

Linking tourism-related types of Mediterranean destinations with the cohesion policy objectives. The case of Interreg MED

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Abstract

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), also known as the Interreg programme, is one of the two pillars of the EU Cohesion Policy, which aims at reducing the disparities between EU regions. Tourism constitutes an intervention field of ETC towards sustainability, especially in coastal regions. In this vein, the Interreg Med Programme funded a community of projects with the aim of promoting sustainable and responsible coastal and maritime tourism in the Mediterranean region during the 2014-2020 programming period (Sustainable Tourism mission - ST). Although the objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Community (STC) were built upon the priorities of the 2014-2020 period, its outputs remain thematically linked to the priorities of the Interreg Programme and Cohesion Policy of the 2021-2027 period.

Under this notion, considering the types of eligible regions with respect to their tourism characteristics and development potential and economic status could prove essential for generating effective interventions for the new period (2021-2027). The objective of this paper is to assess the allocation of projects and funds to the Mediterranean regions considering tourism and development characteristics. To do so, the paper uses two different regional typologies. A tourism-related typology of Mediterranean regions based on the types of projects implemented and a typology related to cohesion policy objectives that classify regions according to their achieved level of economic development. Under the first typology, six types of destinations occur through the project-based analysis: a) urban destinations, b) islands, c) destinations with environmentally important assets, d) coastal sites of important value, e) coastal regions and f) interregional coastal areas. The second typology identifies types of regions using the Cohesion Policy eligibility architecture for allocating funds (more developed, transition, and less developed regions).

After analysing the typologies, the paper examines the allocation of funds and projects among the different types of regions in order to identify the types of tourism destinations that were active during the 2014-2020 period. In addition, the paper aims to unveil the alignment of the distributed budget under the ST mission with the Cohesion Policy funding allocation methodology within the cooperation area of the Interreg MED Programme and highlight potential imbalances and deviations in the context of reducing regional disparities. The findings include three strands of generated knowledge, related to the type of destination, the budget allocated, and the regions' performance, that, when interlinked and compared, provide useful information on the types of tourism destinations attracting funding and their position to the priorities of the Cohesion Policy covering both 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 periods.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, typology, Cohesion Policy, Mediterranean destinations

1. Introduction

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), also known as the Interreg programme, is one of the two goals of the EU Cohesion Policy, which aims at reducing the disparities between EU regions. Some of the main goals of the Programme are to ensure maximum geographical coverage across the whole cooperation area, complement missing territorial funding, be coherent with the European policy framework and find complementarities and links to other initiatives addressing similar topics (INTERREG MED PROGRAMME, 2019).

Tourism constitutes an intervention field of ETC towards sustainability, especially in coastal regions. In this vein, the Interreg Med Programme funded a community of projects with the aim of promoting sustainable and responsible coastal and maritime tourism in the Mediterranean region during the 2014-2020 programming period. The Interreg Med Programme cooperation area is presented in Figure 1. Although the objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Community (STC) were built upon the priorities of the previous period¹, its outputs are linked to the new priorities of the Interreg Programme and Cohesion Policy. More specifically, the Interreg Programmes have adopted two additional policies, “A better cooperation governance” and “A safer and more secure Europe” while the cohesion policy provides support for: 1) a more competitive and smarter Europe; 2) a greener, low-carbon and resilient Europe; 3) a more connected Europe; 4) a more social and inclusive Europe; 5) a Europe closer to citizens (INTERREG MED PROGRAMME, 2019, EU, 2015).

Under this notion, considering the types of eligible regions with respect to their tourism characteristics and development potential and economic status could prove essential for generating effective interventions for the new period. Tourism typologies are considered very useful, but yet complex, methods to identify important dimensions of the tourism sector, either on the demand or the supply side, and build effective tourism planning and management practices (Batista e Silva et al, 2021; Coccossis & Constantoglou, 2008). Tourism destinations are at the core of such processes as they constitute the areas where decision making is taking place. Their tourism dynamics and potential are often the criteria through which they claim funding opportunities and the use of spatial typologies could assist in understanding the distribution of tourism focus. The significance of spatial typologies has been stressed by various initiatives, such as the Tercet initiative, provided by Eurostat, which used the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) for identifying different types of regions, and the OECD that categorizes regions according to spatial and demographic criteria. Additionally, there are a number of studies that use tourism-related parameters or indicators to build typologies, such as tourists' profile and characteristics, the expenditures of tourists, the proportion of tourists to the local population, the number of beds, tourist flows, the relative importance of tourism to countries' economies, characteristics of destinations, the type of tourism offered, climatic conditions, employment, quality, hotel location patterns

¹ Priority Axis 1: Promoting Mediterranean innovation capacities to develop smart and sustainable growth

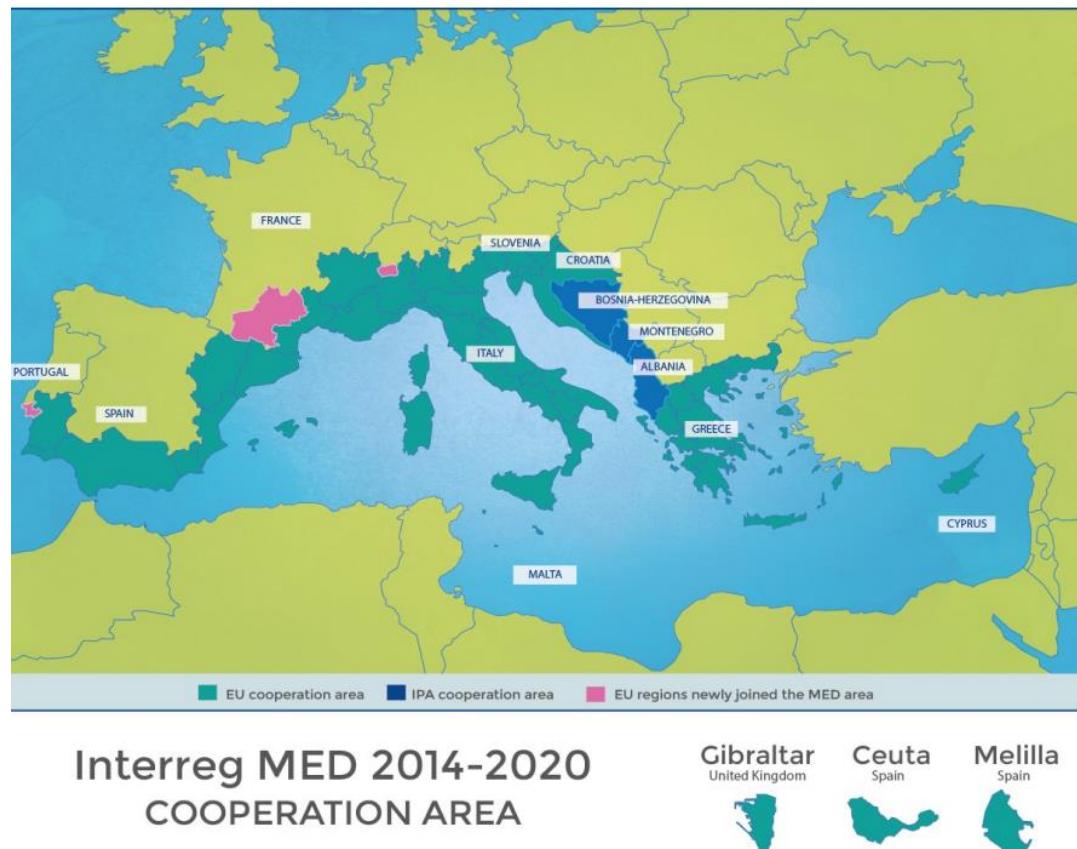
Priority Axis 2: Fostering low-carbon strategies and energy efficiency in specific MED territories: cities, islands and rural areas

Priority Axis 3: Protecting and promoting Mediterranean natural and cultural resources

Priority Axis 4: Enhancing Mediterranean Governance

etc. In such cases, the lack of quantitative and/or harmonized data is usually the biggest challenge (Niavis et al, 2021; Batista e Silva et al, 2021; Batista e Silva et al, 2018; Eurostat, 2019; Coccossis & Constantoglou, 2008).

Figure 1. The Interreg Med Programme area



Source: INTERREG MED PROGRAMME, 2017

In this context, this paper uses two different typologies to assess regional development in the Mediterranean. The first typology is destination-based, as an outcome of the selection of areas for implementing tourism initiatives performed by the STC and funded by the Interreg Med Programme. The second typology is related to the Cohesion Policy objectives that classify regions according to their achieved level of economic development. The objective of this paper is not only to analyze and compare both typologies but also to assess the allocation of projects and funds to the Mediterranean regions considering tourism and development characteristics.

2. Typologies to assess tourism development

The project-based typology of this paper is taking into account the selection of the implementation areas of 30 projects of the STC based on criteria, such as the tourism potential of the destinations and the dynamic of tourism development. The level of implementation differs covering either national, regional or local needs. The STC counts more than 300 implementation areas, which constitute Mediterranean coastal destinations.

With an attempt to reach a typology of destinations based on the STC selection of implementation areas, a categorization of the destinations has been conducted. The analysis revealed six types of destinations. These are described below.

- a) **Urban destinations.** The category includes urban destinations, such as cities, cities focusing on their heritage sites, and small towns, and concerns projects that aim at preserving and enhancing cultural heritage and identity in coastal destinations in the context of coastal management. The focus here has urban and cultural functionalities in its core.
- b) **Islands.** The category refers to islands that differ in size and characteristics. The level of implementation does not necessarily cover the entire islands. On the contrary, the focus is on specific sites regarding environmental protection and coastal de-concentration activities.
- c) **Destinations with environmentally important assets.** This type of destination concerns areas that show environmental sensitivity in terms of the ecosystems they consist of, such as marine areas, marine parks, mountain areas, lakes, coastal parks, underwater cultural sites, protected areas, reserves. The level of implementation differs depending on the management framework (e.g. established or not, level) while the objectives of the projects concern the preservation and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, environmental protection, certification and coastal de-concentration. The focus here has environmental protection in its core.
- d) **Local coastal sites.** The category refers to site-specific coastal areas selected based on their tourism potential and value. These include beaches, ports, river sites, capes, cultural sites, marinas, villages etc. The focus of the STC projects lies on coastal management, the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage and identity.
- e) **Coastal regions.** This type of destination refers to the regional level, including coastal regions (NUTS III level), that are either mature destinations with the aim to solve tourism-related issues and promote alternative tourism solutions or are interested to increase their tourism potential. The key objectives under this category are resource efficiency, promotion of sustainable tourism products, coastal management, coastal governance, circular economy, innovation etc. The focus here is wider and does not necessarily relate to the specificities of a destination.
- f) **Interregional coastal areas.** The category refers to areas with an interregional character, covering multiple local/regional tourism destinations, selected under a more national context rather specific regional focus. The STC focuses on promoting sustainable tourism products, coastal management, coastal governance, innovation, etc.

Table 1. The STC project-based types of destinations

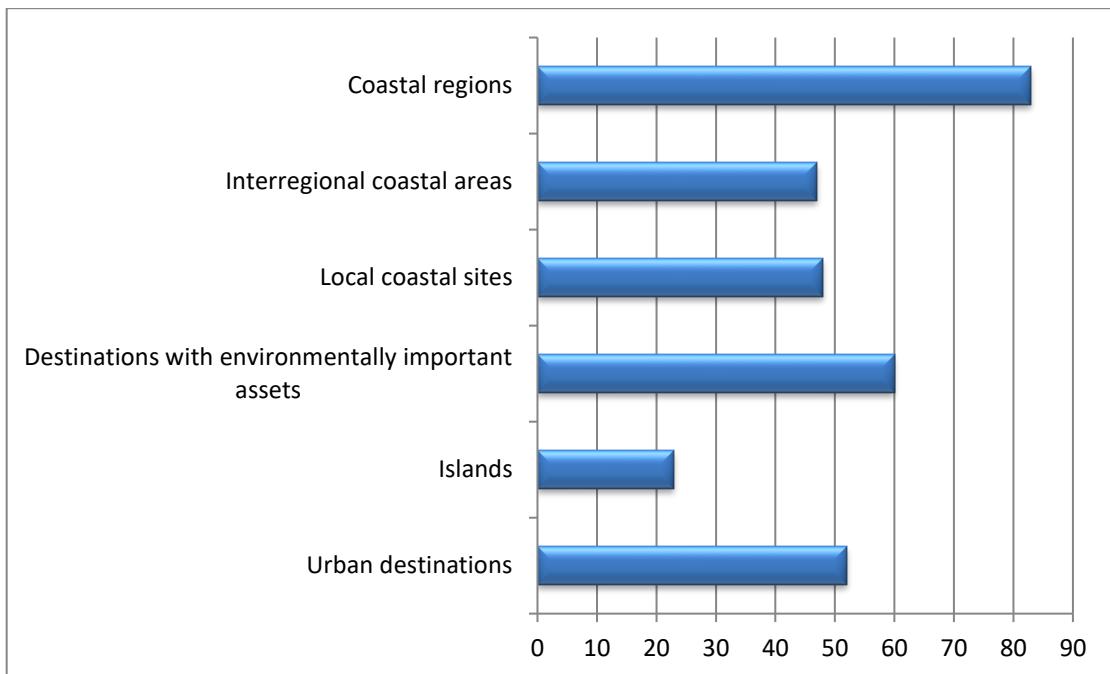
Type	Key objective	STC project related
Urban destinations	Preservation of cultural heritage/identity	ALTER ECO, ALTER ECO PLUS, CO-EVOLVE, HERIT DATA, MITOMED+, SuSTowns
Islands	Environmental protection, coastal de-concentration	BLUEISLANDS, WINTER MED

Destinations with environmentally important assets	Preservation of cultural heritage, environmental protection, coastal de-concentration, certification	BLUAMED, BLUAMED PLUS, CO-EVOLVE, DestiMED, DESTIMED PLUS, EMbleMatiC, EMbleMatiC Plus, INHERIT, LABELSCAPE
Local coastal sites	Cultural heritage/identity, coastal management, certification	CO-EVOLVE, HERIT DATA, LABELSCAPE, MITOMED+, SIROCCO, TOURISMED, TOURISMED PLUS
Coastal regions	Resource efficiency, promotion of sustainable tourism products, coastal management, coastal governance, circular economy, innovation	CASTWATER, CONSUME-LESS, MEDFEST, INCIRCLE, LABELSCAPE, CONSUME-LESS PLUS
Interregional coastal areas	Promotion of sustainable tourism products, coastal management, coastal governance, innovation	BEST MED, COASTING, COASTING PLUS, MEDCYCLETOUR, ShapeTourism, SMARTMED

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2 shows the number of destinations identified by the STC in the Mediterranean based on the project-based typology.

Figure 2. Number of destinations per type of destination identified by the STC in the Mediterranean

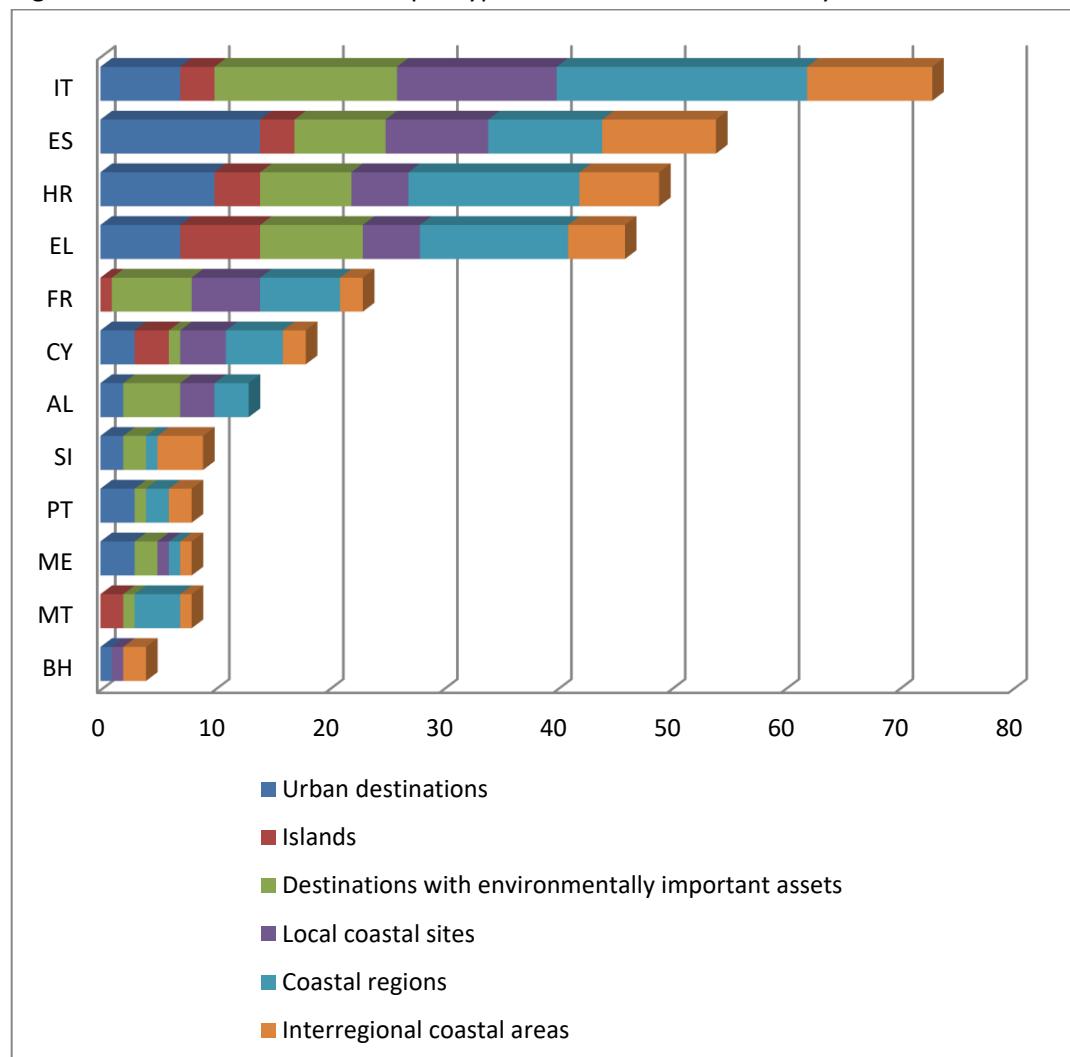


Source: Own elaboration

According to Figure 2, the type with the highest number of destinations (26,5%) is 'coastal regions'. The focus on NUTS III destinations is justified by the availability of data in such scale as well as the administrative division of regions in combination to the legal and political

frameworks governing tourism issues in the Mediterranean. The next two most usually selected types of destination, namely 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (19,2%) and 'urban destinations' (16,6%), are areas where tourism pressures have been at the core of their management and development strategies. The focus on site-specific destinations and destinations with an interregional character has a lower share in the selection of the STC. This could be attributed to the lack of reliable and available data at the local level and the implementation difficulties at the local scale, in the case of 'local coastal sites' (15,3%), and the large scale and number of destinations connected under a common vision in the case of 'interregional coastal areas' (15%). Finally, although the Mediterranean can be considered as a region with a high number of islands, the share of 'islands' (7,4%) is the lowest among the 6 types of destinations. It is worth mentioning that, in some cases, islands have been selected by the STC not necessarily for their identity and specificities as islands but for their characteristics as coastal destinations.

Figure 3. Number of destinations per type of destination and country



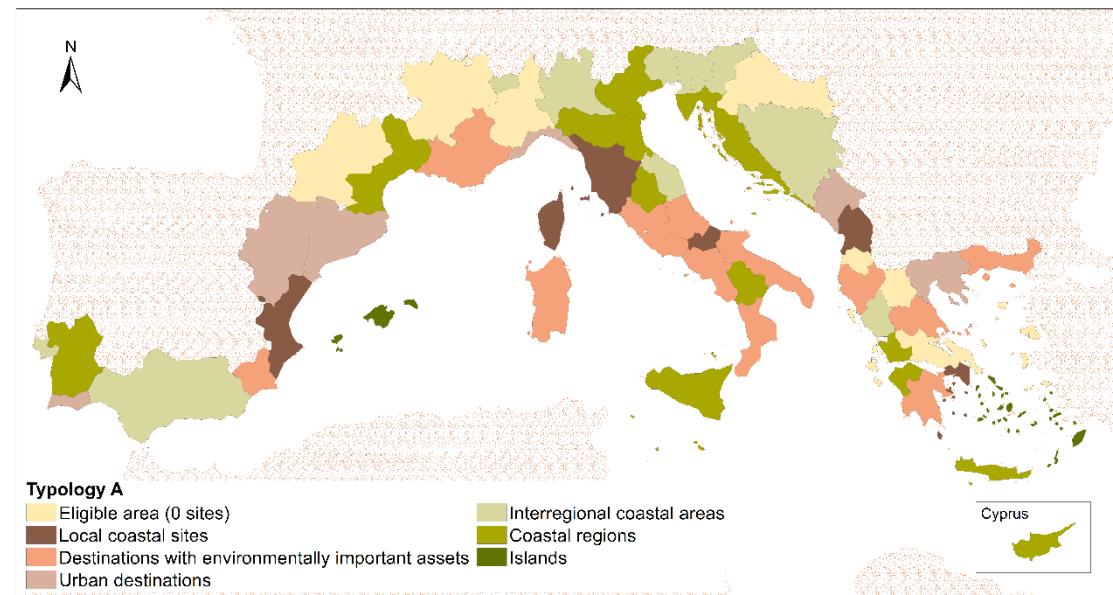
Source: Own elaboration

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the numbers above to the types of destinations per each country in the Mediterranean region. It is evident that the predominant type of destination in

6 (Italy, Croatia, Greece, France, Cyprus, Malta) out of 12 countries is 'coastal regions'. Spain, Portugal and Montenegro have shown an emphasis on 'urban destinations', Albania and France on 'destinations with environmentally important assets' and Slovenia and Bosnia & Herzegovina on 'interregional coastal areas'.

As stated above, the destinations selected by the STC cover different levels of implementation, from local to national. Therefore, in order to obtain comparable data at the NUTS II level, a single specific type to each NUTS II region of the Mediterranean countries should be appointed. In this context, a simple method has been applied. Each NUTS II region has been appointed a type of destination based on the predominant type of destination that gathers the largest number of destinations². The analysis and results are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The Mediterranean project-based typology at coastal NUTS II level



Source: Own elaboration

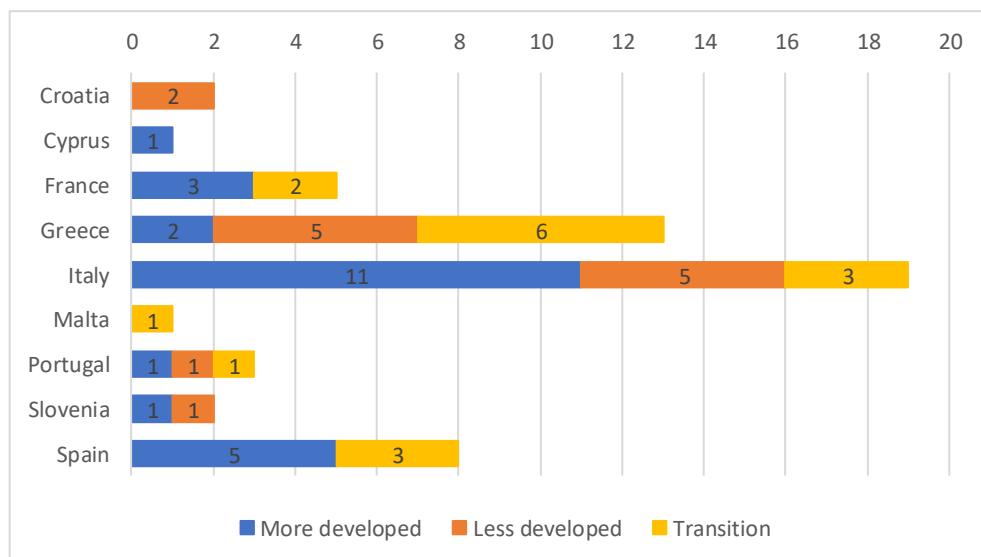
Regarding the classification of regions in relation to their level of economic development and according to the Implementing Decision L50/22 (2014) of the European Commission, the regions eligible for funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund for the period 2014-2020 are listed under the following three categories based on their GDP per capita:

- A) **Less developed regions**, where GDP per capita is less than 75 % of the EU-27 average
- B) **Transition regions**, where GDP per capita is between 75 % and 90 % of the EU-27 average
- C) **More developed regions**, where GDP per capita is more than 90 % of the EU-27 average (European Commission, 2014)

² In the case of regions presenting equal numbers of destinations in specific types, the budget received by the region through each project is taken as a criterion for choosing the type of destination. Therefore, in these cases the predominant type of destinations follows the type of the regions with the higher budget.

For the needs of this paper, the listing of regions within the INTERREG MED programming area that fall under these three categories for the 2014-2020 period is of particular interest. As shown in Figure 5, 44% of the INTERREG MED regions are listed as more developed, 26% as less developed and 30% as transition regions. Although the Cohesion policy covers every region in the EU, the funds are mostly targeted at the less developed regions where the GDP per capita is under 75% of the EU average.

Figure 5. Number of regions eligible for funding (ERDF and ESF) per category and country for 2014-2020 period within the INTERREG MED programming area



Source: European Commission (2014), Own elaboration

3. Integrated analysis

This chapter performs an integrated analysis of the project-based typology, henceforth Typology A, and the Cohesion Funds eligibility typology, henceforth Typology B. Taking into account the share of destinations selected by the STC in terms of typology A and comparing it to typology B, the focus of the STC at country and NUTS II level occurs.

Under typology A, the *Italian* NUTS II regions have been considered by the STC mostly as 'coastal regions' (Basilicata, Emilia-Romagna, Sicily, Umbria, Veneto) and 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Lazio, Puglia, Sardegna). 4 regions are appointed as 'interregional coastal areas' (Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Marche, Valle D' Aosta/Vallee D' Aoste), 2 as 'local coastal sites' (Molise, Toscana) and 1 as 'urban destination' (Liguria). Under typology B, the majority of them are 'more developed' with 'destinations with environmentally important assets' presenting the best representation in all typology B categories.

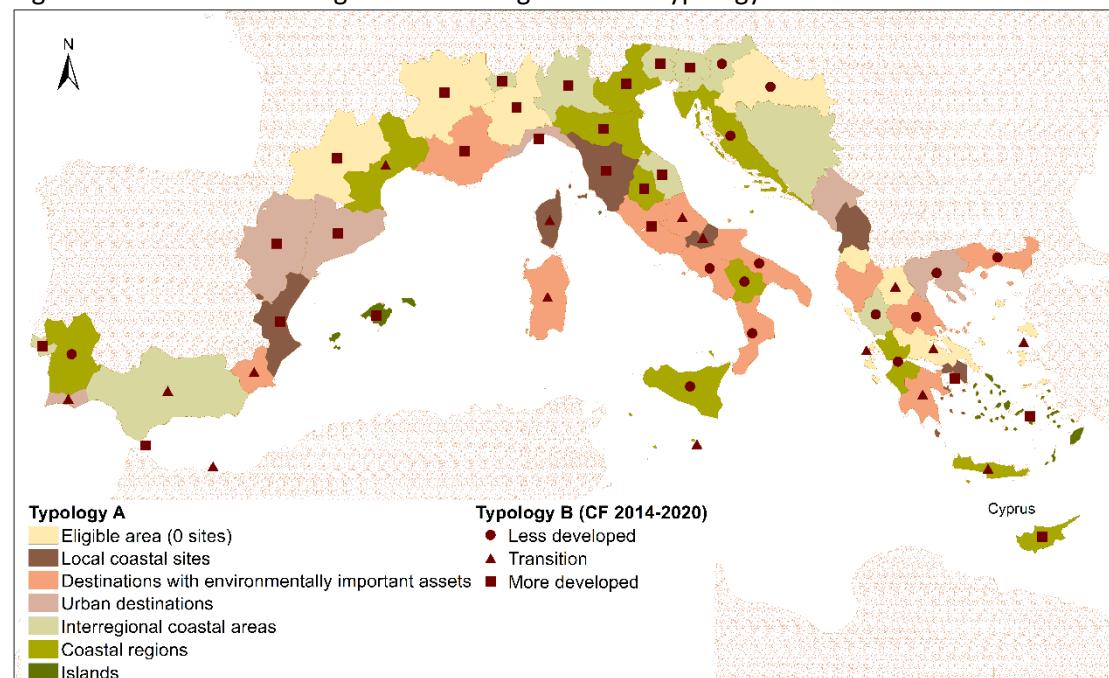
Spain shows the highest share in 'urban destinations' (Aragón, Catalonia), lower in 'interregional coastal areas' (Andalucia), 'local coastal sites' (Valencia) and 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (Murcia) and the lowest in 'islands' (Balearic Islands). The majority (4 out of 6 regions) falls under the category 'more developed'.

In the case of *Greece*, the STC has mostly considered its regions as 'coastal regions' (Dytiki Ellada, Kriti) and 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (Anatoliki Makedonia-Thraki, Peloponnisos, Thessalia) with 'urban destinations' (Kentriki Makedonia), 'islands' (Notio Aigaio), 'local coastal sites' (Attiki) and 'interregional coastal areas' (Ipeiros) presenting lower shares. Half of the regions are appointed as 'less developed'.

For the remaining NUTS II regions, the predominant types under typology A are 'coastal regions' (Jadranska Hrvatska/Croatia, Languedoc-Roussillon/France, Cyprus, Malta, Alentejo/Portugal) and 'interregional coastal areas' (Vzhodna Slovenija & Zahodna Slovenija/Slovenia, Area Metropolitana De Lisboa/Portugal, Bosnia & Herzegovina). 'Urban destinations' (Montenegro, Algarve/Portugal), 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (PACA/France, Southern Albania/Albania) and 'local coastal sites' (Corse/France, Northern Albania/Albania) show lower shares. Their distribution under the typology B categories is almost equal³.

The collective results for all NUTS II coastal regions are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Coastal NUTS II regions of Interreg Med with typology A and B results



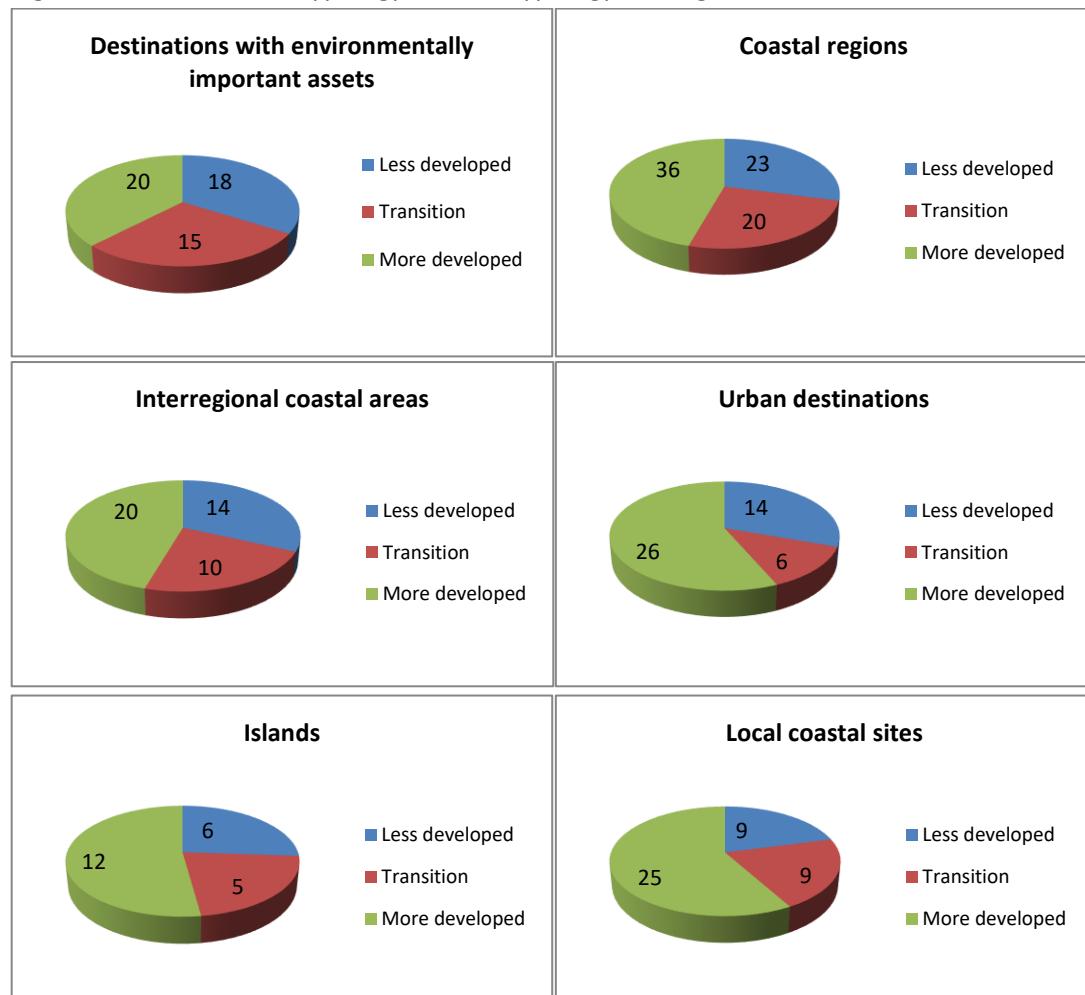
Source: Own elaboration

Analyzing the distribution of each type A region under the typology B categories, some useful results are highlighted regarding the emphasis of the STC. More specifically, the distribution among the typology B categories is much more harmonized in the case of 'destinations with environmentally important assets', 'coastal regions' and 'interregional coastal areas'. In the case of 'urban destinations', 'islands' and 'local coastal sites' there seems to be a higher share of 'more developed' destinations (Figure 7). The specificities of typology A could justify this result given that the first three types are much broader as a concept and could entail a variety

³ In this distribution, the data of Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina is missing from typology B.

of destinations. However, in the latter three types the focus is much more concentrated and local and –in such cases- the maturity of the destination plays an integral role in the effective project development and implementation.

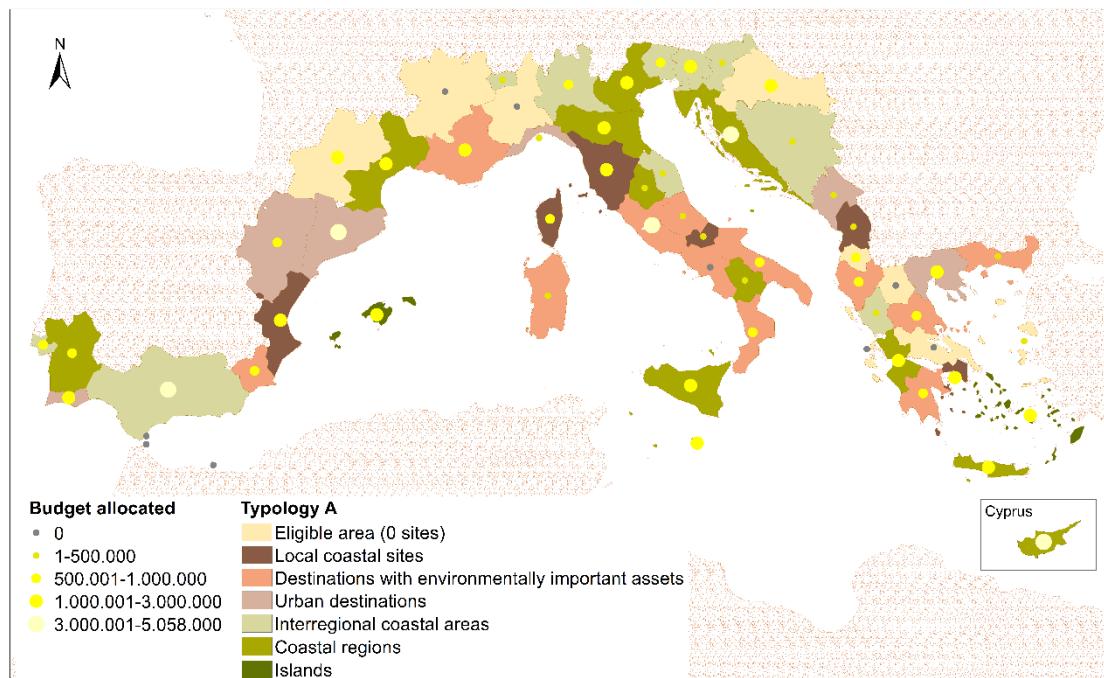
Figure 7. Distribution of typology A under typology B categories



Source: Own elaboration

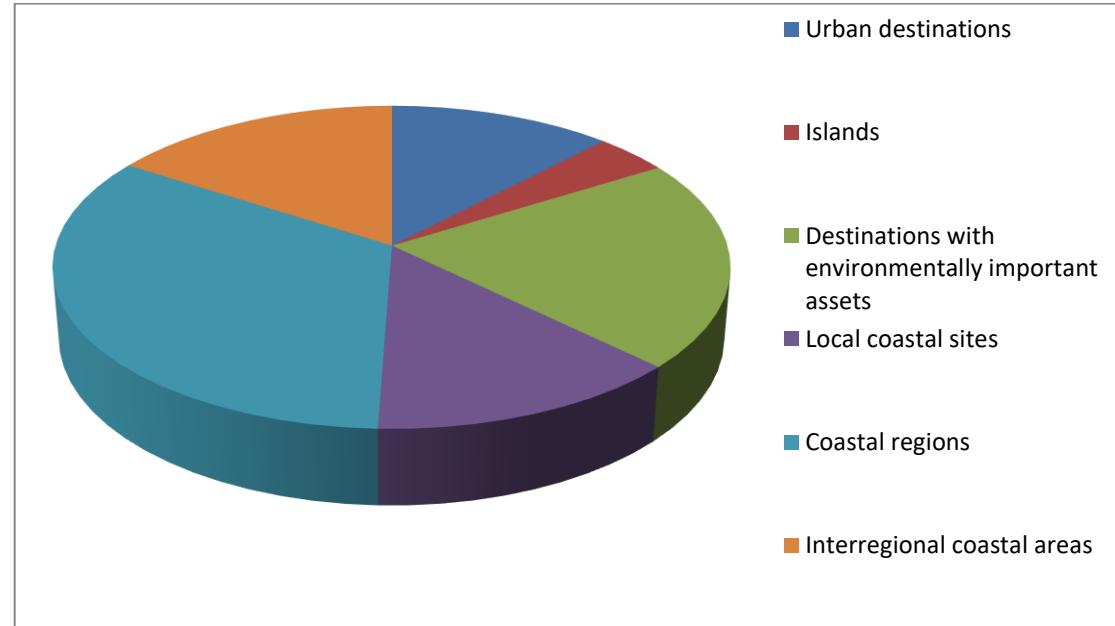
In economic terms, during the 2014-2020 programming period, 1,2 million € on average was allocated to each eligible region of the Interreg MED programme under the Sustainable Tourism mission. Figure 8 shows the budget allocation in the case of the NUTS II regions of the Mediterranean coast. 48 out of 61 regions have received funding during the 2014-2020 period.

Figure 8. Coastal NUTS II regions under typology A with budget allocation for 2014-2020



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 9. Distribution of Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism axis budget to typology A destinations



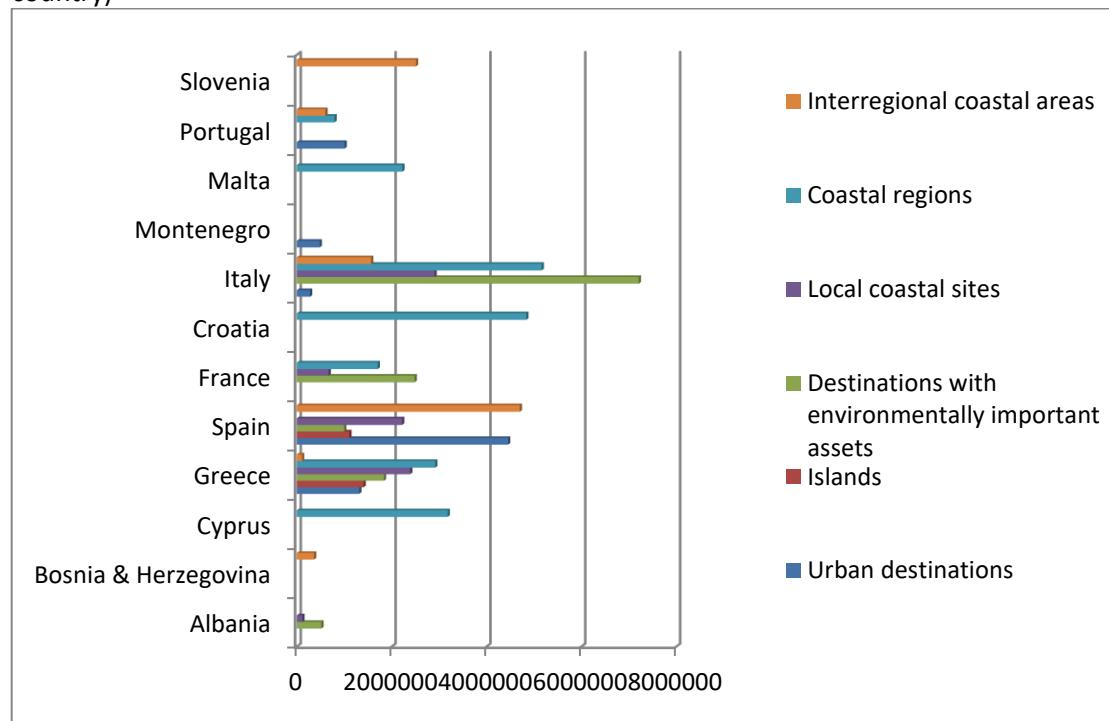
Source: Own elaboration

When comparing the allocated budget to the types of destinations selected by the STC (Figure 9) overall, it is evident that the largest amount has been allocated to 'coastal regions' (over 33%), a high proportion has been allocated to 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (21%), 'interregional coastal areas', 'local coastal sites' and 'urban destinations' have received similar percentage of funding (approximately 16%, 13% and 12% respectively) while islands present the lowest allocation of budget, namely 4%. Taking into account the budget

classification, the majority of the budget allocated varies from 500.000 to 3.000.000 euros. The destinations that have attracted the highest category of budget (3.000.000-5.058.000) are 'coastal regions' (Cyprus, Jadranska Hrvatska/Croatia), 'destinations with environmentally important assets' (Lazio/Italy), 'interregional coastal areas' (Andalucia/Spain) and 'urban destinations' (Catalonia/Spain).

At country/NUTS II level and in economic terms, the predominant type is indicated in Figure 10. It is evident that more emphasis has been placed by the STC at destinations with a more regional character ('coastal regions', interregional coastal areas) and destinations with environmental assets.

Figure 10. Distribution of Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism axis budget to typology A (per country)



Source: Own elaboration

For the EU countries, the average budget was about 1.2 mil Euros, while the maximum allocated budget exceeded 5 mil euros. In per capita terms, the mean allocated budget amounted to 0.85 euros p.c., with the maximum budget estimated at 4.7 euro p.c. What is interesting to note is that the coefficient of variation (CV), as estimated by the ratio of standard deviation to the mean, reveals that the higher variability of the three variables is found for the Total Budget p.c.. This means that the distribution of funding per capita was more unequal than the distribution of the funding in absolute terms as well as the population of the MED regions.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the total budget and total budget per capita

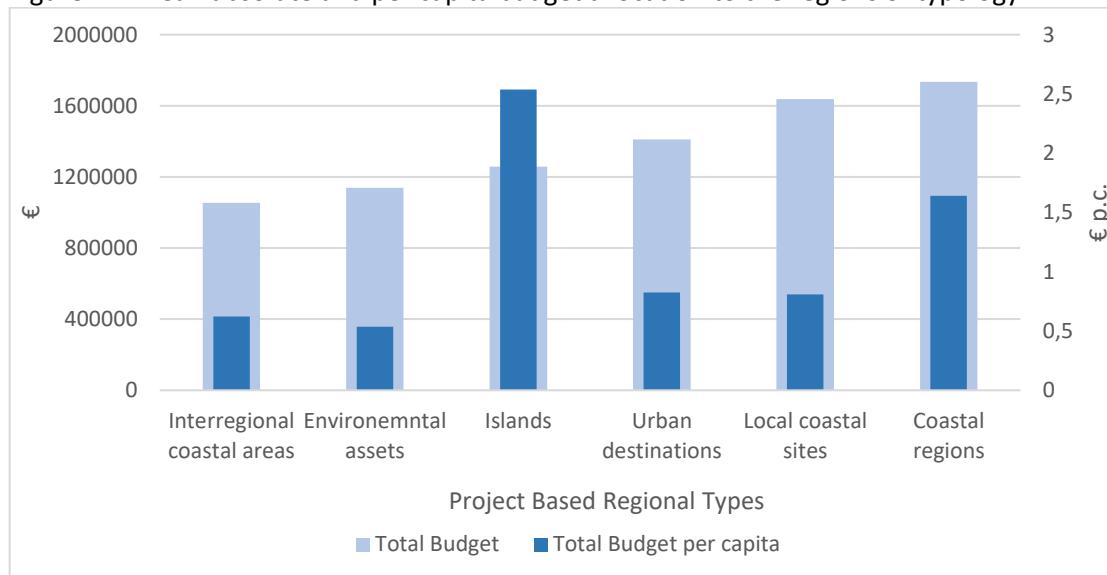
Metric	Total Budget (€)	Population	Total Budget p.c. (€ per capita)
Total	64,064,638	124,528,441	0.514

Max	5,057,969	10,036,258	4.677
Min	0	84,708	0
Average	1,186,382	2,306,082	0.850
St. Dev	1,279,752	2,363,611	1.083
CV	1.079	1.025	1.273

Source: Own elaboration

What is worth examining is the comparison of the mean absolute and per capita budget allocation to the regions of typology A, which is presented in Figure 11. According to the figures, the highest mean budget was found in 'coastal regions', while the lowest was in the case of 'interregional coastal areas'. The mean funding gap between these two areas is estimated at about 700.000 euros. Focusing on the per capita figures, the ranking of the regions is modified. The regions with the highest budget are the insular ones, followed by the coastal regions. The gap between the islands and the regions with environmental assets is over 2 euros p.c.

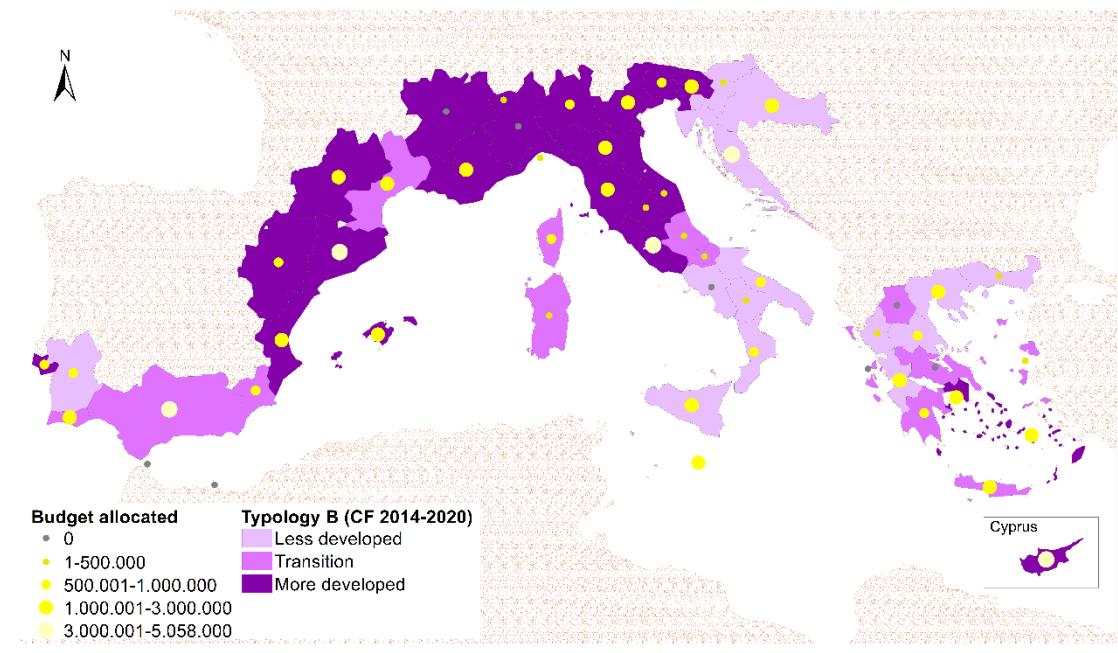
Figure 11. Mean absolute and per capita budget allocation to the regions of typology A



Source: Own elaboration

When comparing the allocation of funds from the INTERREG MED Programme under the ST mission to the Cohesion Funds eligibility typology (Typology B), it turns out that 25% was allocated to less developed regions, 22% to transition regions and 53% to more developed regions. Figure 12 shows the budget allocated under the ST mission of the INTERREG NED Programme per Cohesion Fund eligibility category at regional and country level (2014-2020 period)

Figure 12. Budget allocated under the ST mission of the INTERREG NED Programme per Cohesion Fund eligibility category at regional and country level



Country	Cohesion Fund 2014-2020 category	(1) Category as % at country level	(2) Budget allocated as % at country level	Difference Budget share minus categories' share (2-1)
Cyprus	Less developed	0	0	0,0
	Transition	0	0	0,0
	More developed	100	100	0,0
Greece	Less developed	38,5	41	2,6
	Transition	46,2	21	-25,0
	More developed	15,4	38	22,5
Spain	Less developed	0	0	0,0
	Transition	37,5	42	4,8
	More developed	62,5	58	-4,8
France	Less developed	0	0	0,0
	Transition	40	39	-1,4
	More developed	60	61	1,4
Croatia	Less developed	100	100	0,0
	Transition	0	0	0,0
	More developed	0	0	0,0
Italy	Less developed	26,3	22	-4,2
	Transition	15,8	3	-12,4
	More developed	57,9	75	16,6
Malta	Less developed	0	0	0,0
	Transition	100	100	0,0
	More developed	0	0	0,0
Portugal	Less developed	33,3	33	-0,3
	Transition	33,3	42	8,5
	More developed	33,3	25	-8,2

Slovenia	Less developed	50	14	-36,2
	Transition	0	0	0,0
	More developed	50	86	36,2
MED area (multiregional and countries with more than one category included)	Less developed	24	17	-7
	Transition	30	23	-7
	More developed	46	60	14

Source: Own elaboration

In *Spain* and *France* the budget that was allocated from the Programme (overall and at country level) is proportionally shared between the Cohesion Fund eligibility categories, taking also into account the percentage of each category at the country level. The same seems to be the case for *Portugal* with a slightly increased budget for the transition regions. In *Greece* and *Italy*, the more developed regions received the largest share of the budget in contrast to the regions in transition. This can be attributed to the particular tourism characteristics and priorities of the regions, the number of applications of each region to participate in the Programme and the potential funding from other related Programmes.

In *Slovenia*, 86% of the budget was allocated to the more developed region of Zahodna Slovenija which is the western and coastal part of Slovenia and therefore eligible from the Programme in terms of the ST mission's objectives and field of intervention. For *Cyprus*, *Croatia* and *Malta*, the budget was allocated in its entirety to the eligible (and unique in the case of Cyprus and Malta) regions of the Programme.

All in all, considering only the multiregional countries, in three of them, namely Italy, Greece and Slovenia, the proportion of budget allocated to the most developed regions exceeded the respective share of these regions to the regional system. In contrast, in Spain and Portugal, the more developed regions received the lowest proportion of the budget than their share in the regional system. Finally, for France, the shares of more developed regions in the regional system and the proportion of the budget allocated to them are almost equal. In the MED area, the proportion of budget allocated to the most developed regions exceeded the respective share of these regions to the MED regional system in contrast to the less developed and transition regions.

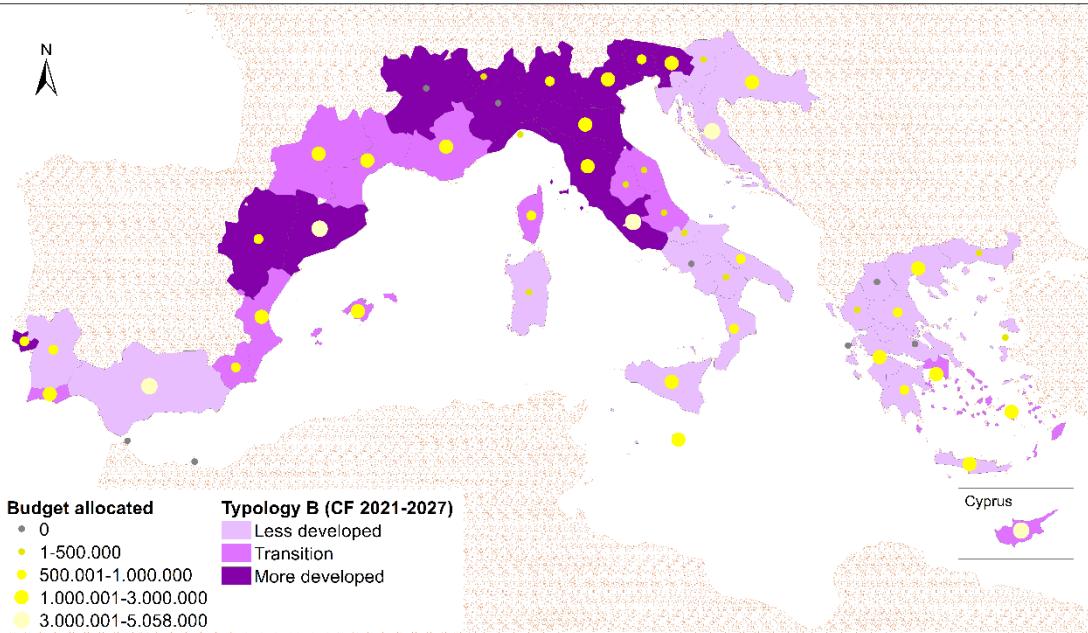
Taking this analysis one step further, the same budget is compared with the listing of regions eligible for funding from ERDF and ESF for the period 2021-2027⁴. In total, 20 regions have changed categories from the 2014-2020 to the 2021-2027 period. As shown in Figure 13, 10 regions were moved from transition to less developed, 9 from more developed to transition regions and 1 region from more developed to less developed. These regions received 34% of

⁴ For 2021-2027 period the regions eligible for funding from ERDF and ESF are listed as follows (European Commission, 2021):

- A. Less developed regions, where GDP per capita is less than 75 % of the EU-27 average
- B. Transition regions, where GDP per capita is between 75 % and 100 % of the EU-27 average
- C. More developed regions, where GDP per capita is more than 100 % of the EU-27 average

the budget during the 2014-2020 Interreg MED programme under the Sustainable Tourism mission.

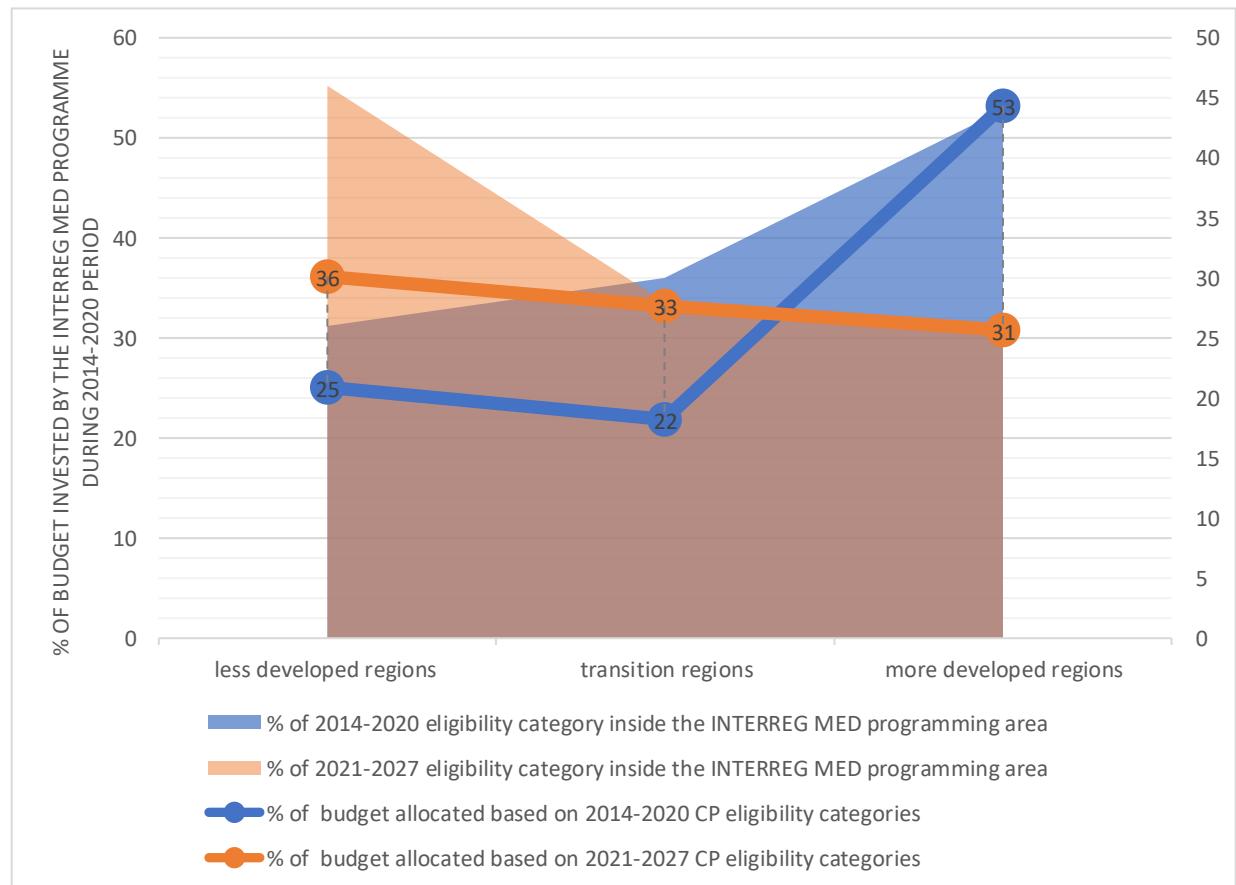
Figure 13. NUTS II coastal regions under Cohesion Policy eligibility categories for 2021-2027 period with INTERREG MED 2014-2020 budget allocation



Source: Own elaboration

The same conclusions are drawn when looking at Figure 14 where the share of budget is compared to the share of the regions to the total regional system of the Mediterranean for the two programming periods. During the 2014-2020 period, 25% of the Programme's budget was allocated to less developed regions which corresponded to 26% of the total eligible area in contrast to 53% of the budget allocated to more developed regions which corresponded to 44% of the total eligible area. Even when attributing the same budget from the 2014-2020 programming period of the INTERREG MED to the new Cohesion Policy eligibility categories, the same conclusion can be drawn in terms of favoring the most developed regions. In more detail, 36% of the Programme's budget was allocated to the less developed regions which for the new Cohesion Policy period 2021-2027 correspond to 46% of the total eligible area in contrast to 31% of the budget allocated to the more developed regions which correspond to 26% of the total eligible area.

Figure 14. Share of budget allocated by the INTERREG MED Programme during the 2014-2020 period compared to Cohesion Policy eligibility categories for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 implementation periods

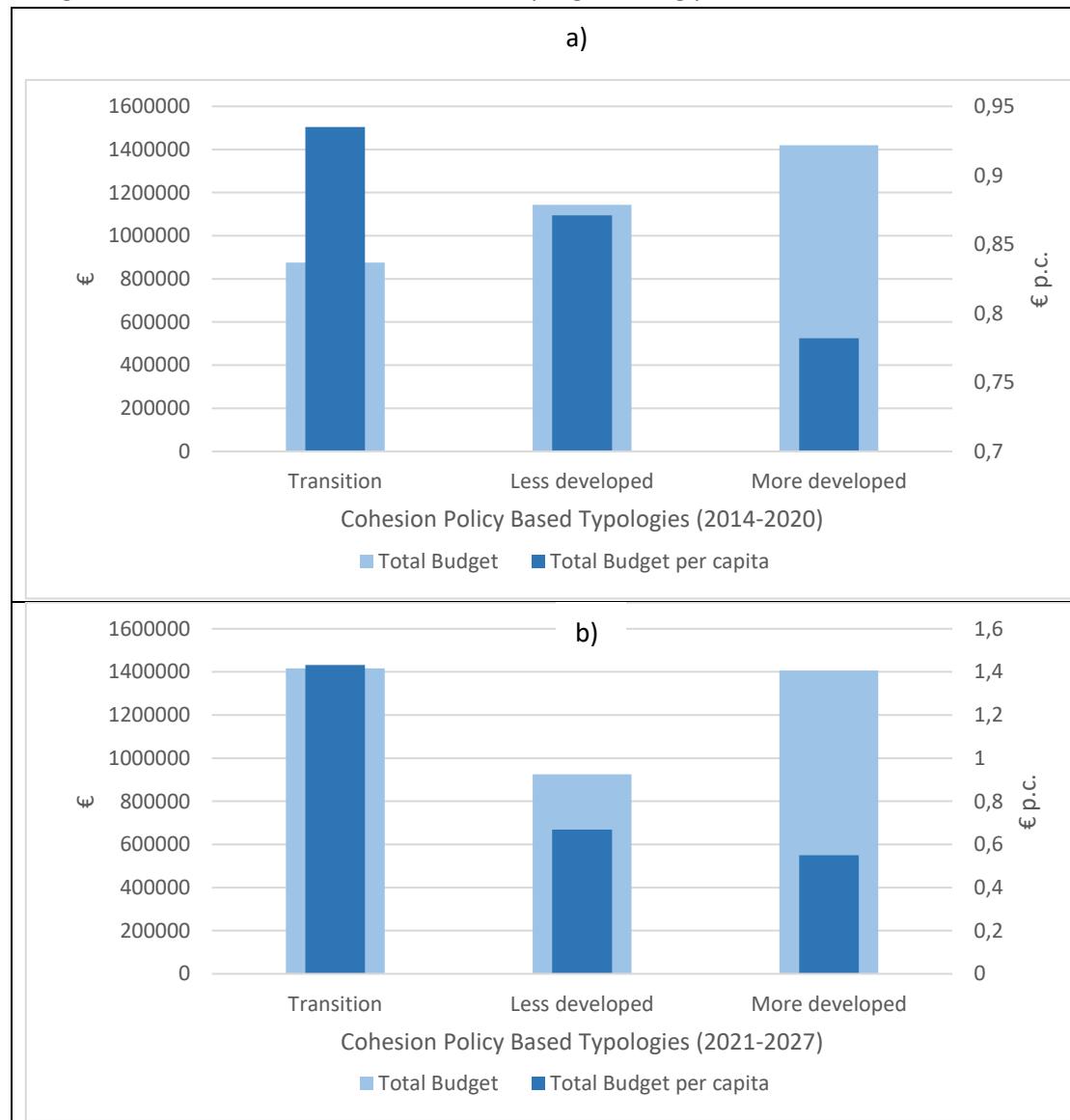


Source: Own elaboration

Figure 15 presents the average absolute and per capita budget allocated to the three types of regions considering both the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programming periods. As can be seen from Figure 15a, the more developed regions acquired the highest average budget in absolute terms. Nevertheless, when the per capita figures are examined, the category with the highest budget becomes this of the transition regions. The ranking of less developed regions remains unchanged regardless of the Budget metric considered. On the other hand, the incorporation of 2021-2027 regional typologies (Figure 15b) comes up with changes in the ranking of regions. More precisely, transition regions remain the most funded ones both in terms of absolute but also in per capita terms. What is interesting is that the less developed regions acquire now the lowest ranking of received funds in absolute terms with a budget deficit of about 0,5 mil. Euros compared to the two other types of regions. The ranking is improved when considering the per capita figures but still lags well behind the respective figure of the 2014-2020 regional typology analysis. These findings reveal that the intervention of the programme did not follow a strict cohesion logic, meaning that the less developed regions did not receive the largest share of the budget as in the case of the Cohesion Policy funds. This reality does not change even if the 2021-2027 eligibility categories are considered. The budget deficit of the less developed regions could be explained first by the very logic of the Interreg which is to bring together different types of regions in working towards common goals. Therefore, there is no

guarantee that the less developed regions will acquire funding. Second, it may be the result of the thematic orientation of the mission which targeted regions with challenges arising from the intensive development of tourism. This could mean that the regions with the highest interest in tourism are the ones with the highest development levels.

Figure 15. Average absolute and per capita budget allocated to the Cohesion Policy eligibility categories for the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programming periods



Source: Own elaboration

4. Conclusions

Tourism destinations has been the core of this paper which has attempted to examine their characteristics, their performance and their dynamic in attracting funds. In order to do so, three strands of knowledge have been used. These are related to the type of destination, the budget allocated, and the regions' performance. The integrated analysis has provided useful information in order to identify the destinations' position under the priorities of the cohesion policy addressing both 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 periods.

First, through typology A, a major challenge has been addressed regarding the identification of different types of destinations. This is related to the fact that tourism destinations do not always follow administrative boundaries. They are either situated at a local level, usually linked to a specific site, city, landmark, etc., or they cover a wide area of one or two regional units at the same time and follow spatial interrelationships among ecosystems of the built or natural environment. Therefore, typology A has managed to overcome this challenge and use the knowledge and selection criteria of Mediterranean tourism experts, representing the projects of the STC, to support the identification of implementation-based types of destinations in the Mediterranean coastal regions. Typology A has also provided a thematic classification of the types of destinations with the ones more localized focusing more on cultural identity and environmental issues and the ones under a wider spatial scale giving emphasis on management, governance and innovation issues. However, the connection of typology A with the regions of the Mediterranean is imperative in order to be able to link it with the priorities of the Cohesion policy. In this context, its connection with typology B has been incorporated into the analysis. Typology B, in contrast to typology A, follows exactly the administrative boundaries provided by Eurostat, which uses the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). The integration of both typologies brings an added value to the analysis and conclusions of this paper because, on the one hand, it provides a more focused and destination-oriented typology, while, on the other hand, it highlights insights on how typology A, and specifically, the destinations could be examined under the classification of a strong regional policy. Finally, adding the budget allocation of a territorial cooperation programme to this integration of both typologies, highlights the destinations' performance in absorbing funds during the 2014-2020 period and potential course over the 2021-2027 period.

Going deeper into the findings of the integration of the three strands described above, it seems that the predominant types of destinations, under typology A, both in terms of being selected and attracting funds, are 'coastal regions' and 'destinations with environmentally important assets'. On the one hand, 'coastal regions' could be considered as an 'easy' and 'clear' implementation area for a project, given that it is the only category which shows similar boundaries with the administrative ones. In this sense, the implementation can be much less complicated in terms of finding reliable data for research and testing purposes of the projects' activities. On the other hand, 'destinations with environmentally important assets' have been the focus of territorial cooperation projects for many decades, taking into account that the focus on environmental aspects has always been their priority and is considered one of the most important pillars of sustainability. It is, however, very interesting the fact that both types of destinations are addressing tourism destinations of large scale, covering one or more regions. This means that the focus on more local destinations remains a challenge, considering the lack of available and reliable data at the local scale and taking into account that governance structures are much more defined at the regional level. This finding is supported by the integration of typology A and B which shows that the distribution of typology A destinations among the typology B categories is much more harmonized in the case of 'destinations with environmentally important assets', 'coastal regions' and 'interregional coastal areas' (Figure 7) than in the case of 'urban destinations', 'islands' and 'local coastal sites'.

Moreover, the analysis highlighted a deviation between the Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism selection and funding process and the Cohesion Policy funding architecture, meaning that the allocation of the budget did not favor the less developed regions. This can be attributed to the enhanced capability of the more developed regions to apply for funding or the thematic orientation of the calls which is of greater interest to the more developed touristic areas of the Mediterranean. Another reason is the small participation of less developed regions to international initiatives and networks specialized in attracting funding opportunities and developing capacity-building. The fact that the majority of regions that did not participate in the programme fall under the less developed category also corroborates the findings of this analysis. Therefore and in order to promote the cohesion policy targets, a key priority is to transfer and disseminate the results of the Interreg MED projects under ST mission to other regions that did not participate in the 2014-2020 programming period. Specialized networks and tools such as the MED academy⁵ could be used to reduce this gap. However, future research should focus on incorporating more variables into the analysis in order to test the effect of various development characteristics on the ability of regions to attract funding. Furthermore, the analysis performed by this paper could be taken one step further by examining the typologies proposed by incorporating more economic variables, especially per capita, which provide more insights on the regions' performance.

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⁵ <https://www.interreg-euro-med-academy.eu/>

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