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White Paper on Sustainable Tourism

The Power of Partnerships in Advancing Circular Economy Approaches among SMEs in the Mediterranean

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

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This document has been developed in the framework of the **Dialogue4Tourism Project** of the Sustainable Tourism Mission of the **Interreg Euro-MED Programme 21-27**. This comprehensive white paper examines how collaborative partnerships can enable micro-enterprises and SMEs in the tourism sector to adopt circular economy practices. It draws on extensive research, case studies and expert consultations to identify actionable policy recommendations, and serves as a resource for policymakers, tourism stakeholders and local authorities committed to creating pathways for circular economy among SMEs in the tourism sector in the Mediterranean region.

The Interreg Euro-MED Programme supports cooperation across 14 Mediterranean countries, funding projects that address shared challenges with a focus on sustainability, resilience, and smarter development. With €294 million for 2021–2027, the Programme unites public, private, and civil society partners to create a greener, climate-neutral region while enhancing governance and improving quality of life.

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Image of a recently renovated traditional wooden day cruise boat on the island of Rhodes, Greece. Photo: Cheryl Novak

Executive Summary

Tourism is the cornerstone of local economies across the Mediterranean as well as a driver of regional development. It also places substantial demands on energy, water, other natural resources, ecosystems and infrastructure while putting pressure on local workforces. These pressures are especially visible in the Mediterranean's coastal and island destinations where visitor numbers often peak during the hottest and driest months, when heat, water scarcity and wildfire risk intensify. Circular approaches, such as waste prevention, reuse, and repair, can reduce resource consumption and environmental impacts. As UN Tourism notes, circularity also has the potential to improve well-being in host communities, create jobs and develop more inclusive value chains.

Tourism drives Mediterranean economies but intensifies pressure on natural resources and infrastructure. Circular approaches can reduce environmental impacts while fostering local well-being, employment and more inclusive value chains.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 76% of employment in the tourism ecosystem in 2022 and are therefore central to the transition to circularity in tourism. Accommodation providers, restaurants, activity operators and other businesses make daily decisions about purchasing, resource use and waste. Yet many lack the time or specialist knowledge





to assess circular options. Even when a business identifies a useful measure, it may struggle to secure finance, find suitable suppliers or technical support, or achieve the scale needed to put it into practice. Some changes also depend on infrastructure and planning beyond the control of any single enterprise.

Developed within the Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission this White Paper builds upon two earlier papers: White Paper on Sustainable Tourism Governance: Tourism and Climate Adaptation and the White Paper on Sustainable Tourism: Small Islands as Hubs for Climate Resilience and Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean. Those papers establish the importance of coordinated action on climate adaptation and show how the pressures facing islands call for integrated solutions. This paper focuses on a related question: what enables tourism SMEs to move from interest in circularity to changes in their operations?

The analysis of Interreg Euro-MED projects and other relevant initiatives, policy and research literature, questionnaire responses, official programme and project sources, and interviews and expert consultation within Community4Tourism. The projects provide tools, participation opportunities, pathways to implementation and concrete results. However, many remain at an early stage, making their longer-term impacts difficult to establish.

Across the project portfolio, partnerships emerge as a means of building the enabling ecosystem tourism SMEs need to overcome barriers to circular implementation. They connect enterprises with business support organisations, financial institutions, suppliers and technical experts. Beyond individual businesses, they can aggregate demand, organise shared services and coordinate material flows, while engaging infrastructure providers and public authorities on destination-level dependencies. These functions matter because some circular measures depend on infrastructure, supply chains and public planning beyond any single business's control.



The Interreg Euro-MED project portfolio demonstrates the potential of these arrangements, although many initiatives are still too early to establish their long-term outcomes. The task now is to carry effective tools and partnerships beyond individual project cycles and embed them in sustained business support and destination governance. This would give tourism SMEs a lasting pathway from identifying circular opportunities to implementing them, while ultimately strengthening the resilience of tourism value chains and destinations in the Mediterranean.

0.Introduction

Tourism is a cornerstone of local economies across the Mediterranean and a driver of regional development. Its value chain, known as the tourism value chain, extends through accommodation, food services, transport, retail, construction and other local services. Tourism also places substantial demands on energy, water, other natural resources, ecosystems and infrastructure, while putting pressure on local workforces. These pressures are especially visible in coastal and island destinations, where visitor numbers often peak during the hottest and driest months, when heat, water scarcity and wildfire risk may also intensify (Plan Bleu, 2022; OECD, 2026).

The *European Green Deal* and the *Circular Economy Action Plan* (CEAP) provide the EU policy framework for achieving climate neutrality by 2050, reducing pressure on natural resources, preventing waste and retaining the value of products and materials for longer.

Circular approaches offer ways to reduce these pressures through waste prevention, reuse, repair and more efficient use of resources. They can also create opportunities for local employment and more inclusive value chains. The *European Green Deal* and the *Circular Economy Action Plan* (CEAP) provide the EU policy framework for achieving climate neutrality by 2050, reducing pressure on natural resources, preventing waste and retaining the value of products and materials for longer (European Commission, 2019; European Commission, 2020). Translating these objectives into circular practices in tourism requires changes within enterprises and across the systems on which tourist destinations depend.

The structure of the tourism economy makes the participation of SMEs, particularly micro and small businesses, especially important.[1] In 2022, they accounted for 76.1% of employment in the EU tourism ecosystem, with their share reaching approximately 90% in some Member States.[2] They include many of the accommodation providers, restaurants, activity operators, retailers and other locally based businesses whose purchasing and operational decisions shape resource use across a destination.

For micro and small enterprises, however, the path from identifying a circular opportunity to implementing it can be difficult. The *Transition Pathway for Tourism* identifies recurring needs relating to skills, finance, infrastructure, mentoring and policy support (European Commission,

[1] Under the EU definition, micro-enterprises employ fewer than 10 people and small enterprises fewer than 50. For the sake of this paper, the term SMEs will include micro enterprises. European Commission, Recommendation 2003/361/EC concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, Annex, Article 2. EUR-Lex. EUR-Lex - 32003H0361 - EN - EUR-Lex

[2] EU Tourism Platform. Contribution of SMEs to employment in EU tourism destinations | EU Tourism Platform Accessed 30/7/2026.

2022). Wider EU and OECD evidence also points to constraints involving cost, specialist knowledge, managerial time and administrative capacity (European Commission, 2024; OECD, 2025a; OECD, 2026). An individual business may lack the purchasing power to secure suitable alternatives, the volume needed to make recovery of materials viable, or access to the technical services required to change its operations.



Fresh produce sourced from a local farmers' market. Photo: Christiano Junior

Some circular measures, including food-waste valorisation and water reuse, depend on suppliers, collection systems, shared infrastructure and public planning beyond the control of an individual enterprise. Partnerships can coordinate these elements by aggregating demand, organising material flows and aligning business needs with investment and destination governance. Building on the Sustainable Tourism Mission's earlier White Papers on climate adaptation and small islands, this paper examines how such coordination can enable tourism SMEs to put circular practices into operation.

Purpose and Objectives

This White Paper examines how selected projects and partnerships help tourism SMEs move from identifying circular opportunities to implementing them. It draws on literature, interviews, questionnaires and project evidence to identify the barriers SMEs face and the support provided through business advice, access to finance and technical expertise, shared value-chain systems and destination-level coordination. The analysis then considers where these contributions could be better connected, and develops policy recommendations for making circular support more accessible and durable.

Scope, Methodology and Approach

The analysis focuses on SMEs (particularly micro and small tourism enterprises) across the Interreg Euro-MED cooperation area, which covers 69 regions in 14 countries. These include 10 EU Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia also participate through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

For the purposes of this White Paper, circularity encompasses practices that prevent waste, reduce demand for new resources, extend the useful life of products and equipment, and enable reuse, redistribution and recovery. The analysis considers these practices in relation to water, food, materials, equipment and related services in the tourism economy. It also addresses energy use where it intersects with circular resource systems and business models. The focus is on the support and coordination needed for implementation, rather than a catalogue of measures individual enterprises might adopt.

The White Paper examines selected projects and initiatives addressing circularity in tourism and related territorial systems. The cases are presented in three groups:

- projects from the Sustainable Tourism Mission and the Circular Economy Cluster of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme;
- projects from other Interreg Euro-MED Missions that also address circular economy; and
- initiatives supported through other programmes or organisational models.



Chora, Mykonos. Harbour, local businesses and natural environment, representing the study's geographic scope and territorial dimension of the circular economy. Photo: Natalysaga in Pixabay.

The cases were selected for their relevance to the practical challenges faced by tourism SMEs and to the role of partnerships in addressing them. The three groups reflect programme affiliation and institutional context; they do not rank the cases by relevance or effectiveness.

The White Paper adopts a qualitative, evidence-informed approach drawing on:

- Targeted desk research on related policy documents and research literature;
- Information provided through 14 substantively distinct questionnaire submissions from Interreg Euro-MED thematic projects and related initiatives;
- Official programme records, project websites and deliverables used to verify project dates, formal scope and documented outputs, and to supplement questionnaire responses;

- Targeted project research on MED-Routes and LooP Zone, for which completed questionnaire submissions were not available; and
- Insights gathered through interviews and cross-project expert consultation within Community4Tourism.

This White Paper examines how selected projects and partnerships help tourism SMEs move from identifying circular opportunities to implementing them.

The policy and literature review identifies four principal categories of implementation challenges: limited capacity and expertise; restricted access to finance and implementation support; insufficient scale and shared infrastructure; and fragmented destination-level coordination and governance. These categories provide a framework for examining what prevents SMEs from acting. Across the three case groupings, the analysis then considers the support functions partnerships provide in response: building knowledge and capacity; facilitating access to finance and technical expertise; connecting enterprises with suppliers and service providers; developing shared systems and infrastructure; coordinating action at destination level; and transferring tools and approaches between territories.

The projects differ in thematic focus, geographical coverage, implementation stage and available evidence. Much of the evidence documents activities, tools, partnership arrangements and emerging implementation experience. Because several projects are just entering the implementation phase, comparable baselines, indicators and longer-term follow-up are not consistently available. As a result, the analysis does not evaluate project impacts, nor assess the long-term continuity or transferability across the portfolio. Instead, the White Paper examines how the projects address implementation barriers, and identifies recurring approaches, remaining gaps and policy measures that could strengthen lasting support for SME circular implementation.

1. Circular Tourism and the SME Implementation Challenge

For a tourism SME, identifying a circular opportunity is only the beginning of implementation. A business must understand how water, energy and materials move through its operations, determine which measures suit its premises and services, assess technical and financial feasibility, and manage any changes alongside daily operations. These demands can be particularly difficult for micro and small enterprises with limited managerial time and specialist capacity, and are not just specific to circularity. The European Commission has noted the time, skills and resource constraints faced by small tourism businesses, while an OECD study of micro and small tourism enterprises in Greece identifies knowledge, finance, technology and networks among the dimensions of their enabling environment.[3]

Tourism SMEs face barriers to circular implementation due to limited time, skills, finance, technical expertise and access to support networks.

These constraints are connected. Limited capacity can make it harder to prepare an investment or access finance. Finance cannot resolve the absence of a suitable service or supplier. Other measures depend on material volumes, infrastructure or public decisions beyond the control of one business. Circular practices add a further challenge: they may require new skills, changes to established operations and access to inputs or services that are not available in every destination.

For this analysis, the constraints are organised into four challenge areas: capacity, knowledge and managerial time; finance and implementation support; scale, shared infrastructure and collective action; and destination governance and coordination. The following subsections define each challenge before the paper examines how the selected projects respond.

1.1 Capacity, knowledge and managerial time

Micro and small tourism enterprises may lack the time or specialist expertise to establish a baseline for resource use, identify avoidable losses and assess circular options. Owner-managed businesses must make these assessments while meeting immediate responsibilities for staffing, procurement, service delivery and customer care. Technical and regulatory requirements can add to the difficulty of judging whether a measure is suitable for a particular enterprise and what its

[3] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/enhancing-the-enabling-environment-for-micro-and-small-tourism-enterprises-in-greece_48b4382b-en.html

implementation would involve. The OECD report mentioned above supports the broader finding that skills and knowledge are part of the business environment shaping their capacity to change.

1.2 Finance and implementation support



Small businesses struggle to adopt new practices while managing daily operations with limited time and staff. Photo: Mike Sweeney in Pixabay

Circular measures may require expenditure on equipment, changes to premises, specialist services, alternative inputs or new procurement and operating arrangements. An enterprise must also estimate costs and expected benefits, identify appropriate finance and evaluate technical options before committing to an investment. These requirements can be difficult to meet when financial and administrative capacity is limited. In its research called "Tourism Trends and Policies 2026", the OECD identifies persistent financing constraints for small tourism businesses seeking more resource-efficient operations and calls attention to their financial literacy and preparedness to use available instruments.[4]

1.3 Scale, shared infrastructure and collective action

Some circular measures depend on volumes of materials or levels of demand that an individual enterprise cannot generate. Separate collection or recovery of a material, for example, must be viable across the full chain of separation, storage, transport, processing and subsequent use. Combining volumes from several businesses may improve viability, but it does not remove questions about material quality, costs, regulatory requirements or who will operate the system. The

[4]https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2026_3fd3cd75-en/full-report/tourism-policies-priorities-and-governance_5254e93a.html

OECD's review of waste management and the circular economy documents the importance of scale and service-area design for collection systems.[5]

1.4 Destination governance and coordination

Tourism SMEs depend on infrastructure and public decisions beyond their control, while seasonal demand intensifies resource pressures in Mediterranean coastal and island destinations.

Tourism enterprises rely on water and waste systems, public infrastructure, land-use arrangements and regulatory decisions that they do not control. An enterprise may therefore identify a circular measure and be willing to invest, yet remain unable to implement it under local conditions. These dependencies can be particularly significant in Mediterranean coastal and island destinations, where seasonal demand places concentrated pressure on facilities and natural resources. A European Commission study of coastal and maritime tourism identifies seasonality, limited carrying capacity and constrained infrastructure investment among the sector's challenges.[6]

Taken together, these four areas show why a tourism SME's capacity to implement circular practices depends partly on conditions beyond its own operations. The following sections examine which of these challenges the selected projects address.



Food waste composting turns organic waste into resources, supporting circular practices in tourism SMEs.

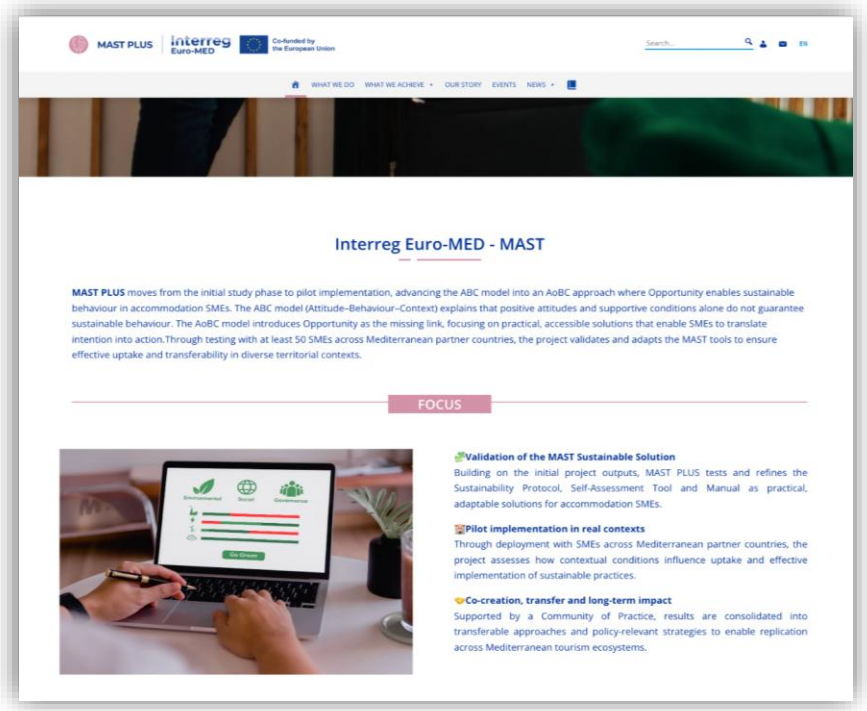
[5] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/waste-management-and-the-circular-economy-in-selected-oecd-countries_9789264309395-en/full-report/component-8.html

[6] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ab0bfa73-9ad1-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1?utm

2. Contributions from the Thematic Projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission and the Cluster of Circular Economy of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme for addressing the challenges related to Circular Economy

2.1 Interreg Euro-MED MAST

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, Knowledge and Managerial Time,** as well as **Destination governance and coordination -** engages with different stakeholders and provides practical and diagnostic tools for businesses to examine their practices against common sustainability requirements and identify areas requiring attention. Developed a sustainability protocol, aligned with ISO 21401:2018, and an online self-assessment tool for small and medium-sized accommodation providers.



Interreg Euro-MED MAST project

MAST built the core frameworks of the project by identifying barriers SMEs may face in the uptake phase, such as regulatory frameworks and support ecosystems (MAST, 2026). Building on this, MAST PLUS tests and refines the tools created to support SMEs transition.

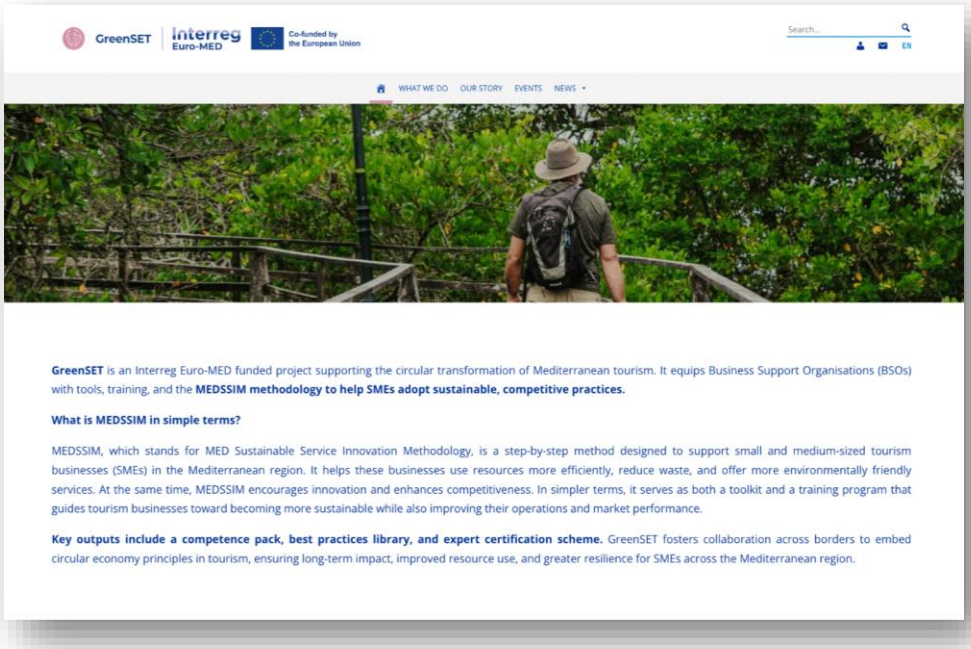
MAST PLUS supports accommodation SMEs across 8 countries in the Mediterranean region. The creation of its Sustainability Protocol, Self-Assessment Tool and Implementation manual enables SMEs to assess their daily operations and supports their transition to circular economy practices. By engagement with stakeholders, the project focuses on effective circular implementation strategy. Its pilot testing engages with 50 accommodation SMEs across 7 EU countries and IPA partner territories.

MAST PLUS adopts an AoBC approach (Attitude-Opportunity-Behavior-Context) in order to support sustainable behaviors in accommodation SMEs (MAST 2026). It relies on an evidence based approach to reinforce SMEs transition to adopting practices in line with circular economy approaches. Its relevance lies in converting a broad and potentially complex agenda into an accessible framework for enterprise-level assessment. The evidence confirms the development of the protocol and tool, but does not establish how extensively they have subsequently been used or whether their use has resulted in sustained changes in business practice (MAST, 2026).

Learn more through the Interreg Euro-MED MAST project website

2.2 Interreg Euro-MED GreenSET

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time -** provides support directly to individual firms towards strengthening the organisation that assists them. Bridging the implementation gap, it trains business-support organisations to apply developed methodology to assist SMEs adoption of sustainable practices.



Interreg Euro-MED GreenSET project

GreenSET shifts the focus from providing support directly to individual firms towards strengthening the organisations that assist them. The project trains business-support organisations to apply the MEDSSIM methodology (MED Sustainable Service Innovation Methodology) and is developing a competence package, implementation toolbox, portfolio of good practices and expert-certification scheme. These are designed to equip the intermediaries, to support tourism SMEs adoption of circular tourism principles through a common methodology (GreenSET, 2026).

Its first reported testing round involved approximately 30 SMEs across nine Mediterranean countries. This intermediary-centred model is significant because it may allow knowledge and support capacity to remain within regional business ecosystems rather than ending when a single training programme or project concludes. At the present stage, however, the evidence demonstrates

early participation and the development of a support architecture, not yet sustained service delivery or changes in SME performance (GreenSET, 2026).

An approach is more likely to remain available when an organisation with an established territorial role is able to incorporate it into its continuing activities. GreenSET explores this possibility by directing capacity-building towards business-support organisations, rather than limiting assistance to a single cohort of enterprises. The project's first testing round demonstrates early participation, but continuing delivery by the trained organisations has not yet been observed.

Learn more through the Interreg Euro-MED GreenSET project website

2.3 Interreg Euro-MED RECIRCLE MED

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Destination-level coordination and governance-**used participatory processes to adapt existing circular-tourism tools and develop local action plans. Its emerging model combines a common blueprint and transfer methodology.



Interreg Euro-MED RECIRCLE MED blueprint for Blue Action Plans for Circular Tourism

RECIRCLE MED approaches destination coordination through participatory planning. The project draws on tools and experience developed through the earlier INCIRCLE and REBOOT MED projects and is working with receiving destinations to adapt these resources and develop local Blue Action Plans for circular tourism. This model recognises that a common methodology cannot simply be transferred unchanged from one destination to another.

Universities, municipalities, technical agencies, business networks and development organisations perform different roles in adapting the inherited material to the priorities and institutional arrangements of receiving destinations (RECIRCLE MED, 2026). Municipal participation gives the transfer process a potential connection to local planning, investment and public-service responsibilities. At the same time, participatory

workshops provide a means of incorporating the knowledge of enterprises and other territorial actors.

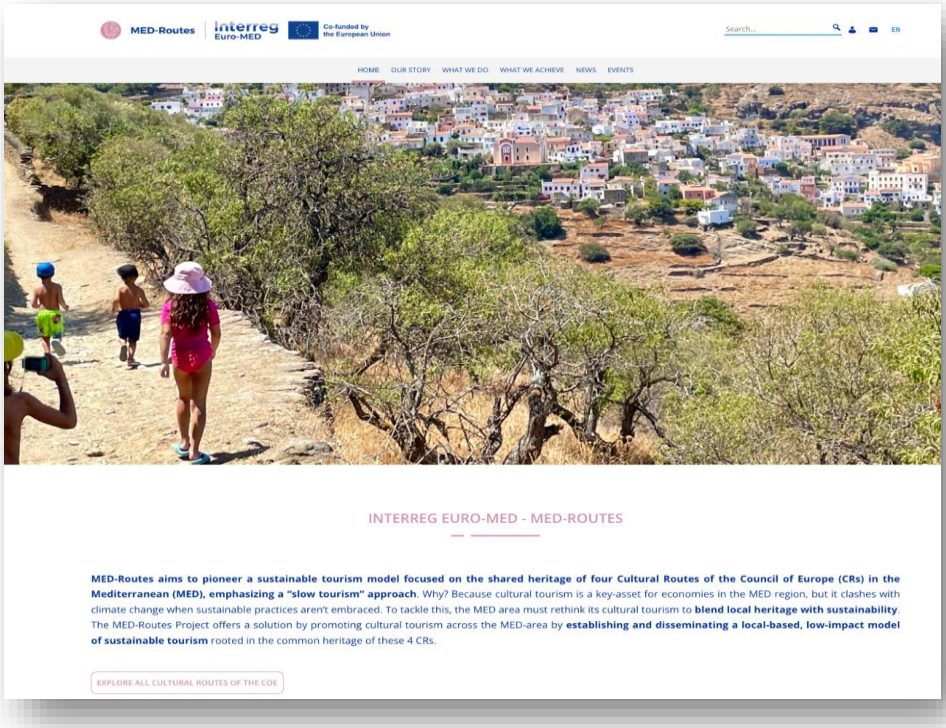
RECIRCLE MED consequently illustrates a governance architecture for combining common tools with local participation and municipal ownership, but it does not yet demonstrate that this process has produced durable institutional change, SME adoption or measurable environmental improvements. As the project remains in implementation, it is also not yet possible to determine whether the resulting action plans will be formally adopted, financed or sustained.

Learn more through the RECIRCLE MED project website, and read the SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BLUE AND CIRCULAR TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - RECIRCLE MED blueprint.

2.4 Interreg Euro-MED MED-Routes

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time-** provides a shared methodological framework that could be interpreted through the characteristics of different routes and territories. Beyond its collaboration with other EURO MED projects, it engages with stakeholders through collaborative workshops to foster a 'bottom-up approach to sustainable tourism development' (MED Routes, 2026).

MED-Routes provides the portfolio's clearest completed illustration of transfer. The project adapted methods and materials developed through INCIRCLE and EMbleMatic for use within four Council of Europe Cultural Routes.



Interreg Euro-MED MED-Routes project

Official reporting records the co-creation of eight eco-itineraries across seven countries, supported through 21 events, laboratories and peer-learning exchanges involving more than 1,000 participants. Its outputs include a knowledge-transfer guide, training package, four Cultural Route action plans and a Green Label (MED-Routes, 2026). Through the establishment of its carbon

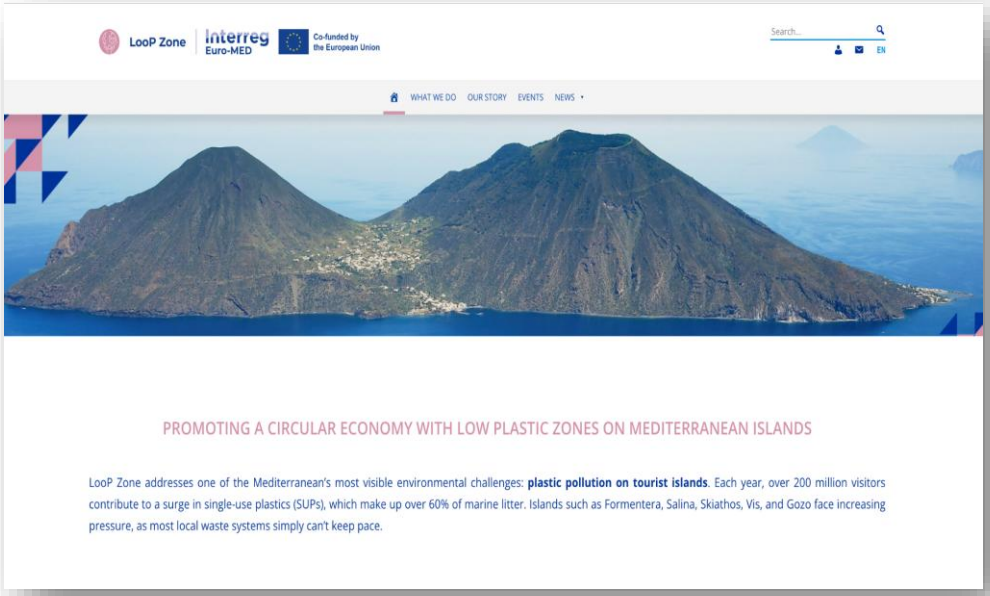
footprint calculation system, it strives for transparency and efficiency by tracking its environmental footprint from its activities, in order to continue adhering to circularity practices.

The relevance of MED-Routes lies in its combination of common methods with local co-creation and identifiable institutional settings. The Cultural Routes and their local networks also offered institutional hosts through which the resulting itineraries and action plans could be connected to existing tourism structures. Through the establishment of the Transnational Working Group, they cross-border collaborate, in order to provide deliverables on sustainability practices. The evidence confirms that this transfer process and its principal outputs were completed; it does not, however, establish whether the eco-itineraries produced sustained changes in SME practices, visitor flows or environmental performance after the project ended.

Learn more through the Interreg Euro-MED MED-Routes project website.

2.5 Interreg Euro-MED LooP Zone

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time-** assists SMEs in attaining tools and skills needed to adopt circular economy practices and addressing waste and plastic pollution on small tourist islands. **Scale, Shared Infrastructure and Collective Action** are also addressed through the creation of regional low plastics zones.



Interreg Euro-MED Loop Zone project

LooP Zone addresses the environmental challenges small tourist islands are facing. With the increase of touristic activities, environmental challenges caused by plastic pollution have affected the islands of Formentera, Salina, Skiathos, Vis and Gozo.

Built on a three pillar approach - private sector, public sector and innovation- in the hospitality (HORECA) sector, it employs a bottom up policy approach aimed to phase out single use-plastics. Through the establishment of "low plastic zones" on both land and sea, it introduces a

space for innovative business models to help SMEs transition to resilient circular economy practices. To support the transition to “low plastics zones”, each region will develop a common framework for the reduction of plastics in their territory, known as Local Action Plans. Through these, relevant stakeholders, regional and local experts, are encouraged to develop alternatives to single use products, in line with EU-level regulations.

Tailored to the respective regional goals on addressing pollution, its three pillar model is tested locally, and shared via a digital platform and scaled through a regional island network (LooP Zone, 2026).

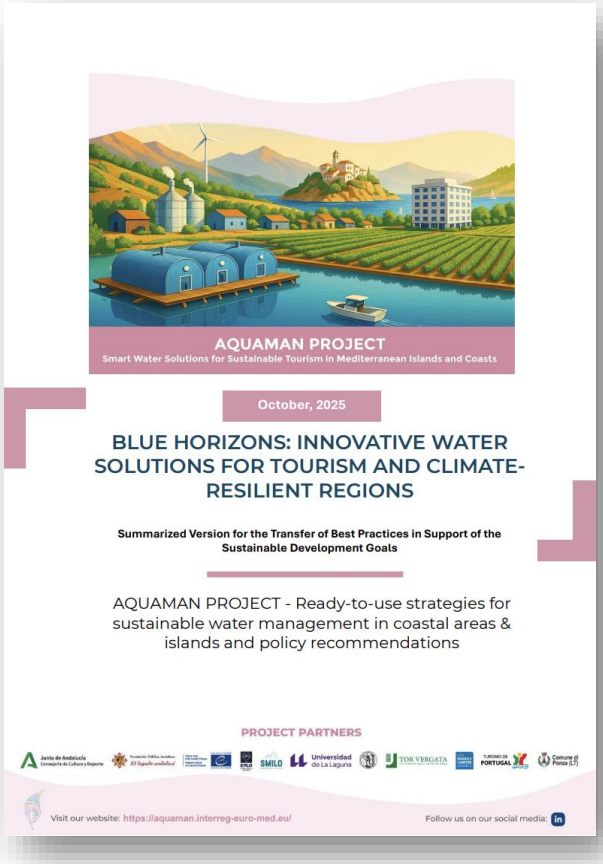
Learn more through the Interreg Euro-MED LooP Zone project website.



Refillable bottle system, designed to reduce unnecessary packaging waste. Photo Sara Chai on pexels.com

3. Contributions from other Interreg Euro-MED Missions to address the challenges related to circular economy

3.1 Interreg Euro-MED AQUAMAN



AQUAMAN Blue Horizons catalogue of Transferable water solutions for tourism

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Destination-level coordination and governance-** by bringing together different communities and stakeholders, it offers training programs, toolkits, methodologies and policy advice to provide a practical guide, implementation support and encourage sustainable water management. **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time**- Living Labs intended to test recommendations and solutions amongst participants.

AQUAMAN focuses on the coordination required for circular and resilient water management. It provides the clearest illustration of why certain circular measures depend on public infrastructure and destination-level cooperation.

Its Blue Horizons: Innovative Water Solutions for Tourism and Climate-Resilient Regions catalogue, published in October 2025, brings together approaches that can inform this process, by establishing a common body of circular and resilient water-management approaches. Its Living Labs undertaken during 2026 are intended to test and adapt solutions to the environmental, infrastructural and governance conditions of participating territories (AQUAMAN, 2026).

This distinction is important because measures such as rainwater collection, infiltration areas or the restoration of wells and cisterns cannot be transferred solely as technical designs. Their feasibility depends on territorial water systems, land ownership, regulation, public responsibilities

and the participation of local users (AQUAMAN, 2026). The project consequently demonstrates an organised process for moving from shared knowledge towards local testing.

The project submission uses the territory of the island of Porquerolles as an illustrative case and identifies possible measures including infiltration areas, the restoration of wells and cisterns, and fountains using collected rainwater. Implementing such measures would require coordination extending well beyond individual tourism businesses. The actors identified include municipalities, metropolitan authorities, a national park, tourism operators, landowners, wineries, associations and residents. Each brings different responsibilities, knowledge or control over the infrastructure and spaces on which the proposed measures depend.

AQUAMAN promotes the transfer of water-saving solutions through a collaborative process involving local authorities, tourism stakeholders and communities, adapting technical measures to each destination's territorial and regulatory context.

At the evidence-review date, however, most territorial measures remained under development or testing. AQUAMAN should therefore be presented as a developing model for knowledge transfer, testing and destination coordination rather than as evidence of demonstrated water-management impacts.

Learn more through the AQUAMAN project website, and read the Blue Horizons: Innovative Water Solutions for Tourism and Climate-Resilient Regions catalogue.

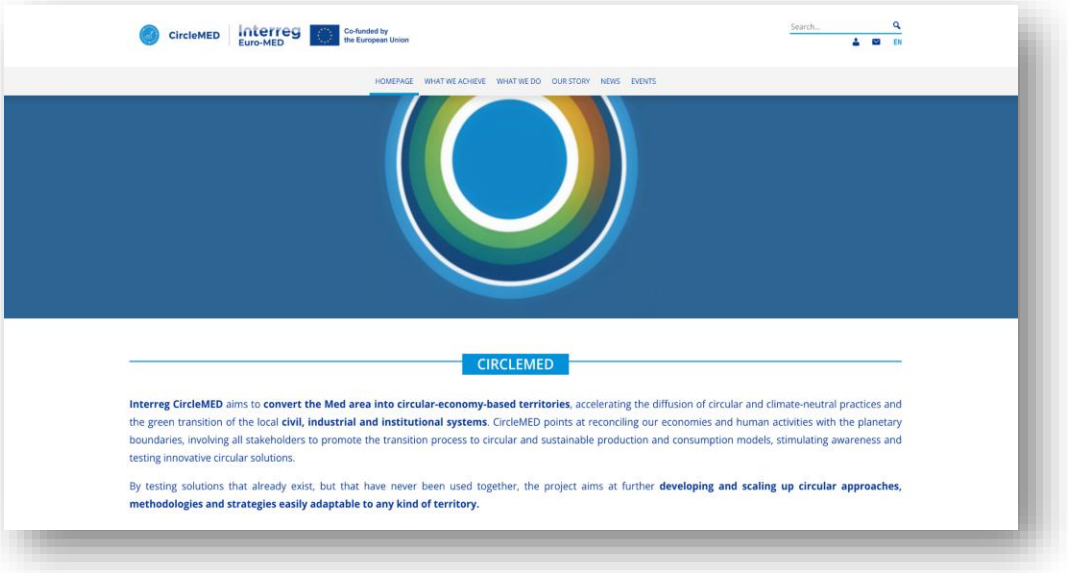
3.2 Interreg Euro-MED CircleMED

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time:** provides support to SMEs through diagnostics and tools intended to bring stakeholders together to inform circular economy practices**.**

CircleMED uses assessment as an entry point, but within a wider, cross-sector circularity framework. CirclePlatform provides basic, intermediate and advanced diagnostic pathways, producing scores, visualisations and benchmarking,

intended to guide participating businesses towards an action plan and relevant resources. Its activity is mainly aimed at influencing civil, industrial and institutional systems. The tiered

structure recognises that enterprises begin from different levels of knowledge and readiness and may therefore require different forms of support. By targeting increased collaboration amongst stakeholders it aims to raise awareness and work closely with locals and SMEs, in order to 'test innovative circular solutions'. As showcased, through the website, its goal is to 'establish a transnational cooperative system', by testing circularity in local 'hubs'. Through its effort to test resource efficiency to boost SME transition, it updates and further develops approaches and methodologies to circularity.



Interreg Euro-MED CircleMED project website

However, CircleMED is not tourism-specific, and the available evidence confirms development and testing of the tool rather than adoption at scale or resulting operational changes within tourism enterprises (CircleMED, 2026).

Learn more through the Interreg Euro-MED CircleMED project website



Project Chenelet Vacheres. Chênelet social housing in Vachères, southern France, combines wood, straw and raw-earth construction with rainwater harvesting. Developed with public authorities and local artisans, the four-home project links resource-conscious building with affordable housing and local skills.

4. Contributions from other Programmes to address the challenges related to circular economy

4.1 Interreg Italy-France Maritime Open Circular

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, Knowledge and Managerial Time-** addresses circular approaches through an intensive Living Lab model. **Finance and Implementation Support-** workshops and Living Lab, include addressing finance as a topic important to SMEs implementation strategy. **Scale, Shared Infrastructure and Collective Action-** developed a marketplace for SMEs to inquire information on materials and resource access.



Interreg Italy-France Maritime Open Circular project

Within the Interreg Italian-French cooperation area, Open Circular aims to strengthen SMEs competitiveness. Through its Living Lab model, nine selected tourism and food businesses participated in eight tailored sessions covering subjects including responsible business models, labels, communication and finance. By bringing enterprises together with specialist and territorial partners, the Living Labs created a setting in which circular approaches could be discussed and adapted to the circumstances of individual businesses. Within the sessions, finance was addressed with participating tourism and food businesses, helping enterprises consider the financial dimension of proposed circular business models. The project reinforces the importance of incorporating financial feasibility into business-model support rather than treating it as a separate question after an intervention has already been designed (Open Circular, 2026).

Open Circular developed CircleXchange through a chamber-led cross-border partnership, intended to facilitate exchanges between SMEs and local businesses providing diagnostic support. The planned marketplace is intended to enable enterprises to offer or request resources and to record exchanges, volumes, estimated carbon savings and economic value. This is especially important as circular systems often require coordination and scale beyond the boundaries of a single enterprise.

CircleXchange illustrates the potential role of digital infrastructure in making otherwise fragmented supply and demand visible. A shared platform could help enterprises identify materials or resources available nearby and create a record of resulting exchanges. Aggregation can address the scale limitations of individual enterprises when it is accompanied by the operational arrangements needed to move materials from one use to another.

Open Circular supports tourism and food SMEs in adopting circular business models through tailored Living Labs, financial guidance and digital resource-sharing tools that encourage cross-border cooperation and exchange.

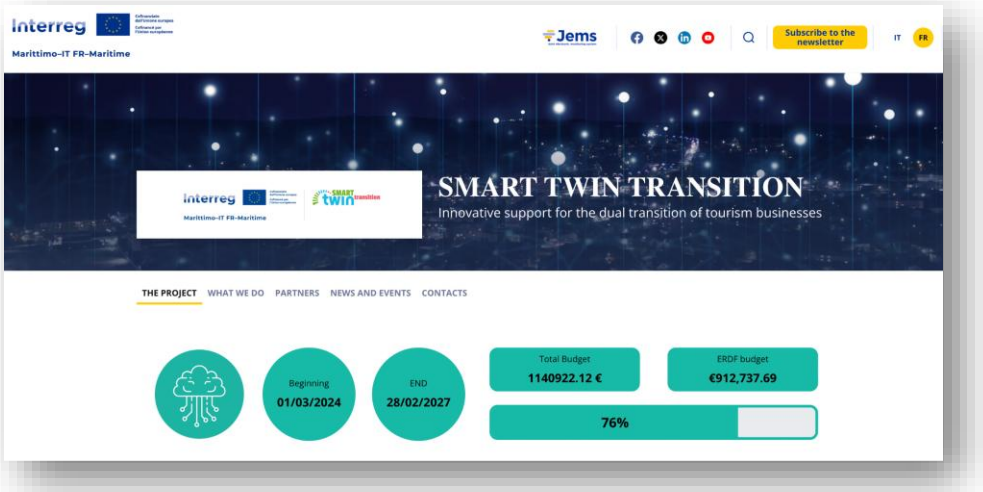
At the evidence-review date, however, the platform was still under development, with release planned for September 2026. Its contribution should therefore be presented as an emerging approach rather than an operational resource-exchange system. The platform forms part of a broader support pathway in which tourism and food businesses have participated in tailored Living Labs (Open Circular, 2026).

Learn more through the Open Circular project website

4.2 Interreg Italy-France Maritime Smart Twin Transition

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time-** with the creation of a toolbox it provides methodology and specialist guidance pathways for SMEs, through the platform, and events. **Finance and implementation support-** vouchers and subsidies given to tourism SMEs to implement dual transition projects.

Smart Twin Transition, part of the Italian-French Interreg program, provides the clearest example of the combination of financial assistance with specialist guidance.



Interreg Italy-France Maritime Smart Twin Transition Project Website

The project is developing a cross-border support model through which tourism SMEs can access vouchers for qualified services alongside coaching, tools and green and digital mentors. The questionnaire reports that three tourism businesses in Var (France) were selected to receive vouchers, specialist coaching and support for investment in energy-efficient equipment. This model recognises that finance and expertise address different but related constraints: a voucher can make an external service or investment more affordable, while coaching can help the enterprise identify an appropriate intervention and navigate its implementation (Smart Twin Transition, 2026).

The significance of this approach lies in the way support is bundled. Financial assistance offered without technical guidance may leave an enterprise uncertain about what to purchase or how to integrate it into its operations. Advice offered without funding may produce a credible plan that the firm cannot afford to implement. Connecting the two can shorten the pathway between diagnosis and action and reduce the transaction burden placed on the business. The shared toolbox and mentor model being developed by Smart Twin Transition may also help participating territories organise this support around a common methodology rather than through isolated grants or advisory activities.

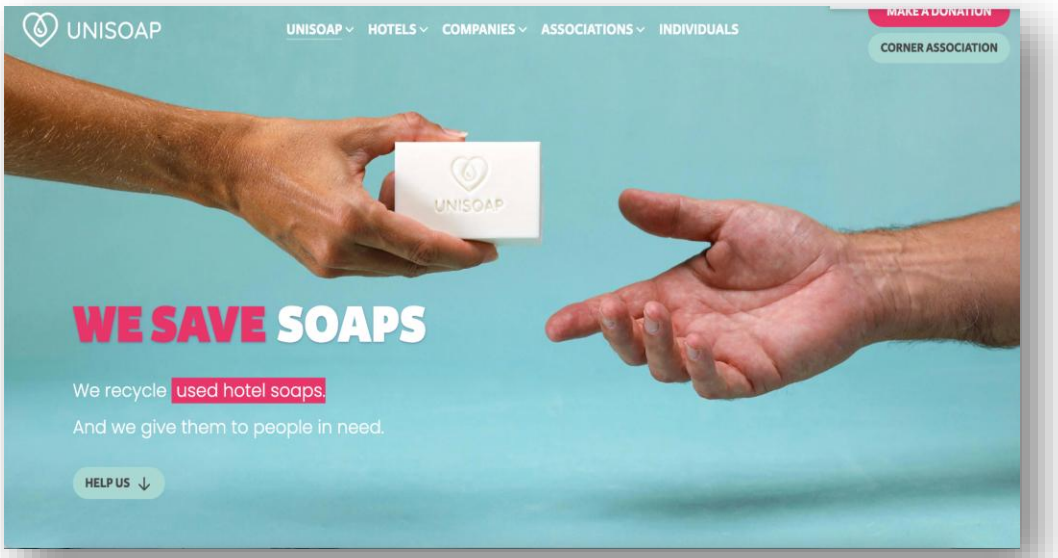
Smart Twin Transition combines financial support, specialist coaching and green and digital mentoring to help tourism SMEs overcome investment barriers and implement tailored environmental and digital transition projects.

The available evidence, however, establishes entry into the support process rather than its results. It does not provide the value of the investments, equipment specifications, enterprise baselines, resulting energy savings or commercial effects. Nor does it demonstrate that the voucher model reduced investment risk or produced changes that continued after the support ended. Smart Twin Transition should therefore be treated as an early operational example of how finance and technical assistance can be combined, rather than as evidence that this model has already delivered measurable environmental or economic benefits at scale.

Learn more through the Interreg Smart Twin Transition project website

4.3 UNISOAP

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Scale, shared infrastructure and collective action:** acts as a specialised intermediary and coordinates an established network linking hotels, collection and processing arrangements, supported employment and beneficiary organisations. Manages transportation, processing and redistribution of used soap through charitable organisations.



UNISOAP project

UNISOAP applies a comparable logic to a more directly hotel-related material stream. The organisation collects partially used soap from hotels, manages its transport and processing through a supported-employment workshop and distributes the resulting hygiene products through charitable organisations. According to its questionnaire submission, the network includes 480 hotel partners and 180 beneficiary organisations and has distributed 200,000 hygiene products (UNISOAP, 2026).

The model allows participating hotels to contribute to a circular system without having to establish their own collection, processing or distribution arrangements. UNISOAP supplies the connective infrastructure: it brings together hotels generating the material, logistics and recycling processes, workers undertaking reprocessing and organisations capable of distributing the final products. The partnership thereby combines an environmental function—redirecting used soap from disposal—with employment and social-solidarity objectives.

The significance of this model lies partly in its specialisation. Used hotel soap is a relatively low-value and dispersed material stream. Recovering it becomes more practicable when an intermediary can collect from multiple hotels, consolidate volumes, manage processing and quality requirements and maintain a network of recipient organisations. The reference in the questionnaire on the alignment with the Green Key accommodation label, also indicates how an established certification scheme can provide a route for connecting the service with hotel sustainability practices.

Learn more through the UNISOAP project website.

4.4 Waste²Reuse & Solidarity

Waste²Reuse & Solidarity demonstrates how collaborative networks can facilitate furniture and mattress recovery, reuse and recycling by coordinating logistics, traceability and partnerships between port operators and social-economy organisations.

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Scale, shared infrastructure and collective action:** Draws on a cooperative network linking ports, operators and social-economy organisations. Acts as an intermediary performing recurring logistical, administrative and coordination functions by redirecting and recycling furniture and mattresses.

Waste²Reuse & Solidarity provides the clearest project-based illustration of aggregation across an operational reuse network. The initiative redirects furniture and mattresses from cruise and port-related activities towards donation, reuse, repair and recycling. According to the project questionnaire, three operations involved approximately 500 items of furniture and 1,500 mattresses and brought together the GPMM port (Grand Port Maritime de Marseille), the shipyard, commercial operators, waste-management companies and 25 social-economy organisations (Waste²Reuse & Solidarity, 2026).

The partnership performs several connected functions. It identifies recoverable items, aggregates sufficient volumes, coordinates their handling and movement, maintains traceability and directs them towards organisations able to reuse, repair, recycle or redistribute them. These activities would be difficult for an individual operator to organise independently, particularly when the materials involve large items, multiple recipient organisations and port-related administrative requirements. By coordinating the chain, the partnership creates a route through which products that might otherwise enter the waste-management system, can retain further social or economic value.



Mattresses recovered from cruise operations are gathered in a warehouse through Waste²Reuse & Solidarity. The initiative connects port operators, logistics providers and social-economy organisations to coordinate reuse, redistribution and recycling.

The project also demonstrates that aggregation involves more than assembling materials. The questionnaire identifies customs procedures as a practical barrier to donations originating in a port environment. This highlights the importance of including organisations capable of addressing legal, administrative and logistical requirements

alongside those supplying or receiving the materials. A circular opportunity may be technically straightforward but remain inaccessible if responsibilities for transfer, documentation, transport or traceability are unclear.

The direct applicability of Waste²Reuse & Solidarity to micro and small tourism enterprises must also be treated with care because the reported operations concern cruise and port operators. Nevertheless, the model illustrates how an intermediary network can organise the recovery and redistribution functions that smaller tourism businesses may also be unable to provide individually.

4.5 EMPREINTE

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Capacity, knowledge and managerial time** and **Finance and implementation support -** highlights need for specialized knowledge in combination with economic viability in the establishment of circular economy approaches for SMEs. Relies on an initiative aimed at creating a three-star hotel room based on sustainability and circularity, reflected through the creation of a coordinated value chain.



Empreinte Call for expression of interest information package

Not all circular investments can be enabled through a direct grant or voucher. In some cases, the principal implementation challenge lies in finding suitable products and coordinating a fragmented value chain. EMPREINTE illustrates this second function through its work to design a three-star hotel room using reused, upcycled, refurbished, eco-designed and lower-impact materials. The initiative brings together Alcmea Architectes, Atelier Emmaüs, Lindera and Valdelia and has issued a call to identify suppliers capable of contributing appropriate materials and products. A pilot room is planned for presentation at a professional exhibition in early 2027, with the possibility of subsequently applying the concept to between 40 and 60 rooms (EMPREINTE, 2026).

This model addresses a practical difficulty faced by tourism enterprises seeking to undertake circular refurbishment. Even where a hotel is willing to use reused or refurbished

products, it may struggle to locate suppliers, verify that products meet functional and design requirements, coordinate multiple contractors or determine whether the resulting solution is economically viable. Due to this, as exemplified through the website, one of their goals is to identify and locate stakeholders, manufacturers and suppliers who are capable of providing innovative ideas, and reused, recycled, handcrafted products and materials. A partnership can perform a market-making and coordination role by articulating demand, bringing together design and materials expertise, identifying potential suppliers and testing whether the proposed combination can work in a commercial setting.

EMPREINTE promotes circular hotel refurbishment by connecting architects, manufacturers and suppliers to develop a sustainable hotel room using reused, refurbished, upcycled and lower-impact materials through coordinated value-chain collaboration.

At the evidence-review date, EMPREINTE remained at the design and supplier-identification stage. The pilot room had not yet been completed, and no cost comparison, technical assessment, environmental result or evidence of hotel adoption was available. Desirability, technical feasibility and economic viability are among the questions the planned pilot is intended to examine and should not be presented as outcomes already achieved. Its present value for the analysis is therefore as an emerging example of pre-commercial supplier discovery and value-chain coordination.

Learn more through the EMPREINTE project website

4.6 Lérins Islands initiative

Circular-tourism challenges addressed: **Destination governance and coordination:** establishes shared understanding of the pressures coming from visitors. Provides data and information necessary for government coordination and environmental considerations, that may inform policies and regulations aimed at developing circular economy practices.

The Lérins Islands initiative promotes data-driven destination governance by combining visitor-flow information from multiple sources to support coordinated decision-making, environmental protection and more sustainable tourism management.

Lérins Islands initiative explores the use of shared visitor data as a basis for destination governance. The initiative concerning usage and visitor traffic on the Lérins Islands illustrates the potential role of common data in supporting decisions among public authorities, transport providers, site managers and local users. The questionnaire describes a broad local partnership led by the City of Cannes and an association promoting environmental and local education: The Permanent Centre for Environmental Education

in the Lérins Islands (CPIE), together with a user committee and information derived from transport operators, eco-counters, events, GPS data and other sources.

Bringing these data together could provide a more complete picture of when, where and how visitors use the islands. By tracking visitor engagement with the region, data focused on how resources are used and spent, can help streamline efforts and strategies created, to adopt circular economy practices and reduce waste. This, in turn, could support decisions concerning transport, visitor communication, ecosystem protection, marine litter and the management of sensitive locations. The governance value lies not only in generating information, but in creating a common evidence base through which different actors can discuss pressures, assess options and coordinate their responses.



The Lérins Islands, off the coast of Cannes, where visitor flows and maritime activities highlight the importance of coordinated destination management. Photo: Ivan Ragozin in Unsplash.

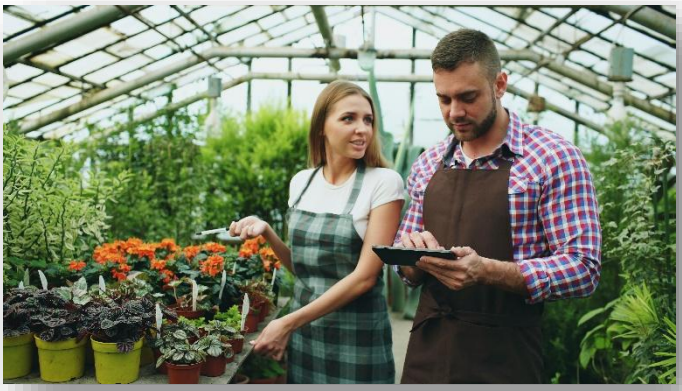
5. From Project Contributions to Coherent Support for SME Circularity

Taken together, the projects examined in the preceding sections provide a diverse body of practical experience on supporting circular tourism. The projects address different parts of the SME circularity implementation challenge, and they are at different stages of development. Some provide tools to assess needs or build support capacity. Others have carried out material recovery operations or are testing ways to connect businesses with finance, suppliers and destination planning. The following analysis examines what the portfolio contributes across the four challenge areas, then considers continuity, local adoption and the evidence available so far.

The projects examined offer diverse practical experience in supporting circular tourism, addressing SME needs through assessment tools, capacity-building, material recovery, financing, supplier connections and destination planning.

5.1 The circular implementation pathway

MAST and MAST PLUS have developed a sustainability protocol, self-assessment tool and implementation manual for accommodation SMEs, with MAST PLUS testing the tools with participating businesses. CircleMED provides tiered diagnostic pathways through CirclePlatform, although its framework is cross-sector rather than tourism-specific. LooP Zone begins with research into business practices, material use, supply chains and constraints on the participating islands. Open Circular has worked with selected tourism and food businesses through Living Labs, while GreenSET trains business-support organisations to use a common methodology in assisting SMEs.



Small businesses play a key role in advancing circular tourism, adopting practical solutions and building sustainable business practices. Photo: Vitaly Gariev in pexels.com

These projects offer different ways to establish what a business or territory needs and to develop the capacity to respond. The project descriptions do not, however, establish a connected route through which an SME can move from assessment to the selection, financing and implementation of a circular measure. A business may leave a diagnostic process with an identified opportunity but still need technical advice, a supplier, finance

or a service able to deliver it. In such cases it is important for various parts of the circularity ecosystem to have clear referral routes between them.

5.2 Finance and implementation of circular measures

Smart Twin Transition is developing a model combining vouchers for qualified services with coaching and specialist guidance. Its questionnaire reports that three tourism businesses in Var were selected to receive support for investment in energy-efficient equipment. That example shows how financial and technical assistance can be offered together, although the reported investment concerns energy efficiency as opposed to circularity in its purest form.

These cases identify essential steps for turning circular opportunities into investment, including financial assessment, expert advice, product sourcing and delivery coordination.

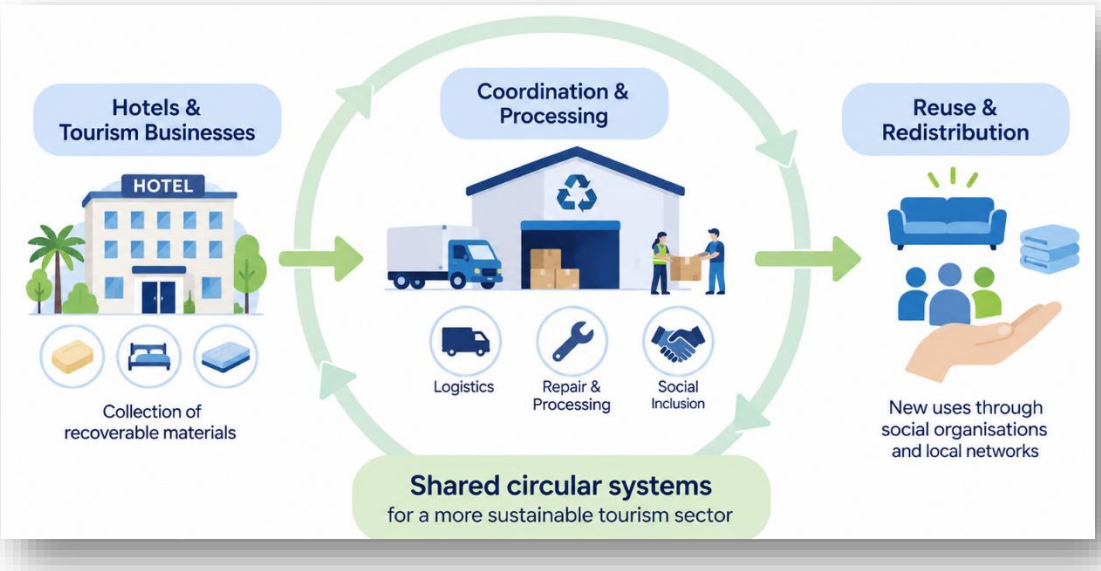
Open Circular addressed finance as part of its Living Lab sessions with tourism and food businesses. EMPREINTE tackles a different obstacle: locating and coordinating products, designers and suppliers for a hotel-room concept incorporating reused, upcycled and refurbished materials alongside other lower-impact products. It has issued a supplier call, but its planned pilot room had not been completed at the evidence-review date.

Taken together, these cases identify several practical requirements between recognising an opportunity and making an investment: assessing financial feasibility, obtaining qualified advice, locating suitable products and coordinating delivery. They do not yet establish which form of support leads to completed circular investments or sustained changes in SME operations.

5.3 Shared circular systems and operational capacity

UNISOAP provides a clear hotel-specific example of an operating circular service. According to its questionnaire submission, it works with 480 hotel partners to collect partially used soap, arranges processing through a supported-employment workshop and distributes hygiene products through beneficiary organisations. For a participating hotel, the route to action is defined: it supplies a particular material stream, while the intermediary manages functions that the hotel does not have to establish for itself.

Waste^{2}Reuse & Solidarity reports three operations redirecting furniture and mattresses from cruise and port-related activities towards donation, reuse, repair and recycling. Its network



Shared circular systems connect tourism businesses with specialised operators, logistics providers and social organisations to enable the collection, processing, reuse and redistribution of recoverable materials.

coordinates handling, traceability, recipient organisations and port-related administrative requirements. These are reported operations, but their direct applicability to micro and small tourism enterprises has not been established because the participating material suppliers are cruise and port operators.

CircleXchange, developed through Open Circular, addresses the information side of resource exchange by proposing a marketplace where enterprises can offer or request materials and record exchanges. The projects section states that the platform was still under development at the evidence-review date, so it cannot yet be treated as an operating exchange network.

These examples show the difference between identifying a potentially recoverable material and providing a functioning route for its reuse or redistribution. UNISOAP and Waste^{2}Reuse report the coordination of actual material flows; CircleXchange is intended to help make potential exchanges visible. The arrangements required will vary by material, but an exchange also needs workable logistics, processing or recipients, clear responsibilities and an operator.

5.4 Destination-level systems and circular implementation

AQUAMAN addresses water-management questions that extend beyond individual tourism businesses. Its catalogue brings together possible approaches, and its Living Labs are intended to test and adapt solutions to participating territories. The Porquerolles example identifies proposed measures whose implementation would depend on land ownership, public responsibilities,

regulation and the involvement of local users. Most territorial measures remained under development or testing at the evidence-review date.



Locations of the seven AQUAMAN Water Scarcity Living Labs

RECIRCLE MED is adapting tools from earlier projects through participatory processes and developing local Blue Action Plans for circular tourism. Its work brings municipalities, technical agencies, business networks and other organisations into the planning process. The project description does not yet establish whether the plans will be formally adopted, financed or implemented.

The Lérins Islands initiative assembles visitor-use information from several sources to inform discussion among public authorities, transport providers, site managers and local users. This contributes to a shared understanding of pressures on the islands. The material provided does not demonstrate that the data have led to a particular circular measure, so its relevance here is to destination coordination rather than proven circular implementation.

AQUAMAN, CircleXchange and Lérins Islands initiative show different forms of territorial work: testing possible water solutions, preparing circular-tourism plans and establishing a common evidence base for decisions.

The three cases show different forms of territorial work: testing possible water solutions, preparing circular-tourism plans and establishing a common evidence base for decisions. Their contribution to SME circularity depends on whether these processes eventually connect to the services, infrastructure or decisions businesses require.

5.5 Continuity and institutional ownership

GreenSET is building capacity within business-support organisations rather than relying solely on direct assistance to a cohort of SMEs. MED-Routes adapted earlier project methods within four Cultural Routes and produced itineraries, action plans and training material through their networks. RECIRCLE MED involves municipalities and other territorial organisations in preparing its plans. UNISOAP, by contrast, is already operating a specialised service through its own network of hotels, processing arrangements and beneficiaries.



Participants meet through Open Circular, an Italy–France cooperation project supporting SMEs' transition to circular business models.

These cases point to different possible organisations for different functions. They do not establish a single institutional model for circular support. The remaining question across the portfolio is which organisations will have the mandate, resources and operating arrangements to maintain each function once project activity ends.

5.6 Transfer and local adoption

MED-Routes provides a completed example of adapting methods and materials from earlier projects for use within Cultural Routes. Its reported outputs establish that the transfer activities took place, but not whether the resulting itineraries and plans produced sustained changes in enterprise practices or environmental performance.



Transferring knowledge and adapting circular solutions to local conditions: Halki Living Lab, AQUAMAN project.

RECIRCLE MED is working with receiving destinations to adapt inherited tools and prepare locally relevant plans. AQUAMAN's territorial testing considers environmental, infrastructural and governance conditions that affect possible water measures. LooP Zone's examination of local business practices and constraints similarly recognises that interventions on one island may not fit another unchanged. These projects establish different processes for tailoring an approach to place; for those still in implementation, subsequent adoption and use remain to be observed.

5.7 Evidence and learning

The portfolio documents tools developed, organisations and businesses engaged, plans prepared and, in some cases, material recovery operations carried out. It provides less comparable information about circular measures implemented by SMEs, their costs and resource effects, or whether practices remain in use over time. That reflects both the different purposes of the initiatives and the fact that many are still developing or testing their approaches.

The portfolio highlights progress in developing tools, support structures and operational pathways, while revealing the need for stronger evidence on SME implementation, resource impacts and long-term adoption of circular practices.

The cross-project finding is therefore about the **state of the enabling ecosystem**, rather than a ranking of project effectiveness. UNISOAP offers an operating pathway for hotels to participate in the recovery of one material stream. Other initiatives are developing diagnostics, intermediary capacity, financing arrangements, supplier connections, exchange platforms or territorial plans that may support implementation across a wider range of practices. These contributions could become more useful to SMEs as the relevant services and decisions connect. Following both the actions businesses take and the availability of the finance, suppliers, services and infrastructure they need would make that progression clearer.

6. Policy Recommendations: Building Lasting Support for the Transition of Tourism SMEs to Circularity

Tourism SMEs need integrated partnerships connecting business support, finance, suppliers and technical services to enable circular practices and strengthen destination-level cooperation.

The project portfolio shows that tourism SMEs need more than information about circularity. They need partnerships that connect business advice with finance, suppliers and technical services; organise shared systems where firms cannot act alone; and bring SME needs into destination infrastructure decisions.

The following recommendations assign responsibilities for building and maintaining those connections as the circularity ecosystem develops.

6.1. Give SMEs one clear route from advice to action

Regional business-support organisations and chambers of commerce should work with financial institutions, suppliers and technical experts to connect initial assessments with the support needed to implement a specific circular measure. Partners should agree who makes each referral and follow up to see whether the business was able to act. Where a necessary service is unavailable, the intermediary should record the gap and bring it to the relevant business network or public authority.

6.2. Keep local support available after projects end

Programme authorities and regional governments should decide during a project which organisation could maintain each useful tool or service. Depending on the function, this may be a chamber, business-support organisation, destination body or specialised operator. The partners should identify the responsible organisation, the staff and expertise required, the operating cost and a credible funding route.



Strengthening cooperation between tourism SMEs, business-support organisations and local service providers. Living Lab in Ponza (Italy). AQUAMAN project

6.3. Build shared services where businesses cannot act alone

Municipalities, business networks and potential service operators should jointly identify and test opportunities for shared collection, repair, reuse or resource exchange. They should assess demand, costs, logistics, regulatory requirements and the availability of suitable suppliers, processors or recipients before establishing or expanding a service. Each arrangement needs an operator responsible for its continued delivery.



Rainwater harvesting as a practical measure to improve water efficiency in tourism facilities.

6.4. Plan destination infrastructure with tourism businesses

Municipalities and regional authorities should plan with tourism businesses, utilities and infrastructure providers where circular measures depend on public water and waste systems or other shared facilities. Destination plans should identify the services and investments required, with a responsible body, funding route and timetable for each action. This connects the measures proposed to SMEs with what the destination can deliver.

6.5. Adapt useful approaches to local conditions

Project partners and organisations in receiving destinations should identify which function of an approach is worth preserving before transferring its tools or methods. They should then assess what must change to fit local businesses, suppliers, infrastructure, regulations and institutional capacity, and agree who will deliver the adapted approach. Transfer should address operating arrangements as well as project outputs.

6.6. Measure results and share what is learned

Projects should record a small set of comparable information, including which SMEs received support, which measures they implemented, what they cost and whether they remained in use. Resource savings should be reported where they can be measured. Projects should also record where an SME could not act because finance, a supplier, a service or infrastructure was unavailable. Programme authorities should make concise findings and usable project outputs easy to find in relevant languages, so businesses and destinations in other territories can assess what an approach requires before adopting it.

7. Conclusion

Micro and small tourism enterprises face familiar constraints when changing how they operate: limited managerial time, specialist expertise, finance and capacity to assess investments. The transition to circularity adds further demands.

Some measures can be undertaken within an enterprise. Others depend on businesses aggregating demand or materials, on an operator providing a shared service, or on changes to water, waste and other destination systems. Partnerships are critical because they can connect SMEs with suppliers, technical experts, financial institutions, service operators and public authorities. The projects examined here provide useful tools and relationships, while a few offer concrete routes for circular action. UNISOAP, for example, gives hotels an operating pathway for the recovery of a defined material stream. Across the wider portfolio, however, these elements do not yet form a consistently connected support system.

Circular tourism requires durable partnerships connecting SMEs with finance, expertise, suppliers and destination infrastructure, enabling practical implementation, stronger resource efficiency and greater resilience across Mediterranean tourism destinations.

The next step for circularity in Mediterranean tourism is to make these connections operational and durable. This means linking advice more closely with finance and implementation services, strengthening organisations that can continue supporting SMEs beyond the end of projects, developing shared systems where individual action is insufficient, and embedding circularity within destination governance and infrastructure. It also requires better evidence on SME adoption, resource outcomes, operating costs and continuity so that effective approaches can be refined and extended.

This White Paper extends the Sustainable Tourism Mission's earlier work on climate adaptation and small islands. Those papers established the importance of coordinated governance and integrated responses to the pressures facing Mediterranean destinations. This paper shows what those principles mean for circular implementation by tourism SMEs: change within the business must be supported by circular tourism value chains and circular destination systems. Building and maintaining those connections is how partnerships can turn circular-economy ambition into practical change, thus enhancing resilience in the Euro-Med region.

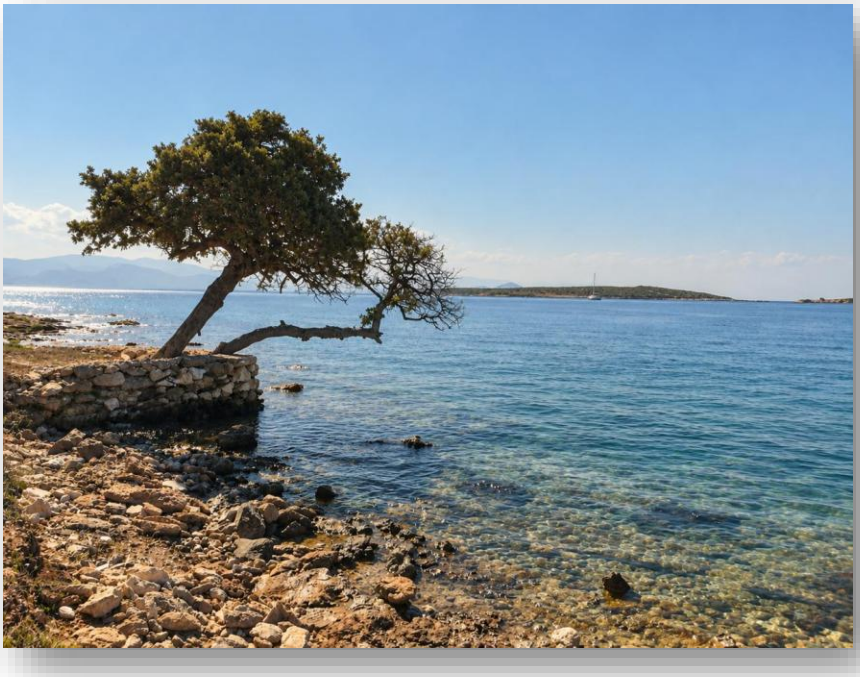


Image of coastal environment on Paros island, often facing water scarcity issues in the summer months. Photo: Cheyrl Novak

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