Interreg Mediterranean

EUROPEAN UNION

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE MED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COMMUNITY

September 2019

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TO ADDRESS MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

Its unique climate, history, culture and natural beauty make the Mediterranean the world's leading tourism destination. Driven by Southern and Mediterranean Europe, international tourist arrivals have grown from 58 million in 1970 to nearly 320 million in 2015, with a forecast of 500 million by 2030. Half of these arrivals are in coastal areas.

Coastal and maritime tourism is undeniably crucial to most Mediterranean economies in terms of the revenue and jobs generated and exports and capital investments created. However, conventional and unplanned tourism is a major challenge for natural and cultural assets as it both causes and suffers from linear and coastal urbanization (littoralization), the overconsumption of natural resources, water pollution, waste generation, marine littering, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and damage to cultural heritage such as landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, cultural practices, knowledge and ways of life, etc. Conventional, unplanned tourism is also detrimental to local communities due to factors including the unbalanced distribution of benefits, its limited ability to create decent jobs (especially for young people and women), the resulting loss of cultural identity, degradation of local infrastructure and the increased cost of food and housing at popular destinations.

In a business-as-usual scenario, tourism will account for over 10% of global CO2 emissions in the next twenty years. A shift to sustainable tourism is not only the path required to preserve our region's natural and cultural assets and local communities' quality of life, it is also an effective strategy for mitigating and adapting to looming climate change challenges: rising sea levels, more acidic oceans, changing marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity, flooding, erosion, saltwater intrusion, long periods of drought, etc.

There is no time left. It is urgent that we move towards ***"tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"*** (UNWTO) now. This presupposes new tourism policies, management practices, and significant financial resources.

European Union and a growing number of other Mediterranean countries' efforts to promote competitive, sustainable, responsible and quality tourism and to develop national sustainable tourism strategies must be recognized despite inherent difficulties relating to this sector's complexity.

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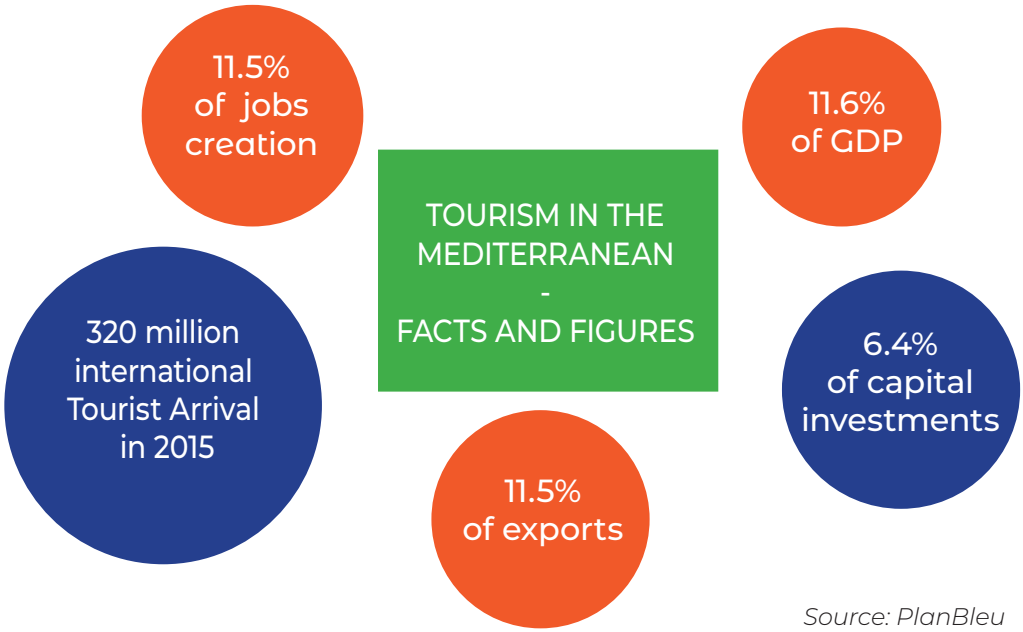

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PRESERVE NATURE AND CULTURE TO IMPROVE LIFE AT OUR DESTINATIONS

The **MED Sustainable Tourism Community** (the Community) is a transnational partnership of 18 sustainable tourism projects funded by the Interreg MED Programme. It aims to move towards sustainable coastal and maritime tourism by capitalising on project results and lessons learned.

The Community's vision is enshrined in the 2017 Athens Declaration. It is currently appealing for solutions to stop degradation of the Mediterranean's natural and cultural assets by mass tourism, and urges decision-makers and key stakeholders to move towards new tourism models capable of meeting tourist expectations and providing economic benefits without destroying coastal and maritime ecosystems and deteriorating local community living standards.

The results and lessons learned from Community projects represent a unique knowledge asset that can help the transition to innovative tourism policies and practices based on sustainability principles. On this basis, the Community has identified the four most urgent action areas that will allow us to move towards sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in the Mediterranean:

1. *Monitor sustainability: where are the knowledge gaps in tourism policy-making? What is the best way to bridge the gaps in tourism data?*
2. *Reduce the environmental, cultural and social impacts of Mediterranean tourism.*
3. *Ensure sustainable and responsible economic growth and prosperity in the Mediterranean through tourism. What is the best way to address the complexity of the tourism sector, including local actors, decision-makers and consumers?*
4. *Establish governance mechanisms that lead the wide variety of stakeholders towards more sustainable, more responsible tourism.*

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ACTION IS THE WAY FORWARD

Based on the experience gained in the field implementing these projects, the Community aims to provide Euro-Mediterranean authorities and other stakeholders with strategic guidance on how to move towards sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in the Mediterranean.

Four **KEY MESSAGES** are therefore presented, explaining:

- The **rationale** behind each message. Namely how shifting to sustainable tourism is instrumental to solving crucial environmental and socio-economic challenges.
- The solution(s) to the **challenge(s)** identified using the results and lessons learned from **Community projects**.
- How to implement the **suggested solution**.
- How the **action(s) required** support **implementation of the global/regional agenda.**

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CURRENT MONITORING SYSTEMS AND TOOLS ARE INADEQUATE FOR PROTECTING THE MEDITERRANEAN FROM IRREVERSIBLE DEGRADATION

Rationale: sustainable tourism models introduce more stringent monitoring systems and tools when assessing the health of marine and coastal ecosystems and therefore ensure better decision-making when it comes to preserving services that are the foundation of most tourism developments.

Challenge(s) addressed: innovative systems and tools that assess the sustainability of tourism activities effectively address the deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems and preserve their economic, social and ecological value.

Suggested solution: allocate EU financial resources to establish a common methodological framework. This will measure sustainability across the entire tourism sector by harmonising existing monitoring systems and introducing destination-specific sustainability indicators.

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Community projects on which the suggested solution is based

CO-EVOLVE project	MITOMED+ project
CASTWATER project	MEDFEST project
DestiMED project	HERIT-DATA project
ShapeTourism project	

Action(s) required

EUROSTAT:

- Commit funds to providing local/regional authorities and the private sector with reliable sources of information for proper data collection.

European Parliament:

- Commit funds to monitoring sustainable tourism under the "Sustainability and Tourism 2021-2027" budget line.

Role in implementing the global/regional agenda:

- ***2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:*** Target 12.B: Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that create jobs and promote local culture and products.
- ***UNWTO - Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainable Tourism*** (SF-MST): includes economic, environmental and social aspects to support the measurement and monitoring of sustainable tourism, thereby supporting evidence-based management.
- ***European Strategy for Coastal and Maritime Tourism -14 actions, 2014:*** Action 8: Promoting Ecotourism, using the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme and Ecolabel Indicators.
- ***Sustainable Tourism for Development paper published by EuropeAid and UNWTO:*** Section 5: Sustainability of the natural and cultural environment: 5.4 Measuring and monitoring tourism impacts.
- ***Directive 2015/720/EU and Directive 2008/56/EC:*** Member States are required to adopt measures to monitor the reduction of plastic bag consumption and marine litter.
- ***BLUEMED Initiative, Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda:*** Goal C1: Linking tourism, tourists and environment - Action C1.7: Develop monitoring and evaluation systems of tourism flows (economic, social and environmental), assessing carrying capacities of destinations, to support an efficient management of tourism flows and impacts leading to an effective governance of tourism growth.

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CONVENTIONAL AND UNPLANNED TOURISM CAUSES IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE TO THE MEDITERRANEAN'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL ASSETS AND IS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Rationale: current tourism policies and practices, which are more focused on boosting competitiveness than sustainability, degrade the environment and limit the sector's ability to promote local and regional development (e.g. to improve infrastructure, create decent jobs, etc).

Challenge(s) addressed: shifting towards sustainable tourism would curb current overexploitation, decrease the pollution of coastal and marine ecosystems and restore more balanced distribution of the benefits generated by tourism developments.

Suggested solution: redistribute tourism flows in space and time by building decision-makers' and key stakeholders' skills in terms of the ICZM Protocol and MSP Principles, in order to leverage the maximum threshold concept to create an alternative model for tourism.

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Community projects on which the suggested solution is based:

ALTER ECO project	DestiMED project
CO-EVOLVE project	MITOMED+ project
BLUEMED project	BLUEISLAND project

Action(s) required:

Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism:

- Organize seminars and training on the application of a maximum threshold, for regional planning authorities.
- Disseminate Community good practices.

Intermediterranean Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions:

- Recognise the value of tourist destination ecosystem services in key strategic documents.
- Establish a tourism task force to help member regions apply a maximum threshold (including extra-EU territories) through knowledge sharing and pilot projects that test/replicate Community results and lessons learned.

European Commission (DG ENERGY & DG CLIMA):

- Recognise sustainable tourism as crucial to achieving EU energy and climate policy objectives.

Role in implementing the global/regional agenda:

- ***2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***: Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism for Small Island developing States and the least developed countries.
- ***Directive 2014/89/EU*** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning.
- ***The Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean:*** Economic activities Art.9d: i) To encourage sustainable coastal tourism that preserves coastal ecosystems, natural resources, cultural heritage and landscapes; ii) To promote specific forms of coastal tourism, including cultural, rural and ecotourism, while respecting the traditions of local populations;
- ***EU Circular Economy Action Plan as part of the Circular Economy Package:*** establishes proposals on water and waste management, recycling a plastics strategy to help the business sector, (including in tourism), and consumers to make the transition to a circular economy resources are used in a more sustainable way.

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- ***2011 White Paper: Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area - Towards a competitive and resource-efficient transport system:*** although tourism is not specifically mentioned, this white paper addresses the need to make travel more sustainable, safe, secure and efficient. It also aims to connect different modes of transport and to increase capacity to carry a growing number of passengers and reduce traffic congestion.
- ***The Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Mediterranean:*** Objective 3.1: Develop and promote practices and solutions to ensure efficient use of natural resources and reduce environmental impacts of tourism, respecting spatial, ecological, and socio-cultural carrying capacities of the destination; Objective 3.3: Raise awareness, capacities and technical skills to support sustainable destinations and green tourism services and promote the development of appropriate marketing and communication tools to ensure a competitive, sustainable Mediterranean Tourism.

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NEGATIVE TOURISM SECTOR EXTERNALITIES ARE ONLY PAID FOR BY LOCAL SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY COMMUNITIES

Rationale: the negative environmental, economic, social and cultural costs caused by conventional and unplanned tourism developments need to be accounted for (internalised) by the developer when drafting planning and budgetary documents.

Challenge(s) addressed: tourism developments, which are not based on sustainability principles are often opposed by local communities, which perceive them as a threat to their quality of life rather than opportunities for growth.

Suggested solution(s): i) Promote tourism services and products to mitigate seasonality and sustain local business initiatives based on the circular economy, local skills and traditions. ii) Engage relevant tourism investors in the sustainable finance debate.

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Community projects on which the suggested solution is based:

CASTWATER project	TOURISMED project
SIROCCO project	MEDFEST project
CO-EVOLVE project	ALTER ECO project

Action(s) required:

Regional and local authorities:

- Engage private local actors to design tourism packages, and related market plans, based on alternative and off-season offers;
- Establish, or strengthen existing, award/label schemes recognizing good tourism practices, especially concerning the creation of decent local jobs.

Interreg MED Programme:

- Establish tourist flow management as a thematic priority in future calls for strategic projects, for the sake of host communities.

Multilateral donors/national banks:

- Voluntarily introduce sustainability funds, principles and targets for tourism investment strategies.

Role in implementing the global/regional agenda:

- ***2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:*** Target 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
- ***The Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) for the Mediterranean, 2016:*** Objective 3.2: Promote regulatory, legislative and financial measures to mainstream SCP in the tourism consumption and production area, to reduce tourism seasonality creating green and decent jobs and to promote local community engagement and empowerment.
- ***Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UN CSD), The Future We Want Declaration, 2012:*** 130. We emphasize that well-designed and managed tourism (….) has close links to other sectors and can create decent jobs and generate trade opportunities (…).
  131. We encourage the promotion of investment in sustainable tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism, which may include creating small and medium sized enterprises and facilitating access to finance, including through microcredit initiatives for the poor, indigenous peoples and local communities (…).
- ***A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy:*** (…) setting up a private investment fund to offset the environmental externalities of plastic production.
- ***European Tourism Manifesto for Growth and Jobs:*** Point N° 35: maintain long-term employment in the tourism sector with fair working conditions for all, especially in key sub-sectors where recruitment and retention remain a challenge (e.g. social protection, remuneration, equal opportunities, equal treatment etc).

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CURRENTLY FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE OF TOURISM IS ALL TOO OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY POOR REPRESENTATION, LEGITIMACY AND LEADERSHIP. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS THREATS TO PRESERVING THE MEDITERRANEAN'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL ASSETS.

Rationale: inclusive, structured and coordinated governance that empowers citizens and decision-makers alike is key to destination resilience and well-planned tourism developments that consider social needs and sector interests.

Challenge(s) addressed: reconcile the numerous policy domains affected by tourism to maximise the sector's potential to promote local and regional development, and effectively address tourists' and resident's main concerns.

Suggested solution: endow governance systems with enough powers to make substantial decisions, based on scientific evidence and corroborated by field experience. If this is not possible, the precautionary principle should prevail.

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Community projects on which the suggested solution is based:

EmbleMatic project	DestiMED project
MITOMED+ project	CO-EVOLVE project
COASTING project	

Action(s) required:

Regional and local authorities:

- Selected regions or local authorities should launch a process engaging different layers of government and different regional and/or local actors to achieve a common vision on developing sustainable tourism in specific areas using Community results and lessons learned (among other evidence).

PANORAMED:

- Organise institutional capacity building activities for selected regions and/or local communities to help them establish effective tourism governance structures and processes.

Role in implementing the global/regional agenda:

- ***Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Title XXII (Article 195):*** this specific section on tourism states that EU action should a) Encourage the creation of a favourable environment for the development of this sector. b) Promote cooperation between the Member States, particularly through the exchange of good practice.
- ***Union for the Mediterranean, Ministerial Conference on Blue Economy, Brussels 2015:*** As regards maritime governance, Ministers acknowledge the need to strengthen coordination and cooperation in the area of maritime affairs in order to improve maritime governance and for exploring the added value and feasibility of maritime appropriate strategies, including at sub-regional level (notably building on existing multilateral processes such as the 5+5 dialogue, Agadir Treaty and EU Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Region).
- ***Union for the Mediterranean Stakeholder Conference: Towards a Roadmap for Blue Investment and Jobs in the Mediterranean, Athens, 2015:*** Regional cooperation is a prerequisite for sustainable tourism in the Med and should be pursued through tools such as joint projects, also using macro-regional strategies, maritime connectivity, etc.
- ***WestMed Initiative, FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION 2017:*** Goal 3: promoting the sustainable management of maritime economic activities and preserving ecosystems and biodiversity. (...) effective and efficient governance systems require constant cooperation and synergies among existing structures and initiatives. This is essential in order to make informed and sound choices and identify trade-offs between environmental, economic, social, political and administrative aspects.
- ***BLUEMED Initiative, SRIA:*** The BLUEMED Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) identifies the governance of maritime space and marine resources in the Mediterranean as a key challenge.

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ANNEX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE POLICY FACTSHEETS

As a result of collective brainstorming facilitated by external experts, the Community has produced four Policy Factsheets (PFs) on the following themes: 1) Ensuring effective Monitoring of Tourism Sustainability in the Mediterranean Region; 2) Promoting Alternative Tourism Models to Reduce Pressures in the Mediterranean Region; 3) Tourism as a Strategic Driver for Inclusive, Responsible and Sustainable Growth in the Mediterranean Region; 4) Governance as a Tool for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism in the Mediterranean Region. The following is a list of the policy recommendations proposed in the PFs based on Community experience with specific actions to achieve them.

1. Design and implement a common methodological framework to measure tourism sustainability

1.1. Advocate at EU level for a Common Methodological Framework to measure and monitor tourism sustainability in the Mediterranean aligned with existing tools within the European policy framework.

1.2. Ensure reliable information for data collection and gathering managed by local authorities with private sector participation.

1.3. Incorporate tailor-made indicators for destination types that capitalise on existing indicator systems at EU and international level.

2. Establish sustained financial investment and a joint budget for capacity building

2.1. Allocate additional financial resources to measuring and monitoring sustainability adapted to regional and national government commitments to include measuring and monitoring activities in their action plans, with specific indicators and in the pursuit of concrete results.

2.2. Shift public investments from promoting and marketing tourism to data monitoring capacity building.

2.3. Design specific training on measuring tourism and its sustainability for SMEs, destination management organizations and statistics producers.

3. Secure data availability and transparency

3.1. Establish collaboration mechanisms between data producers and users to increase dissemination and build a multi-level critical mass of information on a wide range of tourism issues.

3.2. Build an online Mediterranean platform to gather successful tourism experiences and support decision-making processes.

3.3. Review the methods used to build official statistics to provide end-users with user-friendly data.

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4. Understand the factors limiting tourism development

4.1. Set up quantitative/qualitative thresholds above which natural or cultural assets cannot sustain additional visitors and activities without losing value and appeal.

4.2. Define sustainability benchmarks to allow tourist destinations to develop joint solutions to similar challenges.

4.3. Recognise the value of the ecosystem services on which most tourism activities and local livelihoods and well-being depend, to campaign for their sustainable use.

5. Plan and manage tourism sustainably

5.1. Enforce legally binding instruments, such as the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Protocol, Maritime Spatial Planning, the Ecosystem-Based Management principles and the Zoning approach for planning and managing tourism areas.

5.2. Share and disseminate good planning and management tool practices to facilitate transferability and replication.

6. Develop awareness and capacities, change behaviour

6.1. Raise awareness and build private and public actors' capacity to protect natural and cultural heritage through higher education curricula, professional and academic training, knowledge-sharing platforms, etc.

6.2. Communicate residents' and tourists' collective responsibility to preserve destinations' natural and cultural assets.

6.3. Apply economic instruments (e.g. taxes, pricing systems, incentives, etc.) to promote changes in citizen and business behaviour in Mediterranean tourist areas.

7. Redistribute tourism flows in space and time

7.1. Propose innovative off-season products and services.

7.2. Promote hinterland destinations (e.g. through quality standards) and alterntive tourism models (e.g. ecotourism and slow tourism) while offering low-carbon mobility solutions from the coast to inland territories.

8. Increase the socio-economic and environmental benefits for local communities

8.1 Assess local tourism supply/demand to spot strengths and challenges and optimise the chain through solutions that increase productivity and improve resource efficiency to generate higher local profits and reduce pressures.

8.2 Promote stable and qualified jobs to increase destinations' competitiveness through quality products and services, which require well trained, better paid, workers.

9. Improve destinations to make them more inclusive, responsible, attractive and competitive

9.1 Incentivise quality products and services through clear and easily implementable certificates and labels endorsed by residents.

9.2 Ensure destination access for all, including visitors with physical or mental disabilities. This is an opportunity to extend the market and a principle of social responsibility.

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9.3 Evolve from all-inclusive or low-cost "Sun, Sea, Sand" offers to more added value products and services by investing in quality infrastructures and emphasising site-specific environmental and social peculiarities to increase differentiation from other destinations.

10. Build effective collaboration between and a common vision among tourism stakeholders

10.1 Empower key stakeholders in the design, planning and implementation of tourism activities in their territory.
10.2 Build a common Mediterranean identity, value and vision by using unique historic, culinary or cultural heritage to achieve a competitive advantage in the global market.
10.3 Ensure local communities benefit when investing in tourism facilities, services or goods, as they make essential contributions to the tourism industry (e.g. mobility services, food, traditions, crafts, etc).

11. Embrace the complexity of the tourism sector

11.1 Agree upon a set of sustainable tourism principles at local and regional level by means of an inclusive and structured consensus process involving all stakeholders.
11.2 Facilitate knowledge and information sharing between stakeholders while building their big data capacity to promote knowledge-based policy decisions.
11.3 Identify and replicate best practices in managing complex tourism scenarios, including through pilot projects or testing.

12. Balance the three dimensions of sustainability

12.1 Balance the three dimensions of sustainability without jeopardising the sustainability concept and acknowledging different, often conflicting, stakeholder interests in site-specific consultations to determine this balance on a case-by-case basis.
12.2 Endow decision-making processes with legitimacy to promote substantial changes and embed monitoring and evaluation systems coordinated by independent bodies.

13. Ensure participation mechanisms for inclusive decision-making processes

13.1 Ensure all stakeholders, especially residents (who live with the pressures of tourism on a daily basis,) can intervene not only in decision-making, but also in planning and management.
13.2 Establish permanent spaces of dialogue to address conflicts, including innovative decision-making mechanisms (e.g. digital platforms for democratic participation).

14. Promote effective governance through the assertive leadership of empowered agents

14.1 Specify the mandate and role of each level of governance while building their capacity to become change-makers, and ensure tourism policy-making processes are effective, coherent, sustainable and provide a sense of ownership.
14.2 Build trust among, and ensure the commitment of all stakeholders through consensus-based Memoranda of Understanding, collaboration agreements or declarations involving all levels of governance and all sectors relevant to tourism.

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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