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SUSTOURISMO
Action Plan on Sustainable Tourism in the ADRION Region

Index

Introduction

The current output aims to present the SUSTOURISMO Action Plan on the sustainable tourism promotion in the ADRION Area. This action plan is a strategic document that defines how the SUSTOURISMO good practices and lessons learnt can be implemented/developed/transferred in strategic/policy documents at regional/country levels.

This SUSTOURISMO Action Plan is based on the key results of the following technical activities carried out in the SUSTOURISMO WPT2:

- Design and development of the SUSTOURISMO App functionalities (Activity T2.1);
- Assessment of the SUSTOURISMO App and touristic packages key results (Activity T2.2);
- Assessment of the SUSTOURISMO implications in terms of sustainability growth of the involved touristic areas (Activity T2.3);
- Athletic tourism opportunities for SUSTOURISMO areas (Activity T2.4).

This SUSTOURISMO Action Plan, starting from the lessons learnt in the technical activities developed in the SUSTOURISMO WPT2, provides suggestions to any interested public and private stakeholders regarding the following:

- Strategy for a better **integration** of the tourism sector in the wider EU, national and local sustainability policies;
- Actions for promoting sustainable tourism at **transnational/EUSAIR/ ADRION** level and at **local and regional** levels;
- **Tourism key dimensions**. The role of technology and communication strategies in promoting a more sustainable tourism.

The Action Plan intends to incorporate the lessons learnt by the SUSTOURISMO project in order to achieve transferring and adoption of methodologies for reaching the goal of sustainable tourism in ADRION Region.

Overview of the current situation and the EU/EUSAIR strategic sustainable tourims dimensions

According to the Secretary General of the UNWTO, "around the world, in countries at all development levels, many millions of jobs and businesses are dependent on a strong and thriving tourism sector. Tourism is a driving force in protecting natural and cultural heritage, preserving them for future generations".

It's a fact that the tourism industry is one of the most dynamic economic sectors, with a growth rate above the average global economic growth. For example, between 2011-2019, tourism growth rate was of 3.5% per year, while the global economy grew by 2.5% (UNWTO, 2020). Tourism contributing significantly to the recovery of the global economy after the 2008/2009 economic

crisis. In fact, for more than half a century, tourism has been considered a driver of economic growth and development, especially for countries and regions with difficulties in finding other economic opportunities able to create advantages and integration into the international economy, with a relatively high capacity of economic multiplication and dynamism.

Tourism can be described as a complex system aiming at producing leisure experiences, comprising a set of tangible and intangible elements organised in such a way that each element is in some way either directly or indirectly interdependent with every other element. The system is complex, because the relationships between the elements that combine the touristic experience such as visitors and objects are non-linear but fit within what has been called a socio-ecological system (SES). These SES elements are the firms, supplier, visitors, residents, authorities, destination managers and the physical and immaterial environments in which these elements interact with one another. At the core of the SES is people-environment interactions. Hence, the complexity of the system is such that a small change can cause a major adjustment within all the system. Tourists' systems are vulnerable and subject to change, as has been seen in times of crisis.

For all these reasons tourism industry is one of the most vulnerable sectors to all types of crises and hazards, and the effects of these shocks are negative both through the effective damages they determine at the destination and for the potential they have, for a longer or shorter period of time, to deter tourists from visiting the destination. From global shocks, such as the 2008/2009 economic crisis or the current COVID-19 pandemic, to locally or nationally localized shocks, such as terrorist attacks, floods, volcanic eruptions, political conflicts and war, numerous events interfere with the tourism market and generate changes in the geography of tourism from different perspectives. While the COVID-19 pandemic is the most devastating crisis that the tourism industry has faced, paradoxically, it has also been the crisis which has further highlighted the importance of the sector for the socioeconomic development of destinations and the wellbeing of travellers and residents alike.

At European level the most recent strategic guidelines were defined and collected by the European Commission in the "**Transition pathways for tourism**" published in February 2022. The transition pathways document is part of the "EU Industrial Strategy" update published in May 2021. Seven are the "basic building blocks" identified for a strong tourism industry:

- Sustainable competitiveness;

- Regulation and public governance;

- R&I, techniques and technological solutions;

- Infrastructure;

- Skills;

- Social dimension;

- Investments and funding.

Each touristic transition pathway should consider each of these building blocks in the perspectives of the green transition (environmental sustainability and climate neutrality), the digital transition and move to a greater resilience.

The transition pathway for tourism calls on the tourism community to implement measures in twenty-seven areas, with a specific focus:

- To **invest in circularity** to reduce energy, waste, water and pollution, and at the same time to better meet the increasing demand for sustainable tourism;
- To **enhance data sharing practices** to allow for new innovative tourism services and improve the sustainable management of destinations;
- To **invest in skills** to ensure the availability of qualified workforce and attractive careers in the ecosystem.

One of the most relevant challenges for tourism sector at transnational level is the resilience, intended as the capacity for renewal, re-organization and development, and these matters in the aftermath of a disaster. In a resilient social-ecological system (SES), disturbance has the potential to create opportunity for doing new things, for innovation and for development. Hence, system adaptation pertains more to unexpected and incremental changes rather than continuous changes in the environment. As uncertainty can undermine resilience and it is the enemy of successful adaptation, notions of **adaptive capacity** and **absorption of change**s are inherent to the concept of resilience. Adaptive capacity allows a system to absorb changes within its critical thresholds, beyond these thresholds the system collapses (Folke, 2006).

UNWTO's long-term outlook Tourism Towards 2030 shows that there is still a substantial potential for further touristic expansion in coming decades. Both existing and new destinations can benefit from this opportunity, provided they do the necessary to ensure the right conditions with regard to the business environment, infrastructure and travel facilitation.

According to the tourism trend in the 27 national destinations of the European Union, tourism will continue to show growth, yet its rate of growth will be modest compared with that of other regions, but based on an already very large base. In order to stay competitive and tap into the potential demand, it is essential to continue creating and raising awareness and to mainstream tourism in the political agenda. Most of the EU destinations have a strong tradition in tourism and a great professionalism and can count on a highly developed tourism sector underpinned by some very strong assets. However, sufficient challenges remain about **sustainability, infrastructure, accessibility, travel facilitation, changing consumer trends and governance**, and these need to be addressed to guarantee successful future tourism development.

Among various challenges and opportunities tourism market faces a clear expansion, with an urgent need for the destinations to improve the business environment, infrastructures and travel facilitation. The growing of the sector launches the challenge for improved competitiveness and the essential role of clear policy guidelines and supports to face the change. The main challenges remain sustainability, infrastructures, accessibility, travel facilitations, changing consumer trends and governance and the future tourism sustainable development.

Finally, it is important to highlight that on December 1St 2022, the Council of the European Union has adopted conclusions setting out a **European Agenda for Tourism 2030**[1] which includes a multi-annual EU work plan to help member states, public authorities, the Commission and stakeholders make the tourism sector greener and more sustainable, resilient and digitalised. The European Agenda for Tourism 2030 emphasises the need to protect the tourism sector and, at the same time, develop a forward-looking vision to take advantage of the willingness of many Europeans to change their travel and tourism habits so as to become more sustainable and responsible.

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[1] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15441-2022-INIT/en/pdf

Analyzing more in detail the European Agenda for Tourism 2030, it is possible to identify a clear list of priorities for developing a more sustainable tourism. These priorities are organized in the following priority areas:

- Enabling policy framework and governance

- Green transition

- Digital transition

- Resilience and inclusion

- Skills and support for transition

The following tables provide a synthesis of the key priorities.

Priority area: Enabling policy framework and governance	
Key topics	Goals and objectives
Fair measures for short-term rentals (STR)	A transparent EU STR market, promoting competition and consumer protection, creating opportunities and contributing to sustainable tourism.
Statistics and indicators for tourism	Improving the availability and coverage of tourism statistics to consider the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism. Improving access to private and destination-level data for producing official statistics on tourism, respecting data protection rules and legitimate commercial interests.
Comprehensive tourism strategies development or update	Strategic approach to tourism at national, regional and local levels to consider the economic, environmental, cultural and social sustainability of tourism.
Collaborative and data-based destination management	Expanding the scope of tourism destination management organisations to collaborative and data-based decision-making involving all stakeholders, including local residents.

Priority area: Green transition	
Key topics	Goals and objectives
Improving circularity of tourism services	Reducing the environmental footprint of tourism services (food/general waste, water/energy efficiency and pollution).
Supporting the green transition of tourism companies and SMEs	Encouraging tourism companies to take up greener practices by increasing demand for green services by public actors and promoting schemes which support the assessment, tracking and reduction of environmental footprint.

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	Providing support for SMEs to engage in environmentally friendly practices to ensure that it does not become a barrier to trade.
Research and innovation projects and pilots on circular and sustainable tourism	Supporting public-private co-operation on research and innovation projects and pilots which develop models and transferable practices for sustainable tourism.

Priority area: Digital transition	
Key topics	**Goals and objectives**
Digitalisation of tourism SMEs	Effective use of digital tools by tourism SMEs and microenterprises for resource management, internal work processes, service provision, marketing, communication with clients and supply chains and new service development.
Public data sharing for encouraging innovative tourism services	Encouraging and participating in tourism-relevant data sharing to support innovative services.
Research and innovation projects and pilots on digital tools and services in tourism	Supporting public-private cooperation on research and innovation projects and pilots that develop the innovative and sustainable use of digital tools and practices in tourism.

Priority area: Resilience and inclusion	
Key topics	**Goals and objectives**
Accessibility of tourism services	Enhancing social and economic inclusion, taking into account the elderly, persons with disabilities and
Resilient EU tourism services and destinations	Improving the resilience of EU tourism services and destinations to service diverse audiences in all seasons and various locations.
Sustainable innovation in tourism services	Promoting the EU as a destination that meets the changing demands of tourism while maintaining the well-being of residents and their environment.

Priority area: Skills and support for transition	
Key topics	**Goals and objectives**
Awareness-raising on needs and opportunities for the twin transition in tourism	Awareness-raising on changes in tourism demand, the opportunities offered by the twin transition for tourism actors, as well as skills and approaches that help to increase resilience.
Pact for skills in tourism	To meet skills demand in the tourism ecosystem by implementing and expanding participation in the Pact for skills in tourism in order to actively encourage skills development

	and provide training opportunities for the workforce, the unemployed and SMEs.
Integrated support platform for tourism stakeholders	Helping tourism stakeholders find relevant and timely information, funding and support and connections to peers and experts.

The EU priorities are in line with the ones defined in the EUSAIR Pillar 4 Sustainable Tourism as summarized in the table below.

EU/EUSAIR Strategic goals	Source
1. **Diversification** of the macro-region's tourism products and services along with tackling seasonality of inland, coastal and maritime tourism demand.	EUSAIR Pillar 4 Sustainable Tourism
2. Improving the **quality and innovation** of tourism offer and enhancing the sustainable and responsible tourism capacities of the tourism actors across the macro-region.	EUSAIR Pillar 4 Sustainable Tourism

Based on the document "EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region – pillar IV, report/analysis of the EUSAIR national tourism strategies for identifying common priorities and actions in relation to the EUSAIR action plan-pillar IV: "sustainable tourism". Defining relevant EUSAIR macro-regional mid-term tourism result indicators and targets" the common joint proposals/actions with a macro regional dimension are:

- Promotional activities;

- Measuring and monitoring sustainable tourism;

- Skills and vocational training;

- Governance and capacity building;

- Cultural tourism and local identity;

- Innovation, ICT and digital agenda;

- Link between cultural tourism and creative industries;
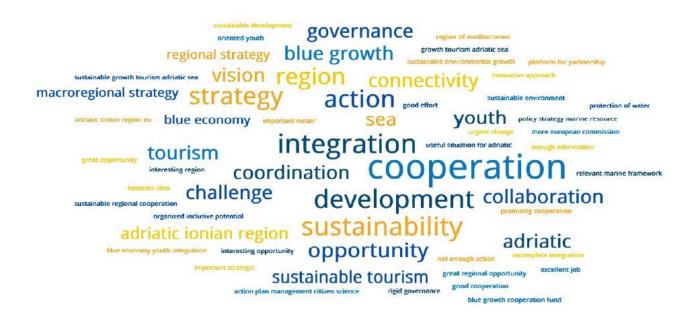
- Access to financing.

The SUSTOURISMO project, during its development and implementation phases, developed specific action and strategic approach to address all these topics and key strategic priorities.

The touristic dimension is particularly important in the ADRION area as it is one of the most important economic sectors in the area and a very important leverage tool in terms of promotion of the sustainable dimension in all the different sectors. For these reasons the strategic and political documents at transnational ADRION level pay particular attention to these topics.

Starting from the "EUSAIR Action Plan Revision: 2022 Public Consultation Report" it is possible to identify the key transnational dimension to be taken into account at transnational level. As it is

possible to see in the graphic elaboration below, sustainable tourism and tourism are among the most important topics at transnational level.
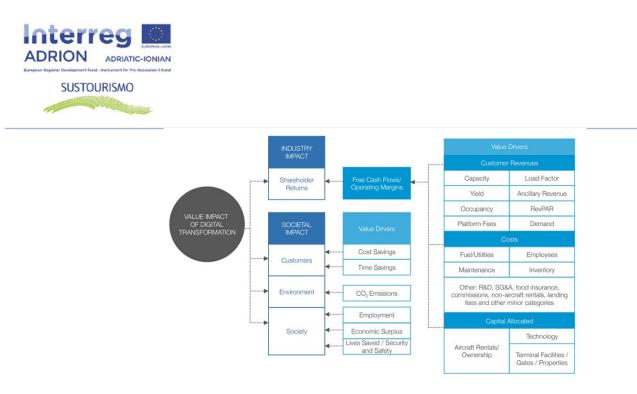

SUSTOURISMO key actions and lessons learnt

In this paragraph is provided a synthesis of the key actions developed during the SUSTOURISMO project in order to improve the tourism sustainability in the involved areas, in line with the EU and EUSAIR priorities in terms of sustainable tourism promotion. The key dimensions analysed in this paragraph are related to technological measures, SUSTOURISMO integrated touristic-mobility actions, communication strategies and athletic tourism.

The role of technology in the sustainable tourism promotion

Digital technologies and applications play a primary role in the promotion of a more sustainable tourism, thanks to their widespread diffusion among citizens all over the world. Indeed, as reported by the "Tourism Trends and Policies" study published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2020), digitization is changing the way people live, work and travel and has opened up new opportunities for tourism businesses. Applied to the tourism sector, innovative technologies are generating, personalizing and offering new products, services and experiences for visitors in ever newer ways (OECD, 2018).

Furthermore, digital technologies have been identified as the main source of value creation, innovation and productivity for the future of tourism, through the activation of new business models, multi-user-generated content, big data and digital commerce (APEC, 2019). According to the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017), this digitization process could create up to $ 305 billion of additional value for the tourism sector alone through increased profitability and another $ 100 billion are growth estimates for tourism companies who will be able to adapt their business models to the digital world. All of this will have a $ 700 billion benefit for customers and society, through a reduced environmental footprint, increased safety and cost and time savings for consumers.

The innovation and digital technologies has supported the development and growth of the entire tourism supply chain, accompanying the user in all the phases that characterize a journey. Mobile apps are one of the leading digital solutions in this context.

In relation to the specific functions offered by each mobile application, these can be classified into seven basic groups (Schieder, 2013; Kiilunen, 2013):

1.   navigation applications

2.   social networking applications

3.   mobile marketing applications

4.   travel safety applications

5.   transaction applications

6.   information applications

7.   entertainment applications

Source: World Economic Forum/Accenture analysis

According to a recent survey by eMarketer (2016), travel-based mobile apps are the seventh most downloaded app category, and nearly 60% of smartphone users regularly use travel apps when planning travel. Another survey, conducted by DCS and Travel Technologies (DCS Plus, 2018), shows a high custom of common and business travellers to use mobile devices and related apps at all stages of the tourism cycle.

Synthesis of the SUSTOURISMO key actions

In the SUSTOURISMO project it was possible to develop and test different touristic measures aimed to promote more sustainable touristic and mobility behaviors. The table below provides a synthesis of the key solutions developed in the framework of the project.

SUSTOURISMO Actions	Partner	Pilot area	Brief description
Rewards for tourists visiting the monuments using the public transport	ITL	Ravenna, Italy	The core of this pilot was to define a reward scheme for tourists visiting at least one of the 6 selected Ravenna monuments using one of the existing public transport integrated tickets.
Walking guided tours for the promotion of more sustainable touristic behaviours	CERTH	Thessaloniki, Greece	Touristic Package 1: "Discovering the Byzantine aspect of Thessaloniki through a walking tour full of stories while further exploring the city by bike". Touristic Package 2: "Walking talking food, Thessaloniki by boat & sea and sun experience".
Improve public transport, cycling and walking guided tours information for a more sustainable discover of the city center	Belgrade Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering	Belgrade, Serbia	This tourist package intended to direct tourists to use alternative modes of transport by using digital application providing information on landmarks in Belgrade, events and public transport key solutions.
Cycling and walking guided tours promotion, with an integration to local products tourism	RCB	Berat, Albania	The first tourist package provides a) a guided walking-tour in the historic city of Berat or b) a bike tour to explore the surroundings areas of the historical center. The second tourist package focused on experience tourism, artisan local products, food and wine tasting.
Public transport and bike integrated solutions for promoting more sustainable touristic travel choices.	CEI-ES	Grado and Aquileia. Italy	The tourist package encouraged the tourists to use green mobility solutions to discover Grado and Aquileia.
Bicycle tourism promotion for a more sustainable visit of the	RRA-LUR and PIL	Ljubljana urban region, Slovenia	The bicycle tour system The Sustainable Circle around Ljubljana Marshes brings an unknown yet

peri-urban areas and integration with the rail solutions.			extraordinary green space on the doorstep of the capital closer to tourists in a sustainable manner, by combining sightseeing with cycling and train rides.
Digitalization of the different sustainable mobility solutions and key touristic attractions.	Tivat Municipality	Tivat, Montenegro	The pilot improved the attractiveness of the key regional attractions as well as their connectivity inside the wider Tivat area thanks to a digitalization of all these information.
Promotion of the public bicycles/motor sharing services for the visit of the city center and walking tours promotion.	Zadar Municipality	Zadar, Croatia	This pilot focus on push tourists to use public bicycles and e-scooters to get to the old part of the city, and then visit the most important points (which are shown to them in the application) on foot.
Promotion of touristic walking and cycling routes for a more sustainable tourism	PED Epirus	Igoumenitsa and Preveza, Greece	A walking and a cycling route were proposed to the visitor using dedicated organized tour through the most prominent sites and points of interested urban areas.

Horizontally for all cases and based on a joint needs analysis, SUSTOURISMO app was developed. SUSTOURISMO app from the one side, is a single point through which the end users (tourists) are provided with necessary information regarding the points of interest in SUSTOURISMO areas and the way to visit them with active and public transportation and from the other side, there is a more intense awareness raising effort towards sustainability that is supported by the SUSTOURISMO app. The app promotes the use of sustainable touristic packages (as seen in table above - joint provision of services that support sustainability, i.e. promotion of active transport) and offers rewards and benefits for responsible choices (i.e. walking more – winning more / steps calculator, and contribution with ideas on building sustainable tourism services and intervening when problems are faced).

Thanks to the SUSTOURISMO project, as evidenced in the table above, it was possible to test and assess different measures and strategies aimed to change the travel behaviours of tourists visiting the key monuments often located in the most congested city centre areas. The main measures developed in the SUSTOURISMO project find different strategies for integrating "traditional" tourism actions with "traditional" transport actions. The integrations of these two different policies dimensions allowed to test more effective and wide sustainable measures. More details on their key effects at local/regional level were presented in the dedicate WP2 related deliverables.

Athletic tourism: a growing touristic sector

Sport tourism is one of the fastest growing segments in EU tourism industry and that was a point highlighted also through the process of co-creation, with the stakeholders, of the SUSTOURISMO touristic packages. Given this identified interest from SUSTOURISMO areas, an additional activity was included in the final list of SUSTOURISMO structure, building recommendations for sport tourism development in ADRION area. Information collected from SUSTOURISMO partners and stakeholders was analyzed and proposals were extracted.

Sport tourism service providers should establish strategic co-operations with local authorities and stakeholders (public – private cooperation schemes) for enhancing the identity of the product and the greater mobilization of necessary resources. Co-planning is also necessary for inclusive sport tourism; sport tourists of all different ages and needs should get involved in decision making and products' design. Furthermore, identifying suitable elements of sport tourism services will generate new opportunities for destination marketing, a marketing that should see destination and needs overall. Stakeholders should invest in developing environmental responsibility attitudes in order to promote destinations as eco-friendly areas keeping sustainability on the top. It is also important that the sport tourism services have tangible objectives which can be measured and assessed at a time and that the estimated impacts are closely aligned with the destinations' identity and objectives. As regards promotion, sport promoters need to pay attention to the use of social media and create suitable messages in the overall marketing strategy and should adopt international marketing strategies to attract inbound tourists. Another crucial aspect is skills development and capacity building for involved actors while last but not least, financial support and sponsorship opportunities for sport providers are necessary for the implementation of sport tourism initiatives.

The SUSTOURISMO implications: the importance of communication and of a sustainable tourism promotional strategy

The promotion of a more sustainable tourism is also a matter of communication. Without an effective communication and engagement strategy, it is very difficult to increase the quota of tourists adopting more sustainable behaviors. For this reason, it is very important to dedicate economic and staff resources to developing effective and wide communication campaigns. The key realistic marketing actions that would benefit of the success of the sustainable tourism (**required for Action Plan, element No.1, ADRION programme manual**):

- Marketing and sales channels:
  - Social Media;
  - Email-marketing software;
  - Connect with relevant OTA (Online Travel Agencies);
  - Access to travel media.
- Pinpoint and encourage well-defined customers/users;
- Encourage tourists thinking about being more sustainable;
- Create a clear pricing and rewarding structure based on each destination's/partner's needs;
- Create a link for the rewards among the SUSTOURISMO cases – mutually promoting the ADRION area;

- Create synergies and collaborations with existing marketing activities within destinations that share the objectives of the SUSTOURISMO project.

The following steps and actions should be added to the list:

- Communicate with a destination's main information source and position the sustainable tourism as a main tourism, rather than an alternative.
- When communicating with travel writers, influencers, and the like, have the destination/DMO promote the sustainable tourism as a way to show that it is taking the idea of sustainable tourism seriously.
- Present the sustainable tourist products at tourism fairs and in presentations by beginning with the fundamental concept, which should be taken as tagline. Sustainability is no longer a niche luxury for a few concerned travelers, but a necessity that every destination must account for.
- Social media campaigns that not only promote the sustainable tourist products, but make it the clear way destinations have taken a strong action in making sustainable, responsible travel a priority with their strategy today and into the future.

The key promotional channels to be developed are:

- **Application/website upgrade**. Most visitors are looking online for information that will help them make smarter booking decisions. In fact, according to the e-Commerce Foundation, 88% of visitors will research product information before they make a purchase online or in the store. This buying behavior trend emphasizes the importance of a website for today's business and well designed and user-friendly application. The importance of a website and application for marketing extends to every aspect of your digital marketing strategy. As the backbone of your online presence, every type of communication, piece of content, or advertisement online will drive the consumer back to the website/application. As such, it's important that the website/application gives visitors a clear idea of what your product is about and what types of services you offer. Normally DMOs web sites have lots of traffic so it would be essential to establish communication about SUSTOURISMO app on their web site so that tourists start using the app already in the process of researching for their next holiday/business trip, etc. In the future it would be important to establish SUSTOURISMO web site which would reflect the content on the App.

- **Social Media**. Social media presents one of the most important communication channels, through which a destination and product builds its visibility and credibility. They are cost-effective tools for global but also targeted marketing, communication and consumer engagement. When using social media, you must be careful not to be too intrusive and need to encourage word-of-mouth communication among key users. The SUSTOURISMO app should establish social media accounts. DMO's social media are strong therefore it would be essential that DMO's social media accounts will be used to drive traffic from their account to SUSTOURISMO app's accounts.

- **Management**. The destination has to encourage visitors to share their experiences on social media. Particular attention should be paid to regularly updating content and engaging in conversations, while also consistently delivering messages across different platforms. The tone and style of communication must be tailored to a specific medium. For social media, it needs a detailed communication plan or a strategy that will support the umbrella communication strategy. In addition to self-produced posts and visitors' posts, posts from influential individuals are also important, but these usually need to be paid. Influential individuals can be invited to a destination

for a study tour. The effectiveness of communication through social media will be measured by the involvement of audiences in online debates, the number of likes, the number of followers, the reach of posts, the number of shares, and the redirects to the destination website.

- **Direct marketing**. Newsletters are an important ongoing communication channel between a product on one side, and its existing and potential visitors on the other. The first task is to get subscribers to its newsletters. Subscriber segmentation enables sending personalized messages. For distribution, we recommend using specialized tools such as Mail Chimp, Mailerlite etc. For the newsletters, quality content must be provided, the appropriateness of which can be verified by A/B tests also known as split tests. In addition to increasing visibility, the purpose of newsletters is also to communicate about offers, campaigns and upcoming events. The performance of individual campaigns is measured by the number of clicks on the news and conversion, as well as by the number of unsubscribes. DMOs have large data bases throughout which they communicate with their public. It would be essential to use this database to drive customers to SUSTOURISMO app where its own database must be established and collected.

- **Promotional materials**. Promotional materials like leaflets and posters must be created and left in the most important destination POIs, info centers etc. This is also material needed for B2B and B2C events where SUSTOURISMO app is presented.

- **Advertising**. Compared to other marketing tools, advertising is considered to be less effective and serves primarily to increase the visibility of the product.

- **Sales promotion**. Sales promotion activities are primarily focused on cooperation with specialized travel agencies and tour operators, as well as on addressing potential visitors directly, for example at trade fairs and B2B events. For successful sales promotion, specialized travel agencies and tour operators must be carefully selected and attracted to long-term cooperation. This can be achieved by organizing a study tour, on which the agency's representatives try the offer. In this way, representatives can test the application, meet the local service providers and check the suitability of the offer. Most of the DMOs organize study tours frequently.

- **Brand merging**. Destinations and products can upgrade their image by merging their brands for instance merging I Feel Slovenia sustainable brand Slovenia Green with SUSTOURISMO App.

- **Media relations and PR activities**. Just as sales promotion activities are related to building relationships with travel agencies, PR activities are related to addressing social media needs as well as communicating with journalists and the media, especially the specialized and respected publications.

In synthesis, the following key communication activities are necessary:

- Organize study tours for journalists from domestic and foreign specialized media, independently or in cooperation with selected service providers.
  - The result will be a credible and affordable presentation in the selected media, which will help to increase visibility.
- Design a media hub on an online portal that provides information and multimedia content for journalists.
  - Organization of press conferences at important events.
- Prepare press releases that make the storyline for the SUSTOURISMO app very clear so that journalists don't need to decode anything to understand the value:

- ○ This is perhaps the main way most projects make errors … by thinking what they have is clear, easy to understand, and important to everyone.
- Present a clear message at Tourism Events:
  - ○ Sustainable tourism is more than a trend. It is the fundamental way that travelers should approach the industry and how they should/will see a destination from this moment in the industry's history and into the future.
- Organize social media posts to provide information for the end user, the service providers, but also entice stories that want to appear as if they are also covering "correct and sustainable tourism behavior."
- Impress on DMOs and their PR/Marketing departments that it is in their best interest to take this easy step to show they are making sustainability a priority.

The SUSTOURISMO operative Action Plan

The SUSTOURISMO project developed several and different measures to promote a more sustainable tourism at local and regional level. Starting from all these experiences, an operative Action Plan is summarized in the following table, evidencing how all the different measures composing our SUSTOURISMO Action Plan tackles the specific key challenges and priorities defined at EU and transnational level (**required for Action Plan, element No.3, ADRION programme manual**).

Key EU priorities in the touristic sector	SUSTOURISMO key measures
Enabling policy framework and governance	- SUSTOURISMO Cooperation Platform (among internal project's partners and with satellite key partners). This platform defined a reliable governance scheme during the project implementation. - Local round tables focussing on pilot actions definition, implementation and monitoring using consolidated methodologies. - Letters of support signed by the key relevant stakeholders to have a long-term commitments on the key principles for sustainable touristic perspective.
Green transition	- Promotion of integrated measures among tourism sector and public transport sector. - Promotion of active tourism (walking and bicycle). - Sustainable tourist packages digitalization in order to reduce CO_2 emissions related to the management and monitoring of the touristic measures. - Promotional campaigns (traditional and social) and reward schemes for tourists' behavioural change promotion.

Digital transition	- Common App at transnational level able to promote sustainable touristic solutions in an integrated way. - Common data collection schemes and methodologies allowing to monitor the key numbers of involved tourists and their touristic choices (allowing comparisons at transnational level). - Gaming methodologies aimed to incentive more sustainable travel behaviours (footsteps counter, etc.).
Resilience and inclusion	- Key stakeholders cooperation schemes allowing a long terms key stakeholder involvement. - Strategies and tools for the decongestion of the tourism flows valorising the less know monuments and attractions. - Solutions able to reduce the conflicts among tourists and residents (mainly in the most congested and touristic ADRION cities).
Skills and support for transition	- Training of the public and private actors involved in the management and promotion of the innovative and sustainable touristic packages. - Dedicated technical webinars with technical speakers' involvement and questions and answers sessions.

Based on all the SUSTOURISMO studies and activities, it was possible to identify also additional transnational measures to be adopted in order to better promote and develop a sustainable tourism model in the ADRION area (**required for Action Plan, element No.3, ADRION programme manual**).

Recommended transnational sustainable and resilient touristic actions	Brief Description
Common sustainable tourism solutions promotional tools and Apps in different ADRION countries	As evidenced with the innovative cross boarders App developed in SUSTOURISMO, merge in a single App different sustainable touristic package can create an added value for all. Tourists can find more easily the sustainable touristic information and offers when arriving in a destination as they tested the same approaches during others similar travels. Common App can also contribute to blocking the proliferation of App and help tourists in find in a more efficient way all the important information for organizing in a better way its sustainable stay in the final destination.

UNESCO cities common sustainability policies	UNESCO is committed to enhancing the sustainability of cities through policy advice, technical assistance and capacity building. Particularly important are the "**UNESCO Cities Platform**", a platform reflects the transversal approach of UNESCO's work on and for cities towards the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals and the different tools related to the "**UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme**"[2]. The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme represents a new approach based on dialogue and stakeholder cooperation where planning for tourism and heritage management is integrated at a destination level, the natural and cultural assets are valued and protected, and appropriate tourism developed.
Cross boarders' platform for the exchange of good practices	There are several good practices developed in Europe and ADRION area in terms of promotion of sustainable tourism. So it is strongly recommended to create a common repository where all these good practices can be classified and valorised.
Thematic transnational tourism offers	Create joint cross boarders thematic touristic packages (cross boarders trekking and cycle routes, byzantine touristic packages in the Adriatic sea, etc).
Transnational sustainable tourism events and fairs	Pay particular attention on promoting the sustainable tourist packages and measures during the most important international and European fairs and events related to the tourism (TTG Travel Experience in Italy, FITUR in Spain, ITB Berlin, Adriatic Sea Forum, Italian Cruise Days, Fiera Alto Adriatico, etc.).
Coordination among the national tourist boards in order to promote common sustainable tourism measures	Valorising the collaboration among the national tourist boards key web pages (VisitGreece[3], Croatia Full of Life[4], Italia.it[5], Albania Home[6], Visit Montenegro[7], etc.) and initiatives.

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[2] https://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/#ttools
[3] https://www.visitgreece.gr/
[4] https://croatia.hr/en-gb
[5] https://www.italia.it/it
[6] https://albania.al
[7] https://www.visit-montenegro.com/

EUROVELO Cycle Tourism	ADRION Region is crossed by different EUROVELO cycle paths and in particular by the **EUROVELO 8** (Cadiz-Athens). This EUROVELO cross all the ADRION countries and 23 different UNESCO sites. It is strongly recommended to invest in promoting common cycle tourism promotional actions valorising the added value of the EUROVELO 8 infrastructure.

All these measures represent the key strategic proposal of the SUSTOURISMO project for a more sustainable tourism at local and ADRION levels.

Recommendations for key transnational, regional and local stakeholders

The SUSTOURISMO project foreseen many local events where it was possible to collect many indications and policy suggestion from the key local stakeholders working on tourism and mobility. Thanks to the three different local round tables conducted in all the SUSTOURISMO pilot areas, it was possible to extensively debated on the recommendations and suggestions related to the promotion of sustainable tourism and mobility in the ADRION area. In general, the recommendations at transnational, regional and local levels concern the initiatives to be undertaken regarding the various ways of promoting and implementing a more sustainable tourism and how to remove existing obstacles. Recommendations are coming as a result of the sequence of actions undertaken within SUSTOURISMO project and are all linked to the main goal of the project, namely the promotion of a more sustainable tourism in ADRION area (**required for Action Plan, element No.2, ADRION programme manual**).

In general, all the key public and private stakeholders involved in the various local SUSTOURISMO meetings confirmed the importance of sustainable tourism both from the point of view of environmental conservation and from an economic point of view. In this regard it is important that tourism should be structured around Sustainability and Circular Economy principles. The natural environment and local communities must be respected, i.e. a respectful use of resources (water, energy), sustainable waste management, food security and sustainable mobility must be implemented.

Many touristic cities and territories at certain times of the year are crowded and congested. Often the tourist is led to use their own cars to the detriment of public transports and other sustainable transport modes (for example public bus or bicycle). This can turn quiet touristic destinations into traffic jammed places and often lead to conflicts between tourists and the resident population. It is therefore important that stakeholders, in developing services or activities for tourists, also take into account the needs of residents by implementing sustainable mobility options if necessary. To

this end, it is essential to develop permanent tables of multilevel governance of the tourism and mobility sectors, also involving the private sector.

The international cooperation is an important issue for the achievement of objectives of sustainable tourism, especially in the context of regional policies. With an efficient international collaboration, the tourist before leaving for their holiday destinations can know the activities foreseen in the place he intends to visit and the local offers in terms of sustainable mobility options. The close collaboration between public stakeholders, such as public transport providers, and private stakeholders, such as travel agencies is an essential factor to get this kind of information and to develop sustainable mobility.

It is important to remember that tourism is an interdisciplinary phenomenon involving a multitude of stakeholders, therefore a broad consultation aimed at analysing the in-depth benefits and adding new members to the consultation policy making strategies is extremely important.

Among the actions discussed and suggested for the key stakeholders, it was agreed that the management and planning of intermodal transport remains one of the main critical issues at local and regional levels.

To improve the efficiency of sustainable services available for tourists, it is important that stakeholders invest in specific surveys/preliminary studies of touristic flows. Often locally there is no accurate knowledge on touristic presences in relation to the reasons for moving/travelling or to the satisfaction of the service received, to the demand for specific services by the different target users. In these cases, the risk is to invest in services for which there is no demand or - on the contrary - not when it would be necessary. There is a strong coordination need between touristic and private mobility supply and demand. The lack of coordination among key stakeholders and inadequate planning affects the service's quality. The local/regional organizations for planning and managing public mobility must be very effective in fulfilling their roles.

The local and regional stakeholders have to consider the integration of sustainable tourism and mobility services as crucial to ensure the region's sustainability. Given the importance of efficient transport services to avoid or at least reduce the use of their own cars by tourists, the stakeholders must provide a better integration of tourism presences and mobility offers. It is very useful also to work on the public transport ticket integration in order to increase the number of locals and tourists using the public transport services. This goal is not an easy task but all stakeholders at local and regional level must work to overcome the various technical and institutional barriers.

In particular, it is recommended that public transport companies pay more attention on the topics of the digitalization of the transport tickets/payments, on the integration of the different public transport solutions and on the definition of touristic packages able to promote/support a better and wider use of public transport solutions. All the regional data show that where the public transport offer is more consistent and attractive, the number of private cars used by tourists is lower. This demonstrates that there is a direct relation between efficient transport services and sustainable tourism promotion.

To meet all the tourists' needs in compliance with "greener" mobility, local and regional stakeholders will increase the development of tourist packages aimed at promoting a more effective link between sustainable tourism and transport, without neglecting to promote sustainable transport also in touristic rural areas. The tourist packages could concern, for example, hotel stays including sustainable mobility services (e.g free or renting bicycles and scooters, tickets for public transport, etc.) or special fares for museums and archaeological sites. Together with tourist packages, stakeholders are recommended to create rewarding systems such

as discounts in shops, restaurants and bars for tourists using sustainable mobility. Past experiences have shown the usefulness of these rewarding systems to promote the use of public transport.

Stakeholders are recommended to promote specific mobile app that provides tourists with information on local interest sites and all local sustainable mobility services. This can be not only useful for tourists, but the information collected regarding the preferences of the selected locations can be used by stakeholders to improve their policies regarding tourist reception and to design efficient sustainable mobility services. In relation to dedicated app development, it is recommended that stakeholders have to be more sensitize in adopting it. It is desirable to create an interdisciplinary support team, under the coordination of the local tourism office, for the implementation and integration into the app of actions and services of other associations related to sustainable mobility and tourism.

In promoting sustainable tourism locally, stakeholders can support the promotion and dissemination of the SUSTOURISMO project results. This activity will require a financial commitment of the stakeholders, but the positive effects for sustainable tourism will be appreciated by both citizens and stakeholders. In this regard, stakeholder websites are identified as the main means of promotion, followed by social media (e.g. Instagram, Facebook). In addition to the promotional opportunities developed by the tourist agency sector and/or by the municipalities, it is recommended to exploit opportunities deriving from various projects/activities at local, national and international level, in particular by linking the specific SUSTOURISMO app with other local or regional tourism initiatives.

Locally all stakeholders should promote the actions developed by the project (including new digitization initiatives) among their partners and colleagues in order to help provide wider visibility of the project activities with the aim of boosting the sustainable tourism. Moreover at local level it is important that all the stakeholders, in order to promote sustainable tourism, actively involve the local community. Its consultation/contribution is very important during the definition of policies and actions to be implemented for the development of sustainable tourism.

Regarding the existing issues, the stakeholders have to focus their efforts to remove the current lack in the direct air connections between ADRION tourist areas. This situation represents a significant obstacle for the development of an integrated transport network in the ADRION region.

In synthesis, and based on the above described integrated approach to sustainable tourism planning, the SUSTOURISMO key WP2 key recommendations, sequence of actions, for a more sustainable tourism at local and regional levels are:

- Tourism is a **highly relevant industry** in the ADRION area, nonetheless it could be further developed, mainly in terms of increasing the sustainability and resilience dimensions.

- From the **demand side**, it is growing the request of sustainability services, mainly related to active/sport tourism. Not always the touristic service offer is in line with this demand.

- Many touristic cities are too crowded and congested. This can generate **conflicts among tourists and residents**. It is important to develop touristic services able to consider also the residents' needs.

- Transport and tourism sectors are often two separated sectors. It is fundamental to develop **tourism and mobility integrated strategies** and permanent **multi-level governance tables**, involving also the **private sector – SUSTOURMOB cycle/strategy (output) of SUSTOURISMO project is towards this direction**.

- **Efficient communication strategies** are the key element for promoting sustainable touristic packages and sustainable travel solutions to tourists.

- It is important to inform the tourists about the different sustainable transport and touristic solutions (when possible) when the tourist plans the travel, so often **before the departure (before arriving to the destination)**.

- "**Tourists have no time**". So the easiness and speediness of the provided solutions are the key for effective actions.

- The **cooperation among private and public sectors** are the key elements for effective solutions. All involved stakeholders and local communities as well as tourists needs' should be taken into account while planning – sustainability and resilience should be in the heard of planning.

In synthesis, the SUSTOURISMO key WP2 key recommendations for a more sustainable tourism at cross-borders ADRION level are:

- **Supporting the green transition of tourism companies and SMEs**, in terms of economic and institutional support.

- **Supporting research and innovation projects and pilots** on circular and sustainable tourism.

- **Public data sharing** (open data) for encouraging innovative tourism services.

- **Accessibility** promotion of the sustainable tourism services (and of all the tourism services).

- **Integrated support platform** for tourism stakeholders training and education – capacity building and skills development is needed.

- **Diversification** of the macro-region's tourism products and services.

- Supporting the improvement of the **quality and innovation** of tourism offer.

- Common **statistics and indicators** for tourism sector.

- Wide experience exchange for transferring good / effective practices.

Cross – search of funding opportunities should be taken into account at local/regional level; public budget available from Operational Plans or other sources, private initiatives, sources from EU projects can be mobilized.