices, and strengthen the region's cultural identity.

CHALLENGES

One significant issue is the inconsistency and fragmentation of signage across various sites, which can lead to confusion and hinder visitors' understanding of sustainability practices and responsible behaviors. This inconsistency is often due to a lack of standardized guidelines and coordination among stakeholders. Additionally, while digital tools like QR codes and augmented reality applications offer innovative ways to convey information, their effectiveness is limited by varying levels of digital literacy among visitors and the availability of reliable internet connectivity in remote areas. Inclusivity is another pressing concern; many attractions lack accessible pathways, tactile exhibits, and multilingual resources, which can exclude individuals with disabilities or those who speak different languages. Furthermore, there is a need for more interactive and

participatory experiences that foster meaningful engagement between visitors and local communities, promoting cultural exchange and deeper appreciation of the region's heritage. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to develop cohesive communication strategies, invest in inclusive infrastructure, and facilitate community involvement in tourism planning and interpretation.

LESSONS LEARNED

The development of the eco-itinerary in the Pafos Region has underscored the importance of fostering a sustainable tourism network that not only strengthens local identity but also promotes responsible tourism practices. By engaging visitors through participatory experiences such as traditional craft workshops, guided nature walks, and local culinary events tourists gain a deeper appreciation for the region's cultural and natural heritage. These interactive activities encourage responsible behavior, support the preservation of local traditions, and create meaningful connections between visitors and the community. Such engagement not only enhances the visitor experience but also contributes to the long-term sustainability and resilience of the region's tourism sector.

ACCESSIBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Pafos region provides efficient and sustainable travel options through a well-developed public transportation network operated by OSYPA Ltd, which connects major points such as Pafos Airport, the city center, and surrounding villages, while intercity buses ensure easy access to cities like Limassol and Nicosia..

VISIBILITY- PROMOTION STRATEGIES

The Pafos region has implemented a multifaceted promotional strategy to enhance the visibility of its eco-itineraries, focusing on sustainability and cultural heritage. Key marketing actions include a comprehensive digital campaign launched in collaboration with stakeholders such as Hermes Airports and the Deputy Ministry of Tourism. This campaign targets both established and emerging European markets, utilizing dynamic content like short videos and banners to showcase Pafos' unique attractions. Additionally, the region has embraced digital tools to enrich visitor experiences; for instance, the "Myth of Aphrodite" augmented reality app offers immersive storytelling at various sites, providing information in multiple languages. Interpretation materials are indeed provided in both local languages and English, ensuring accessibility for a diverse audience. These

efforts collectively contribute to promoting Pafos as a sustainable and culturally rich destination.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

The Capacity Building Module in the Pafos region has been significantly enhanced through a participatory and interactive approach, focusing on real-world applications of circular economy principles. Workshops organized by the Cyprus Circular Economy Network have facilitated collaborative sessions where local businesses and stakeholders analyze their operations to identify opportunities for implementing circular practices. These sessions encourage participants to brainstorm and develop circular business models, fostering a hands-on understanding of sustainability concepts. Additionally, initiatives like the LIFE-IP CYzero WASTE project have introduced practical case studies, such as the management of Green Kiosks for recyclable materials, demonstrating effective waste management strategies. These interactive learning experiences not only provide theoretical knowledge but also inspire participants to apply sustainable practices within their communities, thereby strengthening the region's commitment to circular economy principles.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?

CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT DESIGN

Cultural Eco-Tourism Packages in Pafos: Two Best Practice Examples

(1). “A Day with Aphrodite” is a family-friendly, one-day eco-cultural itinerary designed for educational groups and families seeking an immersive and environmentally conscious experience in the Pafos region. The journey begins with visits to the environmental and cultural centres of the Laona Plateau, including the Inia Turtle Museum and the Akamas Flora and Avifauna Centre, followed by a trip to the protected Turtle Bay within the Akamas Peninsula National Park, where participants learn about marine biodiversity and conservation. A traditional zero-waste lunch is served in the villages of Kathikas or Peyia, featuring local, organic ingredients. In the afternoon, the tour continues at the Kato Pafos Archaeological Park, where visitors discover world-renowned Roman mosaics depicting scenes from mythology, followed by a hands-on workshop where participants create miniature mosaics using recycled materials. The day concludes with a sunset storytelling session at Pafos Harbour, celebrating Aphrodite’s legacy and the maritime heritage of the region. Sustainability is central to the experience, with eco-bus

transportation, reusable kits, low-impact meals, and the involvement of local artisans fostering circular economy practices and cultural transmission. The itinerary is also directly linked to the Phoenicians' Route, a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, which highlights Pafos's historical role as a Phoenician harbour and cultural hub that facilitated artistic, religious, and technological exchanges across the ancient Mediterranean.

(2). "Akamas Adventure & Culture Trail" is a two-day immersive eco-cultural experience designed for active travelers and educational groups eager to explore the natural landscapes and living traditions of the Pafos region. The itinerary begins with a scenic eco-hike or e-bike journey from Kathikas to Fyti, traversing terraced vineyards and rural paths. In Fyti, renowned for its textile heritage, participants witness a traditional weaving demonstration before continuing to a local olive oil mill and boutique wineries to learn about indigenous grape varieties and sustainable farming practices. The day concludes with a hands-on Cypriot cooking workshop and a farm-to-table dinner at a family-run agrotourism inn, where guests stay overnight in solar-powered accommodations. On the second day, participants embark on the Aphrodite Trail in the Akamas Peninsula, a journey where myth and nature converge. As they hike, guides recount stories from both Greek and Phoenician mythology tied to Aphrodite, culminating in a visit to the mythical Baths of Aphrodite. The experience concludes with a tour of the Marion-Arsinoe Archaeological Museum in Polis Chrysochous, which showcases artefacts highlighting the area's importance as a Phoenician and Hellenistic coastal hub. The entire itinerary emphasizes low-impact travel, zero-waste meals, support for local artisans and musicians, and interpretive experiences rooted in cultural heritage and environmental stewardship. Importantly, the tour follows the historical paths of the Phoenicians' Route, a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, allowing participants to engage with Cyprus's maritime legacy and its role as a key Mediterranean crossroads for trade, culture, and innovation.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

As part of the Pafos eco-itinerary development, a series of meetings and workshops were organized, bringing together local authorities, artisans, tourism operators, and academic

institutions to collaboratively co-create and enhance the itinerary..

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Key challenges in developing the Pafos eco-itinerary include crafting engaging and marketable package tours that appeal to diverse audiences, while actively involving local providers such as artisans, guides, and agrotourism operators. Ensuring sustainable mobility through walking, cycling, and public transport is essential but logistically demanding, especially in rural areas. Another critical challenge lies in curating authentic, immersive experiences that genuinely reflect the cultural and natural identity of the Pafos region. Additionally, there is a pressing need to enhance multilingual promotional materials and tools to effectively reach international visitors and communicate the eco-itinerary's values and offerings.

LESSONS LEARNED

The key lesson learned from developing the Pafos eco-itinerary is that creating integrated, participatory, and sustainability-driven tourism experiences not only reinforces the region's unique identity but also elevates visitor engagement and satisfaction. By involving local communities, embedding circular economy practices, and showcasing both cultural and natural heritage, the Pafos eco-itinerary stands out as a replicable model for circular cultural tourism in the Mediterranean.



The Phoenicians' Route, Pafos Region, Cyprus eco-itinerary

Showcasing the hidden cultural and natural beauties of the Akamas peninsular and the Laona plateau at the western site of Pafos region



**CULTURAL ROUTE
TITLE****THE PHOENICIANS' ROUTE****ECO ITINERARY
TITLE****WINE, FOOD AND SAINTS - EXPLORING PAFOS FOREST, THE
TRANQUILITY OF THE WINE VILLAGES AND DIARIZOS VALLEY
SERENITY.****COUNTRY, AREA****CYPRUS – PAFOS REGION****CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?****STATE OF THE ART**

The WINE, FOOD and SAINTS eco-itinerary is set in one of Cyprus's most storied and scenic regions, weaving through a landscape steeped in mythology, culture, gastronomy, and biodiversity. Centered around the western part of the island, the itinerary begins at the iconic coastal site of Petra tou Romiou, celebrated in Greek mythology as the birthplace of Aphrodite, and extends inland through the historic village of Kouklia—home to the Sanctuary of Aphrodite in Palaipafos, once a major religious center of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.

CONTEXT

From the coast, the route meanders northward through the Panagia and Statos-Agios Fotios highland communities, offering a rich tapestry of religious landmarks, traditional crafts, and rural gastronomy. Visitors can explore Ezousa and Diarizos valleys, where historic monasteries and UNESCO-listed churches showcase Cyprus's spiritual heritage amid terraced vineyards and river landscapes. Stops include the Chrysorrogiatissa Monastery and churches adorned with rare 11th-century frescoes.

The eco-itinerary continues into Pafos Forest, where the Stavros tis Psokas Cyprus Mufflon enclosure allows close encounters with this endemic and protected wild sheep species in a preserved natural habitat.

Throughout the itinerary, visitors can enjoy authentic local cuisine—featuring halloumi, olive oil, carob syrup, and wine—through visits to traditional taverns and boutique wineries offering tastings, cellar tours, and panoramic views. Environmental information centers across the route highlight local conservation efforts, while marked cycling and hiking trails connect natural, cultural, and culinary attractions in an immersive low-impact experience. The Itinerary is 120km long

**DEMOGRAPHIC
SITUATION,**

Demographic and Tourism Profile: Pafos Municipality, Geroskipou Municipality to the sparsely inhabited rural heartlands of Kouklia, Panagia, Statos-Agios Fotios, the Diarizos Valley villages and the Pafos Forest.

The Pafos eco-itinerary region covers a wide spectrum of demographic and socioeconomic realities, stretching from the densely populated urban centers of Pafos and Geroskipou Municipality to the sparsely inhabited rural heartlands of Kouklia, Panagia, Statos–Agios Fotios, and the Diarizos Valley villages. Pafos Municipality, as the administrative core of the district, accommodates approximately 37,991 residents within a compact area of 16.95 km², yielding a high population density of 2,241 inhabitants/km². Its population structure is demographically diverse, with young families, professionals, and a significant share of retirees reflecting the city’s appeal as both a dynamic residential and tourist destination.

TOURISM VISION

Our vision:

The Pafos region to become:

“A premium holiday destination that will offer the visitor a wide range of experiences, ensures sustainability in development with respect to the environment and cultural heritage ”

TOURISM VOLUME

In 2023, Cyprus welcomed 3,845,652 tourist arrivals, marking a strong recovery with a 20.1% increase over 2022. The Pafos District stood out as the leading destination, attracting 34.2% of all tourists—more than any other region—surpassing Ayia Napa (16.4%), Larnaca (13.4%), Limassol (12.0%), and Paralimni/Protaras (11.2%).

Visitors to Cyprus stayed an average of 8.6 nights, amounting to an estimated 33 million overnight stays across the country. The Pafos region alone accounted for over 5.3 million overnight stays, positioning it as a premier location for extended holidays. Its scenic coastlines, historical landmarks, and cultural assets make it a preferred base for exploration.

Tourism receipts in 2023 reached an estimated €2.99 billion, reflecting a 22.6% increase compared to 2022. Tourists spent an average of €777.68 per trip. While spending in Pafos was slightly lower (€716.70 per visitor), the district still generated approximately €900 million in total tourism revenue due to its high visitor share.

The visitor base remained primarily European, with 82% of tourists arriving from Europe and 40.8% from EU countries. The United Kingdom led all markets, contributing 33.9% of total arrivals,

followed by Israel (10.7%), Poland (7.1%), Germany (5.5%), Greece (4.9%), and Sweden (3.8%).

VISITORS

Cyprus welcomes a diverse range of visitors, with the majority being independent travelers and couples (approximately 45–50%), followed by families with children (25–30%), seniors and long-stay retirees (15–20%), and a smaller but growing segment of youth and students (5–7%).

SWOT

The eco-itinerary in the Pafos and Akamas region is strongly anchored in the area's distinct strengths, capitalizing on its rich cultural and natural heritage, including UNESCO-listed sites like the Pafos Archaeological Park and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, as well as the biodiversity of Akamas National Park and Pafos Forest. The region's ability to offer a blend of gastronomy, festivals, outdoor recreation, and authentic village experiences positions it ideally within the growing global demand for sustainable and experiential tourism.

CHALLENGES

Enhanced collaboration between operators and municipalities/policymakers is essential, particularly in light of the intense competition within the Mediterranean tourism sector. Additionally, there is a rising demand for improved digital accessibility and information, empowering visitors to independently explore the area as a cohesive regional tourism offering of Pafos region (further on same as in previous chapter).

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

A key lesson learned from the development of the Pafos eco-itineraries is that collaborative governance and stakeholder inclusion are essential for building a successful and resilient sustainable tourism model (further on same as in previous chapter).

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

This capacity building module aims to empower local stakeholders in the Pafos region to co-create and implement sustainable eco-tourism through a participatory, hands-on approach. (further on same as in previous chapter).

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS

MAIN ACTORS - GOVERNANCE

The development of eco-itineraries and the broader transition toward sustainable tourism in the Pafos region is driven by a diverse network of strategic players (further on same as in previous chapter).

VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The shared vision for the Pafos eco-itinerary is to establish the region as a leading cultural and circular tourism destination that celebrates its rich heritage, empowers local communities, and

protects its natural environment (further on same as in previous chapter)..

CHALLENGES

Key challenges to achieving the strategic vision of the Pafos eco-itinerary include maintaining long-term stakeholder engagement, bridging governance gaps between rural and urban areas, and securing stable funding for infrastructure and sustainability initiatives. (further on same as in previous chapter).

LESSONS LEARNED – ADVICE

One of the most important lessons learned through the development of eco-itineraries in the MED-ROUTES project is that human relationships and trust among stakeholders are the cornerstone of sustainable tourism.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

As part of the Capacity Building Module for the MED-Routes eco-itineraries, a strong emphasis was placed on participatory approaches and interactive learning to ensure broad stakeholder engagement and effective knowledge transfer. Workshops and labs actively involved tourism operators, local authorities, cultural organizations, SMEs, and community representatives, fostering co-creation of sustainable solutions. (further on same as in previous chapter).

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY?

HERITAGE SITES

Best Practice Examples: Heritage Sites on the Pafos Eco-Itinerary

The “Wine, Food and Saints” eco-itinerary in the Pafos region showcases five focal heritage sites that blend cultural storytelling, circular practices, and immersive visitor experiences, while intentionally avoiding overtouristed hotspots by guiding visitors to lesser-known yet highly significant sites. These examples illustrate how cultural identity, sustainability, and community engagement intersect within the itinerary:

1. Sanctuary of Aphrodite – Kouklia (Palaipafos) As a UNESCO-listed archaeological site, this sanctuary is central to both the cultural and mythological identity of Pafos, linking directly to the “Goddess Aphrodite Route.” The site incorporates a small museum and interpretation center with energy-efficient lighting, locally sourced building materials for renovations, and water-saving restroom facilities. Interpretation is enhanced with QR codes and AR content from the “Myth of Aphrodite” app. Storytelling focuses on Aphrodite’s symbolic role and the rituals of ancient worship, connecting tangible ruins with intangible myth.

2. Folk Art Museum – Panayia Village Housed in a restored traditional building, this museum showcases Fytiotiko weaving,

carob syrup production, and rural Cypriot crafts. It integrates circularity by demonstrating zero-waste textile techniques and upcycling traditional tools. Workshops with local artisans allow for intergenerational knowledge transfer, helping preserve intangible traditions and support local employment. Lighting is LED-based, and interpretive panels use eco-friendly printing. The site avoids congestion by offering a quiet, authentic rural experience away from busier urban centers.

3. Stavros tis Psokas – Cyprus Mouflon Enclosure
Located in the Pafos Forest, this site provides a rare opportunity to observe Cyprus's endemic wild sheep in their natural habitat. It supports biodiversity and ecological education, aligning with the itinerary's nature-based focus. Water is sourced sustainably, waste is managed through composting, and pathways are constructed from natural materials. Interpretation is delivered via local forestry guides, combining environmental storytelling with conservation messaging, emphasizing the relationship between wildlife and local folklore.

4. Diarizos Valley Churches & Panagia Chrysorrogiatissa Monastery
This network of Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches and monasteries reflects Cyprus's deep spiritual heritage. Many have implemented solar panel lighting, rainwater collection, and minimal-impact visitor management strategies. Their inclusion supports the "Saint Paul Route" and connects religious pilgrimage with eco-conscious rural tourism. Interpretation uses oral narratives from clergy and residents, fostering respectful, community-led storytelling that preserves both tangible monuments and spiritual customs.

5. Centre of Environmental Information – Salamiou
This institution exemplifies sustainable design and education. Built with energy-efficient architecture, it uses solar energy, has on-site composting, and serves as a knowledge hub for circular practices in tourism and agriculture. It hosts exhibitions on Natura 2000 protected areas and the Diarizos landscape, linking natural and cultural values. Visitors can engage in hands-on learning about biodiversity, heritage agriculture, and water conservation, bridging heritage interpretation with sustainability education.

These best practice sites avoid saturation by promoting dispersed visitation, integrating digital tools, and engaging local communities in storytelling and site stewardship. Through a mix of ancient heritage, living traditions, and environmental education, the Pafos

eco-itinerary creates a cohesive, circular tourism experience rooted in authenticity and sustainability.

CHALLENGES

Creating an effective eco-itinerary in the Pafos region presents several interlinked challenges that must be addressed through targeted capacity-building efforts (further on same as in previous chapter).

LESSONS LEARNED

The MED-Routes experience in the Pafos region demonstrated that the foundation of a successful eco-itinerary lies in co-creation, trust-building, and local ownership. (further on same as in previous chapter).

ACTIVITIES

The “Wine, Food and Saints” eco-itinerary in Pafos offers a rich array of visitor activities that align closely with circularity principles and sustainable tourism practices. Best practice examples include guided cycling tours along the Diarizos Valley wine route, where travelers use e-bikes or bicycles rented from local providers, minimizing carbon emissions while exploring scenic vineyards and cultural landmarks. Hiking and birdwatching in Pafos Forest are promoted through marked trails that emphasize Leave-No-Trace principles, and water refilling points encourage the use of reusable bottles to reduce plastic waste. A highlight of the itinerary is the visit to local wineries such as Vouni Panayia, Kolios, Tsangarides, Makkas, and Lagria, where guests enjoy wine tastings paired with local delicacies in settings that showcase traditional architecture and eco-conscious practices. Many of these wineries implement circular measures, such as reusing grape by-products in compost or cosmetics, minimizing water usage, and sourcing energy through solar panels. In villages like Panagia and Salamiou, visitors can also participate in olive harvesting and grape pressing using ancestral techniques, with all organic waste composted or reused in local production. Culinary workshops in guesthouses focus on farm-to-table practices, using local ingredients sourced from nearby producers, while leftover food is repurposed or composted. Additionally, activities such as carob syrup-making, tree planting initiatives in Natura 2000 zones, and interpretive eco-walks organized by environmental centers reinforce awareness of resource conservation, biodiversity, and cultural preservation. These hands-on, community-led experiences not only deepen visitors' connection to the land but also model sustainable behavior rooted in the values of the region.

CHALLENGES

One of the most demanding challenges in creating and sustaining an eco-itinerary lies in the high initial investment costs for infrastructure upgrades such as e-bike charging stations, water refill points, renewable energy installations, and waste management systems (further on same as in previous chapter).

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned from the capacity building process is that genuine co-creation with local stakeholders rooted in mutual trust, shared values, and clear sustainability goals is the key to designing authentic eco-itineraries (further on same as in previous chapter).

SERVICES

The "Wine, Food and Saints" eco-itinerary in the Pafos region blends cultural richness, ecological integrity, and authentic local experiences. Spanning key heritage landmarks such as the Sanctuary of Aphrodite in Kouklia, the myth-laden Aphrodite's Rock (Petra tou Romiou), the culturally vibrant Geroskipou Municipality, and the tranquil Diarizos Valley, the route connects sacred, natural, and gastronomic sites. A highlight of the itinerary is Stavros tis Psokas, nestled within the Pafos Forest—home to the rare and protected Cyprus mouflon. This forest station offers an immersive experience in biodiversity conservation, with walking trails, picnic spots, and educational signage promoting sustainable forestry, water use, and wildlife protection.

The itinerary promotes circular tourism through eco-certified wineries like Vouni Panayia and Kolios Winery, where traditional and sustainable wine production can be explored through tastings and cellar tours. Visitors can engage in low-impact activities such as hiking, cycling, or participating in olive oil and carob syrup workshops that emphasize local sourcing, minimal waste, and energy-efficient practices. In Geroskipou, traditional loukoumi-making workshops use local ingredients and support culinary heritage. Infrastructure supporting the eco-itinerary includes well-marked trails, QR-coded interpretive signs, water refill points, recycling facilities, and printed/digital maps with eco-highlights. Educational brochures and guided experiences further enhance responsible visitor behavior. From the spiritual ambiance of Byzantine monasteries to the biodiversity haven of Stavros tis Psokas forest station, this itinerary unites myth, nature, and local culture in a model of sustainable and regenerative tourism for the Pafos region.

CHALLENGES

Establishing a sustainable and inclusive eco-itinerary requires close collaboration between institutions, local authorities, and tourism operators (further on same as in previous chapter).

**LESSONS LEARNED -
ADVICE**

The key lesson learned is that involving stakeholders from the outset, embedding sustainability principles, and highlighting local identity are fundamental to creating a meaningful and lasting eco-itinerary (further on same as in previous chapter).

TOURISM FACILITIES

The “Wine, Food and Saints” eco-itinerary in Pafos presents a comprehensive and sustainable tourism model that integrates authentic local services, eco-friendly practices, and cultural immersion. Tourism services along the route are thoughtfully curated to align with circular economy principles and community empowerment. Visitors can choose from a variety of accommodation options including traditional agrotourism guesthouses in villages such as Panagia, Salamiou, and Statos–Agios Fotios, many of which are housed in restored stone buildings equipped with solar panels, water reuse systems, and composting facilities. Culinary offerings are anchored by family-run taverns and award-winning wineries like Vouni Panayia, Kolios, and Makarounas, where meals and wine tastings feature seasonal, organic, and locally sourced ingredients, reducing carbon footprints and supporting small producers. Tourists can engage directly with local artisans and food producers through olive oil pressing demonstrations in Timi and Kouklia, carob syrup making, and loukoumi workshops in Geroskipou, preserving intangible heritage while stimulating local economies. Many of these businesses follow sustainable waste management practices and use eco-friendly packaging, especially for takeaway picnics designed for hikers and cyclists. The area is well-equipped with interpretive trails, e-bike rentals, recycling bins, water refill stations, and QR-coded signage offering multilingual cultural and environmental information. These services are enhanced by educational brochures and digital tools that promote sustainable behavior and deepen visitor appreciation for the region’s heritage. Overall, the itinerary’s service ecosystem fosters a regenerative tourism experience rooted in authenticity, resilience, and respect for Pafos’ people and place.

**VISITORS &
COMMUNICATION**

The “Wine, Food and Saints” eco-itinerary in Pafos incorporates best practices in visitor communication and interaction by ensuring clear, inclusive, and engaging interpretation of both cultural and natural assets. Throughout the route, visitors encounter visual signage, QR-coded info points, and digital applications (e.g., the

Myth of Aphrodite AR app) that provide multilingual content on local heritage, responsible behavior, and sustainability practices. These tools help foster environmental awareness while enhancing accessibility for diverse audiences, including non-Greek speakers and families with children. The itinerary promotes active visitor participation through hands-on workshops such as olive oil pressing in Timi, loukoumi-making in Geroskipou, and weaving demonstrations in Panagia, which not only preserve traditional crafts but create authentic encounters with local artisans. Community-based storytelling, guided wine tastings, and cultural performances further enhance interaction between guests and residents, deepening the emotional connection to place. Additionally, the availability of local guides, printed brochures, and educational events ensures that both spontaneous and planned visits are informative, respectful, and immersive, reinforcing Pafos as a model for inclusive and community-driven cultural tourism.

CHALLENGES

One significant issue is the inconsistency and fragmentation of signage across various sites, which can lead to confusion and hinder visitors' understanding of sustainability practices and responsible behaviors (further on same as in previous chapter).

LESSONS LEARNED

The development of the eco-itinerary in the Pafos Region has underscored the importance of fostering a sustainable tourism network that not only strengthens local identity but also promotes responsible tourism practices (further on same as in previous chapter).

**VISIBILITY-
PROMOTION
STRATEGIES**

The Pafos region has implemented a multifaceted promotional strategy to enhance the visibility of its eco-itineraries, focusing on sustainability and cultural heritage (further on same as in previous chapter).

**CAPACITY BUILDING
MODULE**

The Capacity Building Module in the Pafos region has been significantly enhanced through a participatory and interactive approach, focusing on real-world applications of circular economy principles. Workshops organized by the Cyprus Circular Economy Network have facilitated collaborative sessions (further on same as in previous chapter).

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER?**CULTURAL TOURISM
PRODUCT DESIGN**

Example 1: “Sacred Flavours of Aphrodite” – 1-Day Cultural Tour
Target Group: Families, mythology lovers, foodies, cultural enthusiasts

Theme: Mythology, local gastronomy, and sacred heritage

Morning

Example 1: The “Sacred Flavours of Aphrodite” one-day cultural tour is a rich and engaging experience designed for families, mythology enthusiasts, food lovers, and cultural travelers. The journey begins in Geroskipou, where participants visit the iconic five-domed Byzantine Church of Agia Paraskevi, a spiritual landmark that reflects the region’s deep-rooted religious heritage. The experience continues with a hands-on loukoumi-making workshop, where visitors learn the traditional art behind Geroskipou’s famous Cyprus delights, a sweet treat protected for its geographical origin. From there, the tour moves to Kouklia, home to the ancient Sanctuary of Aphrodite. After exploring the archaeological site and museum, the group is led to Petra tou Romiou, where a captivating storytelling session at the legendary birthplace of Aphrodite is brought to life through an augmented reality app that reimagines the goddess rising from the sea. Midday offers a relaxing stop for a lunch made from locally sourced ingredients, served at a traditional tavern in Kouklia that embraces zero-waste practices. In the afternoon, visitors explore an olive oil mill or carob workshop in nearby Kouklia or Timi, gaining insight into sustainable production methods and tasting local products. The final stop is Salamiou village, where guests visit the Environmental Information Center to learn about regional biodiversity and water conservation efforts. A leisurely stroll through the village’s cultural landmarks concludes the day, complemented by a light wine tasting from a local micro-winery, offering a perfect ending that celebrates the harmony of heritage, sustainability, and flavor.

Example 2: The “Wine, Saints & Forest Spirits” two-day eco-cultural package is a curated experience for active adults, cultural travelers, and agrotourism enthusiasts, blending religious heritage, viticulture, sustainability, and nature immersion. Day one begins with a visit to Statos–Agios Fotios, where guests tour Kolios Winery’s organic vineyards and sample native grape varieties such as Maratheftiko, gaining firsthand insight into circular practices in sustainable wine production. The journey continues to the picturesque village of Panagia, where participants explore the Byzantine Museum and the birthplace of Archbishop Makarios III. A second wine tasting follows at Vouni Panayia Winery, paired with an

eco-conscious lunch of local cheeses, wild greens, and fresh village bread. In the afternoon, travelers venture into the Diarizos Valley to witness a traditional weaving demonstration, with the opportunity to try their hand at this centuries-old craft. The evening is spent in a local agrotourism inn powered by renewable energy sources, where guests enjoy a home-cooked Cypriot dinner made with ingredients grown onsite or sourced from nearby farms.

On day two, the itinerary leads into the heart of the Pafos Forest at Stavros tis Psokas Forest Station. Here, participants walk scenic trails, observe the endangered Cyprus mouflon in its natural habitat, and join a local naturalist for a birdwatching or medicinal herb identification session. A plastic-free picnic lunch is served at a designated forest picnic site, using biodegradable or reusable containers and featuring fresh, seasonal products. The afternoon offers a reflective journey through the Diarizos Valley, with visits to Panagia Chrysorrogiatissa Monastery or the remote Panagia tou Sinti church—both important stops on Cyprus’s religious routes. The tour concludes at a panoramic viewpoint, where participants receive a sustainable gift pack including local wine, dried herbs, and handmade crafts. This package exemplifies low-impact, high-value tourism rooted in local identity and environmental stewardship, serving as a replicable model for circular cultural tourism in the Pafos region.

CAPACITY BUILDING MODULE

As part of the Pafos eco-itinerary development, a series of meetings and workshops were organized, bringing together local authorities, artisans, tourism operators, and academic institutions to collaboratively co-create and enhance the itinerary. These sessions incorporated interactive learning formats that enabled participants to apply circular economy principles directly to tourism planning. Through the analysis of real-world case studies from leading sustainable destinations, attendees gained practical insights and inspiration for local implementation. On-site visits to cultural heritage workshops and sustainable gastronomy experiences within the Pafos region such as weaving centers, olive oil mills, wineries and farm to table restaurants offered hands on exposure to circular practices. These capacity-building activities have significantly reinforced the region's ability to design and deliver a cultural eco-itinerary rooted in authenticity, sustainability, and community engagement.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Key challenges in developing the Pafos eco-itinerary include crafting engaging and marketable package tours that appeal to diverse audiences, while actively involving local providers such as artisans, guides, and agrotourism operators. (further on same as in previous chapter).

LESSONS LEARNED

The key lesson learned from developing the Pafos eco-itinerary is that by involving local communities, embedding circular economy practices, and showcasing both cultural and natural heritage, the Pafos eco-itinerary stands out as a replicable model for circular cultural tourism in the Mediterranean.

The Phoenicians' Route, Paphos Region, Cyprus

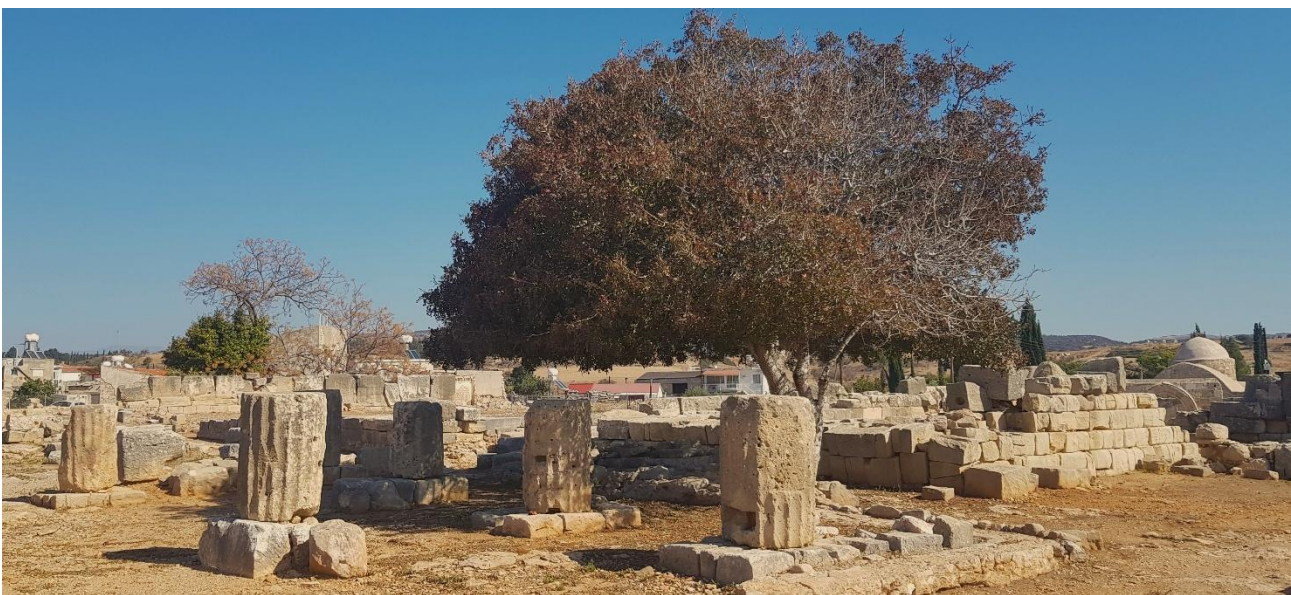
WINE, FOOD AND SAINTS - Exploring Pafos forest, the tranquillity of the wine villages and Diarizos Valley serenity





CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT: As defined by UN Tourism, a Tourism Product is "a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific center of interest which represents the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels and it has a life-cycle". [HTTPS://www.unwto.org/tourism-development-products](https://www.unwto.org/tourism-development-products) Tourism product consists of the attraction and services provided.

DESTINATION: As defined by UN Tourism, destination is a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness. <http://www.unwto.org/global/publication/UNWTO-Tourism-definitions>



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHALLENGES

Finally to summarize, partners have detected several serious challenges that have motivated them to think about circular tourism and eco-itineraries creation.

Speaking of the purpose and **WHY TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY**, the key challenges include depopulation, aging population, limited infrastructure, and low international visibility. There is also a lack of investment, seasonal tourism fluctuations, and the difficulty of balancing growth with sustainability.

Speaking of **WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS** key challenges mentioned by most of the partners include fragmented coordination among stakeholders, limited resources, and difficulties in implementing circular practices. It also points to the challenge of raising environmental awareness among stakeholders, while ensuring sustainable tourism doesn't harm cultural heritage.

Speaking on **HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY** challenges focus on preserving heritage sites while supporting tourism, meeting eco-standards without compromising authenticity, and managing high costs for sustainable events. There's also a lack of digital consistency across regions and difficulty reaching international audiences with inclusive, multilingual materials.

Lastly explaining **WHAT TO CREATE TO USE THE ECO ITINERARY BETTER** main challenges include coordination across multiple municipalities, ensuring consistent circular practices, engaging local communities, and securing long-term funding for maintaining and promoting the eco-itinerary.

LESSONS LEARNED - LISTED BY THE PARTNERS

In the MODULE: WHY – TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY: Engagement in sustainable tourism initiatives enhances knowledge-sharing and builds networks. Authentic, eco-conscious tourism strengthens cultural identity, extends the season, and supports local economies.

Participation in initiatives on sustainable cultural tourism builds knowledge and connections with similar stakeholders. Investing in authentic and sustainable tourism, rooted in heritage, strengthens cultural identity, extends the tourist season, diversifies the economy, and attracts eco-conscious visitors.

Given are some examples:

1. Engage in sustainable cultural tourism initiatives to build awareness and networks

"Get involved in promoted initiatives regarding sustainable cultural tourism to learn more and get to know other stakeholders that face the same paths."
(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

2. Sustainable, authentic tourism builds identity and attracts eco-conscious visitors

"Investing in sustainable, authentic tourism strengthens cultural identity, extends the tourist season, diversifies the economy, and attracts eco-conscious visitors."
(Spain – Castellón)

In the MODULE: WHO – ARE THE STRATEGIC PLAYERS IN THE PROCESS: Strong partnerships and early involvement of communities and stakeholders are essential. Collaborative planning ensures greater visibility, shared goals, and more sustainable tourism outcomes.

Culinary heritage is a strong tool to promote the circular economy. Partnerships between institutions and local communities are crucial to successful eco-tourism. Involving stakeholders (e.g., citizens, operators, visitors) from the beginning increases the visibility and effectiveness of eco-itineraries. Active participation and collaboration foster a sustainable and shared tourism model.

1. Culinary heritage is a strong platform for circular economy promotion

"Culinary heritage offers a powerful platform for circular economic promotion." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

2. Strong partnerships between institutions and communities drive success

"Strong partnerships between institutions and communities drive successful eco-tourism." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

3. Lack of stakeholder engagement limits visibility

"The key lesson learned is that the Ceramic Route was initially promoted only by public authorities, without involving citizens, operators, or visitors, resulting in limited visibility."
(Spain – Castellón)

4. Active stakeholder participation creates sustainable, shared tourism

"To succeed, it is essential to actively engage all stakeholders in its development and promotion." (Spain – Castellón)

In the MODULE: HOW TO USE KEY FEATURES TO CREATE THE ECO-ITINERARY: Sustainable tourism thrives when heritage, circular practices, and community involvement are connected. Local engagement and cultural storytelling foster meaningful, resilient experiences.

Heritage can be activated sustainably by linking it with circularity, local identity, and community involvement. Success of eco-itineraries relies on local community engagement, heritage appreciation, and practical circularity. Valuing heritage and actively engaging the community are key to creating eco-itineraries with lasting territorial impact. Integration of cultural heritage, community participation, and circular practices creates resilient and meaningful tourism experiences.

1. **Heritage activation depends on circularity, local identity, and community**

"It is essential to show how heritage can be activated sustainably. The link between circularity, local identity, and community involvement is key..." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

2. **Community involvement and heritage appreciation are vital**

"The main lesson learned was that the success of eco-itineraries depends on the active involvement of the local community, combined with the appreciation of heritage and the practical application of circularity principles." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

3. **Heritage and sustainability foster meaningful tourism**

"The most important lesson learned is that integrating cultural heritage with circular practices and community participation creates meaningful, resilient tourism experiences..." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

4. **Value local identity and community to create long-term impact**

"Valuing heritage through local identity and actively engaging the community are essential factors in creating sustainable, attractive eco-itineraries aligned with circularity principles and long-term territorial impact." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

In the MODULE: WHAT TO CREATE TO USE THE ECO-ITINERARY BETTER: Cross-sector cooperation and community ownership are key to long-term success. Integrated, participatory design leads to authentic, year-round eco-tourism that empowers local actors.

Cross-sector collaboration and early community involvement are essential to building sustainable and inclusive eco-itineraries. Designing integrated, participatory, and sustainable tourism products enhances local identity and visitor satisfaction. Empowering communities through hands-on, circular-economy-based workshops strengthens their role in tourism and sustainability. A comprehensive, year-round offer involving all local actors ensures authentic and eco-friendly tourism development.

1. **Cross-sector collaboration and early community involvement are crucial**

"The key lesson learned is that cross-sector collaboration and early community involvement are vital to creating sustainable, culturally rich eco-itineraries..." (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

2. **Participatory, sustainable design strengthens local identity and satisfaction**

"The most important lesson learned is that designing integrated, participatory, and sustainable tourism products strengthens local identity, enhances visitor satisfaction..." (Spain – Castellón)

3. **Empowering locals through circular practices enhances tourism**

"Involving local experts in sustainable practices strengthens sustainability within the local community itself, independently of tourism..." (Croatia – Routes of the Olive Tree)

4. **A comprehensive, year-round offer ensures authenticity and impact**

"The most important lesson is the need to create a comprehensive, integrated, and year-round offer that actively involves the entire community..." (Croatia – Routes of the Olive Tree)

COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTION OF ECO-ITINERARIES – SOME EXAMPLES LISTED

Eco-itineraries use **a combination of digital, print, and participatory methods** to communicate their values, engage visitors, and promote sustainable tourism. However, challenges remain in ensuring multilingual accessibility and consistent outreach.

1. Digital Communication and Online Presence

Many itineraries leverage websites and social media for visibility and engagement:

“The promotion strategy for the micro-itineraries includes a strong digital presence via social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, alongside email marketing through municipal and partner newsletters.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“The Ceramic Route of Castellón provides clear and visual information through digital maps, on-site signage, and online platforms (<https://rutasceramicas.castello.es/es/>).”(Spain – Castellón)

“The eco-itinerary will be promoted on the new URF tourism portal and on the website of the European Route of Ceramics.”(Italy – Faenza)

2. Storytelling and Interpretation Tools

The itineraries use **interpretive content** to convey history, values, and sustainable practices:

“Storytelling panels and QR codes offer historical and environmental interpretation.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“Interpretation materials are available in both local languages and English, ensuring accessibility for all visitors.” (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“Interpretation is enriched with exhibitions and murals.”(Spain – Castellón)

3. Print Media and On-Site Materials

Brochures, maps, and signage provide tangible, place-based communication:

“Printed materials, including brochures and maps, will be distributed at tourism offices and hotels.” (Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“A digital map highlights cycling routes, train stations, bike rentals, and public transport connections.”(Italy – Faenza)

4. Multilingual and Inclusive Communication – Challenges and Gaps

Some itineraries still face challenges in reaching diverse audiences:

“Ensuring multilingual and inclusive content across platforms.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon – listed as a challenge)

“Currently, all interpretation materials are available only in Spanish and Valencian... Expanding materials to English and other languages is identified as a key future action.”(Spain – Castellón)

“Participation is encouraged... with the option to take the route accompanied by a guide and an audio device to enhance the experience.”(Spain – Castellón)

5. Word-of-Mouth, Events, and Local Promotion

Some areas rely more heavily on **organic and local promotion**:

“Word-of-mouth and return guests play a strong role in the promotion of offerings.”(Croatia – Routes of the Olive Tree)

“Seasonal festivals, workshops, and local food events serve as effective promotional tools by generating organic publicity.”(Croatia – Routes of the Olive Tree)

“Collaboration with tourism operators and cultural associations to increase visibility and integrate the eco-itinerary into the local offering.”(Italy – Faenza)

In summary

Eco-itineraries promote their offerings by:

- Using **digital platforms**, websites, and social media for outreach.
- Employing **storytelling, signage, and QR codes** for visitor education.
- Distributing **printed brochures and maps** at tourism hubs.
- **Engaging local communities** through events, festivals, and word-of-mouth.
- Working toward **multilingual, inclusive communication**, though improvement is still needed in some regions.



VISITOR MANAGEMENT ON THE ECO-ITINERARIES, WITH EXAMPLES

Eco-itineraries are crafted to **engage eco-conscious, culturally curious travelers** through **sustainable, immersive experiences**, managed with careful attention to impact, education, and inclusion.

Sustainable Mobility and Low-Impact Travel

Visitors are encouraged to use **eco-friendly transport options** such as public transit, walking, and cycling:

“Visitors are encouraged to reduce their carbon footprint by carpooling, using public transport, or renting bikes.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“Castellón can be explored by bicycle or via the ecological TRAM system, minimizing emissions.”(Spain – European Route of Ceramics)

Interactive, Heritage-Based Experiences

Tourists actively participate in **educational, cultural, and hands-on activities**:

“Guided tastings, craft workshops, and educational walks.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“Workshops in various artisanal ceramic studios allow visitors to learn sustainable ceramic techniques, reusing clay and employing low-energy kilns.”(Spain – Castellón)

“Olive oil tasting, biodynamic farming, hiking historic trails, dry-stone architecture... each day invites travelers to actively connect with heritage, ecology, and community.”(Croatia – Routes of the Olive Tree)

Decentralized Tourism and Site Selection

The itineraries avoid overcrowded hotspots by focusing on **lesser-known but high-value cultural sites**:

“These sites avoid saturated tourist destinations and promote a balanced relationship between heritage preservation, local identity, and sustainable practices.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“The itinerary intentionally avoids oversaturated points like major beaches, focusing instead on underappreciated cultural gems.”(Spain – Castellón)

Visitor Education and Circularity

Information and interpretation tools are used to **educate visitors on sustainability and local heritage**:

“Storytelling panels and QR codes offer historical and environmental interpretation.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“A guide on good sustainability practices and voluntary carbon footprint offsetting is provided.”(Spain – Castellón)

Inclusivity and Accessibility

Efforts are made to ensure that **all visitors can participate**, though gaps still exist:

“The route is accessible to all types of visitors, including those with reduced mobility and visual impairments.”(Spain – Castellón)

“Ensuring multilingual and inclusive content across platforms” remains a challenge.(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

Community Engagement and Local Identity

Visitors are connected with local communities through **market visits, food experiences, and storytelling**:

“Local interaction is fostered through markets, cooking events, and cultural activities.”(Portugal – Destination Napoleon)

“Tourist interaction and participation is encouraged through various workshops, and locals are also actively involved in activities with visitors.”(Croatia – Routes of the Olive Tree)

In summary

Eco-itineraries manage visitors by:

- Promoting **green mobility** and minimizing environmental impact.
- Offering **hands-on, circular economy-aligned experiences**.
- Avoiding overcrowding through **site diversification**.
- Emphasizing **visitor education** through storytelling and local context.
- Making progress toward **inclusive access and interpretation**.
- Building authentic, shared experiences through **local community involvement**.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF CIRCULAR TOURISM SERVICES PROVIDED ON THE ECO-ITINERARIES

PT Portugal – Destination Napoleon (Rota Histórica das Linhas de Torres)

Heritage Sites

“São Vicente Fort... interpretive trails and information panels made from recyclable materials... focus on energy sustainability and heritage conservation through energy efficiency projects.”

“Zambujal Fort... pedestrian access and ecological signage... offers immersive experience in direct contact with the original military defense landscape.”

“Interpretation Center of Forte da Casa... implements good practices such as the efficient use of energy, the production of interpretive materials with recycled paper...”

Food & Events

“Brunch at Alqueidão – Participants prepare healthy dishes using fresh, local ingredients.”

“Planting Peace on War Fields – Eco-educational workshop with biodegradable pots and seeds.”

Services

“Best practices include traditional craft workshops using natural materials, interpretive trails guided by trained local experts in sustainable tourism...”

“Local accommodation includes eco-lodges and traditional homes using water- and energy-saving systems.”

ES Spain – Castellón (European Route of Ceramics)

Heritage Sites

“Ebrickhouse uses sustainable materials and energy-efficient technologies.”

“Antigua Fábrica Diago... adaptive reuse conserves built heritage, reduces construction waste, and revitalizes local identity.”

“Matèria Collectiva... low-energy kilns and recycling clay waste.”

Services & Activities

“Workshops in various artisanal ceramic studios allow visitors to learn sustainable ceramic techniques.”

“Restaurants participating in the ‘Castellón Ruta de Sabor’... offer authentic cuisine made with local products.”

“Digital maps and printed brochures (also accessible via QR codes)... recycling bins... bike rental stations.”

IT Italy – Faenza (European Route of Ceramics)

Heritage Sites & Experiences

“Historic Center of Brisighella... preserved through sustainable restoration interventions.”

“Vena del Gesso Romagnola... combines geological enhancement with environmental protection strategies and low-impact tourism.”

Services

“Workshops on medicinal herbs, rural hospitality in sustainable agritourisms, and ceramic artisan workshops in Faenza, with energy-saving practices...”

“Bike rentals and guided nature tours... local wine tastings and winery visits.”

HR Croatia – Korčula, Lastovo, Pelješac (Routes of the Olive Tree)

Heritage and Community Practices

“Ston Saltworks... salt is produced using natural processes (sun, wind, and seawater) without chemicals or machines... minimal energy consumption.”

“Rumarinka family farm... dry-stone wall workshops, traditional cooking sessions, and permaculture education.”

“Local second-hand initiatives are enabling the donation and exchange of clothing reducing waste and promoting a culture of reuse.”



Tourism Services

“EKO Škoj... rainwater collection, composts organic waste, biodynamic farming... meals prepared with ingredients from the estate’s own organic gardens.”

“Gastro Mare Kobaš... visitors participate in oyster harvesting, with the freshly gathered oysters prepared and served on-site.”

GR Greece – Messinia (Routes of the Olive Tree)

“Case studies like Art Farm and KLIMIS show the value of zero-waste and agro-creative tourism.”

CY Cyprus Pafos Archaeological Park

Heritage Sites & Environmental Interpretation

“Circularity is integrated through solar-powered lighting, digital ticketing, and augmented reality storytelling via the ‘UNESCO Archaeological Park App’ to reduce paper usage and enhance the low-impact visitor experience.”

“A shared ticketing model with the nearby Pafos Archaeological Museum promotes clustering and reduces redundant travel.”

Baths of Aphrodite

“Interpretation focuses on myths and legends through augmented reality (AR)... minimizing landscape disruption.”

“Water conservation measures include restricted access, ‘look but don’t touch’ zones, and refill stations to eliminate single-use plastics.”

Craft & Intangible Heritage Workshops

Fyti Weaving Museum

“Supports circular economy through the use of natural dyes, upcycled fabrics, and the zero-waste model in live demonstrations.”

“Participatory storytelling: visitors co-create small woven items and learn oral histories tied to each pattern.”

Loukoumi and Carob Syrup Workshops

“Traditional loukoumi-making workshops use local ingredients and support culinary heritage.”

“Carob syrup-making... emphasizes local sourcing, minimal waste, and energy-efficient practices.”

Circular Agri-food & Wine Tourism

Wineries (Vouni Panayia, Kolios, Makkas, etc.)

“Wineries implement circular measures, such as reusing grape by-products in compost or cosmetics, minimizing water usage, and sourcing energy through solar panels.”

“Visitors enjoy tastings paired with local delicacies in eco-conscious settings.”

Farm-to-Table Culinary Workshops

“Culinary workshops in guesthouses focus on farm-to-table practices, using local ingredients sourced from nearby producers, while leftover food is repurposed or composted.”

Sustainable Mobility & Infrastructure

“Guided cycling tours along the Diarizos Valley wine route... travelers use e-bikes or bicycles rented from local providers, minimizing carbon emissions.”

“Water refill points encourage the use of reusable bottles to reduce plastic waste.”

“Recycling bins, eco-trails, QR-coded interpretive signage, and digital brochures are available along the route.”

Biodiversity & Nature-Based Experiences

Stavros tis Psokas (Cyprus Mouflon Enclosure)

“Promotes biodiversity and ecological education... composting waste, sustainable water sourcing, and natural-material pathways.”

Centre of Environmental Information – Salamiou

“Built with energy-efficient architecture, it uses solar energy, has on-site composting... bridges heritage interpretation with sustainability education.”

SHARED VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

The shared vision across all eco-itineraries is to develop **authentic, sustainable tourism models** rooted in cultural heritage and aligned with circular economy principles. These routes aim to promote **slow, low-impact travel** that fosters environmental awareness, supports local economies, and enhances community resilience. As stated in Portugal’s itinerary: *“Promote the cultural heritage of RHLT while focusing on sustainability through eco-tourism.”*

A key strategic goal is to raise **environmental consciousness among visitors and stakeholders**, through education and circular practices: *“Raise awareness on sustainable practices, such as using reusable water bottles and reducing waste during sports events.”* Another goal is to attract **eco-conscious travelers** who seek meaningful, place-based experiences: *“Attract eco-conscious tourists through sustainable dining and circular economy initiatives.”*

The itineraries are also designed to **boost local employment and entrepreneurship** by linking tourism with regional products and services: *“Boost local businesses by linking tourism activities with local gastronomy and products.”* In Spain’s Castellón route, the vision includes: *“To position Castellón as a benchmark in cultural and circular tourism.”* Similarly, in Faenza, Italy, the objective is to *“increase visitor satisfaction and their average length of stay”* while promoting soft mobility and international visibility.

In Croatia, the strategy emphasizes empowering local actors and promoting *“traditional local knowledge and the sustainable use of resources.”* Greece’s Messinia itinerary focuses on inclusive rural development, aiming to *“diversify income sources—crucial for long-term regional resilience.”* Overall, the eco-itineraries collectively aim to balance cultural preservation, economic development, and environmental stewardship to ensure lasting, high-quality tourism experiences.

Pafos region stresses the vision applicable for all Mediterranean *“The shared vision is to establish the region as a leading cultural and circular tourism destination that celebrates its rich heritage, empowers local communities, and protects its natural environment through eco-itineraries. Specific strategic goals include increasing visitor satisfaction by delivering immersive, story-driven, and participatory experiences; reducing environmental impact through the integration of circular practices such as minimizing waste, promoting water conservation, and encouraging low-emission mobility; and boosting local employment by supporting small-scale producers, agrotourism enterprises, and heritage-based services.”*

CONCLUSION

The project has shown that the eco-itineraries developed across the Mediterranean, spanning Portugal, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Cyprus, and Greece, demonstrate how sustainable cultural tourism can be successfully rooted in circular economy principles. These itineraries actively reduce environmental impact by promoting low-carbon travel such as biking, walking, and public transport, while engaging visitors through participatory experiences like storytelling, traditional workshops, and nature-based education. As shown in Messinia, Greece, practices such as permaculture farming, olive oil production, and community-led workshops integrate heritage with sustainability: *“Empowering local communities and focusing on authentic, sustainable experiences enhances visitor satisfaction.”* Across all routes, eco-conscious infrastructure like refill stations, recycling bins, and solar-powered lighting supports responsible tourism behavior.

Communication and promotion strategies include digital storytelling, QR-coded trails, and social media campaigns, though several regions acknowledge the need for more inclusive and multilingual content. The Phoenicians' Route in Cyprus exemplifies best practices by combining solar-powered interpretive tools and zero-waste craft workshops: *“Visitors co-create small woven items and learn oral histories tied to each pattern.”* Meanwhile, the Olive Tree Route in Messinia blends experiential agritourism with ecological education, as seen in *“EASW workshops to co-create future tourism scenarios based on circular economy values.”*

Across all cases, success hinges on strong community involvement, early stakeholder coordination, and clear integration of circular practices. Lessons learned stress the importance of authentic local identity, participatory planning, and creating year-round, modular experiences such as demonstrated in the European Route of Ceramics eco-itineraries. Ultimately, these eco-itineraries serve not only to amplify cultural tourism products but as models for sustainable regional development, identity enhancement, cultural preservation, and ecological responsibility.