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**Sustainable
tourism**



**Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026**

18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

“Tourism transition in the Mediterranean”

Supporting Tourism SMEs in Their Transition to Circular Economy Practices

Thematic Paper — MED Cluster · Interreg Euro-MED Programme 21–27 · Community4Tourism Project



CPMR
CRPM



NECSTour
European Regions for
Competitive and Sustainable Tourism



Unione delle Università del Mediterraneo
Mediterranean Universities Union
Union des Universités de la Méditerranée
إتحاد الجامعات المتوسطية



Mediterranean
Action Plan
Barcelona
Convention



A project labelled by the UfM



Union for the Mediterranean
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Overview

01

The Challenge

Defining the circular transition challenge for Mediterranean tourism SMEs: environmental pressures, structural barriers, and the two-fold question.



02

Relevance in the MED Context

Policy frameworks, economic drivers, and the Mediterranean regional context shaping the circular transition.



03

The Cluster Approach

Solutions and tools from Thematic Projects, transferable practices, and recommendations for destination managers.





Methodological Approach and Sources

Qualitative & Exploratory | Triangulation

Academic Literature Review

Focus Areas

Circular economy adoption in tourism and SMEs

Key Themes

- Environmental implications of tourism
- Structural characteristics of tourism SMEs
- Opportunities and barriers

Analytical Dimensions

- Resource efficiency
- Waste reduction
- Circular supply chains
- Collaborative approaches

Sectoral Documentation

Core Resources

SEGITTUR manuals and practical guides for tourism SMEs

Four-Stage Methodology

1. Assess the starting point
2. Define a circular vision
3. Develop an implementation roadmap
4. Establish monitoring mechanisms

Subsector Guides

Accommodation, restaurants, tourism activity providers

Practitioner Perspectives

Semi-Structured Interviews

With professionals and experts in tourism development, sustainability and circular economy initiatives

Direct Observation

Of circular initiatives in tourism enterprises and destinations

Stakeholder Validation

Online meeting with project members to define and validate study scope



A Two-Fold Challenge for Mediterranean Tourism

The **Mediterranean** is the world's leading tourism region, yet it is also a **climate change hotspot**.

The sector depends heavily on natural resources while generating substantial waste and emissions, following a predominantly **linear "take-make-dispose" model**.






SMEs are the backbone of the industry but face severe structural barriers to circular transition.

96%

SMEs in Spain

Share of tourism companies that are SMEs (Dataestur, 2025)

KEY BARRIERS FOR SMEs

-  Limited knowledge and technical expertise
-  Financial constraints and limited capital
-  Operational pressures and seasonality
-  Fragmented value chains
-  Low visibility of reference cases

The two-fold challenge:

- (1) How can destinations provide practical tools for micro-SMEs?
- (2) How can cluster project solutions be transferred to daily operations?



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Operationalising Circularity in Tourism SMEs

Adoption remains low due to financial constraints, limited staff, and insufficient information. Seasonality complicates long-term planning.



Water & Energy

Low-flow tech, LED systems, preventive maintenance, and occupancy-based climate control.



Waste Prevention

Replace single-use items with refillable dispensers and durable service materials.



Food Systems

Inventory management, seasonal sourcing, surplus redistribution, and composting.



People & Digital

Staff training, guest communication, digital monitoring, and public-private partnerships.



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Policy Frameworks & Economic Drivers

European Strategic Framework

- **European Green Deal** — primary sustainability roadmap
- **Circular Economy Action Plan** — product lifecycle focus
- **EU Tourism Transition Pathway** — circular sector by 2030

Emerging Regulations (2026–2030)

- **Digital Product Passport** — product sustainability data
- **Mandatory ESG Reporting** — supply chain relevance for SMEs
- **HORECA Packaging Ban (2030)** — single-use prohibition
- **Food Waste Laws** — e.g. Spain's Law 1/2025



EU FUNDING



SUSTAINABLE FINANCE



INNOVATIVE MODELS



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Solutions from Thematic Projects

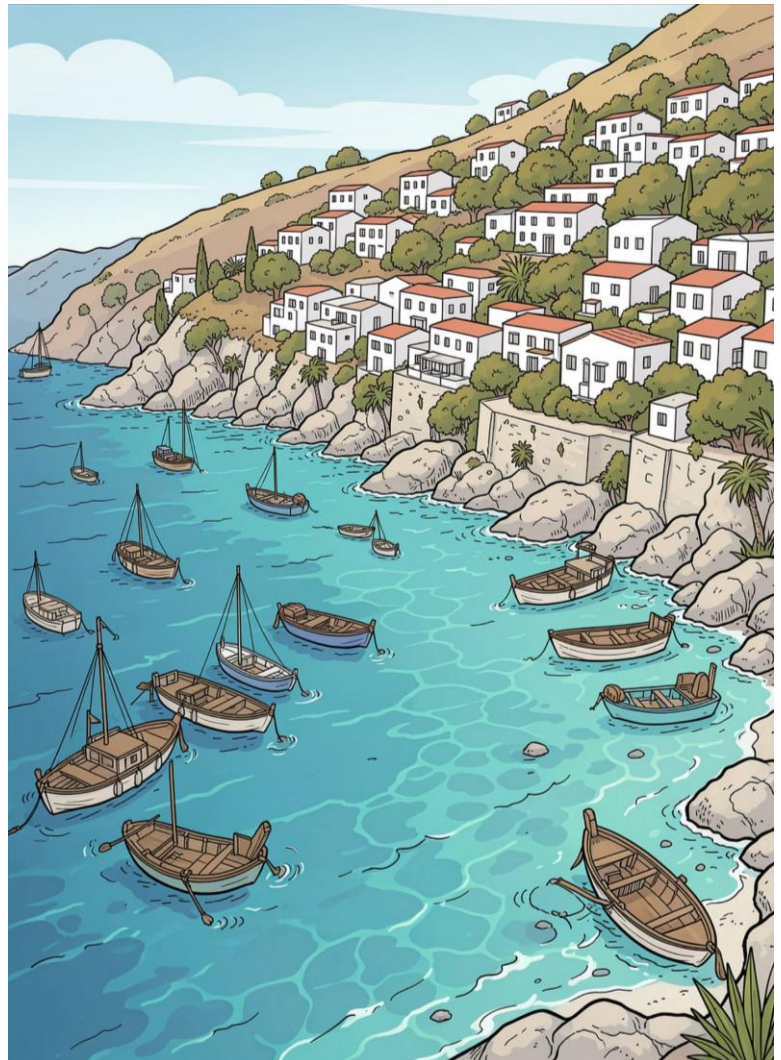
i Cluster Objective: Showcase tools, support transferability of project outputs, and contribute relevant inputs to future Policy Papers.

GreenSET

Service innovation for SMEs through Circular transformation

The MED Sustainable Service Innovation Methodology (MEDSSIM) works as a standardized and scalable approach designed to support the circular transformation of tourism services. It Equips organizations with tools, training, and a certification to guide SMEs through circular service innovation.

In progress until January 2028





Cluster Solutions: MAST & MED-ROUTES

MAST PROJECT

Sustainability Protocol & Self-Assessment Tool

Translates ISO 21401:2018 into a step-by-step diagnostic for SMEs. Digital tool assesses performance across environmental, governance, and operational areas, generating tailored improvement roadmaps. Supports both company and destination-level diagnosis.

Finalized in March 2026

MED-ROUTES PROJECT

Transnational Strategy for Eco-Itineraries

Framework to develop eco-itineraries integrating circular economy and cultural heritage. Includes Green Label certification, methodological guidelines, and replication tools. Builds on INCIRCLE and EMBLEMATIC outputs.

In progress until March of 2027



Cluster Solutions: Loop Zone & Recircle MED

LOOP ZONE

Promoting a Circular Economy with Low Plastic Zones on Mediterranean Islands

3-pillar model for reducing single-use plastics on Mediterranean islands via Local Action Plans, SME support, and a digital platform. Pilots in Formentera, Salina, Gozo, Vis, and Skiathos.

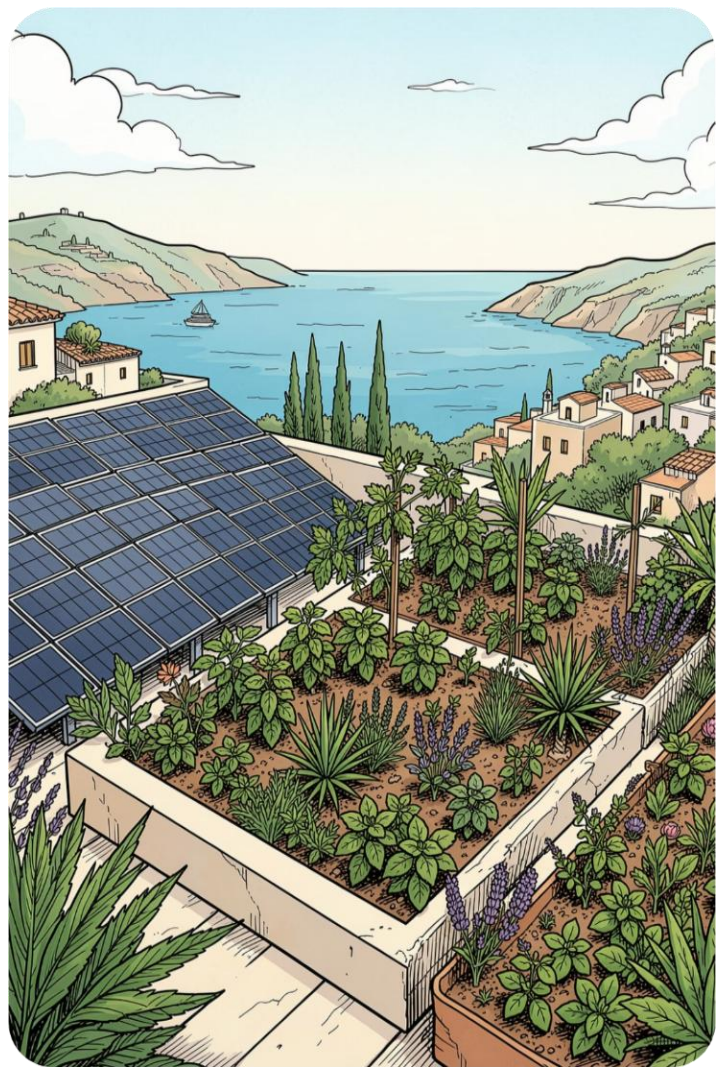
In progress until August 2029

RECIRCLE MED

Circular and Blue Tourism

The Blueprint offers Mediterranean destinations a set of tools to to reimagine tourism for the future. It enables them to create a tailored "Blue Action Plans for Circular Tourism" with SMART objectives, evidence-based analysis, adaptable toolkits, and blue tourism models.


In progress until end of 2027



Other success Stories: Circular Pioneers

 **Finhava (Mallorca)**
Blockchain platform closing the food cycle: hotels buy local, separate waste via smart containers, Tirme transforms it to compost, returned to farmers.

 **Plastic Busters MPAs**
Reusable cup system for coastal SMEs (*chiringuitos*). €1 deposit refunded on return. Industrial washing by Ecofestes. Implemented in Barcelona, Tarragona, Alicante, Huelva, Girona and Cádiz.

 **Hotel La Badira (Tunisia)**
Atmospheric water generators (Kumulus-1) produce drinking water from humidity, eliminating bottled water and transport emissions.

 **A Cozinha (Portugal)**
Mission Zero Academy-recognised restaurant: real-time waste tracking, culinary scrap transformation, completely plastic-free fine dining.



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Circular Economy Implementation Measures

Practical pathways for SMEs with destination-level support conditions.

Area	Challenge	SME Practices	Destination Support
Diagnosis & Monitoring	Lack of resource data	Track consumption KPIs; digital dashboards	Templates, advisory sessions
Water Efficiency	High use, undetected leaks	Aerators, low-flow taps, greywater recovery	Water audits, device grants
Energy Efficiency	High HVAC & lighting costs	LED, sensors, programmable thermostats	Energy audits, joint purchasing
Food & Waste	Over-production, buffet waste	Plated service, seasonal menus, composting	Donation agreements, composting
Materials & Procurement	Single-use, short-life products	Refillable dispensers, durable equipment	Green supplier directories
Visitor Engagement	Concentration, low visibility	Local itineraries, e-mobility, guest comms	Mobility hubs, awareness campaigns



Conclusions

→ Key insight

SMEs cannot become circular in isolation. DMOs and public administrations must provide technical guidance, shared infrastructure, and coordination. Key enablers include employee engagement and visitor participation frameworks like CopenPay, which rewards sustainable behaviours such as cycling and clean-ups.

→ SMEs at the Centre

Despite structural barriers, circularity integrates progressively through everyday management: resource efficiency, waste prevention, extended material lifespans.

→ People Drive Change

Staff engagement and visitor education are critical — daily routines in housekeeping and food preparation directly shape resource outcomes.

→ Destination-Level Collaboration

Shared waste systems, joint procurement, and institutional support embed circularity across the local ecosystem for lasting resilience.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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