RESTART MED! NETWORKING STRATEGY

June 2022

Building competitiveness in tourism

"the ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations"

Ritchie and Crouch, 2003.

INDEX

1. General Frame: sustainable tourism and capitalisation

2. The Restart Med Networking Strategy a a joint commitment of the partnership in defining shared objectives

3. Census of previous experiences of sustainable tourism projects and sustainable tourism international agreement

4. How to harmonise local and common strategy: focusing on a specific target

5. Tools for the networking: common platform and social networks

6. Training as tool of networking

7. Coexistence policies with pandemic and measures to survive the crisis

8. Initiatives to empower the networking and make it sustainable after the end of the project, let's create a legacy. Final remarks

Appendix

1 Project indicators
2 Project targets achieved by country applying the networking strategy

1. GENERAL FRAME
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM & CAPITALISATION

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism is perceived globally as a positive value: the desire to undertake tourism is so strong that the places to tour have no defined boundaries. The impetuous growth of the phenomenon has determined a wide articulation of demand as well as supply.

In such a context, tourism in places where attention is given to the environment and where the well-being of the local populations can be thought of, i.e., where tourism becomes sustainable, is more relevant than ever. Promoting knowledge of the social, cultural and environmental reality of a place; raising awareness among travelers about respect for nature and local populations; and promoting authentic experiences of direct contact with nature and host populations make sustainable tourism the best possible tourism.

To face an increasingly differentiated and demanding tourist request, the accommodation facilities were, therefore, necessarily integrated into the surrounding environment and each offer was designed to be within the reach of the tourists, their interests and their perceptions. Several Mediterranean regions have equipped themselves to propose sustainable tourism as an alternative to mass tourism; it employs a huge number of workers and refers to tourism in developing countries, where an essential part of the planet's environmental heritage is concentrated on and, often, populations are in difficulty. Sustainable tourism is concerned with respecting and safeguarding the traditional culture and rights of local populations, and developing tourism activities with the informed consent of local populations and, possibly, with their active participation in the management of ecotourism businesses.

Sustainable tourism, if on the one hand leads to immerse customers in some of the typical places of ecotourism, on the other hand, it also helps to discover the culture of certain foreign lands, and understand how often the living conditions are for the populations who inhabit the areas, far from the tourist circuits.

With sustainable tourism, traces of collective history and thousands of individual storiesthat populate it can be found in many places

Sustainable tourism has the potential to not only mitigate potentially harmful impacts of visitation to a site but also support the conservation of the resources upon which it depends.

At its best, sustainable tourismbetter aligns the economic activities and needs of rural populations, particularly those living in or around protected areas, with biodiversity conservation objectives. Throughout the world, communities often conflict with protected areas, as they may view protected area managers as enforcers who interfere with activities that providefor their families.Protected areas, on the other hand, often view communities as being extractive and destructive and require constant monitoring and policing. The reality is that communities and their historyof dependence upon the extraction of natural resourcesto survive are often at the center of direct and indirect conservation threats; however "conservation is not an ecological challenge. It is an economic, social, and political challenge." (Brett Jenks, President and CEO of Rare Conservation)

It is for this very reason that some conservation and development organizations around the world focus on solutions that engage and address the needs of local communities, rather than ignore them. Specifically, sustainable tourism offers economic alternatives that are dependent upon the preservation of natural resources, rather than their extraction.

Furthermore, sustainable tourism:

1. helps communities and protected areas to align their interests,
2. initiates a collaborative and productive dialogue,
3. overcomes the incongruity that has traditionally existed between them

In order to achieve these linkages between community-based tourism and conservation, financial incentives to encourage the local community's adoption of sustainable tourism principles and practices are applied (cooperation projects are a very good example of this politic). Additionally,
actions aimed at creating some networks that share the same values and behavior rules among local stakeholders are also taken

Community members may earn a higher percentage of year-end tourism profits in exchange for the time and labor contributed to support conservation activities throughout the year.

CAPITALIZATION

Capitalization. A term that is often heard in the European context including in this concept notions that go far behind this word. But one thing is certain: the trend to capitalize is an absolute priority

There seems to be a common understanding that capitalization is about gathering and building upon the results of programs/projects. Following a thematic approach, the first step is to bring together the results obtained by projects in the same field: the environment, economic development, etc. Then, it is a matter of finding how these results can be used and transferred through projects in other areas, communities and countries. Ultimately, the aim is to see how certain results can be multiplied so that their impact is further increased. This last step is the most ambitious of all and aims at influencing the policy, whether at the national or regional/local level, bringing about a long-term change that projects alone cannot achieve.

Capitalization is considered a priority, especially as a clear vision was lacking by many stakeholders of the added value that such a process could bring.

Capitalization initiatives bring together projects dealing with the same theme, identifying good practices that could be multiplied, issuing thematic publications, etc.

Capitalization can play a key role and become a success factor such as by rendering results visible and ensuring that decision-makers see the interest in keeping the funding instrument in place. This is then a success factor not only for a single program but also for the entire community.

Capitalization should also explore the possibility to establish networks covering the thematic objectives that are more relevant to ENI CBC programs, particularly the ones dealing with entrepreneurship and environmental issues.

So, to begin, the main aims are:

1. to promote networking and cross-contamination among funded projects,

2. to showcase and disseminate project-related good practices with local, regional and national decision-makers and foster replication,

3. to contribute positively to the development/improvement of public policies, and

4. to gather information from projects and spread it in an attractive manner, to support thematic networks.

Among others, the aims can be achieved by creating project thematic communities, organizing clustering events; creating joint thematic platforms that exchange experiences between programs, demanding processes requiring analysis, and clustering and sharing of information and knowledge, with a special focus on a networking strategy that guides the whole process.

2. THE RESTART MED NETWORKING STRATEGY: A JOINT COMMITMENT OF THE WHOLE PARTNERSHIP IN DEFINING SHARED OBJECTIVES

History, people, landscape, nature, gastronomy and of course sea...the ingredients that make the Mediterranean basin a unique tourism destination, so similar and so different in all the countries surrounding the two shores.

Slow tourism, adventure tourism, gastronomic tourism, seaside tourism, cultural tourism and so on: does there exist a topic related to tourism that some consortium didn't already exploit to support the development of sustainable tourism?

Apparently not, and the projects have been, in most cases, successful, but too often not sustainable after the end of the EU funding. The partnership didn't last enough to guarantee a future to some extremely short-term actions.

Moreover, it is perceived a need of an engagement in coordinating the different practices hold by the multiple projects in order to optimize the results as an operative network.

The RESTART MED! project by its nature and the assumptions on which it has been written expresses the primary desire to propose a common strategy for sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean area. The innovative character of bringing together 4 projects that are already committed in the tourism sector, approved within the same call, for a common capitalization instead of proposing a classic capitalization adding a + after the project name already represents a strong networking tool. Moreover, RESTART MED! expresses the intention of wanting to contribute to optimizing all the efforts present in the Mediterranean basin to be able to guarantee the sustainability of the actions already undertaken with the standard projects in the medium term.

The pillars on which the project is based and through which it capitalizes on the best results in terms of sustainable tourism are:

- **training**
- **digital platform/website cataloging best tourism policies**
- **subgrants**

The strategy will relatethese pillars to their usability as networking tools.It is a joint work of the partners and it is the result of the efforts taken in the first six months of the project, by surveying experiences, drafting manuals, discussing in focus groups and enhancing local policies.

Furthermore, the project also aims to involve in the capitalization a significant number of other projects that are engaged in the same sectorbut on different micro-themes, ranging from landscape and gastronomy totechnological innovation, to identify the best productsdeveloped in the last 5–6 years.

TThe RESTART MED! strategy model aims to:

1. Set up a network for the development of a sustainable territorial model of tourism around the existing virtuous experiences.
2. Implement a networking strategy: informing, involving and coordinating a large number of public/private actors within several domains

RESTART MED! also aims to
collect and highlight the existing sustainable (cultural, natural, community) tourism products heritage in the Mediterranean region through a valid marketing channel.

Tourism, and even more so sustainable tourism, as underlined in the premises, is a particularly transversal sector, whose activities are linked to culture, agriculture, industry, cohesion territory, regional planning, transport, sport, and health, as well as multiple territories such as the sea, the mountains, the city, etc.; thus, together public and private, it is made up of administrations, establishments and agencies set up by the public authorities. The role of public authorities is to integrate, develop and protect supply and demand within a territorial strategy. A tourist territory is a "destination," which does not correspond automatically to a politico-administrative territory, but to several or even a part. This reality obliges public authorities to put in place appropriate management systems hoc, and design territorial tourism strategies based on specific aspects, including landscapes, infrastructures, gastronomy, customs and residents. The concept of governance is defined as "the exercise of managing political, economic and administrative authority over a given territory". In the context of tourism, the difficulties of governance are grave, because a given territory is not defined and several political, administrative and economic authorities are required to not only manage part of the tourist territory but also work with private tourism stakeholders, residents and tourists who are involved in the destination.

ENI CBCMED
Cooperating across borders in the Mediterranean

Project funded by the EUROPEAN UNION

REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

RESTART MED!

Due to its intrinsic characteristics, namely the multitude of actors and areas concerned, identify the ins and outs of the governance of the tourism is a particularly difficult exercise that request a big effort of networking.

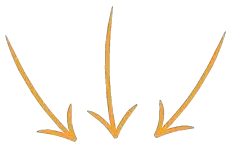**The RESTART MED networking strategy will be based on**

the relationship between, on the one hand, the sustainable management of the natural, cultural and human territory and, on the other, the management of the tourism industry which will be defined in the terms **"tourism governance".**

The primary recipients of the networking strategy are the local SMEs, even if it is **crucial that the active inclusion of political decision makers in a networking strategy ensures sustainability through strengthening interaction, comparison and practices exchange.**

RESTART MED! NETWORKING STRATEGY

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TERRITORY
+
TOURISM GOVERNANCE

TOURISM SMEs IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

CISP
COMITATO INTERNAZIONALE PER LO SVILUPPO DEI POPOLI

Cambra de Comerç de Barcelona

Generalitat de Catalunya
Government of Catalonia
Catalan Tourist Board

AUB
American University of Beirut

WWF

① The very first part of the networking strategy is based on the primary desireto really take a census of previous experiences: looking for a minimum common denominator but maintaining the clarity of capitalizing on the most suitable actions at a local level. Respecting the social, economic, geographical and political reality, always with the idea of a unique Mediterranean with a thousand facets.

The analysis carried out so far will be studied and a summary will be provided. Further clarifications, if necessary, will be requested from the partners of the projects that have already been chosen at the common and local level for capitalization, thereby indicating a macro networking strategy and micro area strategies.

Particular attention will be given to the feedback from the beneficiaries of the projects to effectively build a networking strategy that is based not only on previous results but current needs as well. Even just a year away can have marked significant changes.
It will be important to respect the needs and expectations of individual partner projects in the common networking strategy. Above all, for the strategic orientation of training and subgrants, the global (common) strategy as well as regional (specific) strategy must be taken into account to satisfy the needs of the territory as much as possible and ensure that even territories starting from different levels of expertise can come close to each other. In addition, research of sustainable and slow tourism certifications present in and outside the project areas will be insisted on to provide destinations with the tools required to deal with the certification processes and become part of supranational networks that increase their visibility.

training, subgrant +accompaniment to certification = intrinsic conditionsof RESTART MED! for networking in the Mediterranean

All four projects involved as partners, underlying the partnership and almost all the projects indicated as capitalizable, have developed or are developing a platform for the promotion and, at times, marketing of their products.

②

The secondkey point of the networking strategy is how to exploit these platforms/sites in a profitable way without creating another virtual place

That, due to lack of adequate communal support, risks becoming another *cul de sac* in the so called web cemetery. How to work on a useful product that is not a copy and paste of previous experiences, and that can have adequate visibility? Above all, based on the needs assessment, what do the territories really need—a place of sale, a place for exchanging experiences, a showcase? Which is the best technology? On the one hand, a needs analysis oriented towards the most technological part is required and a presentation of the state of the art of the sites/platforms that are online or on the verge of going online, which also selects the most virtuous ones based on their frequentation and actual usefulness, always linking the analysis to the wishes of the partners in a democratic process of reasoned and reasonable choice.

If it is true that the platform/site is an important tool of the strategy, it is essential to include other points of the RESTART MED! action plan as crucial!Apparently irrelevant to the strategybut of inestimable value for creating cohesion and exchange between SMEs: trainings (and especially their reference manual) and international events

3 The third part of the networking strategy is, of course, related to the pandemic worldwide, which has been a daily nightmare since the past two years. Creating the RESTART MED! project is part of a dramatic historical period for the world economy but also tragic for the tourism economy, therefore the already virtuous exercise of the style of bringing together the best practices developed so far in a single project must also deal with the need for a strategy that can provide for a salvific coexistence with the pandemic, given that the definition post Covid-19 has proved to be unrealistic until today. How adequate networking can help transform a difficult situation into an opportunity, insist on sustainable tourism and proximity as a key to understanding tourism that coexists with the COVID-19 pandemic, do not stop traveling but relearn how to travel.
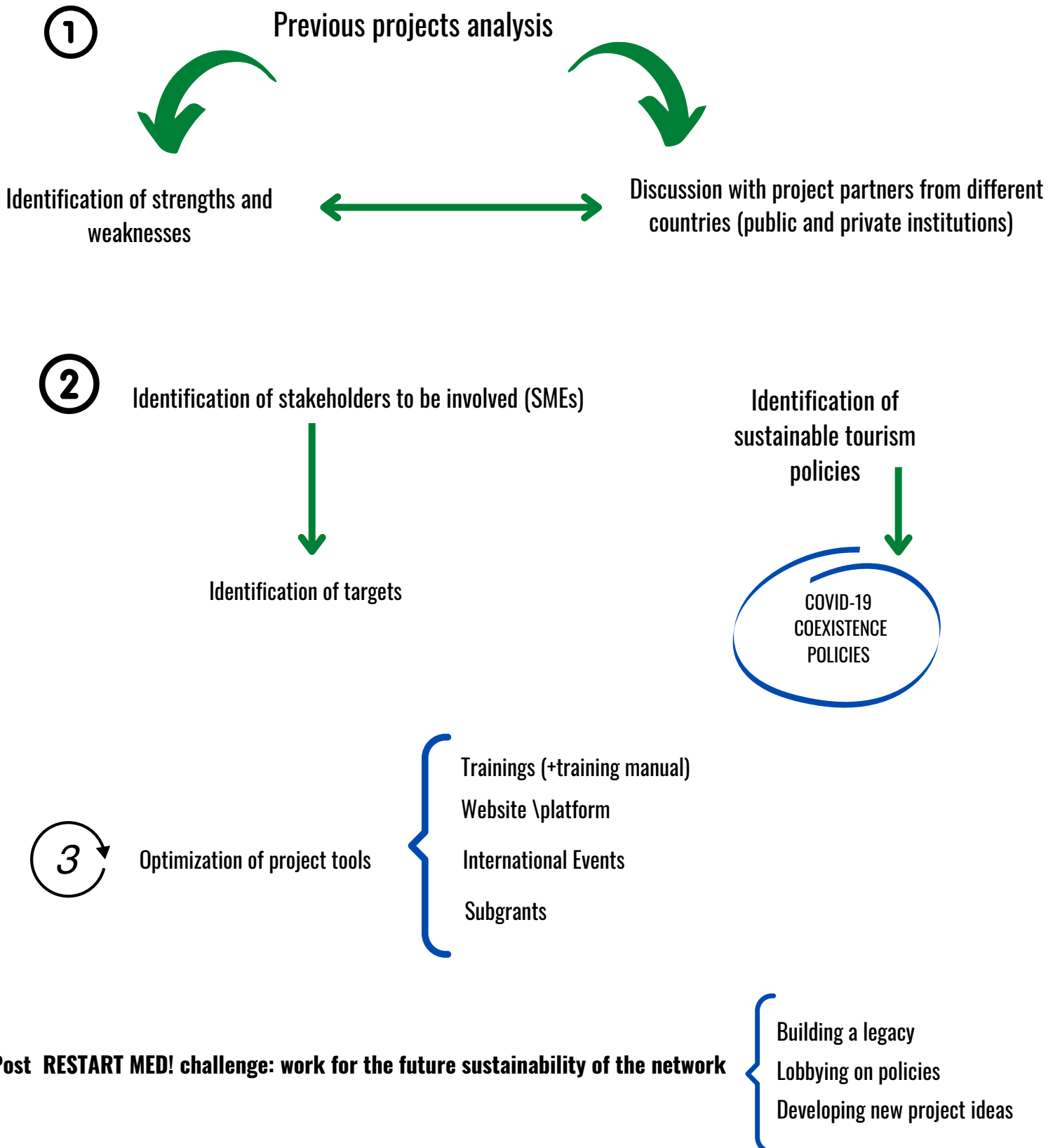
The policies applied by various countries have been investigated and the project is trying to capitalize on them too, outside the project reports, what has worked, what is believed to work

The COVID-19 pandemic must be a school of life for future dramatic social, health and political events that can, at any moment, affect the tourism sector, not in the least like war, whose terrible images remind us of the precariousness of the status quo every day.

This matter is related also to the very last part of the strategy, which contains a series of recommendations relating to actions that can be launched to guarantee sustainability to the strategy itself. Among these actions, encouraging and favoring dialogue between projects and stakeholders, enriching contents of debate, updating data and practices developed, lack of dialogue between projects and actors in the supply chain cannot be overcome in two years of strategy. Above all, strategy needs to be updated continuously. Events such as the pandemic and the recent war have shown us the futility and instability of all possible strategies that must be constantly fed, enriched and updated

ENI CBCMED
Cooperating across borders in the Mediterranean

Project funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION

REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

RESTART MED!

The **RESTART MED! strategy, facilitating the meeting of strategic actors in these two years, can easily structure the passing of the baton and stimulate future dialogue**

Restart Med Strategy steps

① Previous projects analysis

Identification of strengths and weaknesses ⟷ Discussion with project partners from different countries (public and private institutions)

② Identification of stakeholders to be involved (SMEs)

Identification of sustainable tourism policies

Identification of targets

COVID-19 COEXISTENCE POLICIES

③ Optimization of project tools

Trainings (+training manual)

Website \platform

International Events

Subgrants

Post RESTART MED! challenge: work for the future sustainability of the network

Building a legacy

Lobbying on policies

Developing new project ideas

3. CENSUS OF PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECTS AND SWOT ANALISYS

During the first phase of the project, over 20 sustainable tourism projects were analysed among those approved in the framework of various funding programs (MED, ENICBC MED, COSME, INTERREG ITALY TUNISIA, FISHERY FUNDS), with most of them targeting the Mediterranean area, while a small percentage also involved countries of Central-Northern Europe.

Projects that have been analyzed are, in some cases, already completed; however, projects that are in progress as well as those that have just been approved have also been studied. On the one hand, the analysis was aimed at collecting the best practices to be capitalized, but on the other, it also analyzed newly approved projects to understand where to build synergies, avoid overlapping and waste of energy and investments, based on a networking strategy perspective.

A first, analysis was carried out on the online data related to the results of each project, by mapping the impact on each of the partner areas. The results were then compared with the outputs of previous projects in the same geographical area.

During the same period, a survey of 30 questions was carried out with the contribution of the lead partner and the communication managers, to address the strengths and weaknesses of their design with a project representative. Then, implemented with the questions that came up after the exam of the projects carried out with a study of the contents and deliverables present online.

Right after timely interviews with lead and local partners and with beneficiaries and sub grantees of each projects were scheduled in the online content to measure and partially reflect the real effectiveness of the project measures.

Two weeks of interviews made it possible to ascertain the real situation and the starting point for the realization of the capitalization.

In some cases, the partner himself has specified how the results, for different reasons, have deviated from the planning, on the other hand in many cases instead, the initial project was followed by a capitalization project on the same issues witnessing a successful process.

Beyond the best practices identified that have already been the subject of in-depth analysis by RESTART MED!

The analysis made it possible to define how, although each project may have had a positive impact, the dialogue between projects is totally lacking. This prevents the beneficiaries from fully benefiting from the results obtained and, on many occasions, creates an overlap between deliverables. Platforms, quality standards, profiling of sustainable tourism products are the most widespread deliverables and, if within the same program it is easy to avoid twin projects (during the evaluation phase), it emerges that sometimes projects approved in different programs have similar deliverables but the result of not sharing informations among each other could be sometimes that very similar activities proliferate, sometimes creating skepticism and prejudice in the potential beneficiaries towards the projects themselves and distancing them from the activities intended for them.

The overstimulation of the target areas and stakeholders has a boomerang effect, also because often neither public nor private stakeholders are consulted during the drafting of the proposals that are elaborated with a lack of accurate needs assessment on which to rely.

The result is that too often the stakeholders refuse involvement in project actions (training for example), trying in an anodyne way to obtain grants because the only benefit that appears to them from the projects are small sums but to which they can give objective value. The project is passively observed from the outside and not participated.

It is for this reason, among others, that **the RESTART MED! networking will also be preparatory to defining which SMEs may be the most appropriate to be involved in the project activities, networking beyond the signing of agreements, networking applied to sharing management models of the territory that pass from training based on shared common values and on targeted investments**

Focus groups were then held at local level (Italy\Spain\Tunisia\Jordan\Lebanon) to define the impact of the projects and the nature of the capitalisable actions at national level.

The work then proceeded to extrapolation of the list of public and private stakeholders and, above all, of the SMEs that were most active in the projects to be capitalized, so that they were involved in the RESTART MED! This occurred at the area level.

The purpose of the networking strategy should also be to overcome the critical issues that emerged during the research phase, and facilitate dialogue at all levels. Based on given time and available resources, the priority identified is the methodological approach of interlocutors' identification and involvement, creating a concrete opportunity for a real exchange of different stakeholders of different projects related to sustainable tourism. It will, therefore, be a priority to identify which interlocutors could be more easily and effectively involved, thus overcoming the parochialism linked to the recipients of each individual project and finding the most effective path.

It is also interesting to underline that in add it on to the analyzed projects, many NGOs representatives have been interviewed. Among them is USAID, who is investing large sums through initiatives in the development of sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean, financed by private donors.

In Tunisia alone, USAID has a 50-million-euro standing project. A project that involves the SMEs and that, like other projects of the same caliber in the Mediterranean, expresses the desire to use tourism in some areas as an economic lever that can also preserve from political tensions, not only for the possibility of increasing the areas' income, but also because tourism becomes a lever to create a dialogue and a network between companies. The networking strategy in tourism, thus, becomes a dialogue strategy between the Mediterranean countries.

KEY FACTORS

1. INDIVIDUATE THE MOST ACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS
2. CREATE AN OCCASION OF EXCHANGE AMONG THEM
3. TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE INITIATIVES THAT ARE LEAD AT LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL THAT ARE NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO EU FUND BUT THAT INFLUENCE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICIES

List of projects analyzed

· CROSSDEV ENICBC MED
· MEDGAIMS (GAmifIcation for Memorable tourist experienceS (ENI CBC MED)
· MEDUSA Development and promotion of Mediterranean Sustainable Adventure Tourism (ENI CBC MED)
· MEDPEARLS The Mediterranean as an innovative, integral and unique destination for Slow Tourism initiatives (ENI CBC MED)
· EMBLEMATIC (Interreg MED)
· Cluster ACT (Aggregation and Collaboration Tools) (EMFF - EASME),
· CAST - Creative Accelerator in Sustainable Tourism (COSME)
· LABELSCAPE: Integration of Sustainability Labels into Mediterranean Tourism (Interreg MED)
· BLEUTOURMED (Interreg MED)
· MED Sustainable Tourism Community
· WILDSEA Europe (COSME)
· IAM INT.L AUGMENTED MED (Interreg MED)
· DESTIMED / DESTIMED PLUS (Interreg MED) + MEET Network of Sustainable Tourism Destinations
· MEDFEST (Interreg MED)
· TOURISMED (Interreg MED)
· BLUE ROSES (West MED)
· ARTREEF (EASME)

List of experts interviewed:

-Sandra Carvao Unwto
· Luca Santarossa Expert For Meet Network
· Majdi Calboussi Project Manager Governed Tourism of Ben Arous
· Vladimir Rojanski Eu Delegate for Cooperation In Tunisia
· Serge Stagnoli Project Manager Program Tounes Wijhetouna – European Union
· Ibrahim Osta Responsible For Usaid for the Development of the Jordan Trail
· Valeria D'angelo Technical Service Program Italy Tunisia
· Leila Calnan General Manager of Visit Tunisia Project Powered by USAID
--Daniel Asmar American University of Beirut
-Cristina Bajet GENCAT
-Victor Soria Corral Cambra Barcelona
-Dijana Katica President of Klub Klanova Selo Croatia
-Diane Dodd President of IGCATT Spain

4. HOW TO HARMONISE LOCAL AND COMMON STRATEGIES FOCUSING ON THE SMEs SPECIFIC TARGET

The choice of the target in the networking strategy therefore becomes crucial, especially in terms of project credibility and durability even after the conclusion of RESTART MED! In addition to being operational in the two-year project, the strategy should serve as a pilot for stable networking and a fruitful and constant dialogue between interlocutors working in the same sector.

Although the theme of sustainable tourism is common and predominant, the research made on projects in progress and on those already closed, reveals that the players in capitalisation are as heterogeneous as the beneficiaries.

The project is facing with a **heterogeneity** of the following:

- places: countries that have reached a certain level of tourism development and have certain problems; others that do not yet have a clear tourism legislation
- thematic tourism: areas that have invested in cultural tourism, areas in rural or mountain adventure tourism with consequently different expectations and marketing positioning
- beneficiaries: regions where space has been given to community financing, regions where public stakeholders have been the main characters, etc.
- project representatives: NGOs, Chambers of Commerce and Public Bodies, with each one requesting different interlocutors in the framework of a networking strategy
- priority: areas where the strengthening of skills is the most urgent, areas where the focus is on the consolidation of a local brand and areas and where there are gaps in marketing.
- -policies: the priorities are flanked by the policies for their achievement and the contacts in the territory who are able to commit, without even going into the merits of the COVID-19 policies that will be the subject of a specific section. Either or not to adhere to a treaty or to a system of certification of quality destinations are choices made by different institutions in each country.

In deciding how to combine such diversification in a strategy, the intent is to extrapolate, by interviewing the local representatives of the individual projects and tourism policies, the priorities of the regional strategies, analysing them to understand where there could be overlaps and meeting points and points of interest, similarities and common goals.

However, it is clear that there will easily be the possibility of insisting on a common networking with regard to the following:

- promotion and marketing strategies
- presence on the web and interaction with the sustainable tourism community

As previously indicated, although the recipients of the networking strategy in the project are the SMEs, the heart of the dynamics of sustainable tourism, involving other actors in the network through targeted actions, guarantees greater sustainability of the action and results in the field.

On this issue, the interest of the partners is aimed at being able to measure themselves in networking with institutions that are completely different from those they represent, avoiding replicating the networking of Chambers of Commerce, or Municipalities or among members of the same trade associations and insisting instead on cross meetings to understand each other's functioning and dynamics.

For private stakeholders, the indication is for a medium-small scale networking in which to measure themselves with educational experiences in the field compared to what is done in countries with similar socio-economic and legislative profiles.

Instead, since in terms of EU members tourism is mostly managed at a regional level, while in other countries it is still managed at a national level, it will be more complicated to manage networking at the policy level; here the idea is to start dialogue in the regions that have a territorial proximity or a cultural and economic proximity and, only in a second phase, to think of working globally on the policies (just considering case of Italy, it would be impossible to have common policies in the field of tourism). What is possible to do here, is to give directions on some themes, such as the ratification of the **Faro and Landscape Conventions (COE)** or the **Glasgow Declaration**, sharing its added value between countries that have already joined as well as countries still in the process of accession.

RESTART MED! Networking strategy aims, among other objectives, to support tourism SMEs along the value chain in developing a sustainable approach of their businesses, while developing a monitoring framework to collect and analyses data and providing best practices to conduct the twin transition and sustainable transformation.

The strategy is also inspired by the objectives of the **Tourism Transition Pathway, EU Green Deal, EU Data** and will foster the sustainability axis through the Smart Specializations Strategies.
The strategy is perfectly aligned with the current European, national and regional policies towards the development of a sustainable tourism and the importance of tourism sector. For example, not only Spain and Italy, RESTART MED! partners, also France has included the support to a sustainable tourism through the establishment of their National Recovery Plans (digitalisation of SMEs, diversification of the tourism offer, sustainability of the busiest destinations, encourage slow tourism, working on inclusiveness, etc.).

The networking objective is to enhance the sustainability of the tourism sector by reinforcing its positive impact with a holistic view of its impacts on rural areas, jobs for less-privileged persons, inclusive economy, social links, landscapes and the environment. For this RESTART MED! will organise concrete activities to reconcile innovative solutions offered by a range of actors and tourism SMEs.

- The **Faro Convention** emphasizes the important aspects of heritage as they relate to human rights and democracy. It promotes a wider understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society. The Convention encourages us to recognize that objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. They are important because of the meanings and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent.
  The Faro Convention is a "framework convention" that defines issues at stake, general objectives and possible fields of intervention for it's member States to progress.
  The Convention was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 13 October 2005, and it opened for signature to member States in Faro (Portugal) on 27 October the same year. It entered into force on 1 June 2011.
- The **Glasgow Declaration** which was signed on the 15 of November 2021, is an international platform made up of various organisations which aim to coordinate themselves and use novel strategic tools in order to fight for climate justice.

5. TOOLS FOR THE NETWORKING: A COMMON PLATFORM ALONG WITH SOCIAL NETWORKS TO BUILD A COMMUNITY OR INTEGRATING AN EXISTING ONE

Platform, community, social network … the chaos around terminology is also accompanied by an overlapping of virtual spaces with the same purposes and philosophy that generates confusion and bewilderment in the user.

The option shared among partners and technically developed by the Lebanese partner: The American University of Beirut has been identified in a website that should capitalise on other websites in sustainable tourism and create a portal by which visitors can first learn in a comprehensive manner what sustainable tourism is, featuring as examples websites in Gamification, Adventure, Slow, and Heritage.

The partnership considered it appropriate to opt for a one-way showcase site on the web in which to present the results of partner projects and those of projects that can be capitalised in order to share with the community the main contents and topics related to sustainable tourism. This would not be a commercial showcase but a virtual compendium about sustainable tourism based on the valuable training manual already published in the frame of RESTART MED!, a reference for private and public stakeholders and for academics.

In addition to the more academic part, the site will in any case give space to thematic tourism products resulting from previous projects.

The manual will be the *reservoir* of knowledge from which more concrete paths will unfold.

However, some issues were noted, which are listed below:

1) The need to somehow standardise the contents thus giving the showcase site an *avant première* of what can be found in the enhanced sites, thereby avoiding the simple redirection.

2) The site has a one-way nature and therefore does not support the possible creation of a community on sustainable tourism and an exchange and dialogue are the players in the supply chains, it remains difficult to create an ad hoc community not for technical reasons but for sustainability reasons, of course; **therefore, the option of acting on WEB 2 with a LinkedIn community linked to the site in which information, contents and policies can be exchanged between the actors of sustainable tourism should be considered.**

LinkedIn promises to be an easier, more updatable, usable tool, and above all, it does not require a major investment for communication. Further, the scouting of followers interested in the topic is certainly more immediate than in the case of a community created from scratch.

3) This point concerns the self-sustaining system of the site once the project is finished, not only from a hosting point of view but precisely from a content feed point of view. In this regard, there are different options: an emphasis on the commercial nature, which would leave to the end of the project the management of the community of operators who will advertise their products on the site itself, or insisting on the character of a virtual academic pole on sustainable tourism and thus passing the baton at the end of the project to Universities or trade associations. From this, the need to find a preponderant recipient of the whole capitalisation arises once again.

Another alternative is to leave the legacy to one of the project partner wishing to keep working on sustainable tourism projects.

The **newsletter** function has been set up, but it needs to be activated once the sustainability of the site is clear after the end of the project.

Despite all the difficulties and perplexities, the site can and must become an additional networking tool. Even if it is a one-way site without real interaction with the sustainable tourism community, networking becomes possible thanks to the sharing of contents and experiences. Being able to draw from the same source (as in the case of the Training Manual which is also a starting point here) represents a valuable tool for participation. Observing and learning about similar experiences, and drawing inspiration from consolidated models allows companies, operators and universities to have common parameters that make them a network even without direct interaction.

However, there is a strong possibility of supporting platforms that are already functioning, with the aim of promoting the results obtained from the generating projects of RESTART MED! or to work with projects in progress on a common product, for example, the platform under development in Tunisia that is financed within the framework of the tourism promotion project "*TounesWijhetouna*" (Tunisia, our destination), a European Union initiative implemented by GIZ in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism.

The indented contents for this website will include :

Home + 4 sections

- **Sustainable tourism**

- **Sustainable tourism community**

- **Destinations & best practices**

- **About**

The home page will present a general description about sustainable tourism, with a picture that is representative of sustainable tourism and may be a map with locations of the 4 standard projects followed by explanatory videos.

1. The sustainable tourism principles and types section will include 2 sub sections:

- Principles of Sustainable tourism: contents taken from the Training Manual (as mentioned before)
- Types of Sustainable tourism: taken from the Manual and the 4 standard projects

2. The sustainable tourism tools and guidelines will include 3 sub sections:

- General tools

- Tools for the private sector: contents taken from the training manual

- Tools for the public sector: contents taken from the work done in the frame of the RESTART MED! workpackage 5

3. The sustainable tourism community will approach the existing networks, topic with a link to the newly launched Restart Med! Linkedin group.

4. The Destination and best practices section, not only take samples from the manual, but also list and promote other products generated in the frame of other projects.

6. THE TRAINING AS A TOOL OF NETWORKING STRATEGY

One of the pillars of the project is the training activity for SMEs. It is clear that the training and the networking strategy could be strongly interlinked.

The training program is based on modules that capitalise on previous design experiences and is governed by a manual that indicates the criteria to be followed for structuring the courses.

Therefore, **working on common issues with a common method by addressing companies with the same characteristics represents a way to relate them, further making it possible to use in some cases the same modules and the same trainers even during the same period of time. The shared classroom becomes a venue to exchange experience between companies, and mutual support questions on similar problems and facilitates self-learning from the experiences of others. This is also why training becomes fundamental in networking.** **Training can not only multiply the opportunities for meeting, but also bring companies that have benefited from learning the same contents closer in having a common professional behavior toward sustainable tourism.**

The project RESTART MED! will bring support to skills and capacities in sustainable tourism through the implementation of activities organised by the partnership members and the x direct financial support to SMEs via the sub grants scheme; but mostly during the training process, the partners will bring together tourism SMEs of the sustainable tourism sector to work on the development of a sustainability strategy relevant to their specific territories, while sharing best practices and challenges at the transnational level, in order to also provide capacity building, value chain insights and technical assistance to SMEs, by applying European sustainability frameworks and tools (such as Environmental footprint methods & EMAS).

At the core of the project, the partners have established a range of training activities that will foster the application to European sustainability tools. Dedicated sessions will be organised in each country in order to adapt the arguments to each local context, and they will be complemented by cross-borders training to raise the awareness about the advantages of such methods and add value to the network.

These training program will provide a unique opportunity for SMEs to learn more about the best practices, challenges, and concrete methods & tools developed and implemented today elsewhere in Europe. The partners will also deliver specific learning activities (online & offline) to disseminate the success stories and advice on how to transform business into a more sustainable and digital ventures. **Each training session will encompass a time dedicated to exchange of practices between SMEs, building their own network, pushing SMEs from the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea to have fruitful discussions with each other.**

.

One of the pillars of the networking strategy is the training manual published in the frame of the project because:

- it represents the shared references for all the RESTART MED! trainings in each country
- it supplies contents for the platform
- it ensures all the results and best practices achieved by the 4 standard projects
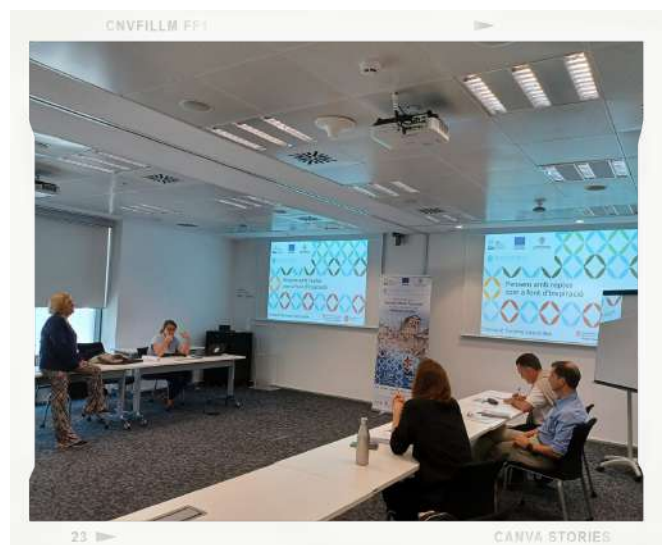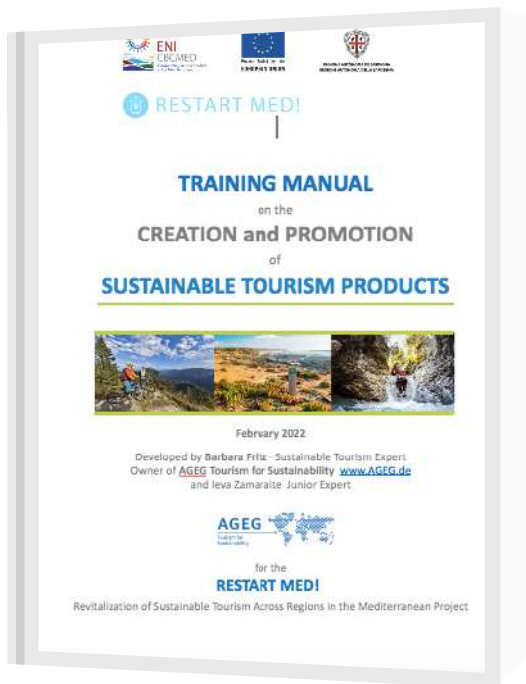
7. COEXISTENCE POLICIES WITH THE PANDEMIC AND MEASURES TO SURVIVE THE CRISIS: DIGITAL AND GREEN TRANSITION

Concerning the most topical issue during this era which is that of overcoming the crisis, not post-pandemic but it would be better to say *co-pandemic* … as tourism did not exactly survive COVID-19 but has rather learned how to live with it; thus the networking strategy should be addressed to SMEs working in sustainable tourism in this context. The focus on national policies would risk not leading us to concrete results, but only to a list of actions and investments that each country has prepared with proper investments and timeline and while the data show how with a correct and prompt reaction of the SMEs, COVID-19 could even turn out to be an opportunity for sustainable tourism.

Tourism suffered the greatest crisis on record in 2020. International arrivals plunged by 73% as the COVID-19 pandemic prompted nearly all governments around the world to introduce a range of measures to restrict travel, including border closures to tourists. To relaunch their activity, the wine tourism sector adapted its activities to the COVID-19 restrictions with smaller groups and outside activities as soon as it was possible. The situation has forced the service providers to target new markets, more domestic and with a greater proximity, while developing online wine activities as a complement to stay packages.

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised new and unexpected challenges related to tourism, highlighting some territorial pathologies generated by non-sustainable forms of tourism and at the same time showing the capacity of tourism resources to face the crisis and discover new functions for a better environmental consciousness. This has revealed potential guidelines for the future of tourism planning that, while analysing the strategies that can be foreseen to face the global and the local impacts of the pandemic, should apply an approach of tourism sustainability and resilience, by withstanding the shock of this pandemic and its disturbances and to use it to catalyse renewal and innovation, rather than to recover tourism back to the same point as it was before the shock.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also reinforced the need for creativity to create new experiences, establish new collaborations and reach new targets. Traditional offerings are showing their limits. Current studies on domestic travelers indicate that tourists are extremely fascinated by the cultural and artistic values reflected in local traditions and landscapes; they are also increasingly interested in well-being proposals (Spas, meditation activities, etc.), even in rural areas.

Basing the strategy on SMEs could be both a key to the question of how to carry a networking strategy at the time of COVID-19 could also be, as well as a way of capitalising on previous experiences, for example by measuring the environmental impact thanks to the tools already developed in the past. But it could, above all be the key to interpreting the entire capitalisation, identifying the general reference target in SMEs ready for a transition towards green and digital business.

Key points

- SMEs are a common element of all projects; the strategy focuses on those willing to engage in digitisation and green transition

- Tourism SMEs can accelerate the economic upturn through a range of transformation measures: develop a strategy to attract more domestic tourists and be less dependent on the international context, diversify experiences and offers, create immersive experiences, develop a long-term customer relationship through social media, etc.

- The sustainable tourism SMEs need to diversify their markets, products and services to anticipate future external shocks and fluctuations while taking into account the expectations of tourists towards the authenticity, proximity and sustainability of the activities.

- In addition, sustainable tourism SMEs need to adapt to the new customers' expectations: slow travel, transformative experiences that focus on helping others as well as helping oneself, authentic, unique and once-in-a-lifetime experiences, opportunities to immerse in the local culture and to 'feel like a local', discovering hidden gems, learning a new skill or experiencing a new way of thinking, ecological tours and extending the tour with additional services.

Today,

- People are more and more aware of their impact on the environment and on climate change not only as citizens in their daily life but also, as tourists.
- Tourists take into account new characteristics to make a purchasing choice: environmental-friendly products and services, the potential impact of their leisure activities, the consciousness of the service providers, the use of pesticides, the risk of pollution, the involvement of the actors in the local context etc.

All the European tourism value chains should adapt to these expectations, or they will lose customers.

The networking strategy in this regard aims to:

1. Enhance the sustainability of tourism sector by reinforcing its positive impact with a holistic view of its impacts on rural areas, jobs for less-privileged persons, inclusive economy, social links, landscapes and the environment.
2. Organise exchanges, promote innovative solutions offered by a range of SMEs.
3. Facilitate dialogue among start-ups that emerged in different countries regarding innovative solutions and support the awareness of SMEs about certification systems in sustainable tourism and environmental performance in order to increase the quality of their services.

European recovery plans including measures to support tourism
Italy
https://www.gop.it/doc_pubblicazioni/939_aeez2tkik5_ita.pdf
Spain
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698878/EPRS_BRI(2022)698878_EN.pdf
France
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698929/EPRS_BRI(2022)698929_EN.pdf

8. INITIATIVES TO EMPOWER THE NETWORKING AND MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE AFTER THE END OF THE PROJECT: LET'S CREATE LEGACY.RESTART MED! NETWORKING EVENTS

Beyond multimedia networking as well as political and economic networking which certainly have a more generalist perspective, the added value of RESTART MED! networking could be provided by the creation of durable tools and initiatives that network specific sustainable tourism actors by providing them with the necessary tools for dialogue.

In particular, actors who are part of categories that are usually less valued, should also be included, so as to also leave a legacy of the project and not limit networking in time and space.

So, in addition to letting companies talk to each other, to learn from themselves and discuss the same topics, the marketing strategy must aim at creating bonds that go beyond the duration of the project, aiming towards goals that can be carried out by SMEs autonomously even outside the project, finding strong themes that bind them and that are also highly communicable.

It is important to start from the priorities identified by the tourism support plans, and among them the priorities for the resilience of SMEs, then the priorities indicated by international organisations in relation to environmental but also social sustainability and the most current issues shared by civil society always in relation to sustainable tourism, after which it is possible to extrapolate which activities\initiatives\tools could represent the strategy legacy.

As for the priorities, PWC, in a study for the Italian Minister of Tourism among others mentioned these two that could fit with this strategy:

1. Implement infrastructure and transport interventions facilitate tourist mobility and therefore accessibility to destinations. Improve the accessibility of tourism, investing in key infrastructural connections related to high potential tourist areas / poles and to date missing, by strengthening the motorway network, high-speed trains, minor tourist airports and the intermodal logistics for cities of art.

   2. Overcoming the limits of sector fragmentation. The tourism sector consists of one high fragmentation of market operators. It is important to overcome the obstacles that are in the way to medium-sized businesses such as as for example, the ability to make investments uch as high impact in marketing and communication.

It is also Important to highlight the need to integrate to the tourism system the numerous extra-hotel microstructures in order to make the offer synergistic and coherent as well in terms of customer experience. It is therefore a priority to foster integration between companies through clubbing products, districts, reticular models, setting up networks of enterprises or similar aggregative forms to share investments and specialist skills.

Regard the first, it could be interesting to combine for instance sustainable tourism with a focus on accessible tourism, since there is no one without the other and at a time when almost everybody is talking exclusively about transition to green and digital, accessible tourism can be an opportunity and an added value for the project areas to be stimulated in the search for building dialogue aimed at networking.

If sustainable tourism is attentive to the consumption of environmental resources, and the pollution of a territory, accessible tourism involves human rights and should be the central element of any sustainable and responsible tourism policy, as well as being an exceptional commercial opportunity and an advantage not only for people with disabilities, but for everyone. "Accessibility is a central element for any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is a human rights imperative, but also an exceptional business opportunity. Above all, we must understand that accessible tourism is not only beneficial to people with disabilities or in general with special needs, but it is an advantage for all of us ".(Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary General)

It would therefore be important to select, identify, promote in some way and above all put in contact in project networking the companies that already work in sustainability and accessibility and give them, as a network, greater visibility, thus rewarding their effort and compared to others for their uniqueness. The deliverable of the strategy on this topic could be as follows :
· **Manifesto for Accessible Sustainable Tourism** (let's measure ourselves with what has been done in the various countries and what has been produced in simple projects and let's create a dialogue to do more in the years to come)

Concerning the second priority related to overcoming the limits of sector fragmentation, in the frame of the networking strategy, the project should involve universities and spin off of universities and facilitate an exchange between the studies activated at local level on the construction of networks between micro-enterprises to then see which winning models can be applied in compatible areas. If it is true that networking is between SMEs, the role of other actors, in this case the universities can be to mediate. The SMEs have a deep individualistic character and networking between SMEs cannot be separated from the involvement of external subjects. In addition to bringing models, the university can signify the involvement of young people and students in the area in support of SMEs. In this regard, the deliverable that should be produced on the sidelines of the strategy could be the following:

Working group among Universities of the Mediterranean aimed to exchange methodological approaches, share instrument strategies and data on the effect of the pandemic on the tourism market and share of any research carried out by the University that can help SMEs in their business.

If the idea of legacy may seem pretentious, we remind you that within the project we have consistent tools to use to facilitate networking that can support the achievement of the challenge.

The role of networking events RESTART MED!

The RESTART MED! project also includes the organisation of two international networking events in its action plan. Halfway through and at the end of the project, two precious opportunities are there to feed the network of SMEs and beyond: two precious opportunities to integrate the discussion on policies, and sustainable tourism and to create the legacy that allows the sustainability of the project.

The two events, in the form of a conference and a workshop, can serve to strengthen relationships and create new ones, and, above all, given the direct and non-virtual relationship between the interlocutors, they can also increase enthusiasm.

If the networking strategy is aimed at SMEs, it will nevertheless be crucial to involve public authorities and encourage the dialogue that we have seen to be lacking. Constructive discussion and confrontation should be provoked. Even if only few issues are addressed they should be addressed well, and should be issues that can also be chosen on the basis of future cooperation strategies. To ensure sustainability of the network, future possibilities must be envisaged, and enthusiasm and strength should be concentrated on topics of mutual interest.

Thus, the two networking events in the meantime can be studied, in order to have a link, that is, in the first, to launch challenges and partnerships, which are to be cultivated and sealed in the second. The study of the programme of the first should somehow involve the hypothetical programme of the second in order to make the most of its potential.

Considering that tourism policies have a diversified management in each country, for Europe the reflection could be oriented at a regional level, at the level of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, including the interlocutors directly involved for each country, to structure working groups to facilitate awareness of the actions undertaken at local level and which ones could become interregional; the work on policies would thus be more effective.

The events could therefore include the aforementioned working table on policies, a conference on a crossover theme linked to sustainable tourism (e.g. women, accessibility or other from the 2030 agenda) and thematic sessions animated by sector experts to bring SMEs together.
We encourage public-private dialogue and the exchange of best practices; COVID-19 has taught us to live and work virtually; however the possibility, especially for small businesses to have real meetings, has a tenfold value, not to mention the opportunity in terms of visibility. and communication for lobbying activities and building future planning.

A strategy to be updated along the ride

*The networking strategy is the soul of the project because it guides all investments, efforts, and common and local actions towards the same goal. The strategy is vital to the project success, but, once drafted, **the strategy cannot be considered exhausted because it will be a document in continuous evolution.** The guidelines can be dictated, but the networking strategy, also being projected towards sustainability after the end of the two years of the project, must take into account the information that will arrive: from territories, from companies and from private and public stakeholders, that have to be part of it. Based on the need assessment, the strategy can also vary according to contingencies: tourism, COVID-19 has taught us and the war insists on the same message, as well- is a sector that is too sensitive to contingent external factors, hence the need for flexible and easily redirected strategies. The important thing for the very nature of a network is the choice of who will be part of it and the maintenance of the balance in exchanges within it. **The intention is to start the path with the awareness that it may undergo deviations during the ride.***

APPENDIX

1.PROJECT INDICATORS

Expected result(s)	Project outputs	WP	Output indicator(s)	Programme target values* *See Annex 2 of the JOP	Project target value Once indicated the outputs indicator(s), quantify the project target values
1.3.2	Training of tourism service providers on Sustainability and Promotion	WP3	1.3.1.1.a Number of enterprises substantially and actively involved in CBC-MED projects	80.0	40.0
	Training of tourism service providers on Sustainability and Promotion	WP3	1.3.2.6.h Number of enterprises and local community entities participating in training and awareness raising events	300.0	50.0
	Product competition (subgrants for visibility initiatives)	WP3	1.3.1.2.c Number of visibility/marketing initiatives to attract tourists in the targeted area	200.0	20.0
	Product competition (subgrants for visibility initiatives)	WP3	1.3.2.3.d Number of private actors substantially and actively involved in new touristic initiatives	100.0	20.0

APPENDIX

1. PROJECT INDICATORS

Network strategy for sustainable tourism community	WP4	1.3.2.5.f Number of cross-border agreements signed by competent bodies to promote low season networks of destinations and / or number of low-season initiatives offered in the participating countries	15.0	1.0
Community-building initiatives for reinforcing/enlarging sustainable tourism stakeholder networks	WP4	1.3.2.6.g Number of enterprises participating in cross-border business events	150.0	30.0
Awareness increase of policy makers/ public authorities on sustainable tourism challenges	WP5	1.3.2.4.e Number of action plans adopted by local authorities based on participatory activities	50.0	10.0
Policy reviews for the mainstreaming of sustainability in tourism	WP5	1.3.2.4.e Number of action plans adopted by local authorities based on participatory activities	50.0	10.0

APPENDIX:

2. TARGETS ACHIEVED BY COUNTRY

SPAIN CATALUNA

Activity	Type of interaction	WP	Output indicator(s)	Number achieved	RESTART MED! target value
Training of tourism service providers on Sustainability and Promotion	Middle-Low	WP3	1.3.1.1.a Enterprises	46	40.0
		WP3	1.3.2.6.h Enterprises/ Local actors	36	50.0
			None	11	0
Product competition (subgrants for visibility initiatives)	Middle-low	WP3	1.3.1.2.c Visibility/marketing initiatives		20.0
		WP3	1.3.2.3.d Private actors		20.0
Network strategy for sustainable tourism community	Middle-high	WP4	1.3.2.5.f Cross-border agreements		3.0
Community-building initiatives for reinforcing/enlarging sustainable tourism stakeholder networks	High	WP4	1.3.2.6.g Enterprises		30.0
Awareness increase of policy makers/ public authorities on sustainable tourism challenges	Middle	WP5	1.3.2.4.e Action plans		10.0
Policy reviews for the mainstreaming of sustainability in tourism	Middle	WP5	1.3.2.4.e Action plans		10.0

* The type of interaction was classified by: (1) **None**: no interaction between people; (2) **low**: some interaction (at least 10%) between the different stakeholders; (3) **Middle**: interaction was at least 50% of the activity and (4) **High**: more than 75% of the event required interaction between the different stakeholders. The type of interaction is not good or bad per se, it is the nature of the activity.