

Interreg
Euro-MED



Co-funded by
the European Union

**Sustainable
tourism**



**Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026**

18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

“Tourism transition in the Mediterranean”

Claudio Milano
Senior Research Fellow
University of Barcelona



**UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA**

**Facultat de Geografia
i Història**

A project labelled by the UfM



UNIVERSITY OF
THESSALY



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



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism

Co-funded by
the European Union

Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026
18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: SHIFTING NARRATIVES IN THE CRADLE OF TOURISM

SOCIOECOLOGICAL TRANSITION: CRISIS AND CHALLENGES

TOURISM TRANSITION(S) IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: TECHNOCRACY GOVERNANCE



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism



Co-funded by
the European Union

Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026

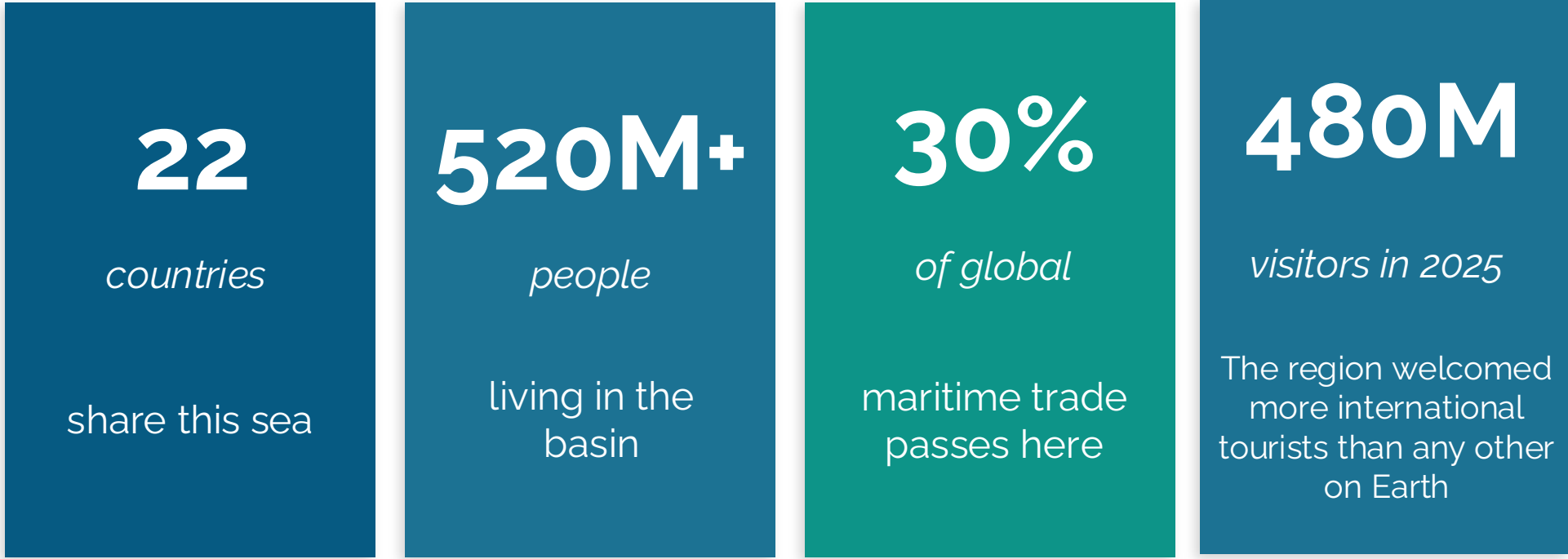
18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

A C T I

TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: SHIFTING NARRATIVES IN THE CRADLE OF TOURISM



THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE SCALE OF IT

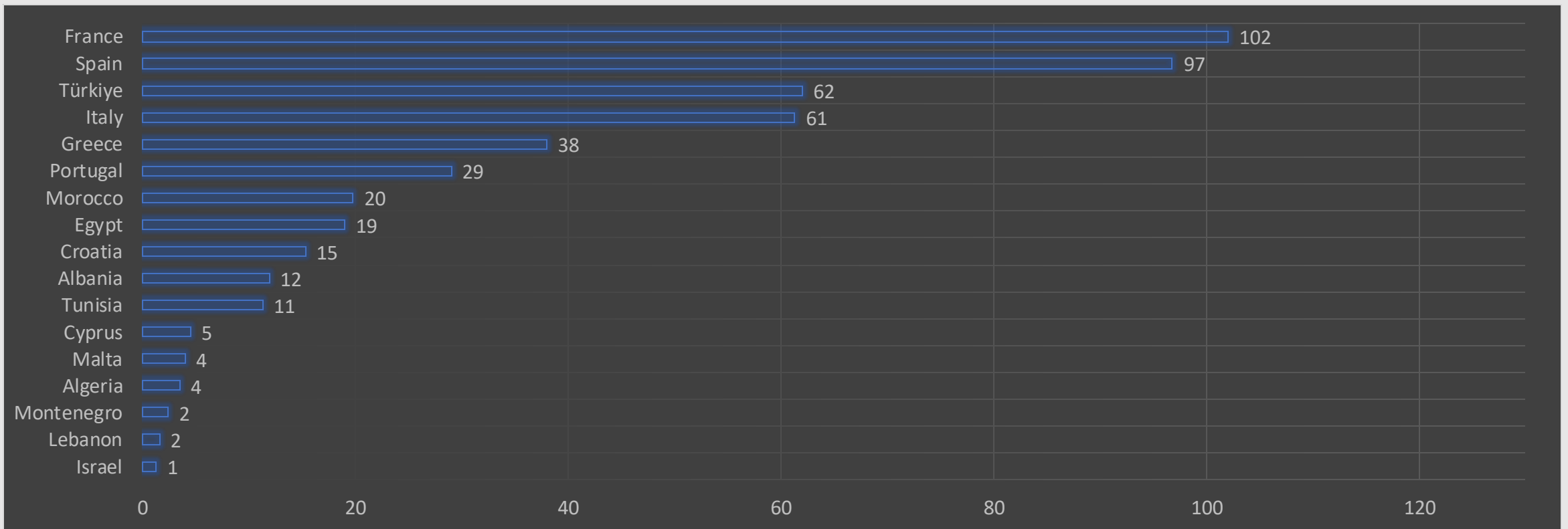


The Mediterranean is not a peripheral region, it is geopolitical, ecological, and economic nexus.



THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION: THE WORLD'S LEADING TOURIST DESTINATION

THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION ATTRACTS AROUND **480 MILLION** INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS IN 2025



Source: Own elaboration based on the UN Tourism dashboard (data as of May 2026)

Notes: France and Portugal: 2024 figures (most recent full year available). Croatia: 2022 figures (latest available). Algeria and Montenegro: 2024 figures. France 2025 (YTD Jan–Jun): +7.7%. Libya and Palestine: no data available. Slovenia: no absolute figure published (YTD change 2025: +8.3%).

ONE SEA, A WHOLE ECOSYSTEM OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

ISLANDS



Santorini, Greece

40%+

of Med. arrivals go to islands

- Mallorca: 12.5M visitors/yr · 1,115/km²
- Cyprus: 3.6M · sea-water desalination
- Malta: 3.1M · 1.8x own population/day at peak

Island destinations face the sharpest tourism pressures (water, waste & mobility)

URBAN ICONS



Barcelona, Spain

200M+

visits to top-10 Med. cities/yr

- Barcelona: 32.4M overnight stays · STR ban 2028
- Istanbul: 20M international visitors/yr
- Rome: 17M · Trevi Fountain access fee

Urban tourism triggers housing crises, resident displacement & infrastructure strain

RURAL & SMALL



Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy

<5%

of visitors reach rural areas

- Italy PNRR: €1.02B for 250 villages (M1C3|2.1)
- Jordan Trail: 675km · 75 communities
- Alentejo, Portugal: agritourism model

High potential for redistribution of tourism value. Currently underfunded & under-promoted

EMERGING CITIES



Thessaloniki, Greece

+12%

avg growth 2023 — fastest segment

- Valencia: 9M/yr · European Green Capital 2024
- Thessaloniki: +28% arrivals 2023–2024
- Moroccan and Egyptian beach-city hub

Medium destinations absorb overflow from saturated icons but lack governance frameworks

Sources: UN Tourism Dashboard (2025); Plan Bleu / IUCN Blue Tourism Report (2025); Govern Illes Balears ITS; Ajuntament de Barcelona (2024); PNRR MiC M1C3|2.1 (2024); Jordan Trail Association; ETC/UNWTO City Tourism 2024.



Interreg Euro-MED
Sustainable tourism

Co-funded by the European Union
Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism Convention 2026
18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

TRANSITION IN TOURISM: A HISTORY OF DISCURSIVE SHIFTS

Each decade rebrands the same model. The vocabulary evolves = The footprint grows.

Eco-tourism

Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin.
Nature as the 'unpolluted' escape.

Responsible tourism

Cape Town Declaration.
Self-regulation by industry bodies.

Smart tourism

Tech & big data.
Efficiency reframed as sustainability.

Slow and Quality tourism

Anti-mass reaction.
'Quality over quantity' discourse.

Conscious and Transformational Tourism

Circular Economy
Mindfulness + ESG.
Latest iteration of same critique.



THE CRITIQUE IS CONSISTENT ACROSS 40 YEARS OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE: NAMING A PROBLEM IS NOT THE SAME AS SOLVING IT. WITHOUT STRUCTURAL CHANGE, BINDING REGULATION, CARBON PRICING, AND REDISTRIBUTION, EACH NEW TERM ABSORBS THE CRITIQUE AND POSTPONES TRANSITION.

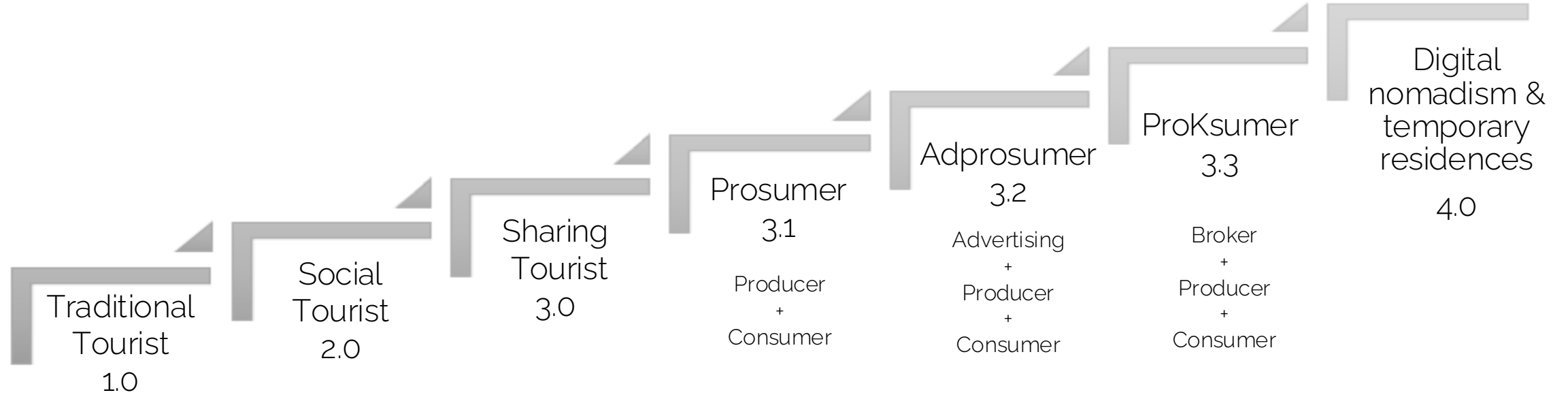
Sources: Saarinen (2006); Milano (2017); Higgins-Desbiolles (2020); Gössling et al., (2024); among others



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism

Co-funded by
the European Union
Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026
18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

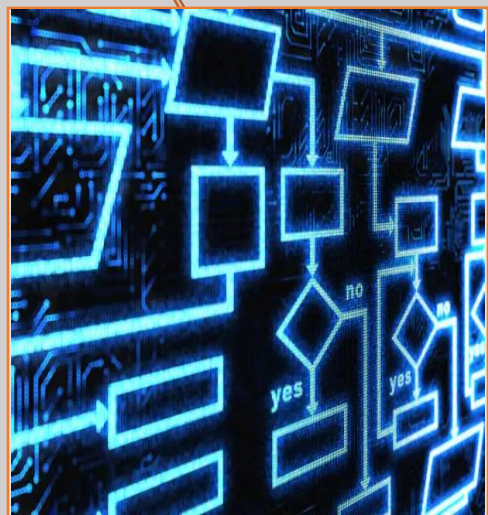
THE EVOLUTION OF *HOMO TURISTICUS* (WHO WORKS AND TRAVEL)



ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE IN TOURISM

From 'steering' to 'being steered'

FROM TRADITIONAL AGENCIES TO GLOBAL PLATFORMS:
AIRBNB, BOOKING, EXPEDIA, TRIPADVISOR.



- Digitalization of tourism experiences and the role of platforms in:
- Organising supply and pricing (**dynamic pricing**);
 - Visibility (**rankings**);
 - Reputation (**reviews**);
 - Access (**suspended accounts**);
 - Spatial distribution of tourism (**geolocation**)

FROM COMMODITY TO DATA AS THE CENTRAL UNIT OF VALUE



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism



Co-funded by
the European Union

Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026

18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

A C T I I

SOCIOECOLOGICAL TRANSITION: CRISIS AND CHALLENGES





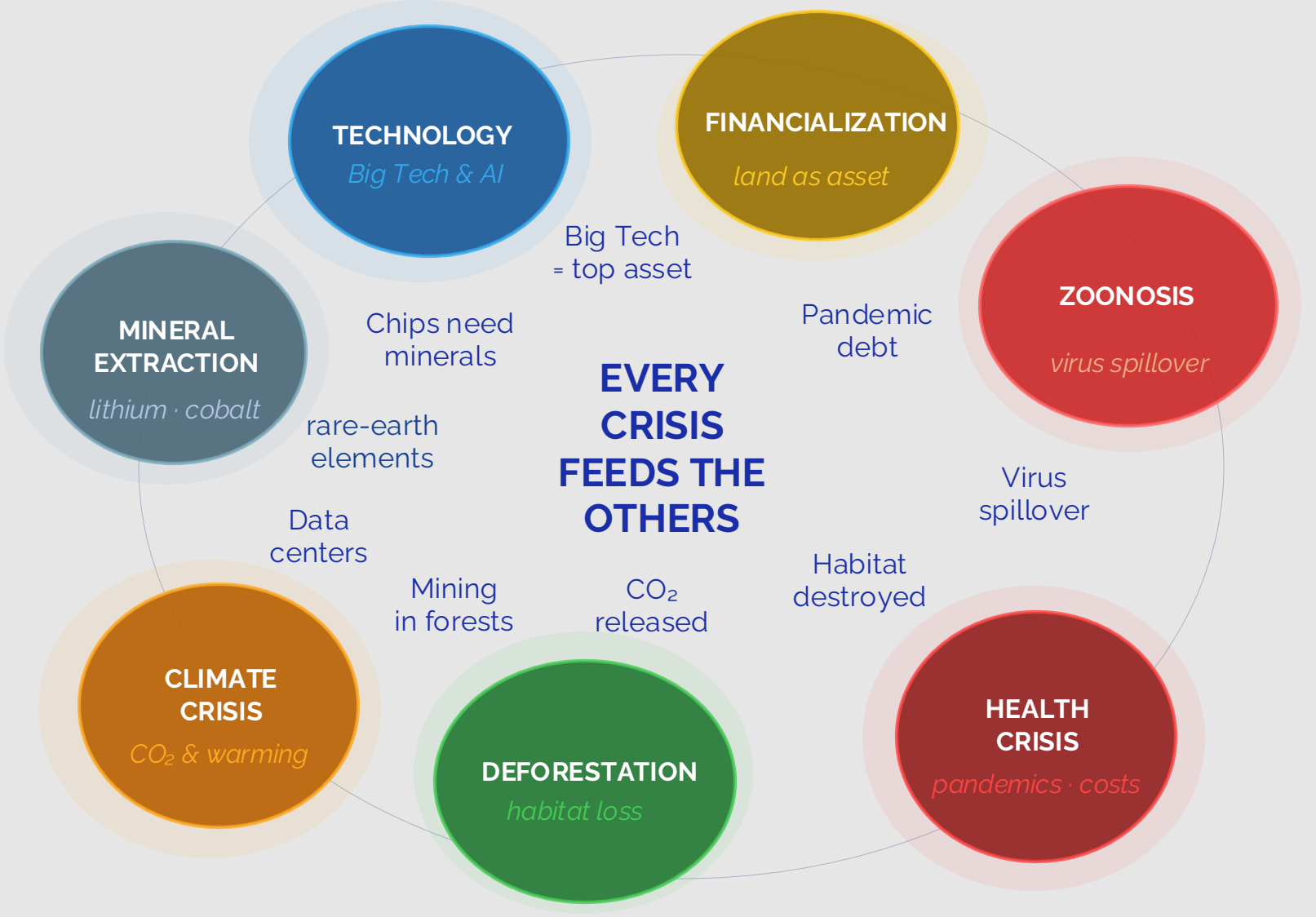
No beginning. No end. No single solution.

polycrisis

[poli-krai-sis] noun

the simultaneous occurrence of several catastrophic events

"These are not separate crises. They are symptoms of the same broken system"
Adam Tooze, 2022

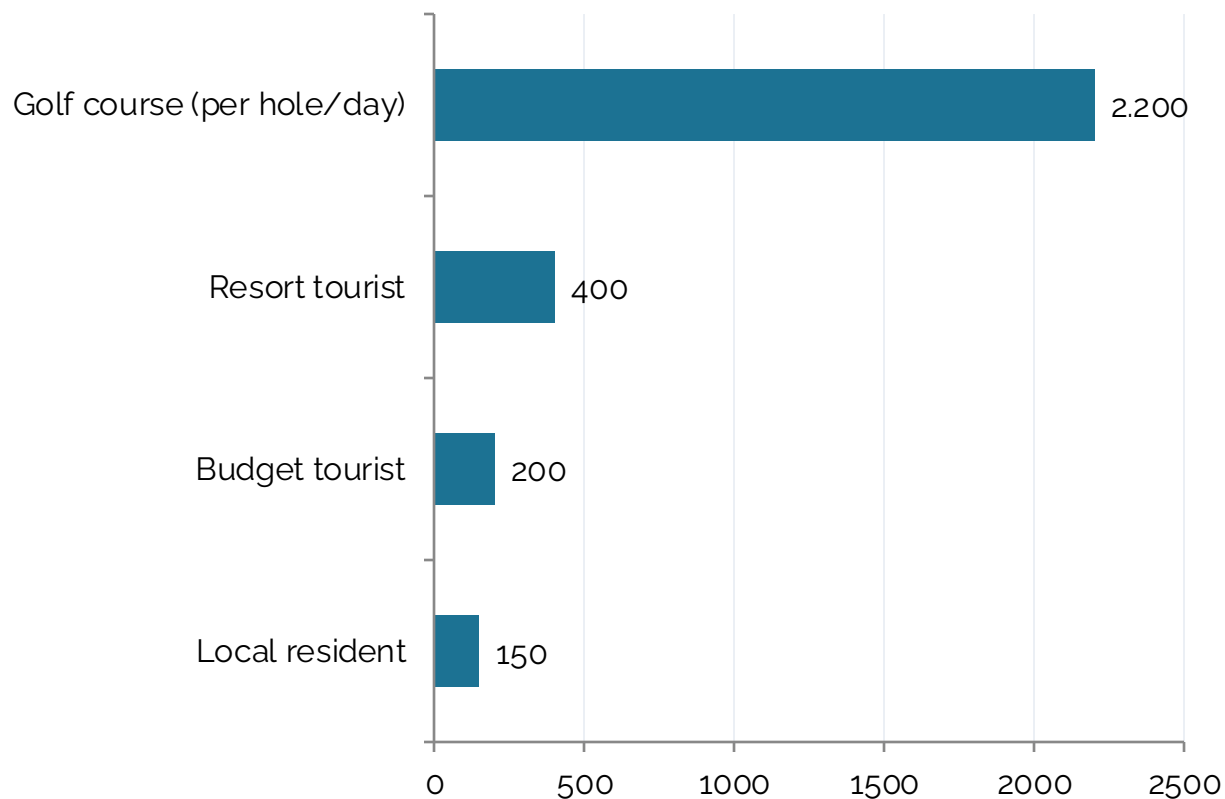




WATER: TOURISM'S MOST UNDERREPORTED CONFLICT

IN A DROUGHT-STRESSED REGION, TOURISM IS A MAJOR WATER CONSUMER, YET INVISIBLE IN MOST TRANSITION PLANS.

Daily Water Consumption (litres)



MALLORCA

2023: worst drought in 20 years + record 14M tourists. Island imports water by tanker. Hotels vs. farmers: an annual water conflict.

MARRAKECH

60+ golf courses consuming ~55 billion litres/year in a semi-arid city. Ourika Valley aquifer in severe long-term decline as hotel construction accelerates

JORDAN

Hotels rely on unregulated groundwater extraction while households face strict quotas

CYPRUS

Among the most water-stressed EU islands. Tourist water use at peak season significantly exceeds local household consumption, straining desalination and import capacity..

Source: EEA Water Stress Report 2024; Mallorca Govern Water Emergency 2023; Water Watch Med; USAID Jordan WASH; Cyprus Water Development Dept.



Green capitalism

Tanuro, Brand & Wissen, Lohmann

Accumulation repainted green



Extractivism and colonial dispossession

Svampa, Riofrancos, Acosta

Imperial mode of living · Lithium & minerals extraction



Degrowth vs. green growth

Hickel, Kallis

Planned degrowth in the Global North

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION(S)

Six key areas for rethinking the tourism transition from a political ecology perspective



Just transition: for whom?

Barca, Huber, Mazzocchi

Governance algorithm · Who decides the transition and who gets left out?



Ecological debt

Malm, Foster

The economy extracts from nature but never gives back · Socio-natural metabolism



(Eco)feminist critique

Herrero, Salleh, Barca

Sustainability of life · Invisibilized reproductive & care work



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism



Co-funded by
the European Union

Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026

18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

A C T I I I

TOURISM TRANSITION(S) IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: TECHNOCRACY GOVERNANCE



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism

Co-funded by
the European Union

Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026

18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

STANDARD TOOLKIT: TACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF SHORT AND MID-TERM TRANSITION IN TOURISM

- 01 SPATIAL** *Where does tourism go?*
Decentralize flows from saturated coasts. Direct investment to peripheral territories. Resist the gravitational pull of coastal path-dependency.
Decentralization · Dispersion · Decongestion
- 02 MARKET** *Who comes, when, and how long?*
Deseasonalise through gastronomy, culture and nature-based circuits. Niche products spread demand beyond the 90-day summer cliff.
Deseasonalisation · Diversification · Niche Tourism
- 03 CONSUMPTION** *What kind of tourism experience?*
Shift from volume to value needs to be taken with caution. Higher spend reduces pressure per visitor, but luxury tourism accelerates local displacement.
Luxury Tourism · Elitization · Value over Volume
- 04 GOVERNANCE** *Who decides and who benefits?*
Visitor caps, tourist taxes, digital monitoring, participatory planning. Management versus Governance. The most politically charged.
Smart Tech · Tourist Tax · Policy Frameworks
- 05 CARBON** *How does the sector decarbonise?*
Aviation and cruises drive the footprint. No credible transition exists without confronting the industry's own emissions head-on.
Aviation Reform · Cruise Limits · Low-Carbon Mobility
- 06 COMMUNITIES** *Who holds voice and economic power?*
Communities and working class must move from tourism's objects to its subjects with real decision rights, local licensing and direct revenue access.
Participatory Rights · Community Ownership · Local Revenue · Social Housing Policies



01 SPATIAL

01

Moving Tourism Beyond the Coast: Redistribution Strategies

ITALY

Piano Nazionale Borghi — EUR 1B for 250 Villages

Italian tourist flows are typically driven by a few 'attractions' that are particularly well-known internationally. Many other places of great artistic and cultural value remain overlooked by tourists. To break this cycle, investment will enable the promotion of small Italian towns and rural areas, thereby combating depopulation. The program has two funding tracks, €220M for 21 "pilot projects" for cultural-social regeneration of historic villages, and €200M as a business subsidy for micro, small and medium enterprises already in or relocating to the *borghi*.

Italy's PNRR M1C3 — Investimento 2.1 (Missione 1, Componente 3) (2022–2026) invests EUR 1 billion in 250 historic villages outside saturated circuits. The “*Borghi più belli d'Italia*” network now attracts 2.3M overnight stays/year.

Does directing PNRR funds toward tourism attractiveness of historic villages reverse depopulation or risk turning them into themed showcases once funding runs out?



Source: Ministero della Cultura — Piano Borghi PNRR, Relazione di Monitoraggio (2023); Coltré (2022).

PNRR BORGHI

21 straordinari territori tornano a vivere

1 Abruzzo Rocca Calascia (AQ)	11 Molise Pietrabbondante (IS)
2 Basilicata Monticchio Bagno (FZ)	12 Piemonte Elva (CN)
3 Calabria Gerace (RC)	13 Puglia Accadia (FG)
4 Campania Santa (SA)	14 Sardegna Ulassai (NU)
5 Emilia Campoleone (BO)	15 Sicilia A. Quarta (CT)
6 Emilia-Romagna Borgo Caselle (OO)	16 Toscana Borgo di Castelluccio in Arezzo (AR)
7 Veneto Griaia	17 Umbria Cesi (TR)
8 Lazio Trevinano (VT)	18 Valle d'Aosta Fontanemore (AO)
9 Liguria Borgo Casello (SV)	19 Veneto Rocaso Terme (VI)
10 Lombardia Lovenato (BS)	20 Provincia di Trapani Pali del Penice (TP)
11 Marche Monte della Morte (AP)	21 Provincia di Salerno Infelice (SA)

#italy4culture





02 MARKET

Deseasonalisation in Practice: Fiscal and Diversification Strategies

BALEARIC ISLANDS

Tourist Tax + Off-Season Discount (Balearic Islands)

The Impost sobre Estades Turístiques (2016, reformed 2022) applies EUR 4/night in peak season, EUR 1/night off-season. A 50% fiscal incentive to shift demand. EUR 376.988.790,52 € collected through 2024-2025 for the Sustainable Tourism Investments

The fund is used to subsidize Sustainable Tourism projects which have the objective of environmental development and protection, the promotion of sustainable tourism, the recovery of historical heritage, scientific research, the promotion of training and employment, and the acquisition and rehabilitation of housing for social renting

If tourism in the Balearic Islands breaks records every year, does the reduced winter rate encourage seasonality, or is it simply a way of collecting a 'green levy' whilst visitor numbers continue to rise?



LOW SEASON
01.NOVEMBRE - 30.APRIL
(Euros per day and place)

CLASSES D'ESTABLIMENTS TURÍSTICS	PREUS
M Tourist cruise ships	0.5 €
L Other establishments or houses used for tourism	0.5 €
K Shelters and refuges	0.25 €
J Hostels, lodgings, guest houses, inns and camps or campsites	0.25 €
I Rural hotels, agrotourism accommodation, hostelry and inland tourism accommodation	0.5 €
H Tourist holiday homes, housing used for tourist stays and houses used for tourism	0.5 €
G Non-residential accommodation establishments run by residential-tourism companies	1 €
F One, two and three-key tourist apartments	0.5 €
E Three-key superior tourist apartments	0.75 €
D Four-key and four-key superior tourist apartments	1 €
C One, two and three-star hotels, city hotels and apart-hotels	0.5 €
B Four-star and three-star superior hotels, city hotels and apart-hotels	0.75 €
A Five-star, luxury five-star and four-star superior hotels, city hotels and apart-hotels	1 €

*10% VAT (not included)

Illes on Transformat

You can find all the information about the Sustainable Tourism Tax on the website: illesostenibles.travel

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INVESTMENTS

HIGH SEASON
01.MAY - 31.OCTOBER
(Euros per day and place)

TYPES OF TOURIST ESTABLISHMENTS	PRICES
M Tourist cruise ships	2 €
L Other establishments or houses used for tourism	2 €
K Shelters and refuges	1 €
J Hostels, lodgings, guest houses, inns and camps or campsites	1 €
I Rural hotels, agrotourism accommodation, hostelry and inland tourism accommodation	2 €
H Tourist holiday homes, housing used for tourist stays and houses used for tourism	2 €
G Non-residential accommodation establishments run by residential-tourism companies	4 €
F One, two and three-key tourist apartments	2 €
E Three-key superior tourist apartments	3 €
D Four-key and four-key superior tourist apartments	4 €
C One, two and three-star hotels, city hotels and apart-hotels	2 €
B Four-star and three-star superior hotels, city hotels and apart-hotels	3 €
A Five-star, luxury five-star and four-star superior hotels, city hotels and apart-hotels	4 €

*10% VAT (not included)

Source: Govern de les Illes Balears (2024) Memoria del Fons de Turisme Sostenible. Agència d'Estratègia Turística de les Illes Balears



03 CONSUMPTION



Value Over Volume with Its Social Contradictions

PUGLIA, ITALY Masserie Tourism: Premium Rural Model

Puglia's *Masserie*, historic fortified farmhouses, have been repositioned as luxury agritourism destinations charging €300–600 per night. Regional data show that tourism's share of Puglia's GDP grew from 9.1% to 14.2% between 2019 and 2024, with agritourism accommodation registering a +32% increase over the same period



Critical caveat: rising land prices displace agricultural workers from historic farmland. Rural gentrification, with local families displaced from land they had worked for generations, is a documented risk when premium conversion is pursued without inclusive governance mechanisms.

Masserie, once centres of collective rural labour, are being reimagined as exclusive retreats — raising the question of whether the "sustainability" label applies to the environment or extends to the social fabric of the communities surrounding them



Source: Regione Puglia (2024). *Rapporto sul Turismo in Puglia 2023*; ARiT — Agenzia Regionale per la Tecnologia e l'Innovazione, *Il Valore Economico del Turismo nel 2024*; Presenza et al., (2020)



04 GOVERNANCE

04

Smart Tourism Management: Gates, Digital Management and Governance?

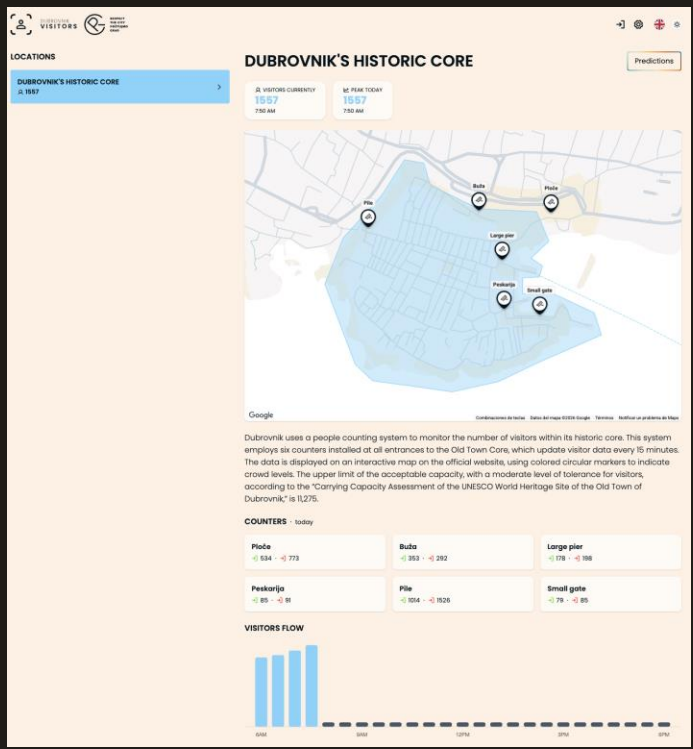
DUBROVNIK

Visitor Cap + Cruise Limit + Digital Monitoring

Dubrovnik limits the number of daily cruise visitors to 4,500 or two ships at a time, thus ensuring sustainable tourism growth while protecting the historic centre. Visitor monitoring systems, monitored by a people-counting system with 6 installed counters, help manage crowds and regulate the number of day trips.

In 2025, there were a total of 1,332,208 million tourist arrivals and 4,204,169 million tourist nights realized in commercial accommodation establishments, and yet the Old Town has lost 75% of its permanent residents (approximately 41,000), 4 in 10 homes are used for tourism, and rents have risen by 250%.

Does 'smart management' manage tourist flows to enhance the visitor experience, or does urban governance mean collectively deciding what kind of city its residents want it to?

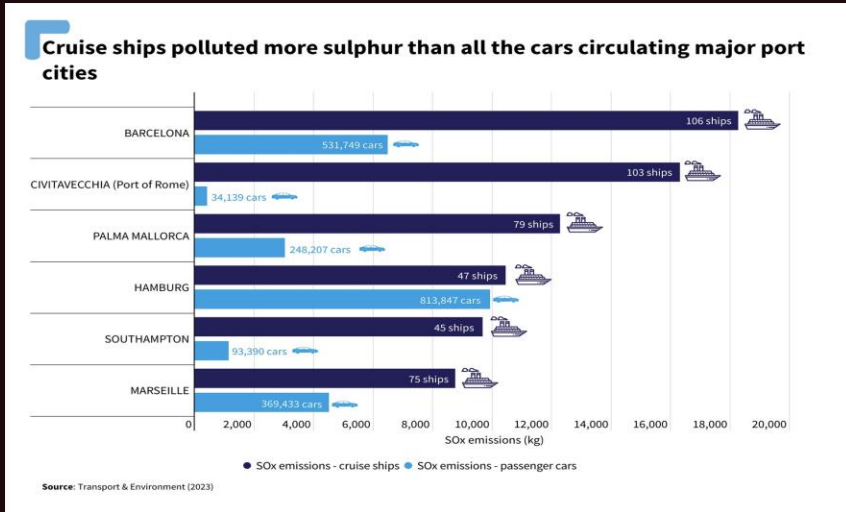


Source: European Commission Dubrovnik - 2026 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism.; DZS — Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Table 1.8, 2025



05 CARBON

The Decarbonisation Gap: ¿Cruise Greenwashing?



MED CRUISE

MSC Cruises - 'LNG Solution' Under Scrutiny

While cruise companies invest in LNG "Liquefied natural gas" to theoretically decrease their CO2 emissions by 15-20%, these vessels are actually 'more damaging than fuel oils from a climate perspective' because the resulting methane slip has a warming potential over 80 times higher than CO2 on a 20-year horizon



T&E (2023): a transition to renewable 'bio-LNG' would fail to solve the climate crisis, as methane leakage remains a 'significant issue affecting climate change' that offsets the intended carbon gains.

Labeling LNG as a bridge to decarbonization is a 'false solution' because the problem of methane slip remains unchanged even with renewable bio-LNG, leaving the cruise sector significantly far from true zero-emission goals despite their claims of environmental progress





06 COMMUNITIES

Community-based heritage tourism: Fez and Marrakech Medina, Morocco



MOROCCO

Community, Decision making and participation as tourist attraction

The Moroccan government has invested MAD 670 million (\$70.3 million) in the rehabilitation of Fez Medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with tourism as the central driver, aiming to enhance residents' quality of life by restoring 1197 historic buildings

Government-backed rehabilitation, has been accompanied by the conversion of traditional houses into riad hotels, "sparking tensions over land use, economic shifts, and the ongoing exploitation of historic cities

Approximately 450 guesthouses in the Marrakesh medina, 70% of which were owned by foreigners of European origin.

The population of the Fez medina is constantly decreasing; in the last two decades, it registered a decrease of more than 25%



Source: ONMT / Federation Nationale du Tourisme Maroc; Boussaa & Madandola (2024); Escher & Petermann (2000); (Spotorno (2019) ; Kasraoui (2020).



Interreg
Euro-MED
Sustainable
tourism



Co-funded by
the European Union

Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026

18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Where We Go From Here:

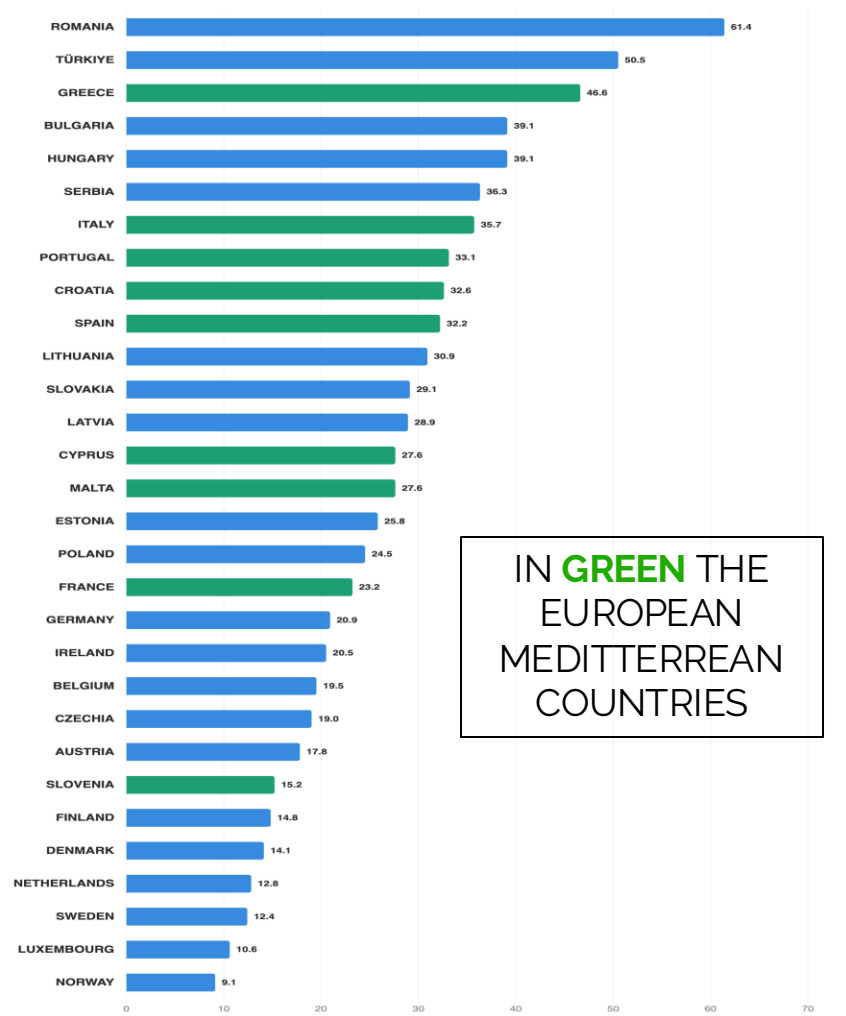
*A transition that does not redistribute does not transition:
it reproduces inequalities.*



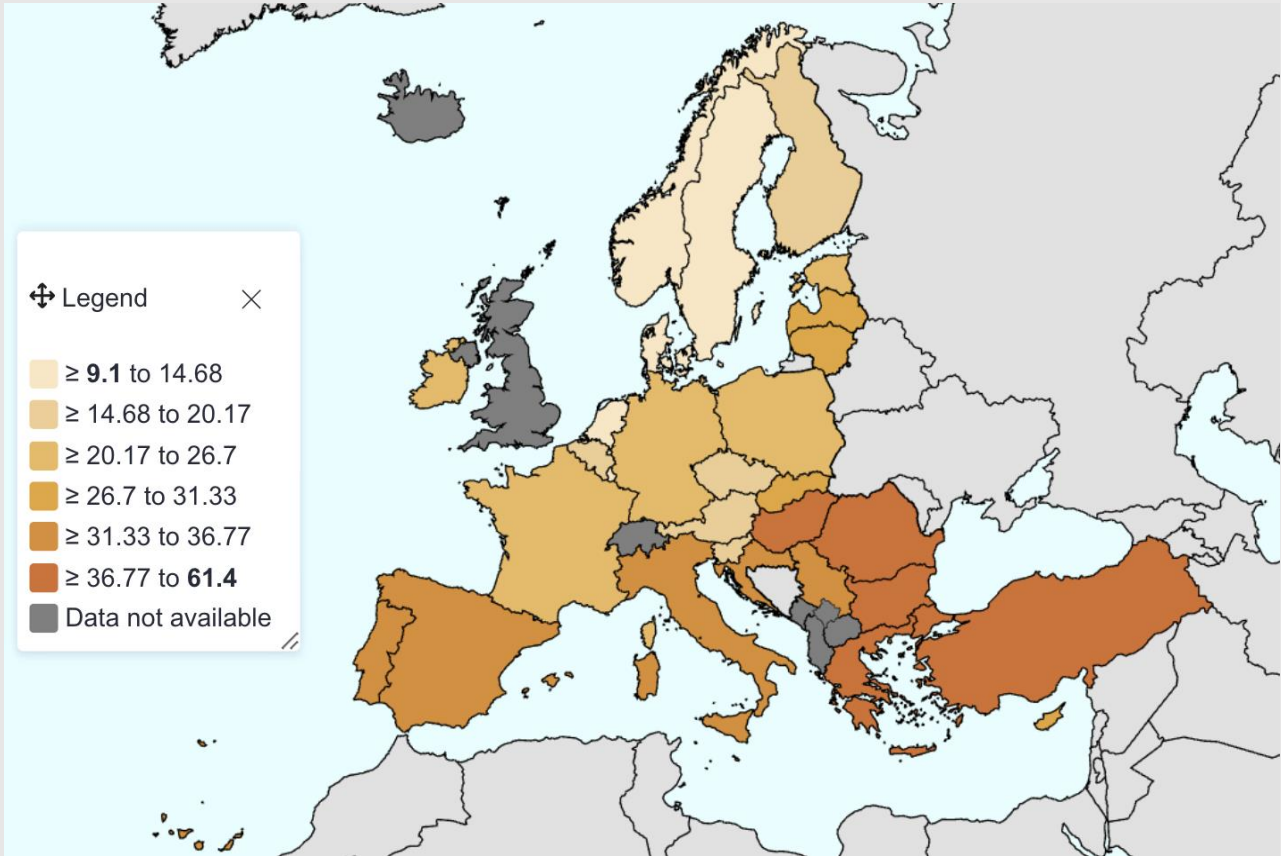
INABILITY TO AFFORD ONE WEEK ANNUAL HOLIDAYS

PRECARIOUS LEISURE AND HOLIDAY PRECARITY?

EU Average 27,5 % in 2025. In 2024 it was 27%



IN GREEN THE
EUROPEAN
MEDITTERREAN
COUNTRIES





The Mediterranean Is Not a Backdrop

Is a Living System That Has Sustained Civilisations for Millennia.

The question is not whether we can afford to transform Mediterranean tourism and socioecological governance. It is whether we can afford not to do it.

Build common knowledge, not competing narratives. Commit to a shared data infrastructure

Make an align fair socioecological transition plans, binding and indicators across borders

Address housing, demographic crisis and socioeconomic inequalities before it becomes irreversible



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Claudio Milano

Department of Social Anthropology
University of Barcelona
claudiomilano@ub.edu



Sustainable
tourism



Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism
Convention 2026
18-19 June, Barcelona, Spain