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# Interreg Euro-MED

## Handbook for Sustainable Tourism Observatories: Strategies and governance guidelines


By Dialogue4Tourism Project
Institutional dialogue on Sustainable Tourism and Governance in the Euro-MED area

Sustainable Tourism Mission


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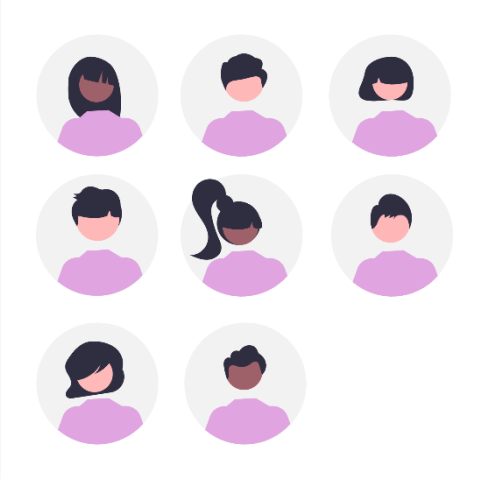
## 1-Credit

This ***Handbook for Sustainable Tourism Observatories: Strategies, governance and implementation guidelines*** is released in the framework of the Interreg Euro-MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories. This Network is led by the Interreg Euro-MED **Dialogue4Tourism Project** with the support of the **Community4Tourism Project (through its MED Cluster of Innovation & Technology Capacities)** and integrates in its core the **Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission as a forum for exchange and debate**. It is managed by Lazio Region, Italy (partner of Dialogue4Tourism Project) with the support of the Università Europea di Roma, Italy (Associated Partner of Dialogue4Tourism Project) and other project partners as El legado andalusí Andalusian Public Foundation (Regional Ministry of Culture and Sport of Andalusia, Spain), ASCAME (Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Spain), GTI (Greening the Islands (Italy), Institute of Agriculture and Tourism, Poreč (Croatia), European Public Law Organisation-EPLO (Greece) and Region SUD (France). It counts as well on the support of the Intermediterranean Commission of CPMR-IMC (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions), coordinator of the MED Cluster of Innovation & Technology Capacities of Community4Tourism Project.

Currently, **40 institutions are members of this Network**, representing a diverse type of stakeholders. Some of these members are part of the partnerships and associated partnerships of the former Interreg MED Program, building on the origins of the Network with the former Best MED Project. In addition to this, the Observatory is collaborating with various Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission of Interreg Euro-MED. Furthermore, it works with several institutions linked to sustainable tourism at a European level. The objective is to enhance the scope and impact of the initiative by bringing in expertise from a wide range of sectors



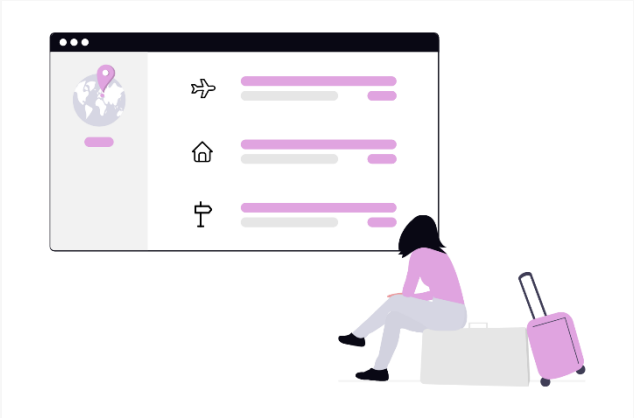
This publication is coordinated by Lazio Region (partner of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project, Italy) and the Università Europea di Roma (Associated Partner

of Dialogue4Tourism Project, Italy) supported by El legado andalusí Andalusian Public Foundation (Regional Ministry of Culture and Sport of Andalusia, Spain-LP of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project) and **compiles the conclusions of this Network' event under the title *Enhancing the MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories: Strategies from the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission* held in Brussels in May 2025** tackling the topic of advancing data-driven policies for sustainable tourism. The activity had the objective of strengthening institutional cooperation, enhancing data-sharing strategies and exploring innovative solutions for sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region.

**Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission**

**The Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission** focuses on fostering circular tourism, considering the sustainability of ecosystem services using innovative technologies and promoting the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage. The Mission works to develop solutions and promote cooperation in the Euro-MED Region and beyond, to increase the coordination level and institutional capacity to make tourism greener, smarter and more resilient.

Integrating the Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission into this Network enhances the capacity to transfer and amplify positive outcomes.



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MISSION

This publication is being validated by the **two different working groups** in the core of the Network involved in enhancing collaborative actions and delivering this document as best practice report on Sustainable Tourism Observatories highlighting the role of the ST Observatories for governance planification. These working groups are focused on:

## First Working Group: Data-driven decision-making for sustainable tourism.

## *Unlocking the potential: Goals & opportunities*

### Overview

Following the objective 6.6. Actions to support better cooperation governance of the European Commission for 2021-2027 selected by the Interreg Euro-MED Program, this — WG explores how regional and national tourism observatories can work more closely to align their methodologies, share data and co-develop strategies that respond to shared sustainability challenges in the Mediterranean region.

By integrating the contributions of the ST Observatories and Thematic Projects of the ST Mission into sustainable tourism policies, the Interreg Euro-MED Program opens a window to transformation -paving the way for a resilient tourism model.

### Main challenges identified in this WG

The core idea of this WG is to share multiple data sources—ranging from environmental indicators to socio-economic statistics, including visitor flows and tourism impact metrics. The goal is to support public administrations, private stakeholders and governance level in general in adopting more informed, transparent and participatory policy decisions.

**Main Challenges Identified in this WG**

Sharing multiple data sources for informed and participatory governance.

| Challenge | Description | Implication for Governance |
|---|---|---|
| Fragmentation of data sources | Data collected using different standards and formats across regions and observatories. | Difficult integration, comparison and interoperrability of data. |
| Inconsistent sustainability indicators | Lack of common metrics and limited willingness to share indicators. | Hard to evaluate and compare sustainability performance of destinations. |
| Limited integration of sustainability in governance frameworks | Sustainability treated as a secondary objective instead of a core planning principle. | Weak alignment between tourism development and sustainability goals. |
| Reactive rather than predictive governance models | Responses to tourism impacts occur after problems arise. | Limited anticipatory capacity and adaptive management. |

**Key points for discussion identified in this WG**

- How can observatories harmonize data collection and reporting standards to enable cross-regional comparisons?
- What mechanisms (e.g., digital platforms, joint working groups, knowledge exchange programs) can be established to facilitate ongoing collaboration?
- In what ways can national observatories support local and regional ones in terms of technical capacity, funding and political backing?
- How can observatories jointly contribute to transnational sustainable tourism goals set by the Interreg Euro-MED programme or the EU Green Deal?
- Main contributions (experiences and practice cases) of previous Interreg MED projects and current Thematic Projects of the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission

**Expected outcomes of this WG:**

- Proposals for collaborative frameworks or protocols across observatories operating in sustainable tourism in the MED.
- To exchange experiences and practice cases on data-driven decisions from the Thematic Projects of the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission.
- Identification of best practices in multilevel coordination of observatories.
- To enhance predictive and responsive tourism governance.
- To discuss indicators and tools for governance to anticipate tourism pressures and design adaptive responses.

## Second Working Group: Recommendations for integrating sustainable tourism into policies. *Unlocking the potential: Goals & opportunities.*

**Overview**

There is a need to consolidate the role of observatories not merely as monitoring tools but as embedded components of policy-making processes at both regional and national levels. This requires institutional recognition of observatories as strategic instruments capable of delivering harmonized, high-quality and context-specific data that is directly relevant to policy planning. By aligning indicator systems with international standards such as the UNWTO-INSTO framework, while tailoring them to Mediterranean

challenges—such as seasonality, resource stress, biodiversity vulnerability and social carrying capacity—observatories can provide a solid foundation for policy coherence.
By integrating the contributions of the ST Observatories and the Thematic Projects of the ST Mission into sustainable tourism policies, the Interreg Euro-MED Program is willing to open a window from experimentation to transformation—paving the way for a tourism model resilient and future-ready.

## Main Challenges Identified in this WG

Sharing and implementing best practices for sustainable tourism governance.

| Challenge | Description | Importance for Governance |
|---|---|---|
| Strengthen role of observatories | Establish sustainable tourism observatories as central governance nodes in the Mediterranean. | Centralize and coordinate tourism data and strategies at the regional level. |
| Define scalable policy models | Develop adaptable and replicable policy models for different Mediterranean destinations. | Enable consistent and effective policy applications across the region. |
| Facilitate knowledge transfer | Translate thematic project results into applicable policy tools and strategies. | Utilize EU project outcomes for pragmatic, evidence-based tourism planning. |
| Advocate for long-term support | Campaign for sustained political and financial resources to support sustainable tourism policies. | Secure stable funding and political backing for long-term sustainability integration. |

**Key points for discussion identified in this WG**

- **Institutional integration of Sustainable Tourism Observatories** - How can STOs be formally embedded within regional and national governance structures to support decision-making?
- **Transferability of policy models and the results of the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission -** What governance models or practices can be adapted and replicated across different territories in the Euro-MED region? How can we share the challenges and results of the

Thematic Projects of the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission better through the STOs?

- **Multi-level governance and coordination mechanisms** - How can collaboration between local, regional and national authorities be improved to ensure aligned and coherent sustainable tourism policies supported by STOs?
- **Identification of gaps between governance levels -** How can STOs help to identify and address gaps between the different governance levels?

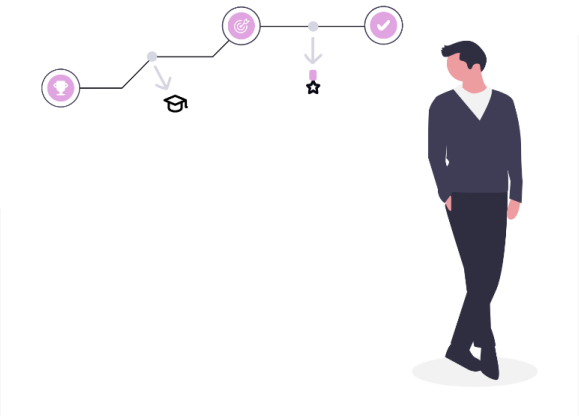
**Expected outcomes of this WG**

- **Improved knowledge transfer mechanisms** – To search for concrete pathways to translate findings from Thematic Projects and observatories into actionable policies.
- To **identify the main contributions** (experiences and practice cases) of previous Interreg MED projects and the current Thematic Projects of the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission.
- **Enhanced policy integration tools** – In parallel to the previous point, to study tools that facilitate the integration of sustainable tourism priorities into broader policy areas such as climate adaptation, cultural heritage, mobility and circular economy.
- **Proposals for long-term sustainability support** – to analyze strategic advocacy points to secure political, financial and institutional backing for the STOs to work on policy impact.

**<u>Common expected outcome to WG 1 & WG2</u>**

Recommendations for enhancing the visibility and influence of sustainable tourism observatories in policymaking in the Euro-MED area to be included in the Annex of the MoU of this Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories.

The two Working Groups will deliberate on the statements to be included in the Annex to the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of the NSTO. This Annex will expand the current framework, articulate a shared vision, and formalize their collective commitment to transnational collaboration and sustainable tourism governance.



By fostering a multi-stakeholder dialogue, this event will contribute to defining **clear strategies** for the Observatory's work in 2026 and beyond.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NSTO
LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WORKING GROUPS
LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

## 2. Executive summary

This Handbook provides a comprehensive framework for the development, strengthening and effective operation of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (STOs), with a focus on the contribution of the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission and the Interreg Euro-MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (NSTO).

Drawing from the contributions, discussions and experiences presented during the sessions organised by the coordinators of this Network: Lazio Region (Italy) partner of Dialogue4Tourism Project, European University of Rome (Associated Partner of Dialogue4Tourism Project), El legado andalusí Foundation-Regional Ministry of Culture and Sport of Andalusia (Spain), LP of Dialogue4Tourism Project, the document outlines data-management approaches, stakeholder engagement strategies and policy-integration practices that enable STOs to become strategic instruments in sustainable tourism governance.

The NSTO promotes evidence-based decision-making through collaborative data collection, analysis and dissemination. **Its mission is aligned and contributes to the global and European frameworks such as the EU Transition Pathway for Tourism, the Glasgow Declaration for Climate Action in Tourism, the EU tourism agenda 2030 and the future EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy.** This handbook supports STOs in transitioning from monitoring structures to governance platforms capable of shaping, informing and evaluating sustainable tourism policies.

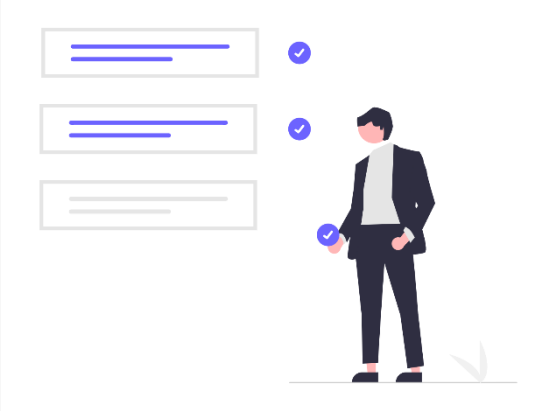
## Structure of the Handbook

This handbook is organized into four main sections:

**Part I: Foundation and Context** (Chapters 1-4) establishes the framework, objectives, methodology and governance principles underpinning sustainable tourism observatories.

**Part II: Core Strategic Drivers** (Chapters 5-8) presents five interconnected pillars essential for effective STO operation:

- **Chapter 5: Governance principles for sustainable tourism**
- **Chapter 6: Data-driven decision-making** – Transforming tourism data into actionable intelligence
- **Chapter 7: Policy integration and multilevel cooperation** – Embedding tourism within broader sustainable development strategies
- **Chapter 8: Role of Sustainable Tourism Observatories** – From monitoring hubs to governance actors
- **Chapter 9: Stakeholder engagement and capacity building** – Co-creating sustainability through participatory processes



**Part III: Evidence & Resources** (Chapter 10): **Case studies and good practices** –

**Part IV: Implementation** (Chapters 10-11) synthesizes recommendations and conclusions to guide STO development and policy integration.

**Each core strategic driver** (Chapters 5-8) is illustrated - and referred to - through practical case studies and supported by operational guidance derived from the Interreg Euro-MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories.

## 3. Context and objectives

The Interreg Euro-MED Programme aims to reinforce cooperation across Mediterranean territories to support greener, smarter and more resilient tourism models. Within this Mission, the NSTO serves as a transnational alliance of institutions engaged in systematic tourism data monitoring and knowledge exchange.

**The objectives of this Handbook are to:**

- Provide methodological and strategic guidance for the development and governance of STOs.
- Highlight the role of STOs in improving institutional cooperation, harmonizing indicators, and enabling data-driven decision-making.
- Document the challenges and opportunities shared by experts, policymakers, and project partners of the Sustainable Tourism Mission of the Interreg Euro-MED Program in the Mediterranean region.
- Present practical examples and lessons learned that can guide STO operations and policy contributions.

***Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***

In alignment with the objective **6.6. Actions to support better cooperation governance** of the European Commission for 2021-2027 selected by the Interreg Euro-MED Program, the network aligns with key global and regional frameworks such as the **EU Transition Pathway for Tourism**, the **Glasgow Declaration for Climate Action in Tourism**, **the EU Tourism Agenda 2030, the future EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy and the UN Tourism INSTO ensuring its contributions to sustainable development goals.**

The handbook contributes directly to **SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)**, **SDG 13 (Climate Action)** and **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals)** by positioning STOs as platforms for multilevel governance, stakeholder engagement and transnational cooperation. By integrating tourism data into broader policy domains—such as climate

adaptation, mobility, cultural heritage and ecosystem management—STOs support informed decision-making that enhances urban and territorial resilience (Target 11.3). The emphasis on data-driven policies, innovative technologies and climate-related indicators strengthens destinations' capacity to anticipate and respond to climate risks, in line with target 13.3 on climate action and awareness. Furthermore, the Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories embodies the principles of SDG 17 by facilitating partnerships among public authorities, academia, private-sector actors and civil society, fostering knowledge exchange, capacity building and coordinated action across borders to advance sustainable tourism transitions at regional and international levels.

LEARN MORE HERE

## 4. Methodology and participants

**This Handbook is based on:**

- Experiences shared by the Governance Projects of the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission Dialogue4Tourism and Community4Tourism project, Thematic Projects of this Mission as SMITour, TO CARE MED, Nature4CChange, AQUAMAN, LIBECCIO, TOURISMO and others. Also, including the MED Cluster of Innovation & Technology Capacities of Community4Tourism Project.
- Contributions from STOs members, European macro-regional strategies, national tourism administrations and Universities.

**Participants included:**

- National and regional policymakers.
- STO managers and technical leads.
- Data scientists, innovation consultants and researchers.
- Tourism destination managers and private-sector representatives.
- EU programme officers.
- Interest groups / networks such as CPMR and NECSTouR

This multilevel and multidisciplinary composition search that the guidelines presented reflect real operational challenges and opportunities within tourism ecosystems.

## 5. Governance principles for sustainable tourism

Effective STO governance is rooted in integrated, multilevel and participatory governance approaches that connect data production, intermediaries and decision makers.

**Core Principles for Sustainable Tourism Governance**

**Transparency and Accountability**

Open communication about methodologies, data sources, indicator limitations, and analytical results to build stakeholder trust.

**Multilevel Governance**

Coordination across local, regional, national, and transnational levels to ensure coherent tourism policies.

**Standardized Frameworks**

Use of harmonised indicators and monitoring systems to ensure comparability and consistency.

**Long-term Vision and Stability**

Sustainable tourism governance requires stable resources and long-term monitoring commitments.

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

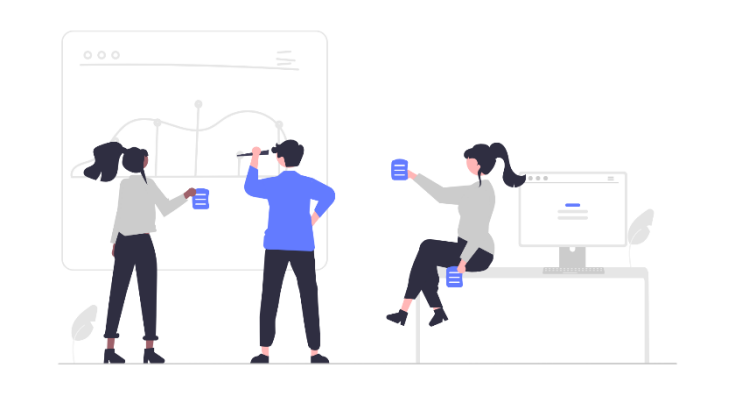
Cross-sector cooperation to address complex sustainability challenges.

**Core principles**

- **Transparency and accountability**
  STOs must ensure open communication about methodologies, data sources, indicators' limitations and analysis outputs to build trust among stakeholders.

- **Multilevel governance**
  Coordination across local, regional, national and transnational levels is essential. Integrated governance strengthens stakeholder engagement and supports coherent tourism policies.

  Effective multilevel governance in sustainable tourism requires structured coordination across local, regional, national and transnational levels through formal cooperation mechanisms, clearly defined roles and aligned strategic frameworks. This can be achieved by establishing permanent inter-institutional working groups, adopting shared sustainability objectives and common indicators and enabling interoperable data-sharing systems that support evidence-based decision-making. Integrated stakeholder engagement, combined with joint capacity-building initiatives and coordinated funding instruments, strengthens policy coherence and implementation. Finally, common monitoring and evaluation frameworks with continuous feedback loops ensure that policies remain adaptive, inclusive and aligned across all governance levels.



- **Standardized frameworks**
  Harmonised indicators and monitoring systems enable comparability and consistency. Former projects such as PANORAMED demonstrate how shared frameworks can support joint governance structures. The former Interreg MED PANORAMED focused on improving governance of Mediterranean innovation

and cooperation. It strengthened coordination between regional, national and EU policies in the Mediterranean area.

- **Long-term vision and stability**
  Sustainable tourism governance depends on stable funding, adequate staffing and long-term commitment to monitoring and evaluation.

- **Interdisciplinary collaboration**

  Environmental scientists, tourism experts, conservation specialists, economists and digital innovation stakeholders must work together to address complex sustainability issues.

## 6. Data-driven decision-making

Data is the backbone of STO operations. However, data alone does not produce better policy—its value emerges when transformed into the right information for the right decision-maker at the right time.

**Key components:**

- **The tourism data ecosystem** *Data producers:* statistical offices, technical services, monitoring equipment.
- **Intermediaries:** STOs, observatories, data platforms.
- **Decision makers:** public authorities, private operators and community stakeholders.
- **Main challenges**
    - Lack of harmonised data across regions
    - Difficulty obtaining high-granularity data at the local level
    - Technological disparities between destinations
    - Complexities in combining multiple data streams (sensors, surveys, web sources, mobile data, APIs)
    -

**Recommendations for effective data use**

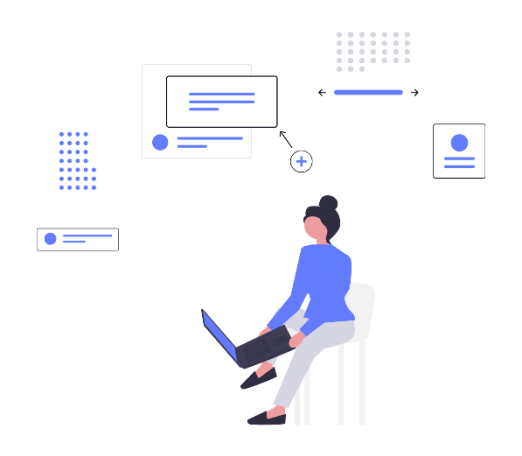
- Use existing data sources before investing in costly sensing equipment.
- Co-design indicator systems with stakeholders from the beginning.
- Focus on simplified, user-oriented dashboards to improve usability.
- Build living labs to test solutions with real users.
- Promote a culture of data—training stakeholders to understand, request and use data effectively.

**The role of indicators**

Indicators shape learning processes, stakeholder dialogue and incremental governance improvements. They rarely change policy alone, but they foster a culture of evidence-based management.

**Operational guidance**

STOs should establish clear data governance frameworks that define roles, responsibilities and procedures across the full data lifecycle. This includes standardized data collection protocols, quality assurance and validation procedures, metadata documentation and clear data-sharing agreements among institutions. Governance frameworks should ensure compliance with data protection rules, transparency and long-term interoperability, while remaining flexible enough to integrate new data sources and technologies over time.



**Link to resources/projects**

- NECSTouR – Tourism of Tomorrow Lab (Community4Tourism): NS 2030 Strategy Pathway and common indicator framework supporting harmonised sustainability measurement across regions.
  LEARN MORE HERE

- LIBECCIO Project: Big data analytics platforms integrating official statistics, web-based data and sustainability indicators.
  LEARN MORE HERE

- Canary Islands Observatory (AQUAMAN): A mature tourism data ecosystem connecting data producers, observatories and decision-makers.
  LEARN MORE HERE

**Specific expected Working Group outcomes**

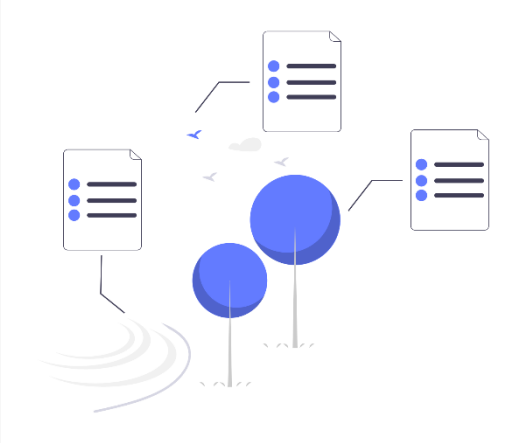
This chapter is directly linked to **WG1 expected outcomes**: proposals for collaborative frameworks across observatories, enhanced predictive governance capabilities and identification of best practices in multilevel coordination.

## 7. Policy integration and multilevel cooperation

Policy integration ensures that tourism is embedded in broader sustainable development strategies.

**Major lessons from dialogue**

- Tourism should not be treated as an isolated sector; it must align with transport, cultural heritage, environmental management and innovation policies.
- Policy integration requires ongoing dialogue between STOs and government authorities.
- Integrated governance models offer blueprints for STOs to contribute to higher-level strategic frameworks.
- Cross-border and cross-policy cooperation fosters innovation, enhances resilience and facilitates shared solutions to regional challenges such as climate change, mobility and resource management



**Operational guidance**

STOs should support the development of integrated policy frameworks through structured, step-by-step processes. These include mapping existing policies across sectors, identifying points of alignment and conflict, establishing interdepartmental coordination mechanisms and defining shared sustainability objectives. Practical tools such as policy alignment matrices, coordination templates and joint action plans can support this process. Reference to existing strategic outputs, such as those developed by the PANORAMED project, can accelerate implementation and ensure coherence.

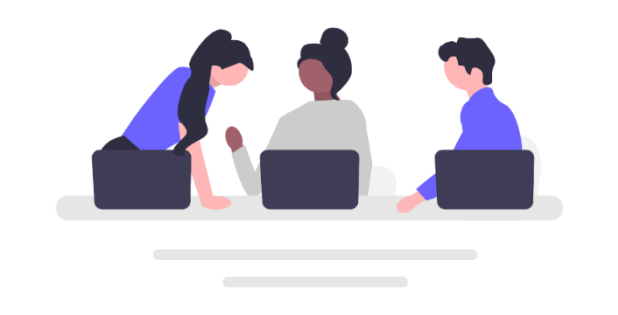
**Links to resources and projects**

Key references include:

- PANORAMED Project: Multi-level governance models embedding tourism into transport, environment, innovation and cultural heritage policies.
  LEARN MORE HERE
- Danube Strategy Point: Macro-regional governance demonstrating cross-border and cross-policy integration.
  LEARN MORE HERE
- Croatian Sustainable Tourism Observatory (CROSTO): Evolution from pilot initiative to nationally mandated policy instrument.
  LEARN MORE HERE

**Specific expected Working Group outcomes**

This chapter is directly linked to **WG2 expected outcomes**: improved knowledge transfer mechanisms, enhanced policy integration tools linking tourism with climate adaptation/circular economy/mobility and proposals for long-term institutional support.



## 8. Role of the Sustainable Tourism Observatories

STOs are evolving **from monitoring hubs to governance actors**.

🌍 **Main Functions Overview**

| Main Function | Description |
|---|---|
| 🔹 **Data collection & monitoring** | Systematic evaluation of tourism impacts across economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. |
| 🔸 **Knowledge transformation** | Producing meaningful insights and analysis to support informed decision-making processes. |
| 🔹 **Stakeholder coordination** | Facilitating dialogue and cooperation among institutions, private sector actors, SMEs and local communities. |
| 🔸 **Policy support** | Providing evidence-based recommendations, participating in policy labs and supporting legislative initiatives. |
| 🔹 **Capacity development** | Strengthening institutional and stakeholder skills in data management and sustainable tourism governance. |
| 🔸 **Innovation enablers** | Identifying gaps in digital tools and supporting pilot actions using technologies such as big data analytics, AI, sensors and mobility data platforms. |

In addition, STOs contribute to building trust among actors by ensuring transparency in methodologies and communication processes. They play a key role in promoting data culture within destinations, encouraging public and private stakeholders to integrate evidence into planning. STOs also help harmonize indicator systems across territories, strengthening comparability and cross-border cooperation. At the same time, they support the integration of tourism within broader policy domains such as climate adaptation, mobility, cultural heritage and regional development. Their work fosters long-

term resilience by identifying emerging risks and monitoring sustainability performance. Through these efforts, the NSTO aims to become a governance mechanism that applies shared knowledge, harmonised practices and long-term sustainability commitments across the Mediterranean region.

- **Operational guidance**

STOs should be supported by clear and formal governance structures. These may include defined terms of reference, steering committees representing key institutions, scientific or technical advisory boards and stakeholder councils. Standardized data dissemination protocols should ensure that outputs are timely, accessible and tailored to different audiences. At network level, the NSTO should articulate a shared strategy and roadmap to guide coordination, transfer of knowledge and joint advocacy efforts.

- **Links to existing resources and projects**

- TOURISMO Project: STOs as science–policy translators converting climate evidence into policy-ready formats.
  LEARN MORE HERE
- Croatian STO (CROSTO): Legal embedding of sustainability monitoring within national tourism policy.
  LEARN MORE HERE
- Canary Islands Observatory: Long-term trust-building within tourism data ecosystems.
  LEARN MORE HERE

- **Expected Working Group outcomes**

This chapter integrates outcomes from both Working Groups: strengthening STOs as governance nodes (WG1) and supporting their institutional integration within regional and national governance structures (WG2).

## 9. Stakeholder engagement & capacity building

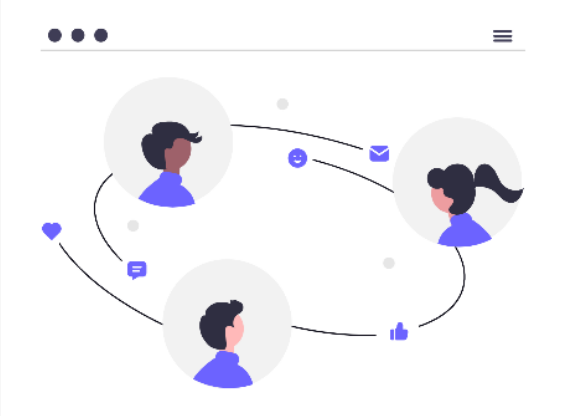
Stakeholder engagement is fundamental to ensuring that sustainability policies are understood, accepted and effectively implemented. For STOs, meaningful engagement not only increases the relevance and legitimacy of data but also reinforces long-term governance structures by promoting shared responsibility and collective learning.

**Enhanced recommendations**

- **Co-design processes from the start:** Engage policymakers, local administrations, DMOs, SMEs, residents and scientific institutions in the early stages of defining indicators, methodologies and monitoring priorities. Co-creation strengthens ownership and helps bridge the persistent gap between data producers and end users.

- **Institutionalize engagement mechanisms:** Move beyond *ad-hoc* participation and establish stable structures—such as permanent working groups, interdepartmental committees, or destination observatory councils—that ensure continuity, shared governance and routine cooperationd across sectors.

- **Develop advanced capacity-building programmes:** Training should extend beyond basic data literacy to include interpretation of complex data sets, use of digital platforms, understanding climate risks and integrating evidence into daily management practices. Tailored modules for SMEs and local authorities help address uneven levels of digital readiness across destinations.



- **Facilitate translation of knowledge into action:** STOs must play an active role in transforming raw data into narratives, scenarios and decision-oriented tools. Clear visualizations, targeted reporting and storytelling techniques enhance usability for policymakers, businesses and communities.

- **Engagement of local and regional stakeholders and policy makers through awareness and participation:** Engagement of local and regional stakeholders and policy makers for the understanding of sustainability challenges—such as water scarcity, climate pressure, overtourism and resource competition—through outreach activities, local dialogues and public-facing communication tools that foster behavioural change.

- **Strengthen multi-level coordination:** Ensure that engagement efforts connect local stakeholders with regional, national and transnational governance structures, enabling coherent action and alignment with broader strategies such as the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the Glasgow Declaration.

- **Promote long-term cultural shifts:** Foster a culture where data-driven governance, transparency and shared responsibility become standard practice. Building trust takes time—continuous presence, frequent communication and alignment of expectations are critical.

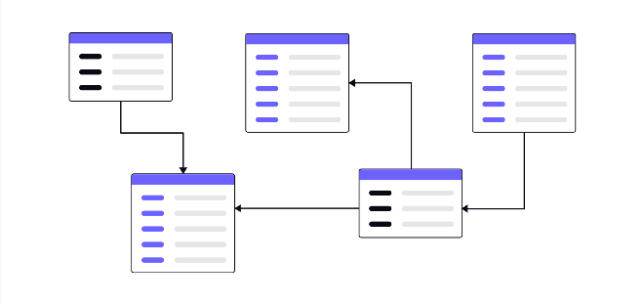
# 10. Good practices and transferability of challenges and results from the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission Thematic Projects

This chapter presents selected good practices emerging from the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission Thematic Projects, that participated during the session *"Enhancing the MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories: Strategies from the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission"*, organised by the Network's coordinator -Lazio Region- in Brussels (May, 2025).

The good practices are here clustered according to four thematic dimensions that reflect the core functions of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (STOs): **(1) data systems**, **(2) governance integration**, **(3) climate adaptation** and **(4) stakeholder engagement and capacity building**. Each thematic area highlights transferable approaches, lessons learned and policy-relevant recommendations for STOs operating in different territorial contexts.

## Thematic area 1 – Data systems for evidence-based decision-making

This cluster focuses on projects that strengthen the technical, analytical and governance dimensions of tourism data systems, enabling STOs to transform raw data into actionable intelligence.



- NECSTouR – Tourism of Tomorrow Lab (Interreg Euro-MED Community4Tourism Project)

The Tourism of Tomorrow Lab, presented by Daniel Iglesias -data scientist at NECSTouR, illustrates how harmonised indicator frameworks and robust data governance can support strategic decision-making across regions. The NS 2030 Strategy Pathway promotes a common set of economic, social and environmental indicators to be adopted by all NECSTouR members by 2030.

Key transferable lessons include the importance of prioritizing decision-relevant indicators, investing in interoperable IT infrastructures and ensuring that data pipelines—from collection to communication—are aligned with policy needs. The experience demonstrates how STOs can act as coordinators of shared measurement frameworks while respecting regional specificities.

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- Interreg Euro-MED LIBECCIO Project -Operational and strategic planning

Presented by Dr. Athanasios P. Kalogeras (Research director /Deputy director at Industrial Systems Institute-Research Centre ATHENA, Project partner of the Interreg Euro-MED LIBECCIO Project. The LIBECCIO project showcases the use of big data analytics platforms integrating official statistics, web-based data and sustainability indicators. The project highlights the value of modular and locally adaptable indicator systems that serve both policymakers and business operators.

LIBECCIO demonstrates how STOs can manage real-time and long-term data simultaneously, support both operational and strategic planning and enhance interoperability by integrating existing platforms rather than creating parallel systems. Early stakeholder involvement through living labs proved critical to ensuring usability and uptake.

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- Interreg Euro-MED AQUAMAN (AQUAtic systems' evaluation for the Mitigation of wAter scarcity in mediterranean islaNds and coastal tourist destinations under severe pressure) Project - Data ecosystem perspective

The Canary Islands experience, presented by Dr. Raúl Hernández (Head of La Laguna University Chair in Tourism (Spain) and responsible for INSTO reporting process at the regional level, project partner of the Interreg Euro-MED AQUAMAN Project) emphasizes the importance of clearly defined roles within the tourism data ecosystem—data producers, observatories as intermediaries and decision-makers. The project shows that indicators alone do not drive policy change; instead, STOs must prioritise user-

oriented data products, regular coordination and long-term trust-building. MED Project. LEARN MORE HERE

- Interreg Euro-MED TO CARE MED Project – Design of vertical tools

Presented by Dr. Nicola Camatti (Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Department of Economics; Lead Partner of the Interreg Euro-MED TO CARE MED project).

The TO CARE MED project showcases the use of digital tools to support the management of tourist flows, providing quantitative methodologies to calculate destination carrying capacity and to design strategies for addressing overtourism. The project emphasizes the importance of an integrated system of indicators at the tourism-system level, capable of capturing both the costs and benefits generated by the tourism sector.

TO CARE MED also underlines the relevance of designing vertical tools as core components of a STO for destinations. The vertical development and targeted use of specific tools within STOs create added value for both users and planners, which can be further enhanced and scaled through data sharing, simulations and comparative analyses across different tourism destinations and STO components."
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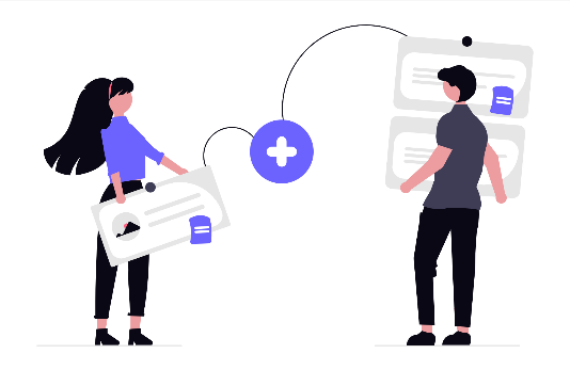
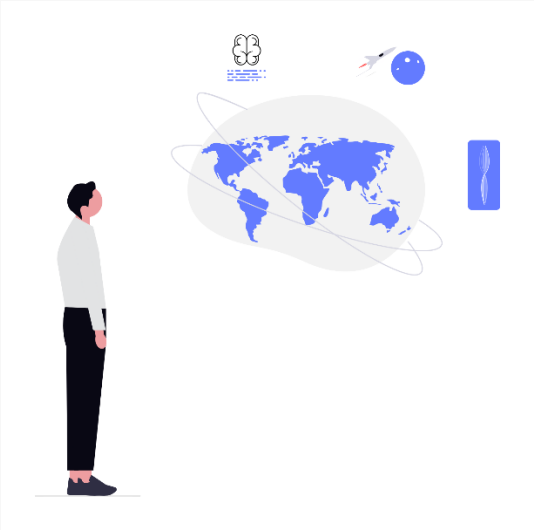


Key recommendations and transferable lessons from this thematic area

- Clarify roles between **data producers, STOs as intermediaries and decision-makers**.
- Focus on **user-oriented data products**, not only indicators.
- Build long-term trust through regular coordination and continuity.
- Prioritise **decision-relevant indicators** over exhaustive datasets.
- Invest in shared data standards.
- Position STOs as **coordinators of shared measurement frameworks**, while allowing regional adaptation.
- Combine **real-time and long-term data** to support both operational and strategic planning.

- Enhance interoperability by **integrating existing platforms** rather than creating parallel systems.
- Use **living labs** early in the process to ensure usability, stakeholder ownership and uptake.

## Thematic area 2 – Governance integration and multilevel coordination



This thematic area highlights projects that demonstrate how STOs can be embedded within governance structures and contribute to coherent, multi-level policymaking.

### • Intermediterranean Commission of CPMR-IMC (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions), coordinator of the MED Cluster of Innovation & Technology Capacities of the Interreg Euro-MED Community4Tourism Project – Orientation Papers

Flora Leroy presented the contributions from the Intermediterranean Commission of CPMR-IMC (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions) remarking that one of the key barriers/challenges in transforming monitoring efforts into real governance tools is the lack of coordination and shared vision among stakeholders. This ties directly to Key Challenge 7 – Governance and Cooperation – identified in the **Orientation Paper of the MED Cluster of Innovation & Technology Capacities of Community4Tourism Project**: "Successful smart tourism strategies leverage the common interests and resources of stakeholders involved, exploiting and creating new synergies. This requires that at least an initial critical mass of stakeholders is aware of the benefits and opportunities of smart solutions, that they trust each other and agree on a mandate, and that they cooperate to build an active and engaged smart tourism ecosystem. Ensuring smooth cooperation, sharing of data, commonality of intents and definition of responsibilities is a key challenge that DMOs embarking towards smart tourism need to consider. All projects will be involved in this challenge."

In response to this challenge, she remarked that several members of this Cluster have developed promising approaches that serve as practical case studies. For example:

**Interreg Euro-MED LIBECCIO Project** implement a quadruple helix approach, engaging public, private, academic and community stakeholders in innovation within living labs.

**Interreg Euro-MED TOURISMO Project** organizes local engagement workshops with public authorities, DMOs, tech providers and SMEs to foster local and transnational cooperation on pilot actions. Use case scenarios for pilot outputs exploitation and a best practices guide on tools and strategies for Certification of Sustainable Tourism Destinations. Cooperating at local and transnational level in designing, specifying, implementing & assessing 8 pilot activities for the monitoring and management of tourism flows

**Interreg Euro-MED SMITour Project** creates joint thematic roadmaps for developing smart industrial tourism in the Med Regions and formalize cooperation through memoranda of understanding for developing Smart Industrial Tourism in the Mediterranean

**Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project** is working on a cross-network alliance on sustainable tourism, ensuring the collaboration of stakeholders across regions and stakeholders to share best practices and contribute to sustainable tourism governance.

These examples show that while governance remains a key challenge, it's also an area where innovation and cooperation can deliver tangible results when backed by structured methodologies and stakeholder engagement. As **the Interreg Euro-MED Community4Tourism Project** is promoting those solutions and supporting their transfer and their integration into broader policy framework together with Dialogue4Tourism Project.

Ms. Leroy stressed the fact that the preparation of the **new EU strategy on Sustainable Tourism**, represents a momentum to advocate for better strategies in sustainable tourism in the MED Region in the future and "we believe that the role of the ST Observatories and the actors and results of the ST Community Projects are both key actors and tangible evidence to be considered when it comes to data used and data-driven decision making".

- Interreg MED PANORAMED Project – Integrated governance frameworks

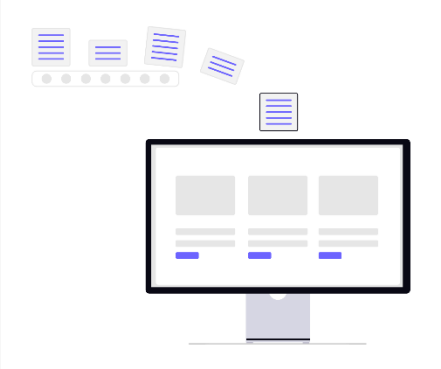
PANORAMED provides a strong example of integrated governance frameworks linking tourism with transport, environment, innovation and cultural heritage policies, as explained by Alen Matić (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of the Republic of Croatia. Project partner of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Innovation and

Associated Partner of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project. Through multi-level coordination mechanisms and pilot governance structures, the project generated strategic outputs that can serve as blueprints for STO governance models.

Transferable lessons include the value of harmonised indicators, co-designed pilot actions and the translation of project results into operational policy tools. PANORAMED shows how STOs can strengthen both horizontal (cross-sectoral) and vertical (multi-level) governance.

### Danube Strategy Point-Comparable datasets (Macro-regional perspective)

The macro-regional experience presented by Raphael Sachs (Pillar Officer of the Danube Strategy Point – EU Strategy for the Danube Region) underlines the importance of harmonised, comparable datasets to support policy coherence across countries and regions. Integrating tourism within broader policy domains—such as mobility, sustainability and innovation—enhances resilience and policy impact.



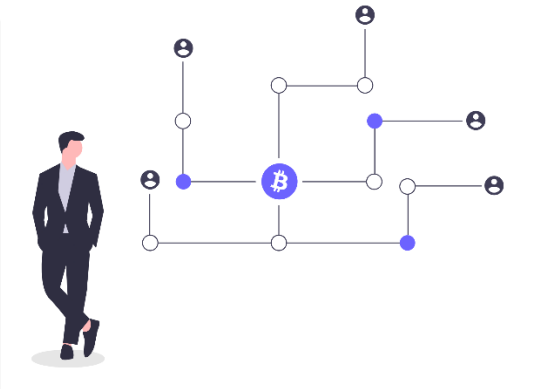
This experience is highly transferable to the Euro-MED context, illustrating how STOs can support transnational coordination and position tourism as a driver of integrated regional development.

### Croatian Sustainable Tourism Observatory – From a pilot initiative into a national policy instrument (CROSTO – Interreg Euro-MED Nature4CChange Project)

Izidora Markovic, Institute of Tourism of Zagreb and coordinator of the Croatian Sustainable Tourism Observatory (CROSTO). LP of the Interreg Euro-MED Nature4CChange Project.

CROSTO demonstrates how an observatory can evolve from a pilot initiative into a nationally mandated policy instrument. By embedding sustainability indicators into legislation and destination management planning, Croatia ensured long-term policy uptake and institutional continuity.

Markovic highlights that measuring sustainability only at regional level often masks local impacts, especially in destinations where tourism is highly concentrated in specific areas. CROSTO therefore developed a framework of **mandatory indicators** measured both at regional and **local (pilot destination) levels**, providing a more accurate picture of tourism impacts. Experience showed that when sustainability measurement is not mandatory, implementation tends to weaken over time. After reviewing over 600 indicators (from ETIS, GSTC, OECD, INSTO, ISO standards), CROSTO proposed: **17 mandatory indicators** to be measured by all destinations in Croatia and **50+ optional indicators** allowing destinations to adapt measurement to their specific needs. Today, all 300 Croatian destinations are required to measure tourism sustainability as part of their destination management plans.



The combination of mandatory core indicators and optional, locally adaptable ones provides a replicable governance model for other Mediterranean destinations.

### Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project. Greening the Islands Observatory – STOs as platforms for dialogue

Amar Djedaoun (Greening the Islands Observatory) remarked that STOs can really play a decisive role in turning vulnerability into resilience, but only if a few conditions are in place. They need to be embedded in long-term governance frameworks, supported by reliable data systems, and, above all, closely connected to the real needs of territories and communities. From our perspective, integrating tourism data with energy, water, mobility and ecosystem management is no longer optional, but essential, especially when we look at challenges like resource scarcity, seasonality and increasing climate exposure.

“We also very much welcome the growing focus on harmonised, but still adaptable, indicator frameworks. Having comparability across regions is crucial, but it has to go hand in hand with respect for local specificities. The mix we’ve seen today, mandatory core indicators combined with flexible, place-based approaches, is particularly relevant for

specific territories like islands, where impacts are concentrated and thresholds can be reached very quickly".

Another point that he remarked on is that STOs should not be seen as purely technical monitoring tools. Their real value lies in acting as platforms for dialogue, learning and innovation. Participatory approaches, living labs and capacity-building initiatives are key to making sustainability transitions socially grounded and economically viable. In that sense, STOs can truly become catalysts for behavioural change, helping to build a shared understanding of challenges and solutions among public authorities, businesses and local communities. Finally, he stressed how important cooperation across the Mediterranean really is. Issues like climate change, water scarcity and ecosystem degradation don't stop at borders, and our responses shouldn't either. "By strengthening networks of observatories and better aligning tourism with wider climate and sustainability policies through the Euro-MED framework, we have a real chance to increase impact and move faster toward more resilient, low-impact tourism models", he underlined. In this sense, we can remark the example of the *Interreg Euro-MED White Paper on Small Islands as hubs for climate resilience in the MED* of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project
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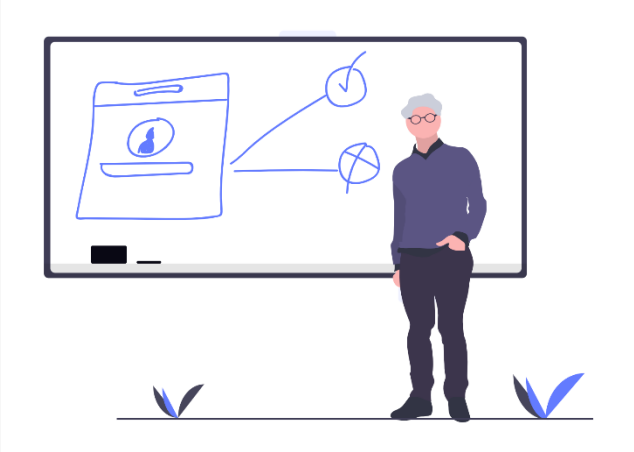
Key recommendations and transferable lessons from this thematic area:

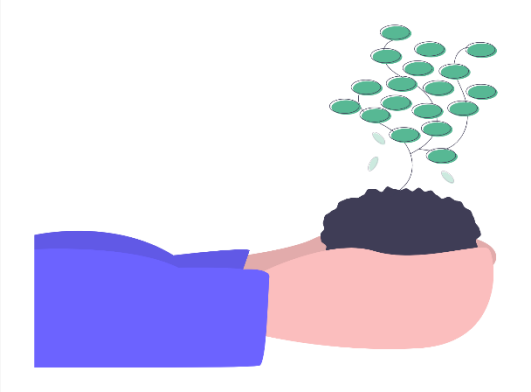
**Transform tourism monitoring into an effective governance tool** by institutionalizing structured, multilevel stakeholder cooperation - built on shared vision, data sharing and clear mandates - so that monitoring results are jointly owned and directly inform decision-making and policy.



- Embed sustainability indicators into **legislation and destination management planning**.
- Combine **mandatory core indicators** with optional, locally adaptable ones.
- Ensure long-term institutional continuity through formal governance recognition.
- Use **harmonised indicators** as a common governance language across sectors.

- Co-design pilot actions with policymakers to ensure policy uptake.
- Translate project results into **operational policy tools**, not only strategic documents.
- Strengthen both **horizontal (cross-sectoral)** and **vertical (multi-level)** governance through STOs.
- Integrate tourism data into **broader policy domains** (mobility, sustainability, innovation).
- Use STOs to support **transnational coordination** and macro-regional strategies.
- Position tourism as a driver of integrated regional development
- **Measure at the right scale:** Complement regional data with local-level indicators to capture real tourism impacts.
- **Avoid reinventing the wheel:** Build on existing international frameworks and indicator systems rather than creating new ones from scratch.
- **Move from voluntary to mandatory frameworks:** Sustainability monitoring becomes effective when embedded in legal and policy frameworks.
- **Ensure policy uptake:** Position observatories as tools that directly support legislation and destination management planning.
- **Think long-term:** Pilot observatories can evolve into national reference systems when supported by consistent governance and institutional commitment.

## Thematic area 3 – Climate adaptation and resilience



This thematic area gathers contributions that address climate change as a central challenge for tourism governance and highlight the role of STOs in supporting adaptation strategies.

### Interreg Euro-MED TOURISMO Project – embedding climate risk assessment into tourism planning

Presented by Alexandros Vakoulas, Innovation Consultant – Kinno, Project Partner of the Interreg Euro-MED TOURISMO Project. TOURISMO positions STOs as science–policy translators capable of converting climate evidence into policy-ready formats. This project highlights the urgency of climate adaptation in the Mediterranean, where rising temperatures, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and extreme weather pose significant risks to tourism.

Key transferable practices include embedding climate risk assessments into tourism planning at all levels, standardizing methodologies, and framing climate risks as economic and operational challenges—particularly for SMEs. The project also stresses the importance of continuous science–policy dialogue through policy labs and structured exchange platforms.

### Key recommendations and transferable lessons from this thematic area

- Embed **climate risk assessments** into tourism planning at all governance levels.
- Standardize methodologies to ensure comparability and credibility.
- Frame climate risks as **economic and operational challenges**, especially for SMEs.
- Maintain continuous science–policy dialogue through policy labs and exchange platforms.
- Integrate **water scarcity indicators** into STO monitoring frameworks.
- Adopt a **long-term vision** supported by stable funding mechanisms.
- Use STOs as platforms for **learning and behavioural change**, not short-term policy fixes.

## Thematic area 4 – Stakeholder engagement and capacity building

This thematic area focuses on participatory approaches, trust-building and the development of human and institutional capacities.

### Interreg Euro-MED Community4Tourism Project – The MED Clusters

The Interreg Euro-MED Community4Tourism Project strengthens sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean by enhancing coordination, reusing best practices and supporting climate-resilient, green and smart tourism governance and innovation.

Flora Leroy remarks that “as part of the community building activities of Community4Tourism we have 4 thematic clusters and WG linked to the 4 specific objectives of the programme tackled by the Sustainable Mission”.

The MED Clusters are **strategic networks aimed at promoting the dissemination of the results of the Community of Projects** and the participation of external actors,

beyond the Sustainable Tourism Community. Launched in April 2024 in Rome, and then organising regular and online meetings through each year.

The Innovation and Technology Capacities MED Cluster covers different topics related to the innovation and use of advanced technologies in the tourism sector, reinforcing tourism as a growth sector supporting environmental and climate change initiatives, improving innovation capacities, competitiveness internationalization and promoting new business models, among others.

### Interreg Euro-MED AQUAMAN Project- Stakeholder engagement dimension

The Canary Islands experience demonstrates that effective observatories prioritise dialogue, learning and regular coordination among stakeholders. By fostering collaboration between public authorities, private actors and communities, STOs can strengthen ownership of sustainability goals and improve policy relevance.

### Interreg Euro-MED LIBECCIO Project - Living labs and co-creation

LIBECCIO Project use of territorial working groups and living labs illustrates how co-design processes enhance the relevance and usability of data platforms. This approach is highly transferable for STOs aiming to align technical tools with real decision-making needs.

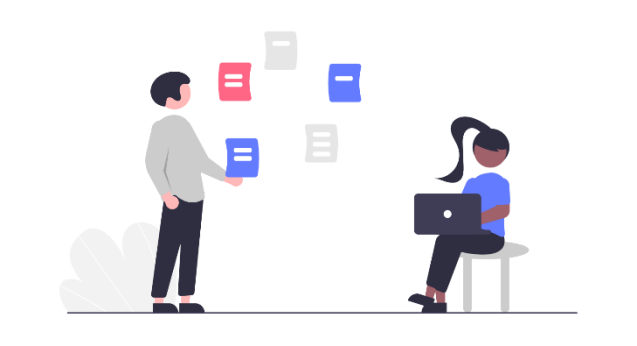
### Interreg Euro-MED TOURISMO Project (SME capacity building)

TOURISMO highlights the importance of empowering SMEs—representing the majority of tourism businesses—through targeted education, simplified indicators and observatory-led capacity-building programmes. Mainstreaming climate urgency and sustainability awareness requires tailored communication strategies and continuous engagement.

### Key recommendations and transferable lessons from this thematic area:

Enhance and strengthen the role of clusters and the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Community to promote knowledge exchange, strengthen stakeholder coordination, enhance capacity building and facilitate expertise transfer.

- Foster collaboration between **public authorities, private actors and stakeholders**.
- Strengthen stakeholder ownership of sustainability goals through continuous engagement.
- Use STOs as neutral spaces for mediation and shared learning.
- Apply **co-design methodologies** to align technical tools with real decision-making needs.
- Involve end-users from early stages to increase uptake and impact.



- Develop **simplified indicators** tailored to SMEs.
- Provide observatory-led **training and capacity-building programmes**.
- Use targeted communication strategies to mainstream climate urgency and sustainability awareness.
- **Foster transnational cooperation:** Encourage collaboration across countries and regions to address shared challenges and best practices.
- **Use tourism as a driver for innovation:** Integrating tourism into broader policy fields creates opportunities for innovative approaches to sustainable development.

By combining **harmonised data, cross-sector integration and transnational collaboration**, observatories and policymakers can design **more cohesive, sustainable and innovative tourism strategies** at the regional and macro-regional level.

Izidora Markovic explained in the session how **a local and pilot-based Sustainable Tourism Observatory can evolve into a nationally recognised policy instrument**, supporting evidence-based tourism governance and long-term sustainability.

# 11. General recommendations & conclusions for policy implementation

The discussions and experiences shared during the Dialogue4Tourism (D4T) meetings, and the event referenced in this document, together with the accumulated knowledge of the Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (NSTO) and the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects, lead to a clear and shared conclusion: advancing sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean requires going beyond standalone monitoring systems. Rather than operating as isolated initiatives, observatories must evolve into fully integrated, policy-oriented mechanisms. In this context, Sustainable Tourism Observatories should be formally recognised and operationalised as strategic governance instruments, embedded within multi-level, data-driven and adaptive policy frameworks that support continuous learning and evidence-based decision-making.

## General recommendations

### 1.- Strengthening governance structures and policy integration

Effective Sustainable Tourism Observatories depend on clear governance arrangements and formal recognition within public decision-making processes. STOs should be structurally embedded within tourism and cross-sectoral policies to ensure their long-term relevance and impact.

#### Key recommendations

- Formalise STO roles within regional and national tourism strategies, destination management frameworks and sustainability plans.

- Establish and support multi-level governance mechanisms that include STO representatives, ensuring coordination across local, regional, national and transnational levels.

Promote integrated governance approaches linking tourism with environmental protection, climate adaptation, cultural heritage, mobility, innovation and circular economy policies.

- Position STOs as active contributors to policy design and evaluation processes, not only as monitoring or reporting tools.
- Strengthening communication and public awareness
- Enhance coordination with non-tourism policy domains
- Ensure scalability beyond pilot territories

### 2.- Stabilizing financial and institutional support

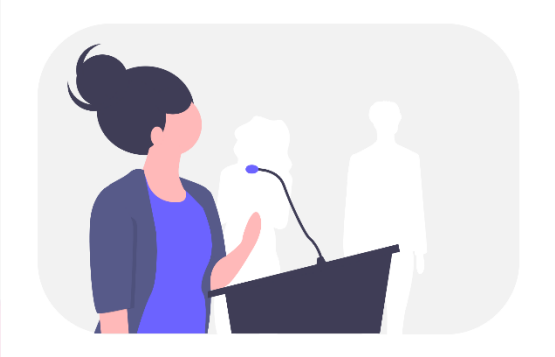
The continuity and effectiveness of STOs depend on stable institutional anchoring and predictable resources. Short-term project-based funding alone is insufficient to sustain monitoring, analysis and policy support functions.

#### Key recommendations

- Ensure long-term funding lines for STOs, including human resources, digital infrastructure and data management capacities.
- Embed STO activities into public administration processes, workflows and planning cycles to reinforce their operational role.
- Strengthen institutional anchoring of observatories within ministries and regional authorities to guarantee continuity, legitimacy and policy relevance/uptake.

### 3.- Enhancing a multi-level data ecosystem and harmonization

Sustainable tourism transformation depends on the existence of a complete and interoperable data ecosystem that connects technical infrastructure, human capacities and governance mechanisms. **Experiences from initiatives such as the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects SMITour, LIBECCIO, TOURISMO, TO CARE MED, NaTour4CChange, AQUAMAN and others** demonstrate that Sustainable Tourism Observatories are most effective when they act as facilitators of coordinated, evidence-based action across local, regional, national and transnational levels. To achieve this, open and interoperable data platforms are essential. These platforms must ensure timely and accessible information



flows tailored to different governance needs: supporting local authorities in piloting actions, enabling regional administrations to design territorial strategies, and informing national ministries in legislative and policy development. In this perspective, **the future European Tourism Data Space** represents a strategic opportunity to reduce fragmentation, enhance interoperability and align STOs with emerging European data infrastructures, particularly in the Mediterranean context.

Key recommendations:

- Develop and maintain harmonised frameworks across STO network, combining a shared core set with flexible indicators reflecting territorial specificities, to ensure consistency and policy relevance.
- Promote systematic sharing of data, methodologies and tools among STOs, building on the lessons learned and solutions developed by the Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission.
- Encourage interoperability and use of existing digital platforms, APIs and non-traditional data sources.
- Align STO data systems with emerging European infrastructures, including the future European Tourism Data Space, to reduce fragmentation and improve comparability across the Mediterranean region.

### 4.- Fostering stakeholder collaboration and ensuring long-term sustainability

Long-term sustainability requires stable institutional anchoring within ministries, regional development agencies, or tourism authorities, supported by clear mandates and political recognition of observatories as essential instruments for evidence-based governance. STOs function within complex tourism ecosystems that require trust, participation and shared ownership. Strong stakeholder engagement enhances both the quality of data and the legitimacy of observatory outputs. Moreover, public–private partnerships and the involvement of tourism industry associations, destination management organisations and private operators can enhance data availability and stakeholder ownership.

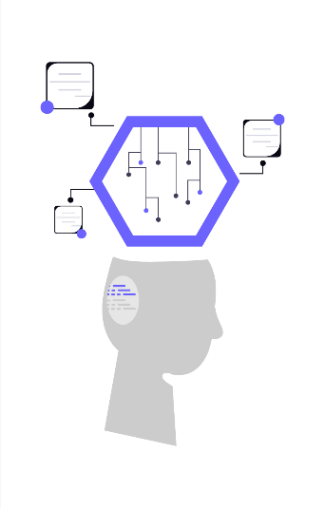
Key recommendations

- Establish permanent working groups at national and regional levels including actors of STOs like academia, civil society and destination management organisations.

- Integrate private-sector actors - particularly SMEs- into monitoring, interpretation of results and decision-making processes through transparent and well-defined governance arrangements.
- Promote carefully designed public–private partnerships that enhance data availability and stakeholder commitment while safeguarding data integrity, ethical use and observatory independence.
- Strengthen collaboration with academic and scientific institutions to reinforce methodological robustness and analytical capacity and to boost capacity building.

### 5.- STOs as hubs for knowledge transfer and innovation

Beyond monitoring, STOs should operate as knowledge hubs that facilitate experimentation, learning and the transfer of sustainable tourism solutions across territories.



#### Key recommendations

- Support living labs as the Sustainable Tourism Policy Labs implemented by the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project, digital tools and experimental approaches to sustainability monitoring.
- Encourage the transfer and adaptation of successful pilot actions across destinations and regions in the MED, using STOs as hubs for knowledge transfer.
- Capitalise on the results of Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects to scale up proven tools, methodologies and governance models through the NSTO framework.

### 6.- Improving policy uptake of STO outputs

A recurring challenge remains the translation of monitoring results into concrete policy actions. STOs must actively bridge the gap between data production and decision-making.

#### Key recommendations:

- Create policy labs like the **Sustainable Tourism Policy Labs of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism Project** mentioned in this document and structured dialogue spaces connecting STO findings to real decision-making and planning processes. LEARN MORE HERE

- Develop differentiated communication strategies and translate technical data into policy-ready formats, including dashboards, policy briefs and strategic recommendations. LEARN MORE HERE ABOUT THE POLICY BRIEF ON SUSTAINABLE MED ISLANDS
- Tailor outputs to specific audiences: simplified visual tools for local stakeholders and SMEs, strategic syntheses for regional and national authorities and detailed analytical reports for technical and research institutions.
- Embed STO-generated evidence into climate adaptation strategies, circular economy policies, sustainable mobility plans and destination management instruments.

### 7.- Supporting capacity building

A robust data ecosystem cannot function without adequate human capacities. Sustainable tourism governance is an adaptive learning process rather than a linear transfer of best practices.

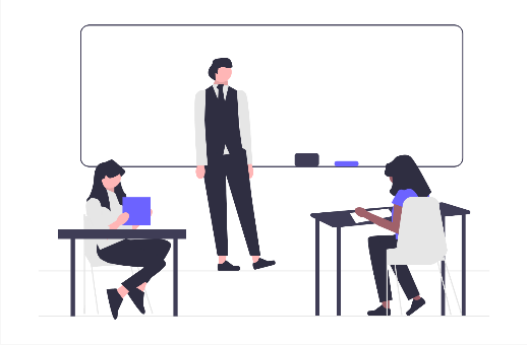
Tourism professionals, policymakers, researchers and academia/training system need strengthened competencies in data interpretation, analysis and strategic application. Capacity building should therefore move beyond ad-hoc training activities toward structured and continuous professional development, including interdisciplinary education programmes, peer-learning mechanisms and internships linking students and young professionals with destination management organisations and observatory operations.

Moreover, mainstreaming sustainable tourism is fundamentally a learning and adaptive process rather than a linear transfer of best practices. Differences in institutional cultures, governance traditions, resource availability and tourism development models mean that solutions must be adapted to territorial specificities. STOs should actively foster communities of practice where observatory members and stakeholders share experiences, challenges and lessons learned—including failures—thus building collective intelligence for sustainable tourism transitions.

Structured mechanisms for feedback and adaptation are essential. Thematic working groups, regular exchanges within the NSTO and continuous dialogue with institutional stakeholders allow early identification of emerging barriers—technical, organizational, or political— and support timely adjustments to strategies and tools.

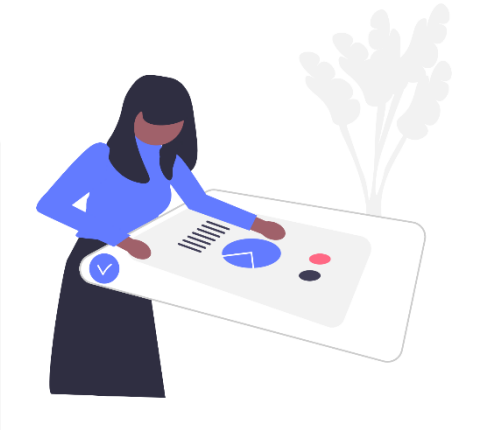
### Key recommendations

- Invest in continuous capacity-building programmes for public authorities, STO teams, SMEs, tourism professionals and community stakeholders in data-driven tourism management.
- Develop shared learning materials, workshops, peer-learning mechanisms and transnational training programmes within the NSTO.
- Dynamically align the educational and training system's curricula and promote interdisciplinary education pathways and internships connecting students and young professionals with STOs, DMOs and public administrations.



- Foster, support and dynamically align the continuous learning systems and actions and promote communities of practice that encourage the exchange of experiences, challenges and lessons learned, supporting adaptive management and continuous improvement.

## Conclusions

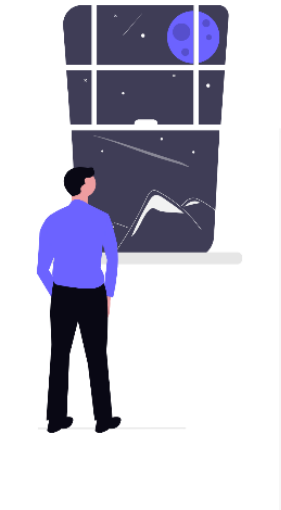


Annarita Iacopino and Valentina Castello (Università Europea di Roma) -associated partner of the Interreg Euro-MED Dialogue4Tourism-, coordinators of this network together with

Lazio Region (Italy) -partner of the Interreg Euro-MED D4T- supported by El legado andalusí Andalusian Public Foundation (Regional Ministry of Culture and Sport of Andalusia, Spain, LP of D4T Project) highlight the strong potential of a shared data-driven decision-making framework to support sustainable tourism. The jointly developed roadmap provides a concrete pathway to strengthen evidence-based policymaking, advance research and academic action and support education and professional training. By enhancing data availability, interoperability and effective use across these areas, the initiative contributes to a tourism sector that is economically viable, environmentally responsible and socially inclusive.

They underline the importance of sustained collaboration among public authorities, businesses, academia and technology providers, as well as coordinated action at NSTO level, as key enablers for achieving long-term impact. In this context, the Dialogue4Tourism project is acknowledged for providing the framework that facilitated stakeholder engagement and supported the development of shared strategic directions. They conclude by reaffirming that academia, institutions and practitioners share both the responsibility and the opportunity to contribute to the transformation of the tourism sector. The commitments undertaken and the connections established through this process provide a solid foundation for continued collaboration and concrete action toward sustainable tourism.

The Mediterranean region faces unprecedented and interconnected challenges: climate change progressing faster than global averages, increasing water scarcity, biodiversity loss and growing social pressures linked to overtourism. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond isolated initiatives toward systematic, coordinated and evidence-based governance.



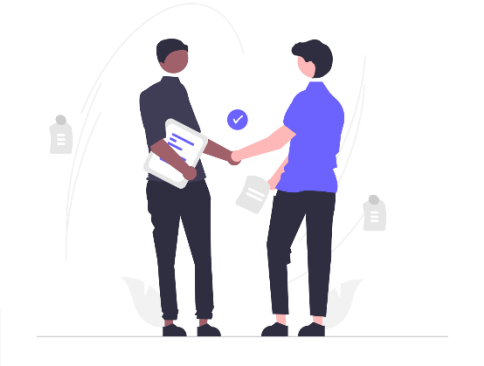
Sustainable Tourism Observatories play a critical role in guiding the transition toward a greener, more resilient tourism model in the Mediterranean. By strengthening integrated governance, investing in robust and interoperable data systems, fostering human capacity and embedding observatories within policy processes, **STOs can evolve from monitoring mechanisms into strategic platforms for sustainable tourism governance, into strategic actors shaping the tourism policies of tomorrow.**

The recommendations and practices outlined in this handbook offer a pathway for STOs to strengthen cooperation, amplify their impact, playing a decisive role in shaping resilient, inclusive and sustainable tourism models across the Euro-MED region and beyond, ensuring that data is transformed into insight, insight into policy, and policy into lasting positive change.

**Importance of policy integration**

Robust monitoring frameworks have been developed through the Interreg Euro-MED Governance and Thematic projects such as **Dialogue4Tourism, Community4Tourism, LIBECCIO, TOURISMO, NaTour4CChange, TO CARE MED, MAST, SMITour, COOL NOONS, LooP Zone, HERIT ADAPT, AQUAMAN, MED-GIAHS, ECO-SEAROUTES, PortCREW and others** in order to transfer the actions. But there is still a way to solve the fragmented institutional coordination data silos, limited capacity at local levels, the absence of harmonized indicators across regions and the lack of political continuity often hinder the effective use of evidence in decision-making.

Successful examples such as the Croatian Sustainable Tourism Observatory (CROSTO) - LP of the Thematic Project NaTour4CChange show that **embedding observatory outputs into national and regional tourism policies is possible when there's alignment with government priorities and institutional commitment to long-term strategies**. Political commitment, institutional anchoring and alignment with governmental priorities are as critical as technical robustness.



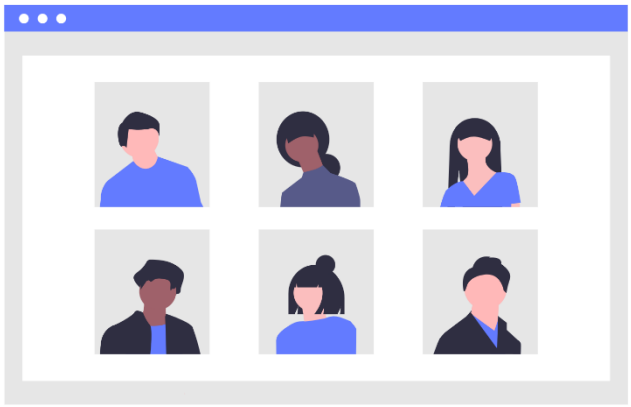
STOs should therefore proactively engage in policy dialogue, contribute to policy labs and strategy development processes and position themselves as trusted providers of policy-relevant evidence rather than passive monitoring entities. A key enabling factor in this transition is the ability to translate complex technical data into policy-ready formats. Scientific evidence on climate impacts, carrying capacity, resource efficiency, or socio-economic pressures must be transformed into clear policy briefs, strategic recommendations, dashboards and actionable toolkits. Communication strategies should be differentiated by audience: simplified visual tools for SMEs and local stakeholders, strategic syntheses for regional authorities and detailed analytical outputs for research and technical institutions.

**The Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects as facilitators**

The Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission are practical facilitators of change —generating innovative methodologies and stakeholder engagement processes that are being scaled through the NSTO.

The conclusions provide a solid basis for shaping the *Annex of the Memorandum of Understanding of the NSTO*, especially by embedding actionable governance mechanisms, case-driven best practices, harmonised yet flexible indicator frameworks and regionally adapted capacity-building tools. The work of the NSTO working groups—particularly those focused on data-driven decision-making and policy integration—offers clear pathways forward, balancing harmonization with respect for territorial diversity.

## 12-Acknowledgements



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*4 – Methodology and participants*

*6 – Data-driven decision-making*

*8 – Role of Sustainable Tourism Observatories*

***UNWTO (2019). INSTO framework, objectives and operational guidelines***

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*8 – Role of Sustainable Tourism Observatories*

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***9 –*** *Stakeholder engagement and capacity building*

***10 –*** *Good practices and transferability*

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