



# BETTER GOVERNANCE FOR SMARTER TOURISM

**Recommendations for SMART Mediterranean  
destinations: safe, lively, authentic and attractive for  
living, visiting and investing**

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This policy paper was produced within the framework of PANORAMED, the governance project of the InterregMED Programme. The recommendations are the result of the debate and collaborative work of policy makers, tourism experts and Interreg MED communities from the 12 countries of Interreg MED and the associated PANORAMED partners. The recommendations of this policy paper are developed in more detail in the [Gaps and Growth Opportunities Report](#) of the PANORAMED Coastal and Maritime Tourism Workpackage.



# 1. SUMMARY

In the framework of InterregMED, **PANORAMED gathers 21 institutional partners from 12 countries and regions of the Mediterranean** with the goal to establish an innovative permanent dialogue and decision-making process among national and regional public authorities and other stakeholders to contribute to inform national and transnational-level policy and decision-making processes on common challenges and opportunities in the Mediterranean.

**The economies of MED regions and countries greatly depend on tourism.** However, tourism attractiveness has posed many challenges to the destinations as a great number of tourists are concentrated at coastal areas only during summer months.

The **COVID-19** caused a complete halt of all tourism activities, with still unknown consequences. Although we are witnessing global health and socioeconomic crisis and tourism suffers the most (60%-80% decline in the international tourism economy in 2020, according to UNWTO), the sector is expected to recover.

We can predict that **development challenges** of coastal and maritime tourism identified before COVID-19 crisis will persist, but with a still unclear post-pandemic context. The crisis is also offering possibilities to **rethink tourism governance** in MED countries and regions.

This document is offering **recommendations that can be easily translated in the regional and national tourism policies**, to prepare MED countries and regions for transformations needed for more **informed**, more **sustainable**, and more **resilient tourism**.

## 2. KEY CHALLENGES

For many decades, the Mediterranean region has been an attractive tourism destination with tourism flows, showing continuous growth. The tourism sector is one of the highest **income generators** in the Mediterranean and it contributes to **local economies** of tourism regions.

Intensive tourism development has many positive impacts, from generating **jobs** and **income** to the valorization of **natural and cultural heritage** making many tourism areas more attractive for living as well as for visiting. But intensive growth brought along negative impacts and discourse in Mediterranean countries shifted to sustainable tourism development.

The COVID pandemic is reshaping the markets and the growth estimation, but at the same time is putting **sustainability** at the heart of the tourism sector.

The sustainability roadmap **European Green Deal** (European Commission 2019) identified priority policy areas, actions, and related mechanisms. Significant improvements in respect to the gas emissions and air, water and soil pollution, biodiversity impacts and climate change were identified as necessary in the transport and food production sectors. As tourism is directly connected to transport food production, and construction, Green Deal priorities, the future governance actions should reflect that.

The World Travel & Tourism Council published a series of protocols under the title '**Safe Travels': Global Protocols & Stamp for the New Normal** to help navigate the tourism practice.

The crisis requires responsibility at all levels of tourism policy to take proactive steps and coordinated actions in the immediate, medium, and long-term periods to minimize the impacts of crisis and support recovery of the tourism sector. After opening the borders, restoring transport and connectivity, Mediterranean countries need to **rebuild consumer confidence** and embrace EC goals – “The Commission will promote a transition toward a more sustainable model of coastal and maritime tourism, as part of its strategic approach for a sustainable blue economy” (EC, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020), and work together towards sustainable future.

### 3. GOALS, VISION AND MISSION

Considering different levels of tourism development in different MED regions and countries, PANORAMED has identified shared vision and mission for MED regions and countries.

The tourism vision for the Mediterranean, a long-term direction for tourism development, can be defined as:

**Mediterranean destinations and regions are safe, lively, authentic, and attractive for living, visiting, and investing - with their natural and cultural heritage and way of life, valorized and improved.**

How are we going to realize the vision statement? For future development of coastal and maritime tourism, the mission could be expressed as:

**MED regions practice tourism governance that enables continuous improvements of environmental, social and economic sustainability, increases competitiveness through quality and innovation and ensures implementation and monitoring of strategies and policies.**

This mission states that tourism governance should balance the three pillars – environment, community and economy. Decision-making processes should be based on relevant indicators and progress made through the improvement of quality and innovative solutions.

In this way, the Mediterranean as an attractive and authentic tourism region adapted to the needs of inhabitants as well as tourists could be achieved. Added-value innovations to business processes or products are welcome and should be in function of differentiation as one of the strategies of tourism development. The necessity of progress monitoring is highlighted as it is difficult to plan and execute initiatives/projects/actions without the clear outcomes of (previous) activities conducted in the area.

## 4. KEY ISSUES, OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Seasonality and weak cooperation of the actors in tourism have been detected as the major development challenges in most of the Mediterranean countries and regions.

Recommendations are focused on activities, methods and tools that could resolve or minimize those problems. As highlighted in the vision and mission, efficient tourism governance based on sustainable principles is a key idea of all the proposed strategic issues, objectives and recommendations.

They follow methodological propositions - *thematic concentration* to avoid overlapping; *transnationality* and *applicability* so that all recommendations could be implemented on national and transnational and *capitalization*, using all achieved project results and partners' experiences.

Five key issues have been identified:

- 1. DATA SHARING AND HARMONIZATION AS BASIS FOR KNOWLEDGE-BASED DECISION MAKING**
- 2. INTEGRATED AND INFORMED TOURISM GOVERNANCE FOR SMART AND MORE RESILIENT DESTINATIONS**
- 3. ENHANCED AND INNOVATIVE TOURISM (BUSINESS) SOLUTIONS**
- 4. GREENING TOURISM (REDUCING PRESSURES) AND IMPROVING HISTORIC, TRADITIONAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**
- 5. INFORMING, EDUCATING, AND ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS FOR CHANGING BEHAVIOUR**

## DATA SHARING AND HARMONIZATION AS BASIS FOR KNOWLEDGE-BASED DECISION MAKING

### The problem

Most EU funded projects conducted in the Mediterranean countries and regions highlight the lack of availability of comparable data in various fields – from basic data on tourism flows and guests' profiles to destination management and tourism governance indicators that emphasize smart and sustainable tourism. In short, there is “a serious lack of reliable and detailed data” (Peters et al, 2018). Sets of the harmonized methodology of collecting data as well as definitions of the indicators are missing, and data sharing is exception reserved for specific projects.

Destinations are not prepared for the task and responsibility of continuously collecting and sharing tourism data as well as best practices in this area (methodology issues). Statistical sources are also not harmonized and do not provide all relevant data. Sustainable tourism development and successful planning and tourism governance depend on the valuable and relevant indicators and data collection including big data. Hence, the priority is furthering progress in data harmonization, research methodologies, model development, data sharing, knowledge transfer and enhancing resources. Data management and analytical capabilities create new collaboration opportunities among different stakeholders that would be even more needed in the post COVID-19 period.

### OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVED DATA COLLECTION AND DATA HARMONIZATION

#### Recommendations

- Investigate the influence and recovery possibilities of the tourism sector due to COVID-19 crisis (short-term recovery and long-term sustainability),
- Define indicators and a minimal set of comparable data in tourism and related fields and thematic areas (tourism seasonality, over tourism, same-day visitors, sustainable development, smart tourism, destination management, visitor profile),
- Define big data sources and exploitation possibilities – foster cooperation with big data providers (for example real-time data collection for defining accurate tourist profile segments) to be able to respond to changing tourist demand and provide predictive models,

- Harmonize research methodologies of the most important studies (visitor survey methodology; tourism satellite account for regional/tourism product level, carrying capacity studies, etc., from the type of samples and survey instruments to analysis),
- Harmonize definitions of different types of tourism (nautical tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, meetings, conferences, and exhibitions segment, sport tourism, etc.) and define a minimal set of comparable data on different types of tourism.

## OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVED DATA SHARING

### Recommendations:

- Develop approaches and models of data sharing within countries and regions – create a platform for MED tourism statistics and best practices as an open data system, (possible partnership agreement with all stakeholders),
- Establish a platform for data sharing that could help in the phase of tourism recovery after COVID-19 crisis (impacts, data needed for long-term recovery plans).

## OBJECTIVE 3: ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND ESTABLISHED KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

### Recommendations:

- Identify best practices and competency centers/institutions in data collection and creation of research methodologies – establish research networks that can collaborate to enable knowledge transfer and could ensure education in the area of data collection and tourism research for destination managers and other stakeholders,
- Establish knowledge networks that could initiate and conduct research on important but rarely investigated topics (social distancing, visual pollution, impacts of other industries on tourism, the inclusion of local population in tourism decision-making, guest-host, relationships, socio-economic context of the MED, cultural degradation, etc.),
- Develop ways of inclusion of research experts in the translation of research results into recommendations for tourism practices in collaboration with important tourism stakeholders.

## Implementation

Organizations that need to take part in the implementation phase should include research centers at tourism faculties and universities, independent tourism research organizations and statistical institutions on the national level, as well as DMOs. They must be supported by national and regional authorities dealing with tourism and related topics and by private organizations in the tourism business. Nonetheless, the European statistical system – EUROSTAT should commit funds to provide reliable sources of information for proper data collection.

# INTEGRATED AND INFORMED TOURISM GOVERNANCE FOR SMART AND MORE RESILIENT DESTINATIONS

## The problem

Most of the coastal and maritime tourism development problems in the Mediterranean stems from lack of management and governance skills, poor collaboration on the destination/local level and often different goals of different stakeholder groups. Sustainable development is the common goal in majority of tourism master plans but rarely implemented.

As already stated in Interreg Mediterranean Horizontal project on Sustainable tourism (2019) “tourism is a complex and interrelated multi-level and inter-sectoral system undergoing constant evolution” and therefore it needs successful destination management including smart practices and solutions followed by adequate tourism governance. Better governance systems must ensure better cooperation and understanding among different stakeholders as a basis for more sustainable and responsible tourism in the Mediterranean.

A multi-level approach to governance that facilitates horizontal and vertical cooperation and coordination that can help in reducing the complexity of the challenges of tourism development has been recognized as well as the need to foster stronger collaborative relationships and commitment to the improvement of tourism governance processes.

As suggested by European Parliament change from ‘growth paradigm’ to ‘regional development paradigm’ based on sustainability objectives should be in the focus of all governance and destination management recommendations. Tourism management and governance systems need to be prepared for building a stronger, more sustainable, and resilient tourism economy in ‘the new post COVID-19 reality’ and in the future, as a strategic area within regional smart specialization strategies.

## **OBJECTIVE 1: ENHANCED PARTICIPATORY AND INTEGRATED, KNOWLEDGE-BASED, AND MULTILEVEL PLANNING**

### **Recommendations**

- Define methodology and structure of tourism master and strategic tourism plans (as well as smart specialization strategies) and develop a monitoring system of implementation including set of valorization criteria, to adopt sustainable growth policies and practices by both public and private sector; ensure stakeholders participation (principle of inclusivity),
- Develop (long-term) plans to restore travelers’ confidence and stimulate demand after COVID-19 crisis including post COVID recovery procedures that follow the requirements of public health,
- Ensure that tourism experts are engaged in the spatial planning process and procedures on the local and regional level, and participation of DMOs as an important stakeholder and encourage cooperation between tourism scholars, public and private sector in tourism from local to national level,
- Ensure inclusion of tourism into regional/country smart specialization strategies.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVED DESTINATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS /ORGANIZATIONS – TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

### **Recommendations**

- Improve DMO mechanisms and empower them to address structural weaknesses and make destinations more resilient and sustainable - transformations needed in the post COVID-19 crisis (digital transformation, performance management, fast decision making),

- Develop innovative tourism governance tools that can help decision-makers such as destination data hubs and destination dashboards, and ensure stakeholders mapping as a tool for effective destination management,
- Ensure integrated management of cultural heritage and tourism activities to achieve cultural heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development,
- Include crisis management into destination tourism management plans: how to approach COVID-19 pandemic and change practices in different crisis situations (forest fires, earthquakes, refugee crises, etc.).

### Implementation

Those who should implement recommendations are national and regional authorities, tourism boards and/or existing DMO and DMC systems dealing with tourism management and related topics, sectorial national organizations/networks and tourism development agencies. Partnerships may be complemented by associated partners (private sector and other institutions such as research institutes). In implementing this key issue public authorities (national, regional and local DMOs and/or tourism boards) should be supported by business organizations (tourism companies including SMEs) and public-private organizations.

## ENHANCED AND INNOVATIVE TOURISM (BUSINESS) SOLUTIONS

### The problem

Majority of the problems of coastal and maritime tourism in Mediterranean countries are consequences of (planned) tourism growth and tourism flows that are not evenly spread but rather concentrated in summer months and geographically on coastal areas, islands and rarely coast hinterlands. For many decades the whole MED region depends on the 'sun and sea' tourism product and although many other special interest products are available on the market, they are still not able to prolong the main tourism season and the situation calls for innovative products, marketing and distribution solutions. Mediterranean destinations still have not used their common market values, their 'unique selling propositions' and have not created prestigious joint tourism products aimed for the third markets nor have they promoted and shared the common identity.

According to global consumer trends (Euromonitor International 2019), authentic tourism products that offer unique experiences are often attractive for most tourism segments and represent an ‘untapped’ market opportunity. Post COVID-19 will bring new, still unclear, demand trends that might shape new elements of supply. Efforts are needed in developing diverse portfolios of tourism products to avoid overreliance on a single one.

## OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVED PROCESS OF INNOVATION OF TOURISM SOLUTIONS

### Recommendations

- Create mechanisms for supporting the development of new and/or for upgrading tourism products that could extend tourism season, depending on available resources and attractions (cultural tourism, MICE, manifestations, sport tourism, health and wellness, culture/heritage tourism including thematic touring, etc.) to avoid overdependence on ‘sun and sea’ tourism product,
- Create MED tourism offer based on tangible and intangible cultural heritage that can extend the season and promote MED identity and way of life,
- Define clusters of producers including creative industries, culture and agriculture and develop special interest tourism products that use regional sources and promote regional tourism identity with particular emphasis on environmental and ecological aspects,
- Ensure support mechanisms and investment measures for better use of ICT and digital transformation of tourism SMEs,
- Promote smart destinations – create national award system for innovations in tourism.

## OBJECTIVE 2: VALUES OF MEDITERRANEAN IDENTITY AND SHARED VISION DEFINED – MED’S OVERALL DESTINATION BRAND ENHANCED

### Recommendations

- Identify common values of Mediterranean identity as a prerequisite for creating joint tourism products (routes) and create destination brand architecture for the Mediterranean aligned to the shared vision,
- Ensure that shared vision and mission are promoted to tourism business enterprises, tourist agencies and involved human resources – ensure better coordination of national, regional and local governmental institutions and DMO’s.

## OBJECTIVE 3: INCREASED COMPETITIVENESS AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS INCLUDING SAFETY

### Recommendations

- Promote less visited but attractive locations, attractions, and destinations; internal routes for pedestrians/bikes to bring people from coast to hinterland,
- Incorporate physical distancing and other safety measures as a quality label of a destination,
- Develop methodology of categorization of tourism attractions (based on the type and attractiveness of an attraction) and action plans focused on improvements of specific attractions (accessibility, promotion, interpretation); Identify the most attractive destination spots and develop action plans to preserve their values,
- Ensure training possibilities and certification of specialized competencies related to maritime and coastal tourism, both formal and informal,
- Develop and conduct studies on ambience values of destination (destination features that can be enhanced according to visitors' experiences),
- Ensure digital transformation for SME's in tourism and exploit digitalization opportunities.

### Implementation

This key issue should be implemented by a high percentage of decision-makers in tourism as the goal is to make destinations competitive, attractive, and safe. All stakeholders, from tourism authorities and tourism boards to representatives of private tourism companies not only in tourism but also in related activities, such as creative industries, development agencies and all those that are involved in innovation and education processes (educational institutions and research centers) should be involved in the implementation phase.

## GREENING TOURISM (REDUCING PRESSURES) AND IMPROVING HISTORIC, TRADITIONAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

### The problem

After many decades of sustainability orientation emphasized in many tourism destination master plans, sustainability discourse and the greening of tourism seems to be slow, fragmented, and marginal. Regardless of the long presence of sustainability orientation, it is still challenging for professionals, researchers, and policy makers how to go about implementing it. As tourism experts stated, the concept of sustainability would be more practical if it was based on more tangible indicators, rather than on broad, general formulations (Carić, 2018).

Sustainability, as one of the key principles of this KPP and PANORAMED, needs to find its way to being visible in the governance of coastal and maritime tourism development in the Mediterranean in the near future. Moreover, during COVID-19 recovery phase destinations need to develop new tools in ensuring health standards for restoring tourists' confidence.

### OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVED AND PROTECTED TOURISM ECO-SYSTEM

#### Recommendations

- Develop a comparable sophisticated indicator monitoring system on a regional-destination level based on existing experiences,
- Gather best practices and design guidelines on carrying capacity and tourism ecological footprinting,
- Develop transport policy schemes that enable accessibility of less frequently visited attractions and encourage more eco-friendly transport options,
- Set-up Mediterranean over tourism task force to monitor destinations on risk, report on trends and recommend interventions,
- Establish a formal MED network of sustainable tourism spearheaded by EC DG GROW and EP TRANS Committee.

## OBJECTIVE 2: REDUCED PRESSURE AND ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGES IMPLEMENTED

### Recommendations

- Invest in smart mobility to boost sustainable transportation,
- Minimize resource use and production of waste; control and manage the use of natural, scarce and limited resources,
- Ensure tourism flow management and monitoring of sensitive cultural and natural sites;  
Assess the role of social media, digital and other platforms in causing and reducing over tourism,
- Encourage implementation of regulations that restrict license in the housing for touristic use in congested areas.

## OBJECTIVE 3: VALUE GIVEN TO PROTECTED CULTURAL, TRADITIONAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

### Recommendation

- Develop tourism management/action plans for protected areas with special attention to the spatial-temporal distribution of visitors,
- Develop and implement quality standards in heritage interpretation that educates and/or involves tourists in the conservation/preservation processes,
- Improve the management of visitors in the protected areas (heritage and nature sites of different types and sizes).

### Implementation

Experts on sustainability need to be engaged in developing tools, plans and monitoring, but tourism authorities and tourism companies are those that must be responsible for implementation phases. Cultural and nature protection institutions and management authorities are pivotal for implementation at protected sites that are often the main tourist attractions. Various sources of experiences and knowledge exist (for example MedPAN, UNESCO programs, UNEP, UNWTO, MIO-ECSDE<sup>1</sup>, etc.) that can be utilized to enhance implementation.

## INFORMING, EDUCATING, AND ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS FOR CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

### The problem

Mediterranean destinations are characterized by specific destination life-cycle and according to many studies, the great majority of the destinations have gone through the initial phases (beginning, development and growth) and are in the 'maturity' phase with stagnating tourism flows coupled with over tourism and infrastructural problems. Therefore, without intervention in the planning of tourism development, differentiation based on the mix of products and appropriate governance methods, destinations could remain at their position with a possible decline in tourism flows.

Less satisfied tourists and a decrease in the quality of tourism services will cause problems of losing their competitive position. Previous key issues elaborated many of the problems of this sensitive phase of tourism development. Therefore, in order to induce the change, all stakeholders should become aware of their market position, so they can jointly realize the need to adapt to the trends in the fast-changing environment. Crisis and uncertainties, including COVID-19 emphasize the urgency to comprehend the complexities and react accordingly. They also offer an opportunity for repositioning and transformations.

### OBJECTIVE 1: INCREASED ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

#### Recommendations

- Create internal and external media mix to increase the environmental and social responsibility of all actors involved in tourism activities,
- Create marketing campaigns to raise awareness about the need 'to change' existing practices and to learn how to adapt and make destinations more resilient,
- Ensure that stakeholders are aware of the need to take actions, to use the COVID-19 crisis to re-develop and make their products more competitive, to support sustainable development and to become socially responsible.

### OBJECTIVE 2: MORE EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION, AND GROWTH OF COMPETENCIES

## Recommendations

- Precisely define and map stakeholders in tourism and develop plans for informing and educating various groups of stakeholders within destinations for better communication (private and public sector),
- Engage research and higher educational institutions (formal and informal education) to improve their curricula regarding the aspects of communication, collaborations, adoption to market changes and/or crises and the need for reduced pressures,
- Attract stakeholders to participate in e-learning, long-life learning methods and innovative ways of learning.

## Implementation

Tourism stakeholders – tourism boards and authorities, development agencies, marketing and promotional agencies, educational institutions and all those that are involved in offering formal and informal education and creating and implementing awareness campaigns. Destination inhabitants should be included as they are also among important destination stakeholders.