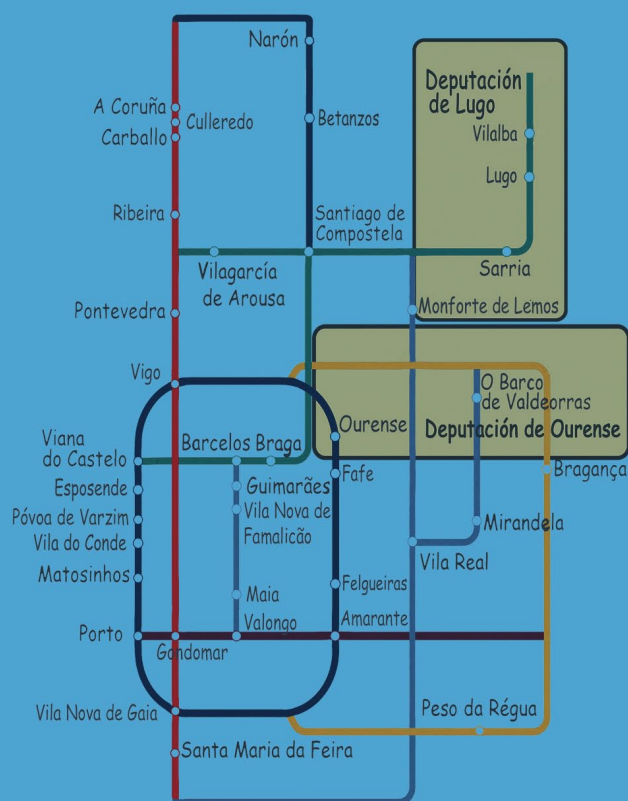




THE STRATEGY OF A NEW TOURISM MODEL:

POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



**EIXO ATLANTICO
COOPERATION GUIDES**

**THE STRATEGY OF A
NEW TOURISM MODEL:
POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM**

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ÍNDICE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	10
RESUMO EXECUTIVO	22
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO	34
RESUMO EXECUTIVO	46
01. INTRODUCTION	59
02. METHODOLOGY	63
03. TERRITORIAL STATE OF ART: THE PROJECT TERRITORIES CHARCATERIZATION	75
04. SWOT ANALYSIS	83
4.1. Strengths	83
4.2. Weaknesses	84
4.3. Opportunities	86
4.4. Threats	87
05. POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL	93
5.1. Polycentric Tourism approach	93
5.2. Polycentric Sustainable Tourism definition	96
5.3. Strategic axes and Intervention aims	97
5.3.1. AXIS I - Strengthening the Tourism Offer	98
5.3.2. AXIS II - Improving Infrastructure and Mobility	99
5.3.3. AXIS III - Digital Transformation	99
5.3.4. AXIS IV - Cooperation and Partnerships	100
5.3.5. AXIS V - Adapting to Trends and Challenges	100
5.3.6. AXIS VI - Managing Global Threats	100
5.4. Measures for permeability	101
5.4.1. Dimensions of permeability	104
5.4.2. Permeability measures	106
5.4.3. Implementation support and evaluation	109
5.4.4. Expected outcomes and conclusion	110

5.5. Proposals of Actions and Inspiring Good Practices	111
5.5.1. Action 1 – Immersive Tourist Experience	112
5.5.2. Action 2 - Heritage Hub: Showcasing and Promoting Cultural and Natural Sites	117
5.5.3. Action 3 – Greenways.....	120
5.5.4. Action 4 – Explore the development of Small-Scale Alternative Accommodation.....	125
5.5.5. Action 5 - Supporting the development of Nighttime Economy Festivals & off-season Events	129
5.5.6. Action 6 – Proximity Tourism	133
5.5.7. Action 7 - Local transport services for everyone, everywhere	137
5.5.8. Action 8 - Living Streets "Development of new Mobility Trails"	141
5.5.9. Action 9 – Smart Visitor Experience: Collaborative Digital Platforms for Equitable and Sustainable Tourism Flow Management	145
5.5.10. Action 10 - Collaborative Social Media Campaigns for Visibility and Redistribution.....	148
5.5.11. Action 11 – Smart Tourism Flow Management: Leveraging Data Analysis for Sustainable Visitor Redistribution.....	152
5.5.12. Action 12 – Polycentric Tourism Clustering: Strengthening Local Collaborations for Visitor Flow Redistribution	155
5.5.13. Action 13 - Strengthening Cross-Border Partnerships for Polycentric Tourism Development	158
5.5.14. Action 14 – Implementing Sustainable Tourism Practices to Mitigate Overtourism and Promote Regional Balance	161
5.5.15. Action 15 – Wellbeing Offers	165
5.5.16. Action 16 – Resilient Destination Planning.....	169
5.5.17. Action 17 - Leveraging Technological Innovation for Sustainable Tourism Management.....	173
5.6. Summarizing the polycentric sustainable tourism model logical framework	176
5.7. Polycentric tourism model main Tools	178
5.8. Main conclusions and recommendations	180
5.8.1. Main conclusions.....	180
5.8.2. General recommendations	185
REFERENCES	191



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. WHY POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: ADDRESSING THE NEEDS

At the European level, mass tourism has become one of the defining challenges of our time. While it generates significant economic revenue, its unchecked growth places heavy pressure on natural resources, public infrastructure, and the social fabric of host communities. Iconic destinations risk losing their authenticity, while residents face rising costs of living, congestion, and declining quality of life.

Tourism remains a driver of growth and cohesion across the Atlantic Area, yet the current model shows structural challenges. Overtourism in cities such as Porto, Dublin, or Santiago de Compostela strains infrastructure, increases housing costs, and generates social tensions. Meanwhile, rural and inland regions remain overlooked, experiencing economic stagnation, depopulation, and wasted cultural potential.

This imbalance creates a dual crisis: excess tourism in some areas, insufficient tourism in others. It erodes resident well-being, weakens territorial cohesion, and undermines sustainability. Climate change, demographic decline, and shifting tourist preferences make the problem even more urgent. To ensure long-term resilience, tourism must be rethought as a system that balances demand with the capacity of places to host visitors sustainably. This means safeguarding environmental resources, preserving cultural identity, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared fairly. The future of tourism depends on reconciling the interests of visitors and residents alike - creating experiences that are meaningful, responsible, and respectful, while protecting the well-being of the communities that make destinations unique.

At the same time, vast rural and disadvantaged territories across the Atlantic Area—often ageing, depopulated, and lacking employment opportunities—are excluded from mainstream tourism circuits, despite their remarkable cultural, natural, and social assets. Redirecting part of the flows from saturated destinations towards these undervalued regions could both relieve pressure on overcrowded hotspots and foster revitalisation, job creation, and sustainable development in communities currently left behind.

This is why a rethink is needed: to seize opportunities in some areas while providing solutions for others. **Tourism must evolve into a strategic tool for territorial balance, sustainability, and resilience.** The EU's Green Deal, Tourism Transition Pathway, and the SDGs highlight this urgency: tourism can no longer be managed reactively but must be governed strategically to benefit both visitors and residents.

The POST project (Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Strategy), developed under the Atlantic Area programme, embodies this vision. It involves regions from Spain, Portugal, France, and Ireland, each with different levels of tourism development and diverse urban-rural dynamics. These territories—such as inland Galicia (Ourense province), the mountain areas surrounding Dublin, inland Northern Portugal, and rural regions like Cognac in France—have served as testing grounds for applying and adapting the polycentric model.

Polycentric Sustainable Tourism directly addresses both overtourism and undertourism. By creating circuits and strategic links, it shifts flows away from saturated zones and unlocks the untapped potential of smaller destinations. This approach creates a win-win scenario for both communities and travelers.

2. WHY: PURPOSE AND GOALS

The purpose of this strategy is not to generate more tourism, but to ensure better tourism—tourism that is sustainable, inclusive, and fair. It is a deliberate commitment to sustainability, territorial cohesion, and equity. Tourism should act as a mean, not an end in itself, serving local development, identity, and quality of life; this why it must achieve the following **objectives**:

- Redistribute tourism benefits fairly across regions and communities.
- Strengthen cohesion between coastal hotspots and inland/rural areas.
- Position tourism as a catalyst for identity, inclusion, and resilience.
- Protect natural and cultural heritage while safeguarding community well-being.
- Align tourism with EU guidelines and policies, and the UN SDGs.

3. WHAT IS POLYCENTRIC AND SIGNATURE TOURISM?

Polycentric Sustainable tourism moves beyond reliance on a few iconic hotspots. Instead of concentrating flows, it creates networks of destinations, each with unique assets, linked together to spread value. This reduces pressure on crowded sites while unlocking untapped potential elsewhere.

It is an innovative approach that enhances regional appeal and sustainability by fostering connections between multiple micro-destinations within a territory. Rather than focusing on a single central hub, it builds collaborative networks that redistribute tourist flows, ease congestion in overcrowded areas, and bring opportunities to those with underused assets. In simpler terms: polycentric sustainable tourism shifts the paradigm from tourism *in one place* to tourism *among places*.

The Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model is a strategic framework designed to address imbalances in tourism development across the Atlantic Area. Its core objective is to create a network of interconnected, equally attractive destinations that function in synergy rather than in isolation or competition. This represents a shift from the traditional monocentric paradigm -where tourism concentrates in a handful of “must-see” hotspots - towards a polycentric system, where multiple centres of interest distribute demand more evenly.

The model is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but a flexible, adaptive tool that provides principles, strategic axes, and implementable actions tailored to the specific realities of each territory. Its ultimate goal is to maximise the benefits of tourism while minimising its negative impacts on communities, landscapes, and resources.

By recognising that multiple interconnected tourism nodes - each with distinct heritage, culture, and attractions - can collectively drive regional development, this model reduces pressure on urban centres, distributes economic benefits, and fosters innovation in less-visited areas. It also aligns with EU cohesion policy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to inclusive economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, and responsible consumption and production. Within this system, destinations do not compete, but collaborate, offering complementary experiences.

Alongside polycentric sustainable tourism, **signature tourism** plays a vital role. Signature tourism refers to a type of tourism offer that creates unique, almost artfully designed travel experiences, each bearing the distinct signature of its creator. These experiences are meant to surprise travelers – not necessarily sought out in advance – and are tailored to individual clients with differentiated proposals that go beyond conventional tourist circuits. They are characterized by authenticity, exclusivity, sustainability, and personalization, aligning closely with the concepts of signature travel and tailor-made journeys.

Signature Tourism has the capacity to address challenges such as the overcrowding of popular destinations (hence its strategic importance within the framework of polycentric tourism) and the seasonality of tourism activities. For this reason, it stands as a powerful tool for advancing and ensuring the success of polycentric tourism. It places authenticity and community at the centre, emphasising products rooted in heritage, creativity, and local identity. By avoiding standardisation, it creates unique, place-based experiences and makes communities co-creators rather than bystanders.

Together, polycentric and signature tourism form a comprehensive response: one addresses territorial imbalances, the other enriches content with authenticity and community ownership.

4. HOW: THE IMPLEMENTATION

This strategy has to be implemented through a set of thematic chapters, which form the backbone of a roadmap that is adaptable to the diverse contexts of the Atlantic Area. Guided by these principles, the operational model is structured as follows:

- **Training New Professionals:** Tourism requires new skills to adapt to sustainability, digitalisation, and community engagement. This means developing new professional profiles or reorienting existing ones. Training programs should empower local actors, SMEs, and municipalities to co-create experiences and manage flows effectively.

- **Innovating Sector Practices:** Innovation is needed not only in products but also in governance, management, and marketing. This includes new models of destination management organisations (DMOs), participatory planning with residents, and practices such as green certification, digital monitoring, and cross-border collaboration.
- **Developing Offer:** To diversify away from overcrowded hotspots, new tourism products must emerge. Examples include wellness and thermalism tourism in inland areas, cultural and wine routes, gastronomy circuits, or cross-border itineraries; and all, under the signature tourism perspective. These products attract visitors to lesser-known places and extend the tourism season.
- **Developing New Services:** Supporting services must meet evolving expectations. This means higher hospitality standards, improved accessibility, digital visitor tools, and community-based services. Services should reinforce inclusion, ensuring that both residents and visitors benefit from tourism activity.
- **Improving Connectivity (Digital and Physical):** Connectivity is essential for balanced tourism. Digital inclusion allows small destinations to become visible and competitive, while physical connectivity—such as sustainable transport links, cycling routes, and local mobility systems—makes inland and rural areas more accessible. Both are critical to integrating peripheral regions into wider tourism networks.
- **Awareness-Raising among Tourists, Residents, and Policymakers:** Tourism sustainability depends on awareness. Campaigns should encourage responsible behaviour among tourists, empower residents to see tourism as an opportunity rather than a burden, and inform policymakers about the benefits of inclusive, polycentric models.
- **Accessible, High-Quality Information:** A tourism strategy can only succeed if supported by transparent, user-friendly, and high-quality information. This includes digital platforms, shared databases, storytelling initiatives, and signage systems that guarantee accessibility and inclusivity for all, including persons with disabilities.

The operational heart of the model is its multi-level, multi-stakeholder strategy designed to create new centralities - alternative destinations that absorb tourism pressure from overloaded zones and attract new flows by showcasing distinctive assets.

The operationalisation of the Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model relies on the principle of **permeability**, conceived as a policy instrument to enhance connectivity, cooperation, and territorial cohesion across the Atlantic Area. Permeability is articulated through **five complementary dimensions** – territorial, digital, sociocultural, institutional, and communicational – each representing a specific layer through which destinations can interact and co-develop.

To translate these dimensions into action, the strategy defines a set of **permeability measures** that serve as policy enablers for coordinated implementation:

- **Territorial permeability** improves accessibility and mobility, supporting balanced visitor flows and integration of inland and coastal areas.
- **Digital permeability** promotes data sharing, digital visibility, and smart visitor management tools that strengthen competitiveness and innovation.
- **Sociocultural permeability** empowers local communities through participation, training, and co-creation of authentic tourism experiences.
- **Institutional permeability** facilitates multi-level governance and policy alignment across borders, fostering integrated destination management.
- **Communicational permeability** ensures coherent branding, joint promotion, and transparent communication, essential for both crisis management and shared identity-building.

Together, these dimensions and measures provide the **structural backbone** for policy coordination and strategic implementation of the POST model. They enable regional and local authorities to operationalise the principles of **polycentricity and sustainability**, reinforcing the EU's broader objectives of territorial balance, inclusiveness, and green transition within the tourism sector.

To guide the transition toward a polycentric sustainable tourism model, the project defines **six strategic axes and 17 proposed actions**. Together, they provide a flexible framework that supports balanced tourism development across diverse territories. Each region is encouraged to select, adapt, and prioritise the axes and actions most relevant to its specific realities, challenges, and ambitions. This flexibility ensures that implementation remains locally grounded and realistic, while offering an ambitious step-by-step pathway forward.

AXIS 1 – Strengthening the Tourism Offer

Small destinations often hold strong cultural and natural assets but lack visibility or coordination. Polycentric sustainable tourism helps unlock this potential by creating new points of interest - such as wellness experiences, local trails, or heritage hubs - that attract visitors and distribute flows more evenly year-round.

AXIS 2 – Improving Infrastructure and Mobility

Tourism depends on effective mobility. This axis focuses on practical solutions such as improved transport links, green infrastructure, and soft mobility systems. These measures connect remote areas, reduce car dependency, and make it easier to explore beyond the usual hotspots.

AXIS 3 – Digital Transformation

Digital tools are essential for small municipalities to compete. Polycentric sustainable tourism promotes the use of data, apps, and storytelling platforms to increase visibility, manage flows, and support small providers -ensuring that no destination is left behind in the digital transition.

AXIS 4 – Cooperation and Partnerships

Polycentric sustainable tourism encourages cross-regional and cross-border cooperation to build critical mass, share costs, and scale impact. It supports joint branding, shared learning, and governance models that give smaller actors a stronger voice and better access to funding and networks.

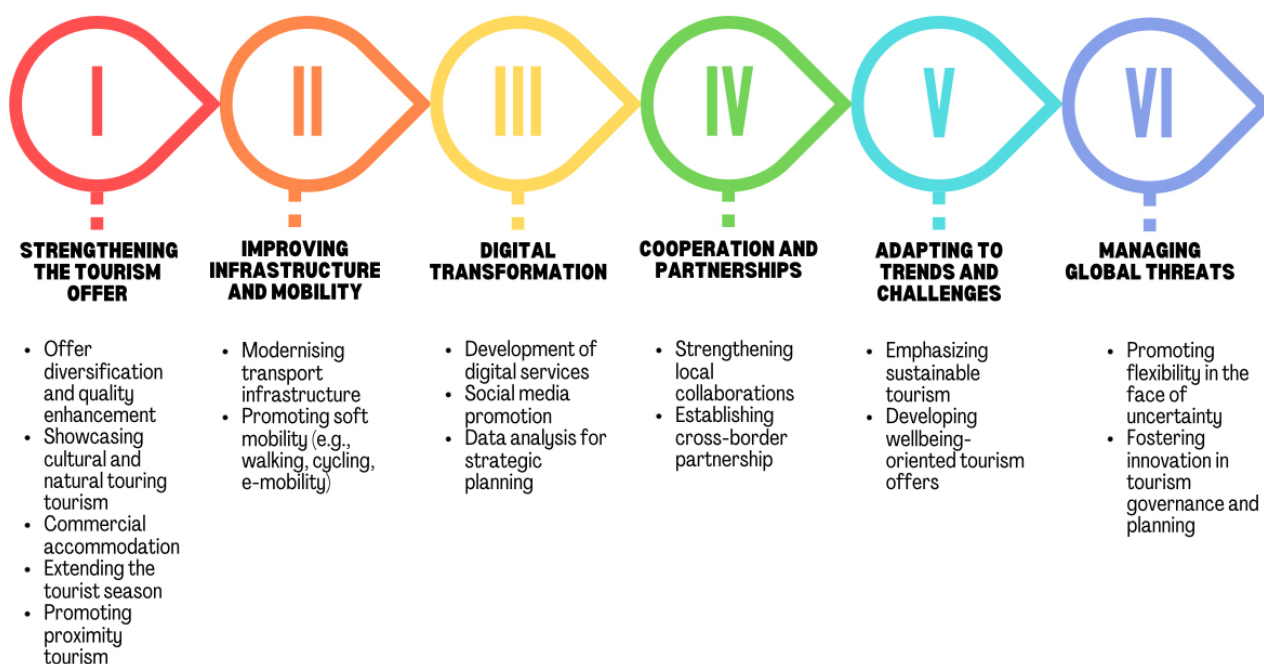
AXIS 5 – Adapting to Trends and Challenges

Tourism trends are shifting toward authenticity, wellbeing, and slower travel. Polycentric sustainable tourism helps territories adapt to changing demand, extend the season, and make better use of existing assets, while also reducing pressure on overcrowded sites.

AXIS 6 – Managing Global Threats

Climate risks, demographic decline, and global crises all affect tourism. Polycentric sustainable tourism equips local and regional authorities with resilience tools—from climate adaptation to community engagement -so that tourism continues to support the territory even in times of disruption.

These actions serve both as practical interventions and as sources of inspiration, offering guidance through good practices that can be replicated or adapted to each territorial context. Whether it is creating bike tourism routes (Axis 2 – soft mobility), modernising transport infrastructure (Axis 2), or developing local storytelling apps (Axis 3 – digital transformation), the strategy provides tailored solutions for every type of destination.



5. FOR AND BY WHOM? STAKEHOLDERS AND BENEFICIARIES

The strategy is conceived as a collaborative effort that relies on the engagement of a wide ecosystem of actors. Its success depends on shared ownership across multiple levels of governance, the private sector, civil society, and the communities who both shape and experience tourism.

Local and Regional Governments

These actors are at the frontline of implementation. They are responsible for embedding polycentric sustainable tourism approaches into planning documents, land-use strategies, and funding programmes. Local governments also ensure that tourism is consistent with residents' needs and that investments strengthen rather than erode social and environmental capital. Regional administrations, meanwhile, provide coordination across territories, helping to integrate tourism into broader cohesion and development agendas.

Residents

Communities are not passive recipients but central protagonists in this model. Tourism must enhance, rather than diminish, their quality of life. Residents are both hosts and co-creators of signature tourism products. They safeguard intangible heritage, traditions, and community identity. By including residents in decision-making, the strategy ensures legitimacy, long-term sustainability, and social acceptance.

Tourism SMEs and Entrepreneurs

Small and medium-sized enterprises - ranging from family-run accommodations to gastronomy, cultural operators, and artisans - are the backbone of territorial tourism economies. Supporting these actors is essential for innovation, product diversification, and employment creation. Their proximity to local resources and communities allows them to embody the principles of authenticity and sustainability at the heart of the strategy.

Tourism Boards and Consortia

Tourism Boards play a central role in promoting sustainable and diversified offerings, ensuring that destination branding and marketing are aligned with long-term territorial balance. Public-private consortia, as well as private sector collaborations, are equally important to foster joint initiatives, pool resources, and co-develop tourism products that respond to both market demand and sustainability imperatives.

NGOs, Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Non-governmental and heritage organisations play a vital role in protecting landscapes, traditions, and cultural assets from overexploitation. They provide expertise in conservation, interpretation, and awareness-building, ensuring that growth in tourism does not undermine long-term heritage values. They are also key actors in promoting inclusivity and accessibility.

Cross-Border Networks and EU Institutions

The strategy is explicitly transnational. Cooperation across the Atlantic Area - between Spain, Portugal, France, and Ireland - ensures that solutions are not isolated but mutually reinforcing and transferrable to different territories. Cross-border networks facilitate knowledge exchange, joint branding, and shared governance. EU institutions provide the and policy frameworks (e.g. Tourism Transition Pathway, Green Deal, Agenda 2030) that enable scaling up and replication across Europe.

Academia and Training Providers

Universities, vocational schools, and training centres are key partners in rethinking skills. They develop new professional profiles, support research and innovation, and ensure that the workforce can adapt to changing models of tourism management.

Tourists

Although often seen only as consumers, tourists are also stakeholders. Their choices, behaviours, and expectations shape demand. Raising awareness and offering them authentic, responsible options turns them into allies of sustainable and polycentric sustainable tourism.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism in the Atlantic Area stands at a crossroads. For some territories, it has become a source of overcrowding, housing pressure, environmental degradation, and declining resident satisfaction. For others, it represents a missed opportunity, with rural and inland regions struggling with depopulation, economic stagnation, and lack of visibility. This duality risks deepening territorial inequality and undermining cohesion.

In this scenario, the **Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Strategy** is both innovative and distinctive because:

- It has been designed to help territories adapt to today's most pressing challenges - from climate change and shifting mobility to demographic transitions and evolving visitor expectations. It provides a future-oriented response rooted in local capacity.
- At the same time, it addresses both sides of the spectrum: offering solutions to overcrowded destinations while supporting those that lack tourism.
- Its core strength is **permeability**: the ability of regions to connect - physically, digitally, and institutionally - both within and across borders. This connectivity makes tourism more balanced, inclusive, and circular, especially in places often excluded from mainstream flows.
- It is **practical**. It does not offer one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, it supports territories in taking locally driven action through flexible, easy-to-use tools - including self-assessments, participatory methods, and governance templates - all tailored to small and mid-sized municipalities.

Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Strategy is conceived as a progressive process that unfolds across short, medium and long term horizon. Its timeline ensures that early actions build momentum while deeper structural changes consolidate over time.

Polycentric sustainable Tourism reframes tourism not as an end in itself, but as a tool for balance, resilience, and inclusion. By combining the concepts of polycentric sustainable tourism and signature tourism, it proposes a new paradigm that redistributes flows, diversifies products, and ensures that local communities remain at the heart of tourism development.

It is important to stress that tourism cannot be demonized, because it's extremely important for national economic development. For instance, in countries such as Spain and Portugal, the sector generates more than 10% of GDP and employment, making it indispensable for economic prosperity and social stability. The challenge is not to reduce or reject tourism, but to reshape it so that its benefits are fairly distributed, its impacts managed, and its contribution aligned with long-term sustainability goals.

This strategy positions residents as co-creators of authentic experiences, supports SMEs and cultural operators as drivers of innovation, and empowers local and regional authorities to embed sustainability into their planning. It also aligns with European priorities - from the Tourism Transition Pathway to the Green Deal and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - ensuring relevance beyond the Atlantic Area.

Ultimately, tourism can divide or unite. With the Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Strategy, it becomes an instrument of cohesion, sustainability, and innovation. By addressing the **WHY, WHAT FOR, WHAT,** and **HOW**, the strategy provides European territories with a vision and framework to transform tourism into a lever for a more balanced and resilient future.

Challenges and Solutions for Polycentric Sustainable Tourism



1. Overtourism

Challenge: Overtourism is mainly measured through quantitative indicators, neglecting residents' perceptions. Authorities act reactively instead of proactively.

POST Solution: Proactive planning with qualitative indicators, balanced territorial management, and prevention before saturation occurs.



2. Community Impacts

Challenge: Pressure on housing, public services, and cultural identity. Gentrification and loss of authenticity.

POST Solution: Redistribution of tourist flows, empowerment of local communities, and fair sharing of economic benefits with surrounding areas.



3. Lack of Integrated Territorial Planning

Challenge: Tourism investments often ignore impacts on water, waste, mobility, and infrastructure.

POST Solution: Inclusion of environmental and social forecasts in planning and stronger coordination between destinations.



4. Regional Inequalities

Challenge: Strong imbalance between overcrowded coastal destinations and neglected, depopulated rural areas.

POST Solution: Polycentric networks that create new tourism hubs, foster rural dynamism, and reduce territorial asymmetries.



5. Weak Institutional Cooperation

Challenge: Limited coordination between national, regional, and local authorities.

POST Solution: Collaborative governance, data sharing, and joint action between leading and emerging destinations.



6. Irresponsible Communication

Challenge: Uncontrolled promotion of fragile sites, often intensified by digital influencers.

POST Solution: Responsible and targeted communication, creation of alternative flows, and new local narratives.



RESUMO EXECUTIVO

I. PORQUÊ O TURISMO SUSTENTÁVEL POLICÊNTRICO: RESPONDER AOS DESAFIOS ATUAIS

A nível europeu, o turismo de massas tornou-se um dos desafios prementes do nosso tempo. Embora gere receitas económicas significativas, o seu crescimento descontrolado exerce forte pressão sobre os recursos naturais, as infraestruturas públicas e o tecido social das comunidades anfitriãs. Destinos icónicos correm o risco de perder a sua autenticidade, enquanto os residentes enfrentam custos de vida crescentes, congestionamento e diminuição da qualidade de vida.

O turismo continua a ser um motor de crescimento e coesão em toda a Área Atlântica, contudo, o modelo atual revela desafios estruturais. O sobreturismo em cidades como o Porto, Dublin ou Santiago de Compostela sobrecarrega as infraestruturas, aumenta os custos de habitação e gera tensões sociais. Entretanto, as regiões rurais e do interior permanecem negligenciadas, enfrentando estagnação económica, despovoamento e desperdício do potencial cultural.

Este desequilíbrio cria uma crise dupla: excesso de turismo em algumas áreas e turismo insuficiente noutras. Perturba o bem-estar dos residentes, enfraquece a coesão territorial e mina a sustentabilidade. As alterações climáticas, o declínio demográfico e a alteração das preferências dos turistas tornam o problema ainda mais premente. Para assegurar a resiliência a longo prazo, o turismo deve ser repensado como um sistema que equilibra a procura com a capacidade dos locais para acolher visitantes de forma sustentável. Isso implica salvaguardar os recursos ambientais, preservar a identidade cultural e garantir que os benefícios do turismo sejam partilhados de forma equitativa. O futuro do turismo depende da conciliação dos interesses de visitantes e residentes – criando experiências que sejam significativas, responsáveis e respeitadas, protegendo simultaneamente o bem-estar das comunidades que tornam os destinos únicos.

Paralelamente, vastos territórios rurais e desfavorecidos em toda a Área Atlântica – frequentemente envelhecidos, despovoados e com escassez de oportunidades de emprego – são excluídos dos roteiros turísticos tradicionais, apesar dos seus notáveis ativos culturais, naturais e sociais. O redirecionamento de parte dos fluxos de destinos saturados para estas regiões subvalorizadas poderia, simultaneamente, aliviar a pressão sobre os pontos de interesse sobrelotados e fomentar a revitalização, a criação de emprego e o desenvolvimento sustentável em comunidades atualmente marginalizadas.

É por este motivo que é necessário uma reflexão: para aproveitar oportunidades em algumas áreas, ao mesmo tempo que se apresentam soluções para outras. **O turismo deve evoluir para uma ferramenta estratégica de equilíbrio territorial, sustentabilidade e resiliência.** O Pacto Ecológico Europeu, o Roteiro para a Transição do Turismo e os ODS (Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável) sublinham esta urgência: o turismo já não pode ser gerido de forma reativa, mas deve ser governado estrategicamente para beneficiar tanto os visitantes como os residentes.

O projeto POST (Estratégia de Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico), desenvolvido no âmbito do programa da Área Atlântica, incorpora esta visão. Envolve regiões de Espanha, Portugal, França e Irlanda, cada uma com diferentes níveis de desenvolvimento turístico e diversas dinâmicas urbano-rurais. Estes territórios – como o interior da Galiza (província de Ourense), as zonas montanhosas em redor de Dublin, o interior do Norte de Portugal e regiões rurais como Cognac, em França – serviram de campo de testes para aplicar e adaptar o modelo policêntrico.

O Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico aborda diretamente tanto o sobreturismo como o subturismo. Ao criar roteiros e ligações estratégicas, desvia os fluxos das zonas saturadas e desbloqueia o potencial inexplorado de destinos mais pequenos. Esta abordagem cria um cenário vantajoso tanto para as comunidades como para os viajantes.

2. PORQUÊ: PROPÓSITO E METAS

O propósito desta estratégia não é gerar mais turismo, mas sim assegurar um melhor turismo – um turismo que seja sustentável, inclusivo e justo. É um compromisso deliberado com a sustentabilidade, a coesão territorial e a equidade. O turismo deve atuar como um meio, não como um fim em si mesmo, servindo o desenvolvimento local, a identidade e a qualidade de vida; é por isso que deve alcançar os seguintes **objetivos**:

- Redistribuir os benefícios do turismo de forma justa entre regiões e comunidades.
- Reforçar a coesão entre os pontos turísticos costeiros e as áreas interiores/rurais.
- Posicionar o turismo como um catalisador para a identidade, inclusão e resiliência.
- Proteger o património natural e cultural, salvaguardando simultaneamente o bem-estar da comunidade.
- Alinhar o turismo com as diretrizes e políticas da UE e com os ODS da ONU.

3. O QUE É O TURISMO SUSTENTÁVEL POLICÊNTRICO E DE AUTOR?

O turismo sustentável policêntrico vai além da dependência de alguns pontos turísticos icónicos. Em vez de concentrar os fluxos, cria redes de destinos, cada um com ativos únicos, ligados entre si para disseminar valor. Isto reduz a pressão sobre os locais sobrelotados, ao mesmo tempo que desbloqueia potencial inexplorado noutros locais.

É uma abordagem inovadora que aumenta o apelo regional e a sustentabilidade ao promover ligações entre múltiplas microdestinos dentro de um território. Em vez de se focar num único centro, constrói redes colaborativas que redistribuem os fluxos turísticos, aliviam o congestionamento em áreas sobrelotadas e criam oportunidades para aqueles com ativos subutilizados. Em termos mais simples: o turismo sustentável policêntrico muda o paradigma do *turismo num só lugar* para o turismo *entre lugares*.

O Modelo de Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico constitui um quadro estratégico concebido para colmatar os desequilíbrios no desenvolvimento turístico em toda a Área Atlântica. O seu objetivo central reside na criação de uma rede de destinos interligados e equitativamente atrativos, que operem em sinergia em detrimento do isolamento ou da concorrência. Tal representa uma transição do paradigma monocêntrico tradicional – no qual o turismo se concentra num número restrito de pontos de atração incontornáveis – para um sistema policêntrico, onde múltiplos polos de interesse distribuem a procura de forma mais equilibrada.

O modelo não configura uma solução universal padronizada, mas sim um instrumento flexível e adaptável que fornece princípios, eixos estratégicos e ações exequíveis, ajustados às realidades específicas de cada território. O seu objetivo último consiste na maximização dos benefícios do turismo, mitigando simultaneamente os seus impactos negativos nas comunidades, nas paisagens e nos recursos.

Ao reconhecer que múltiplos polos turísticos interligados – cada um detentor de património, cultura e atrações distintos – podem impulsionar coletivamente o desenvolvimento regional, o presente modelo atenua a pressão sobre os centros urbanos, distribui os benefícios económicos e fomenta a inovação em áreas de menor afluência. Alinha-se, de igual modo, com a política de coesão da UE e com os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS) da ONU, nomeadamente os que respeitam ao crescimento económico inclusivo, às cidades e comunidades sustentáveis, e ao consumo e produção responsáveis. No âmbito deste sistema, os destinos não concorrem entre si, mas colaboram, oferecendo experiências complementares.

Paralelamente ao turismo sustentável policêntrico, o **turismo de autor** desempenha um papel vital. O turismo de autor refere-se a uma tipologia de oferta turística que cria experiências de viagem únicas, concebidas de forma quase artística, ostentando cada uma a assinatura distinta do seu criador. Tais experiências visam surpreender os viajantes – não sendo necessariamente objeto de procura prévia – e são adaptadas a clientes individuais através de propostas diferenciadas que transcendem os roteiros turísticos convencionais. Caracterizam-se pela autenticidade, exclusividade, sustentabilidade e personalização, alinhando-se estreitamente com os conceitos de viagens de autor e viagens à medida.

O Turismo de Autor detém a capacidade de mitigar desafios como a sobrelotação de destinos populares (daí a sua relevância estratégica no quadro do turismo policêntrico) e a sazonalidade das atividades turísticas. Por este motivo, afigura-se como um instrumento poderoso para o avanço e a garantia do êxito do turismo policêntrico. Coloca a autenticidade e a comunidade no centro, enfatizando produtos enraizados no património, na criatividade e na identidade local. Ao evitar a padronização, cria experiências únicas de base local e torna as comunidades cocriadoras, em detrimento de meras espetadoras.

Conjuntamente, o turismo policêntrico e o turismo de autor constituem uma resposta abrangente: um aborda os desequilíbrios territoriais, o outro enriquece o conteúdo com autenticidade e sentido de pertença comunitária.

4. COMO: A IMPLEMENTAÇÃO

A presente estratégia deve ser implementada através de um conjunto de capítulos temáticos, os quais formam a espinha dorsal de um roteiro adaptável aos diversos contextos da Área Atlântica. Orientado por estes princípios, o modelo operacional encontra-se estruturado da seguinte forma:

- **Formação de Novos Profissionais:** O setor do turismo requer novas competências para se adaptar à sustentabilidade, à digitalização e ao envolvimento da comunidade. Tal implica o desenvolvimento de novos perfis profissionais ou a reorientação dos já existentes. Os programas de formação devem capacitar os atores locais, as PME e os municípios para a criação de experiências e a gestão eficaz de fluxos.
- **Inovação nas Práticas do Setor:** A inovação é necessária não apenas nos produtos, mas também na governação, na gestão e no marketing. Isto inclui novos modelos de organizações de gestão de destinos (DMO), o planeamento participativo com os residentes e práticas como a certificação ecológica, a monitorização digital e a colaboração transfronteiriça.
- **Desenvolvimento da Oferta:** Para diversificar e reduzir a dependência dos pontos críticos saturados, devem surgir novos produtos turísticos. Os exemplos incluem o turismo de bem-estar e o termalismo nas zonas interiores, rotas culturais e vitivinícolas, roteiros gastronómicos ou itinerários transfronteiriços; e tudo isto, sob a perspectiva do turismo de autor. Estes produtos atraem visitantes para locais menos conhecidos e prolongam a época turística.
- **Desenvolvimento de Novos Serviços:** Os serviços de apoio devem corresponder às expectativas em evolução. Tal implica padrões de hospitalidade mais elevados, melhoria da acessibilidade, ferramentas digitais para visitantes e serviços de base comunitária. Os serviços devem reforçar a inclusão, garantindo que tanto os residentes como os visitantes beneficiem da atividade turística.
- **Melhoria da Conectividade (Digital e Física):** A conectividade é essencial para um turismo equilibrado. A inclusão digital permite que os pequenos destinos se tornem visíveis e competitivos, enquanto a conectividade física – tal como ligações de transporte sustentáveis, rotas cicláveis e sistemas de mobilidade local – torna as zonas interiores e rurais mais acessíveis. Ambos são cruciais para a integração das regiões periféricas em redes turísticas mais amplas.
- **Sensibilização de Turistas, Residentes e Decisores Políticos:** A sustentabilidade do turismo depende da consciencialização. As campanhas devem encorajar um comportamento responsável entre os turistas, capacitar os residentes para encararem o turismo como uma oportunidade e não como um encargo, e informar os decisores políticos sobre os benefícios de modelos inclusivos e policêntricos.

- **Informação Acessível e de Alta Qualidade:** Uma estratégia de turismo apenas poderá ter êxito se for apoiada por informações transparentes, de fácil utilização e de elevada qualidade. Tal inclui plataformas digitais, bases de dados partilhadas, iniciativas de narrativa turística e sistemas de sinalização que garantam a acessibilidade e a inclusividade para todos, designadamente pessoas com deficiência.

O núcleo operacional do modelo consiste na sua estratégia multinível e multiparceiros, concebida para criar novas centralidades — destinos alternativos que absorvam a pressão turística de zonas saturadas e atraiam novos fluxos através da exibição de ativos distintivos.

A operacionalização do Modelo de Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico assenta no princípio da **permeabilidade**, concebida enquanto instrumento de política para reforçar a conectividade, a cooperação e a coesão territorial em toda a Área Atlântica. A permeabilidade articula-se através de **cinco dimensões complementares** — territorial, digital, sociocultural, institucional e comunicacional —, representando cada uma delas uma camada específica através da qual os destinos podem interagir e se desenvolver mutuamente.

Para traduzir estas dimensões em ação, a estratégia define um conjunto de medidas de permeabilidade que funcionam como catalisadores de políticas para uma implementação coordenada:

- **A permeabilidade territorial** melhora a acessibilidade e a mobilidade, apoiando fluxos de visitantes equilibrados e a integração das zonas interiores e costeiras.
- **A permeabilidade digital** promove a partilha de dados, a visibilidade digital e ferramentas inteligentes de gestão de visitantes que reforcem a competitividade e a inovação.
- **A permeabilidade sociocultural** capacita as comunidades locais através da participação, formação e cocriação de experiências turísticas autênticas.
- **A permeabilidade institucional** facilita a governação multinível e o alinhamento de políticas transfronteiriças, fomentando a gestão integrada de destinos.
- **A permeabilidade comunicacional** assegura uma imagem de marca coerente, a promoção conjunta e uma comunicação transparente, essenciais tanto para a gestão de crises como para a construção de uma identidade partilhada.

Em conjunto, estas dimensões e medidas constituem a **espinha dorsal estrutural** para a coordenação de políticas e a implementação estratégica do modelo POST. Estas permitem às autoridades regionais e locais operacionalizar os princípios de **policentricidade e sustentabilidade**, reforçando os objetivos mais amplos da UE de equilíbrio territorial, inclusão e transição verde no setor do turismo.

Para orientar a transição para um modelo de turismo sustentável policêntrico, o projeto define **seis eixos estratégicos e 17 ações propostas**. Conjuntamente, estes elementos facultam um quadro flexível que apoia um desenvolvimento turístico equilibrado através de territórios diversificados. Incentiva-se cada região a selecionar, adaptar e priorizar os eixos e ações mais pertinentes para as suas realidades, desafios e ambições específicas. Esta flexibilidade garante que a implementação se mantenha ancorada no nível local e realista, oferecendo, em simultâneo, uma trajetória progressiva e ambiciosa.

EIXO 1 – Reforço da Oferta Turística

Os destinos de menor dimensão detêm, frequentemente, sólidos ativos culturais e naturais, mas carecem de visibilidade ou coordenação. O turismo sustentável policêntrico contribui para desbloquear este potencial através da criação de novos pontos de interesse – tais como experiências de bem-estar, percursos locais ou polos patrimoniais – que atraiam visitantes e distribuam os fluxos de forma mais equitativa durante todo o ano.

EIXO 2 – Melhoria das Infraestruturas e da Mobilidade

A atividade turística depende de uma mobilidade eficaz. Este eixo centra-se em soluções práticas, tais como melhores ligações de transporte, infraestruturas verdes e sistemas de mobilidade suave. Estas medidas conectam áreas remotas, reduzem a dependência do automóvel e facilitam a exploração para além dos focos de atração habituais.

EIXO 3 – Transformação Digital

As ferramentas digitais são essenciais para assegurar a competitividade dos pequenos municípios. O turismo sustentável policêntrico promove a utilização de dados, aplicações e plataformas de narrativa turística para aumentar a visibilidade, gerir fluxos e apoiar pequenos operadores, garantindo que nenhum destino seja deixado para trás na transição digital.

EIXO 4 – Cooperação e Parcerias

O turismo sustentável policêntrico incentiva a cooperação inter-regional e transfronteiriça para constituir massa crítica, partilhar custos e ampliar o impacto. Apoia a criação de marcas conjuntas, a aprendizagem partilhada e modelos de governação que conferem aos atores de menor dimensão uma voz mais ativa e um acesso melhorado a financiamento e redes.

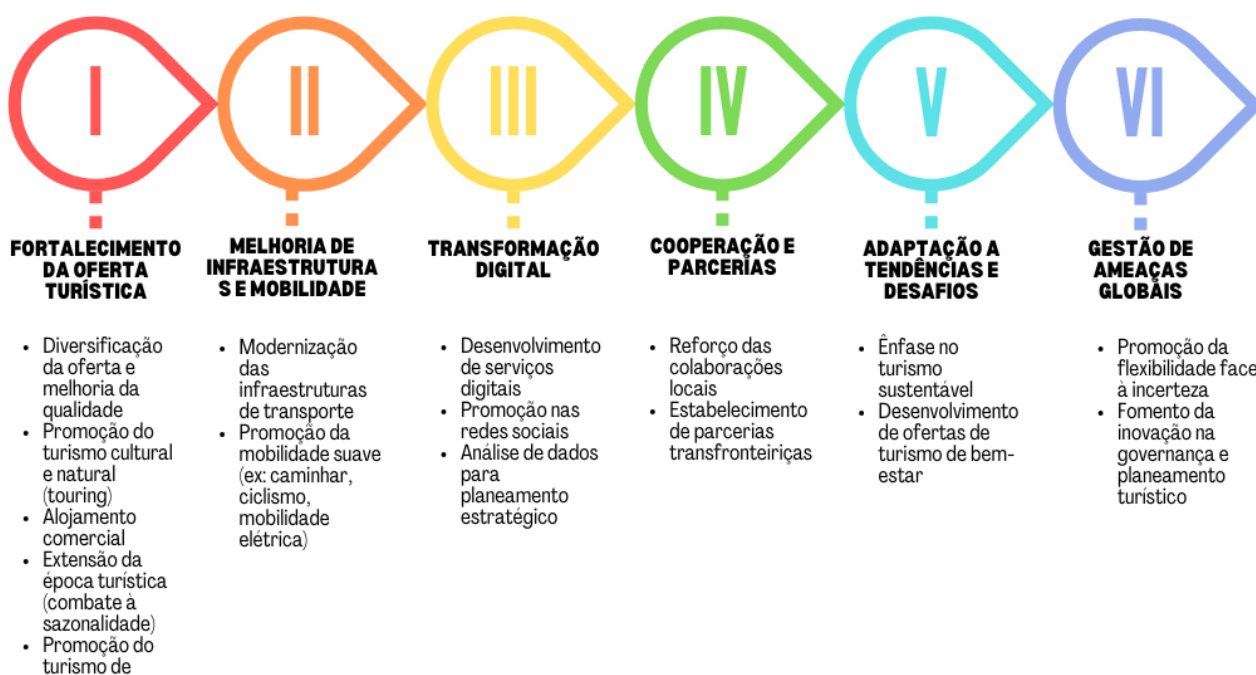
EIXO 5 – Adaptação a Tendências e Desafios

As tendências turísticas estão a evoluir em direção à autenticidade, ao bem-estar e ao slow travel. O turismo sustentável policêntrico auxilia os territórios na adaptação à alteração da procura, no prolongamento da época turística e na otimização dos ativos existentes, reduzindo, simultaneamente, a pressão sobre os locais saturados.

EIXO 6 – Gestão de Ameaças Globais

Os riscos climáticos, o declínio demográfico e as crises globais afetam transversalmente o turismo. O turismo sustentável policêntrico dota as autoridades locais e regionais de instrumentos de resiliência – desde a adaptação climática ao envolvimento comunitário – assegurando que o turismo continue a apoiar o território, mesmo em períodos de perturbação.

Estas ações constituem tanto intervenções práticas como fontes de inspiração, oferecendo orientação através de boas práticas passíveis de replicação ou adaptação a cada contexto territorial. Quer se trate da criação de rotas de cicloturismo (Eixo 2 – mobilidade suave), da modernização das infraestruturas de transporte (Eixo 2), ou do desenvolvimento de aplicações de narrativa local (Eixo 3 – transformação digital), a estratégia fornece soluções à medida para cada tipologia de destino.



5. PARA QUEM E POR QUEM? PARTES INTERESSADAS E BENEFICIÁRIOS

A estratégia é concebida como um esforço colaborativo que assenta no envolvimento de um vasto ecossistema de atores. O seu êxito depende de uma responsabilidade partilhada entre os múltiplos níveis de governação, o setor privado, a sociedade civil e as comunidades que moldam e vivenciam o turismo.

Governo Local e Regional

Estes atores encontram-se na linha da frente da implementação. Incumbe-lhes a responsabilidade de integrar abordagens de turismo sustentável policêntrico nos instrumentos de planeamento, nas estratégias de ordenamento do território e nos programas de financiamento. As autarquias locais garantem, igualmente, a compatibilidade do turismo com as necessidades dos residentes, assegurando que os investimentos reforcem, em detrimento de erodir, o capital social e ambiental. Por seu turno, as administrações regionais asseguram a coordenação interterritorial, fomentando a integração do turismo nas agendas mais amplas de coesão e desenvolvimento.

Residentes

As comunidades não constituem meros recetores passivos, assumindo-se antes como protagonistas centrais neste modelo. O turismo deve potenciar, e não diminuir, a sua qualidade de vida. Os residentes atuam simultaneamente como anfitriões e cocriadores de produtos de turismo de autor. São eles os guardiões do património imaterial, das tradições e da identidade comunitária. Mediante a inclusão dos residentes nos processos de tomada de decisão, a estratégia garante a legitimidade, a sustentabilidade a longo prazo e a aceitação social.

PME do Turismo e Empreendedores

As pequenas e médias empresas — que abrangem desde o alojamento familiar à gastronomia, passando pelos operadores culturais e artesãos — constituem a espinha dorsal das economias turísticas territoriais. O apoio a estes intervenientes é essencial para a inovação, a diversificação do produto e a criação de emprego. A sua proximidade aos recursos e comunidades locais permite-lhes materializar os princípios de autenticidade e sustentabilidade que constituem o cerne da estratégia.

Entidades de Turismo e Consórcios

As Entidades de Turismo desempenham um papel central na promoção de ofertas sustentáveis e diversificadas, garantindo o alinhamento das estratégias de marca e marketing do destino com o equilíbrio territorial a longo prazo. Os consórcios público-privados, bem como as colaborações no setor privado, revestem-se de igual importância para fomentar iniciativas conjuntas, partilhar recursos e desenvolver conjuntamente produtos turísticos que respondam, simultaneamente, à procura do mercado e aos imperativos de sustentabilidade.

ONG e Organizações Culturais e Patrimoniais

As organizações não governamentais e patrimoniais desempenham um papel vital na proteção de paisagens, tradições e ativos culturais contra a sobre-exploração. Estas entidades fornecem conhecimentos especializados em conservação, interpretação e sensibilização, assegurando que o crescimento turístico não comprometa os valores patrimoniais de longo prazo. Constituem, de igual modo, atores fundamentais na promoção da inclusão e da acessibilidade.

Redes Transfronteiriças e Instituições da UE

A estratégia assume um caráter explicitamente transnacional. A cooperação em toda a Área Atlântica – entre Espanha, Portugal, França e Irlanda – garante que as soluções não sejam isoladas, mas sim mutuamente reforçadoras e transferíveis para diferentes territórios. As redes transfronteiriças facilitam o intercâmbio de conhecimentos, a criação conjunta de marcas e a governação partilhada. As instituições da UE fornecem o financiamento e os quadros políticos (por exemplo, Caminho de Transição para o Turismo, Pacto Ecológico, Agenda 2030) que permitem a expansão e a replicação em toda a Europa.

Meio Académico e Entidades Formadoras

As universidades, escolas profissionais e centros de formação constituem parceiros fundamentais na requalificação de competências. Desenvolvem novos perfis profissionais, apoiam a investigação e inovação, e asseguram que a força de trabalho se adapta à evolução dos modelos de gestão turística.

Turistas

Embora frequentemente considerados apenas como consumidores, os turistas são também partes interessadas. As suas escolhas, comportamentos e expectativas moldam a procura. A sensibilização e a oferta de opções autênticas e responsáveis convertem-nos em aliados do turismo sustentável e do turismo sustentável policêntrico.

6. CONCLUSÕES

O turismo na Área Atlântica encontra-se numa encruzilhada. Para alguns territórios, tornou-se uma fonte de saturação, pressão habitacional, degradação ambiental e declínio da satisfação dos residentes. Para outros, representa uma oportunidade perdida, com as regiões rurais e do interior a debaterem-se com o despovoamento, a estagnação económica e a falta de visibilidade. Esta dualidade acarreta o risco de aprofundar as assimetrias territoriais e de minar a coesão.

Neste cenário, a **Estratégia de Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico** é simultaneamente inovadora e distintiva, porquanto:

- Foi concebida para apoiar os territórios na adaptação aos desafios mais prementes da atualidade - desde as alterações climáticas e a mudança nos padrões de mobilidade até às transições demográficas e à evolução das expectativas dos visitantes. Proporciona uma resposta orientada para o futuro, alicerçada na capacidade local.
- Simultaneamente, aborda ambos os extremos do espectro: oferecendo soluções para destinos saturados, ao mesmo tempo que apoia aqueles onde a atividade turística é deficitária.

- A sua força nuclear reside na **permeabilidade**: a capacidade das regiões de se conectarem - física, digital e institucionalmente - tanto internamente como além-fronteiras. Esta conectividade torna o turismo mais equilibrado, inclusivo e circular, especialmente em locais frequentemente excluídos dos fluxos dominantes.
- É de natureza **prática**. Não preconiza soluções do tipo «tamanho único». Pelo contrário, apoia os territórios na implementação de ações de base local através de instrumentos flexíveis e de fácil utilização - incluindo autoavaliações, metodologias participativas e modelos de governação - integralmente adaptados às especificidades dos pequenos e médios municípios.

A Estratégia de Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico é concebida como um processo progressivo que se desenrola num horizonte a curto, médio e longo prazo. O seu cronograma assegura que as ações iniciais criam dinamismo, enquanto as mudanças estruturais mais profundas se consolidam ao longo do tempo.

O turismo sustentável policêntrico reconfigura o turismo não como um fim em si mesmo, mas como um instrumento de equilíbrio, resiliência e inclusão. Ao combinar os conceitos de turismo sustentável policêntrico e turismo de autor, este propõe um novo paradigma que redistribui fluxos, diversifica produtos e assegura que as comunidades locais permanecem no centro do desenvolvimento turístico.

É importante sublinhar que o turismo não pode ser diabolizado, porquanto é extremamente importante para o desenvolvimento económico nacional. Por exemplo, em países como a Espanha e Portugal, o setor gera mais de 10% do PIB e do emprego, tornando-o indispensável para a prosperidade económica e estabilidade social. O desafio não reside em reduzir ou rejeitar o turismo, mas em remodelá-lo para que os seus benefícios sejam distribuídos equitativamente, os seus impactos geridos e a sua contribuição alinhada com os objetivos de sustentabilidade a longo prazo.

Esta estratégia posiciona os residentes como cocriadores de experiências autênticas, apoia as PME e os operadores culturais enquanto motores de inovação e capacita as autoridades locais e regionais para integrar a sustentabilidade no seu planeamento. Alinha-se, igualmente, com as prioridades europeias - desde o Caminho de Transição para o Turismo até ao Pacto Ecológico e à Agenda 2030 para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável - assegurando a sua relevância para além da Área Atlântica.

Em última análise, o turismo pode dividir ou unir. Com a Estratégia de Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico, este torna-se um instrumento de coesão, sustentabilidade e inovação. Ao abordar o **PORQUÊ, PARA QUÊ, O QUÊ**, e **COMO**, a estratégia fornece aos territórios europeus uma visão e um quadro de referência para transformar o turismo num motor de um futuro mais equilibrado e resiliente.

Desafios e Soluções para o Turismo Sustentável Policêntrico



1. Excesso de Turismo

Desafio: O excesso de turismo é medido principalmente através de indicadores quantitativos, negligenciando a percepção dos residentes. As autoridades agem de forma reativa em vez de proativa.

Solução POST: Planeamento proativo com indicadores qualitativos, gestão territorial equilibrada e prevenção antes que a saturação ocorra.



2. Impactos na Comunidade

Desafio: Pressão sobre a habitação, serviços públicos e identidade cultural. Gentrificação e perda de autenticidade.

Solução POST: Redistribuição dos fluxos turísticos, capacitação das comunidades locais e partilha justa dos benefícios económicos com as áreas circundantes.



3. Falta de Planeamento Territorial Integrado

Desafio: Os investimentos turísticos ignoram frequentemente os impactos na água, resíduos, mobilidade e infraestruturas.

POST Solution: Inclusão de previsões ambientais e sociais no planeamento e maior coordenação entre destinos.



4. Desigualdades Regionais

Desafio: Forte desequilíbrio entre destinos costeiros superlotados e áreas rurais negligenciadas e despovoadas.

Solução POST: Redes policêntricas que criam novos centros turísticos, promovem o dinamismo rural e reduzem as assimetrias territoriais.



5. Cooperação Institucional Fraca

Desafio: Coordenação limitada entre autoridades nacionais, regionais e locais.

Solução POST: Governança colaborativa, partilha de dados e ação conjunta entre destinos líderes e emergentes.



6. Comunicação Irresponsável

Desafio: Promoção descontrolada de locais frágeis, muitas vezes intensificada por influenciadores digitais.

Solução POST: Comunicação responsável e direcionada, criação de fluxos alternativos e novas narrativas locais.

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

I. POR QUÉ TURISMO SOSTENIBLE POLICÉNTRICO: ABORDANDO LAS NECESIDADES

A nivel europeo, el turismo de masas se ha convertido en uno de los mayores retos de nuestro tiempo ya que si bien el turismo genera ingresos económicos importantes, su crecimiento descontrolado provoca gran presión sobre los recursos naturales, las infraestructuras públicas y el tejido social de las comunidades receptoras. Destinos emblemáticos están en riesgo de perder su autenticidad, al tiempo que sus residentes se enfrentan a crecientes costes de vida, congestión y, en definitiva, pérdida de calidad de vida.

El turismo sigue siendo un vector de crecimiento y cohesión en el Espacio Atlántico, pero el modelo actual muestra retos estructurales. El turismo masivo en ciudades como Porto, Dublín o Santiago de Compostela amenaza las infraestructuras, incrementa el coste de la vivienda y genera tensiones sociales. Por otro lado, las regiones rurales y de interior continúan distantes de este fenómeno, experimentando estancamiento económico, despoblación y desaprovechando su potencial cultural.

Este desequilibrio genera una doble crisis, resultado de la diferente intensidad con la que el turismo se manifiesta en los territorios. Mientras en algunas zonas afrontan una alta concentración de visitantes, otras reciben una presencia más limitada. Esto erosiona el bienestar de los residentes, debilita la cohesión territorial y socava la sostenibilidad. El cambio climático, el reto demográfico y los cambios de preferencias de los turistas hacen que el problema sea aún más urgente. Para garantizar la resiliencia a largo plazo, hay que repensar el turismo como un sistema que equilibre la demanda con la capacidad de los destinos para acoger visitantes de manera sostenible. Esto significa salvaguardar los recursos naturales, preservar la identidad cultural y asegurar que los beneficios del turismo se reparten de forma equitativa. El futuro del turismo depende de la capacidad de conciliación de intereses entre visitantes y residentes – creando experiencias que sean significativas, responsables y respetuosas, al tiempo que se protege el bienestar de las comunidades que hacen que los destinos sean únicos.

Al mismo tiempo, vastos territorios Rurales y desfavorecidos del Espacio Atlántico – a menudo envejecidos, despoblados y carentes de oportunidades de empleo – quedan excluidos de los circuitos turísticos habituales, a pesar de sus notables activos culturales, naturales y sociales. Redirigir parte de los flujos de los destinos saturados hacia estas regiones infravaloradas puede aliviar la presión sobre los puntos de interés masificados e impulsar la revitalización, la creación de empleo y el desarrollo sostenible en comunidades que actualmente están abandonadas.

Por este motivo es necesario un replanteamiento: para aprovechar las oportunidades en unas zonas y ofrecer soluciones para otras. **El turismo debe evolucionar hasta convertirse en una herramienta estratégica para el equilibrio territorial, la sostenibilidad y la resiliencia.** El Pacto Verde Europeo, la Vía de Transición del Turismo, y los ODS ponen de relieve esta urgencia: el turismo ya no puede gestionarse de manera reactiva sino que debe regirse estratégicamente para beneficiar tanto a visitantes como a residentes.

El proyecto POST (Estrategia de Turismo Sostenible Policéntrico, en sus siglas en inglés) desarrolla, amparado por el programa Espacio Atlántico, esta visión. En él participan regiones de España, Portugal, Francia e Irlanda, cada una con diferentes niveles de desarrollo turístico y dinámicas urbanas y rurales diversas. Estos territorios —como el interior de Galicia (provincia de Ourense), las zonas montañosas que rodean Dublín, el interior del norte de Portugal y regiones rurales como Cognac en Francia— han servido como campo de pruebas para aplicar y adaptar el modelo policéntrico.

El turismo sostenible policéntrico aborda directamente tanto el exceso de turismo como la carencia del mismo. Al crear circuitos y vínculos estratégicos, desvía los flujos desde las zonas saturadas y libera el potencial de los destinos turísticamente menos explorados. Este enfoque crea una situación favorable tanto para las comunidades visitadas como para los viajeros.

2. POR QUÉ: PROPÓSITO Y OBJETIVOS

El propósito de esta estrategia no es generar más turismo, sino garantizar un turismo mejor: un turismo sostenible, inclusivo y justo. Se trata de un compromiso deliberado con la sostenibilidad, la cohesión territorial y la equidad. El turismo debe actuar como un medio, no como un fin en sí mismo, al servicio del desarrollo local, la identidad y la calidad de vida; por eso debe alcanzar los siguientes **objetivos**:

- Redistribuir los beneficios del turismo de manera justa entre las regiones y comunidades.
- Fortalecer la cohesión entre los puntos de interés costeros y las zonas interiores/rurales.
- Posicionar el turismo como catalizador de la identidad, la inclusión y la resiliencia.
- Proteger el patrimonio natural y cultural, salvaguardando al mismo tiempo el bienestar de la comunidad.
- Alinear el turismo con las directrices y políticas de la UE y los ODS de las Naciones Unidas.

3. ¿QUÉ ES EL TURISMO POLICÉNTRICO Y EL TURISMO DE AUTOR?

El turismo policéntrico sostenible va más allá de la dependencia de unos pocos puntos de interés emblemáticos. En lugar de concentrar los flujos, crea redes de destinos, cada uno con activos únicos, vinculados entre sí para generar valor. Esto reduce la presión sobre los sitios concurridos y libera el potencial sin explotar en otros lugares.

Se trata de un enfoque innovador que mejora el atractivo regional y la sostenibilidad promoviendo conexiones entre muchos micro-destinos de un mismo territorio. En lugar de centrarse en un único lugar, genera una red colaborativa que redistribuye los flujos turísticos, alivian la congestión en las zonas masificadas y ofrecen oportunidades a aquellos activos infrautilizados. En pocas palabras: el turismo sostenible policéntrico cambia el paradigma del turismo *en un solo lugar* al turismo *entre lugares*.

El modelo de turismo sostenible policéntrico es un marco estratégico diseñado para abordar los desequilibrios en el desarrollo turístico en el Espacio Atlántico. Su objetivo principal es crear una red de destinos interconectados e igualmente atractivos que funcionen en sinergia en lugar de de forma aislada o competitiva. Esto representa un cambio del paradigma monocéntrico tradicional, en el que el turismo se concentra en unos pocos puntos de interés «imprescindibles», hacia un sistema policéntrico, en el que múltiples centros de interés distribuyen la demanda de forma más uniforme.

El modelo no es una solución única para todos, sino una herramienta flexible y adaptable que proporciona principios, ejes estratégicos y acciones aplicables adaptadas a las realidades específicas de cada territorio. Su objetivo final es maximizar los beneficios del turismo y minimizar sus impactos negativos en las comunidades, los paisajes y los recursos.

Al reconocer que múltiples nodos turísticos interconectados –cada uno con un patrimonio, una cultura y unos atractivos distintos– pueden impulsar colectivamente el desarrollo regional, este modelo reduce la presión sobre los centros urbanos, distribuye los beneficios económicos y fomenta la innovación en las zonas menos visitadas. También se ajusta a la política de cohesión de la UE y a los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) de las Naciones Unidas, en particular los relacionados con el crecimiento económico inclusivo, las ciudades y comunidades sostenibles y el consumo y la producción responsables. Dentro de este sistema, los destinos no compiten entre sí, sino que colaboran, ofreciendo experiencias complementarias.

Junto con el turismo sostenible policéntrico, el **turismo de autor** juega un papel fundamental. El turismo de autor se refiere a un tipo de oferta turística que crea experiencias de viaje únicas, casi *artísticamente diseñadas*, cada una de las cuales lleva la firma distintiva de su creador. Estas experiencias están pensadas para sorprender a los viajeros – no necesariamente buscadas con antelación – y hechas a medida de cada cliente, con propuestas diferenciadas que van más allá de los circuitos turísticos convencionales. Se caracterizan por su autenticidad, exclusividad, sostenibilidad y personalización, en estrecha consonancia con los conceptos de *viajes de autor* y *viajes a medida*.

El turismo de autor tiene la capacidad de abordar retos como la masificación de los destinos más populares (de ahí su importancia estratégica en el marco del turismo policéntrico) y la estacionalización de las actividades turísticas. Por este motivo, se posiciona como una herramienta potente para promover y garantizar el éxito del turismo policéntrico. Sitúa la autenticidad y la comunidad en el centro, haciendo hincapié en los productos arraigados en el patrimonio, la creatividad y la identidad local. Al evitar la estandarización, crea experiencias únicas y basadas en el lugar y convierte a las comunidades en co-creadoras en lugar de espectadoras.

Juntos, el turismo policéntrico y el turismo de autor forman una respuesta integral: uno aborda los desequilibrios territoriales y el otro enriquece el contenido con autenticidad y apropiación comunitaria.

4. CÓMO: LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN

Esta estrategia debe implementarse a través de una serie de capítulos temáticos que conforman el esqueleto de una hoja de ruta adaptable a diferentes contextos del Espacio Atlántico. Guiado por estos principios, el modelo operativo se estructura de la siguiente manera:

- **Formación de nuevos profesionales:** El turismo requiere nuevas habilidades para adaptarse a la sostenibilidad, la digitalización y la participación de la comunidad. Esto significa desarrollar nuevos perfiles profesionales o reorientar los ya existentes. Los programas de formación deben capacitar a los agentes locales, las pyme y los municipios para co-crear experiencias y gestionar los flujos de forma eficaz.
- **Innovación en las prácticas del sector:** La innovación es necesaria no solo en los productos, sino también en la gobernanza, la gestión y el marketing. Esto incluye nuevos modelos de organizaciones de gestión de destinos (DMO), la planificación participativa con los residentes y prácticas como la certificación ecológica, la supervisión digital y la colaboración transfronteriza.
- **Desarrollo de la oferta:** Para diversificar y alejarse de los puntos turísticos masificados, deben surgir nuevos productos turísticos. Algunos ejemplos son el turismo de bienestar y termalismo en zonas del interior, las rutas culturales y enológicas, los circuitos gastronómicos o los itinerarios transfronterizos, todo ello bajo la perspectiva del turismo de autor. Estos productos atraen a los visitantes a lugares menos conocidos y prolongan la temporada turística.
- **Desarrollo de nuevos servicios:** Los servicios de apoyo deben satisfacer las expectativas cambiantes. Esto significa unos estándares de hospitalidad más elevados, una mejor accesibilidad, herramientas digitales para los visitantes y servicios basados en la comunidad. Los servicios deben reforzar la inclusión, garantizando que tanto los residentes como los visitantes se beneficien de la actividad turística.
- **Mejora de la conectividad (Digital and Física):** La conectividad es esencial para un turismo equilibrado. La inclusión digital permite que los destinos pequeños sean visibles y competitivos, mientras que la conectividad física —como las conexiones de transporte sostenibles, las rutas ciclistas y los sistemas de movilidad locales— hace que las zonas del interior y rurales sean más accesibles. Ambas son fundamentales para integrar las regiones periféricas en redes turísticas más amplias.
- **Sensibilización entre turistas, residentes y responsables políticos:** La sostenibilidad del turismo depende de la sensibilización. Las campañas deben fomentar un comportamiento responsable entre los turistas, empoderar a los residentes para que vean el turismo como una oportunidad y no como una carga, e informar a los responsables políticos sobre los beneficios de los modelos inclusivos y policéntricos.

- **Información accesible y de alta calidad:** Una estrategia turística solo puede tener éxito si se apoya en información transparente, fácil de usar y de alta calidad. Esto incluye plataformas digitales, bases de datos compartidas, iniciativas de narración de historias y sistemas de señalización que garanticen la accesibilidad y la inclusión de todos, incluidas las personas con diversidad funcional.

El núcleo operativo del modelo es su estrategia multiactor y multinivel, diseñada para crear nuevas centralidades, es decir, destinos alternativos que absorban la presión turística de las zonas sobrecargadas y atraigan nuevos flujos mostrando sus activos distintivos.

La puesta en práctica del Modelo de Turismo Sostenible Policéntrico se basa en el principio de **permeabilidad**, concebido como un instrumento político para mejorar la conectividad, la cooperación y la cohesión territorial en toda la zona atlántica. La permeabilidad se articula a través de **cinco dimensiones complementarias** –territorial, digital, sociocultural, institucional y comunicativa–, cada una de las cuales representa una capa específica a través de la cual los destinos pueden interactuar y desarrollarse conjuntamente.

Para traducir estas dimensiones en acciones, la estrategia define un conjunto de **medidas de permeabilidad** que sirven como facilitadores políticos para una implementación coordinada:

- **La permeabilidad territorial** mejora la accesibilidad y la movilidad, favoreciendo un flujo equilibrado de visitantes y la integración de las zonas interiores y costeras.
- **La permeabilidad digital** promueve el intercambio de datos, la visibilidad digital y las herramientas inteligentes de gestión de visitantes que refuerzan la competitividad y la innovación.
- **La permeabilidad sociocultural** empodera a las comunidades locales a través de la participación, la formación y la cocreación de experiencias turísticas auténticas.
- **La permeabilidad institucional** facilita la gobernanza multinivel y la armonización de políticas a través de las fronteras, fomentando la gestión integrada de los destinos.
- **La permeabilidad comunicativa** garantiza una imagen de marca coherente, una promoción conjunta y una comunicación transparente, aspectos esenciales tanto para la gestión de crisis como para la construcción de una identidad compartida.

En conjunto, estas dimensiones y medidas proporcionan la **columna vertebral estructural** para la coordinación de políticas y la aplicación estratégica del modelo POST. Permiten a las autoridades regionales y locales poner en práctica los principios de **policentricidad y sostenibilidad**, reforzando los objetivos generales de la UE en materia de equilibrio territorial, inclusión y transición ecológica en el sector turístico.

Para guiar la transición hacia un modelo de turismo sostenible policéntrico, el proyecto define **seis ejes estratégicos e es y 17 acciones propuestas**. En conjunto, proporcionan un marco flexible que apoya el desarrollo turístico equilibrado en diversos territorios. Se anima a cada región a seleccionar, adaptar y priorizar los ejes y acciones más relevantes para sus realidades, retos y ambiciones específicos. Esta flexibilidad garantiza que la implementación siga estando basada en el ámbito local y sea realista, al tiempo que ofrece una ambiciosa hoja de ruta paso a paso para avanzar.

EJE 1: Fortalecimiento de la oferta turística

Los destinos turísticamente menos desarrollados suelen tener importantes activos culturales y naturales, pero carecen de visibilidad o coordinación. El turismo sostenible policéntrico ayuda a liberar este potencial mediante la creación de nuevos puntos de interés, como experiencias de bienestar, rutas locales o centros patrimoniales, que atraen a los visitantes y distribuyen los flujos de forma más uniforme a lo largo del año.

EJE 2: Mejora de las infraestructuras y la movilidad

El turismo depende de una movilidad eficaz. Este eje se centra en soluciones prácticas, como la mejora de las conexiones de transporte, las infraestructuras ecológicas y los sistemas de movilidad suave. Estas medidas conectan zonas remotas, reducen la dependencia del coche y facilitan la exploración más allá de los puntos de interés habituales.

EJE 3: Transformación digital

Las herramientas digitales son esenciales para que los pequeños municipios puedan competir. El turismo sostenible policéntrico promueve el uso de datos, aplicaciones y plataformas de narración de historias para aumentar la visibilidad, gestionar los flujos y apoyar a los pequeños proveedores, garantizando que ningún destino se quede atrás en la transición digital.

EJE 4: Cooperación y asociaciones

El turismo sostenible policéntrico fomenta la cooperación interregional y transfronteriza para crear masa crítica, compartir costes y ampliar el impacto. Apoya la creación de marcas conjuntas, el aprendizaje compartido y los modelos de gobernanza que dan a los actores más pequeños una voz más fuerte y un mejor acceso a la financiación y las redes.

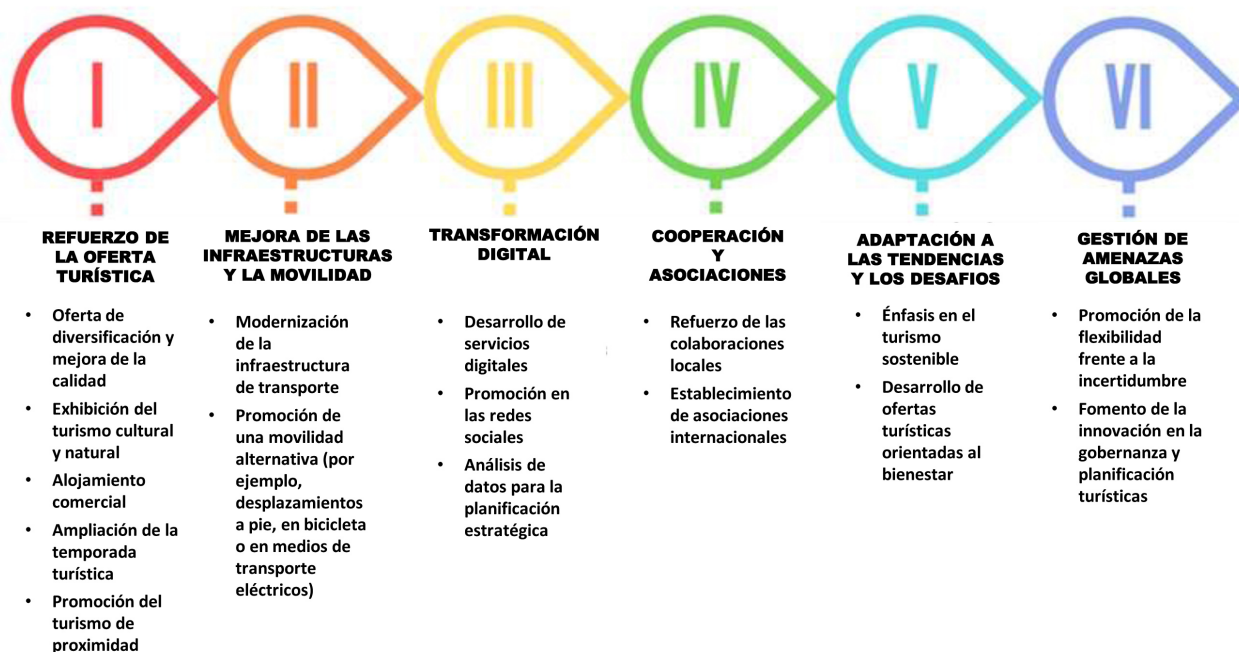
EJE 5: Adaptación a las tendencias y los retos

Las tendencias turísticas están cambiando hacia la autenticidad, el bienestar y los viajes más lentos. El turismo sostenible policéntrico ayuda a los territorios a adaptarse a la demanda cambiante, prolongar la temporada y hacer mejor uso de los recursos existentes, al tiempo que reduce la presión sobre los sitios más concurridos.

EJE 6: Gestión de las amenazas globales

Los riesgos climáticos, el declive demográfico y las crisis globales, afectan al turismo. El turismo sostenible policéntrico dota a las autoridades locales y regionales de herramientas de resiliencia – desde la adaptación al clima hasta la participación de la comunidad – para que el turismo siga apoyando al territorio, incluso en tiempos de cambio.

Estas acciones sirven como intervenciones prácticas y de Fuente de inspiración, ofreciendo orientación a través de buenas prácticas que pueden replicarse o adaptarse a cada contexto territorial. Y a sea creando rutas de cicloturismo (Eje 2 – movilidad suave), modernizando la infraestructura de transporte (Eje 2) o desarrollando aplicaciones locales e narración (Eje 3: transformación digital), la estrategia ofrece soluciones a medida para cada tipo de destino.



5. ¿PARA QUIÉN Y POR QUIÉN? PARTES INTERESADAS Y BENEFICIARIOS

La estrategia se concibe como un esfuerzo colaborativo que se basa en la participación de un amplio ecosistema de actores. Su éxito depende de la implicación compartida de múltiples niveles de gobernanza, el sector privado, la sociedad civil y las comunidades que dan forma al turismo y lo experimentan.

Gobiernos locales y regionales

Estos actores están en primera línea de la implementación. Son responsables de incorporar enfoques de turismo sostenible policéntrico en los documentos de planificación, las estrategias de uso del suelo y los programas de financiación. Los gobiernos locales también se aseguran de que el turismo sea coherente con las necesidades de los residentes y de que las inversiones refuercen, en lugar de erosionar, el capital social y medioambiental. Las administraciones regionales, por su parte, proporcionan coordinación entre territorios, ayudando a integrar el turismo en agendas más amplias de cohesión y desarrollo.

Residentes

Las comunidades no son receptoras pasivas, sino protagonistas centrales de este modelo. El turismo debe mejorar, en lugar de disminuir, su calidad de vida. Los residentes son tanto anfitriones como co-creadores de productos turísticos emblemáticos. Protegen el patrimonio inmaterial, las tradiciones y la identidad de la comunidad. Al incluir a los residentes en la toma de decisiones, la estrategia garantiza la legitimidad, la sostenibilidad a largo plazo y la aceptación social.

Pymes y emprendedores turísticos

Las pequeñas y medianas empresas, que van desde alojamientos familiares hasta operadores gastronómicos, culturales y artesanos, son la columna vertebral de las economías turísticas territoriales. El apoyo a estos actores es esencial para la innovación, la diversificación de productos y la creación de empleo. Su proximidad a los recursos y comunidades locales les permite encarnar los principios de autenticidad y sostenibilidad que constituyen el núcleo de la estrategia.

Consejos y consorcios turísticos

Las oficinas de turismo desempeñan un papel fundamental en la promoción de ofertas sostenibles y diversificadas, garantizando que la marca y el marketing del destino estén en consonancia con el equilibrio territorial a largo plazo. Los consorcios público-privados, así como las colaboraciones del sector privado, son igualmente importantes para fomentar iniciativas conjuntas, poner en común recursos y desarrollar conjuntamente productos turísticos que respondan tanto a la demanda del mercado como a las exigencias de sostenibilidad.

ONGs, organizaciones culturales y patrimoniales

Las organizaciones no gubernamentales y las organizaciones dedicadas al patrimonio desempeñan un papel fundamental en la protección de los paisajes, las tradiciones y los bienes culturales frente a la sobreexplotación. Aportan sus conocimientos especializados en materia de conservación, interpretación y sensibilización, garantizando que el crecimiento del turismo no socave los valores patrimoniales a largo plazo. También son actores clave en la promoción de la inclusión y la accesibilidad.

Redes transfronterizas e instituciones de la UE

La estrategia es explícitamente transnacional. La cooperación en el Espacio Atlántico – entre España, Portugal, Francia e Irlanda – asegura que las soluciones no sean aisladas, sino que se refuercen mutuamente y sean transferibles a diferentes territorios. Las redes transfronterizas facilitan el intercambio de conocimiento, la creación de marcas conjuntas y la gobernanza compartida. Las instituciones de la UE, por su parte, proporcionan los marcos políticos (ej. Vía de Transición del Turismo, el Pacto Verde Europeo o la Agenda 2030) que permiten la ampliación y la replica del modelo por toda Europa.

Mundo académico y proveedores de formación

Las universidades, escuelas de formación profesional y centros de formación son socios clave para replantearse las competencias. Desarrollan nuevos perfiles profesionales, apoyan la investigación y la innovación, y aseguran que la mano de obra pueda adaptarse a los modelos cambiantes de gestión turística.

Turistas

Aunque a menudo se les considera solo consumidores, los turistas también son partes interesadas. Sus elecciones, comportamientos y expectativas determinan la demanda. Sensibilizarlos y ofrecerles opciones auténticas y responsables los convierte en aliados de la sostenibilidad y del turismo sostenible policéntrico.

6. CONCLUSIONES

El turismo en el Espacio Atlántico se encuentra en una encrucijada. Para algunos territorios, se ha convertido en una fuente de masificación, presión inmobiliaria, degradación medioambiental y disminución de la satisfacción de los residentes. Para otros, representa una oportunidad perdida, con regiones rurales y del interior que luchan contra la despoblación, el estancamiento económico y la falta de visibilidad. Esta dualidad corre el riesgo de agravar la desigualdad territorial y socavar la cohesión.

En este escenario, la **Estrategia de Turismo Sostenible Policéntrico** es innovadora y distintiva porque:

- Ha sido diseñada para ayudar a los territorios a adaptarse a los retos más acuciantes de la actualidad, desde el cambio climático y la movilidad cambiante hasta las transiciones demográficas y las expectativas cambiantes de los visitantes. Ofrece una respuesta orientada al futuro y basada en la capacidad local.
- Al mismo tiempo, aborda ambos extremos del espectro: ofrece soluciones a los destinos masificados y apoya a los que carecen de turismo.

- Su principal fortaleza es la **permeabilidad**: la capacidad de las regiones para conectarse —física, digital e institucionalmente— tanto dentro como fuera de sus fronteras. Esta conectividad hace que el turismo sea más equilibrado, inclusivo y circular, especialmente en lugares que a menudo quedan excluidos de los flujos principales.
- Es **práctica**. No ofrece soluciones únicas para todos. En cambio, apoya a los territorios para que adopten medidas impulsadas a nivel local mediante herramientas flexibles y fáciles de usar, como autoevaluaciones, métodos participativos y plantillas de gobernanza, todas ellas adaptadas a los municipios pequeños y medianos.

La estrategia de turismo sostenible policéntrico se concibe como un proceso progresivo que se desarrolla a corto, medio y largo plazo. Su calendario garantiza que las primeras medidas generen impulso, mientras que los cambios estructurales más profundos se consolidan con el tiempo.

El turismo sostenible policéntrico replantea el turismo no como un fin en sí mismo, sino como una herramienta para el equilibrio, la resiliencia y la inclusión. Al combinar los conceptos de turismo sostenible policéntrico y turismo de autor, propone un nuevo paradigma que redistribuye los flujos, diversifica los productos y garantiza que las comunidades locales sigan siendo el centro del desarrollo turístico.

Es importante destacar que el turismo no debe demonizarse pues es extremadamente importante para el desarrollo económico de los países. A título de ejemplo, en España y Portugal, el sector genera más del 10 % del PIB y del empleo, lo que lo hace indispensable para la prosperidad económica y la estabilidad social. El reto no es reducir o rechazar el turismo, sino remodelarlo para que sus beneficios se distribuyan de forma equitativa, se gestionen sus impactos y su contribución se ajuste a los objetivos de sostenibilidad a largo plazo.

Esta estrategia posiciona a los residentes como co-creadores de experiencias auténticas, apoya a las pymes y a los operadores culturales como motores de la innovación y empodera a las autoridades locales y regionales para que incorporen la sostenibilidad en su planificación. Además, se alinea con las prioridades europeas – desde la Ruta de Transición del Turismo hasta el Pacto Verde Europeo o la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible – asegurando la relevancia del modelo más allá del Espacio Atlántico.

En última instancia, el turismo puede dividir o unir. Con la Estrategia de Turismo Sostenible Policéntrico, se convierte en un instrumento de cohesión, sostenibilidad de innovación. Al abordar el **POR QUÉ, PARA QUÉ, QUÉ y CÓMO**, la estrategia proporciona a los territorios europeos una visión y un marco para transformar el turismo en una palanca para un futuro más equilibrado y resiliente.

Retos y Soluciones del Turismo Sostenible Policéntrico



1. Masificación Turística

Retos: La masificación turística se mide, principalmente, a través de indicadores cuantitativos, descuidando la percepción de los residentes. Las autoridades actúan de manera reactiva en lugar de proactiva.

Solución POST: Planificación proactiva con indicadores cualitativos, gestión territorial equilibrada, y prevención antes de que la saturación ocurra.



2. Impacto en la Comunidad

Retos: Presión sobre la vivienda, los servicios públicos, y la identidad cultural. Gentrificación y pérdida de autenticidad.

Solución POST: Redistribución de flujos de turistas, empoderamiento de comunidades locales, y distribución justa de los beneficios económicos con las áreas colindantes.



3. Falta de Planificación Territorial Integrada

Retos: Las intervenciones del sector turismo a menudo ignoran los impactos que tienen sobre la gestión del agua, los residuos, la movilidad o las infraestructuras.

Solución POST: Inclusión de previsiones ambientales y sociales en la planificación y refuerzo de la cooperación entre destinos turísticos.



4. Desigualdades Regionales

Retos: Fuerte desequilibrio entre destinos en la costa, a menudo sobre saturados, y áreas rurales despobladas e ignoradas.

Solución POST: Redes policéntricas que creen nuevos hubs turísticos, dinamicen el rural y reduzcan las asimetrías territoriales.



5. Cooperación Institucional Débil

Retos: Coordinación limitada entre autoridades nacionales, regionales y locales.

Solución POST: Gobernanza colaborativa, compartir datos, y acción conjunta entre destinos consolidados y emergentes.



6. Comunicación Irresponsable

Retos: Promoción no controlada de lugares frágiles, a menudo intensificados por los influencers digitales.

Solución POST: Comunicación responsable y dirigida, creación de flujos alternativos, y nuevas narrativas locales.



RESUMO EXECUTIVO

I. POR QUE UN TURISMO SOSTIBLE POLICÉNTRICO: A ABORDAXE DAS NECESIDADES

No ámbito europeo, o turismo de masas converteuse nun dos desafíos que definen o noso tempo. Aínda que xera importantes ingresos económicos, o seu crecemento descontrolado exerce unha forte presión sobre os recursos naturais, as infraestruturas públicas e o tecido social das comunidades de acollida. Os destinos emblemáticos corren o risco de perder a súa autenticidade, mentres que os residentes se enfrontan ao aumento do custo da vida, á conxestión e á diminución da calidade de vida.

O turismo segue a ser un motor de crecemento e cohesión en todo o Espazo Atlántico, pero o modelo actual presenta desafíos estruturais. O sobreturismo en cidades coma o Porto, Dublín ou Santiago de Compostela sobrecarga as infraestruturas, aumenta os custos da vivenda e xera tensións sociais. Mentres tanto, as rexións rurais e do interior seguen a pasarse por alto e experimentan estancamento económico, despoboamento e desperdicio do potencial cultural.

Este desequilibrio crea unha dobre crise: exceso de turismo nalgúns zonas e turismo insuficiente noutras. Erosiona o benestar dos residentes, debilita a cohesión territorial e prexudica a sostibilidade. O cambio climático, o declive demográfico e os cambios nas preferencias turísticas fan que o problema sexa aínda máis urxente. Para garantir a resiliencia a longo prazo, o turismo debe repensarse como un sistema que equilibre a demanda coa capacidade dos lugares de acoller visitantes de forma sostible. Isto supón protexer os recursos ambientais, preservar a identidade cultural e garantir que os beneficios do turismo se repartan de forma xusta. O futuro do turismo depende de conciliar os intereses tanto dos visitantes coma dos residentes, creando experiencias significativas, responsables e respectuosas, e protexendo ao mesmo tempo o benestar das comunidades que fan que os destinos sexan únicos.

Ao mesmo tempo, vastos territorios rurais e desfavorecidos de todo o Espazo Atlántico —a miúdo envellecidos, despoboados e con escaseza de oportunidades de emprego— están excluídos dos circuitos turísticos convencionais, a pesar dos seus notables activos culturais, naturais e sociais. Reencamiñar parte dos fluxos desde destinos saturados cara a estas rexións subestimadas podería aliviar a presión sobre os abarrotados puntos críticos e fomentar a revitalización, a creación de emprego e o desenvolvemento sostible nas comunidades que actualmente quedan atrás.

Por iso é necesario un novo enfoque: aproveitar as oportunidades nalgúns áreas e, ao mesmo tempo, proporcionar solucións para outras. **O turismo debe evolucionar cara a unha ferramenta estratéxica para o equilibrio territorial, a sostibilidade e a resiliencia.** O Pacto Verde Europeo, o Itinerario de Transición para o Turismo e os Obxectivos de Desenvolvemento Sostible (ODS) salientan esta urxencia: o turismo xa non se pode xestionar de forma reactiva, senón que debe gobernarse estratexicamente para que beneficie tanto a visitantes coma a residentes.

O proxecto POST (do inglés *Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Strategy*, estratexia de turismo sostible policéntrico), desenvolvido no marco do programa Espazo Atlántico, encarna esta visión. Implica rexións de España, Portugal, Francia e Irlanda, cada unha con diferentes niveis de desenvolvemento turístico e diversas dinámicas urbano-rurais. Estes territorios —coma o interior de Galicia (provincia de Ourense), as zonas montañosas que rodean Dublín, o interior do norte de Portugal e as rexións rurais coma Cognac en Francia— serviron de campo de probas para a aplicación e adaptación do modelo policéntrico.

O turismo sostible policéntrico aborda directamente tanto o sobreturismo coma o subturismo. Ao crear circuitos e conexións estratéxicas, despraza os fluxos das zonas saturadas e libera o potencial inexplorado dos destinos máis pequenos. Este enfoque crea un escenario vantaxoso tanto para as comunidades coma para os viaxeiros.

2. POR QUE: PROPÓSITO E OBXECTIVOS

O propósito desta estratexia non é xerar máis turismo, senón garantir un mellor turismo: un que sexa sostible, inclusivo e xusto. É un compromiso deliberado coa sostibilidade, a cohesión territorial e a equidade. O turismo debería ser un medio, non a finalidade; debería estar ao servizo do desenvolvemento, da identidade e da calidade de vida dos lugares. Por ese motivo, debe acadar os seguintes **obxectivos**:

- Redistribuír os beneficios do turismo de forma xusta entre as rexións e comunidades.
- Fortalecer a cohesión entre os puntos críticos costeiros e as zonas rurais e de interior.
- Situar o turismo como catalizador da identidade, a inclusión e a resiliencia.
- Protexer o patrimonio natural e cultural, salvagardando ao mesmo tempo o benestar da comunidade.
- Axustar o turismo ás directrices e políticas da UE e aos ODS da ONU.

3. QUE É O TURISMO POLICÉNTRICO E DE AUTOR?

O turismo sostible policéntrico vai máis alá da dependencia duns poucos puntos críticos emblemáticos. En lugar de concentrar os fluxos, crea redes de destinos, cada un con activos únicos, conectados entre si para distribuír o valor. Deste xeito, redúcese a presión nos sitios concorridos á vez que se libera un potencial inexplorado noutros lugares.

Trátase dunha estratexia innovadora que mellora o atractivo e a sostibilidade rexionais ao fomentar as conexións entre varios microdestinos dentro dun territorio. En lugar de enfocarse nun único centro, constrúe redes colaborativas que redistribúen os fluxos turísticos, alivian a conxestión nas zonas ategadas e ofrecen oportunidades a aquelas con activos subutilizados. En termos máis sinxelos: o turismo sostible policéntrico cambia o paradigma do turismo *nun só lugar* ao turismo *entre lugares*.

O modelo de turismo sostible policéntrico é un marco estratéxico deseñado para tratar os desequilibrios no desenvolvemento turístico en todo o Espazo Atlántico. O seu obxectivo principal é crear unha rede de destinos interconectados e igualmente atractivos que funcionen en sinerxía, en lugar de illados ou en competencia. Isto representa un cambio do paradigma monocéntrico tradicional, en que o turismo se concentra nun puñado de puntos críticos “imprescindibles”, cara a un sistema policéntrico, onde varios centros de interese distribúen a demanda de forma máis uniforme.

O modelo non é unha solución única para todos, senón unha ferramenta flexible e adaptable que proporciona principios, eixes estratéxicos e accións implementables adaptadas ás realidades específicas de cada territorio. O seu obxectivo final é maximizar os beneficios do turismo e minimizar os seus impactos negativos nas comunidades, as paisaxes e os recursos.

Ao recoñecer que múltiples nodos turísticos interconectados (cada un con patrimonio, cultura e atraccións distintos) poden impulsar conxuntamente o desenvolvemento rexional, este modelo reduce a presión sobre os centros urbanos, distribúe os beneficios económicos e fomenta a innovación en zonas menos visitadas. Tamén se axusta á política de cohesión da UE e aos ODS da ONU, en particular aos relacionados co crecemento económico inclusivo, as cidades e comunidades sostibles, e o consumo e a produción responsables. Dentro deste sistema, os destinos non compiten, senón que colaboran, ofrecendo experiencias complementarias.

Xunto co turismo sostible policéntrico, o **turismo de autor** desempeña un papel vital. O turismo de autor refírese a un tipo de oferta turística que crea experiencias de viaxe únicas e enxeñosas, cada unha delas co selo distintivo do seu creador. Estas experiencias están pensadas para sorprender os viaxeiros –non necesariamente buscadas con antelación– e adáptanse a clientes individuais con propostas diferenciadas que van máis alá dos circuitos turísticos convencionais. Caracterízanse pola autenticidade, a exclusividade, a sostibilidade e a personalización, ao aliñárense estreitamente cos conceptos de viaxes exclusivas e feitas á medida.

O turismo de autor ten a capacidade de abordar desafíos coma a masificación de destinos populares (de aí a súa importancia estratéxica no marco do turismo policéntrico) e a estacionalidade das actividades turísticas. Por este motivo, constitúe unha ferramenta poderosa para avanzar e garantir o éxito do turismo policéntrico. Pon a autenticidade e a comunidade no centro, facendo fincapé nos produtos arraigados no patrimonio, a creatividade e a identidade local. Ao evitar a estandarización, crea experiencias únicas e baseadas no lugar, e converte as comunidades en cocreadoras en lugar de espectadoras.

En conxunto, o turismo policéntrico e o de autor conforman unha resposta integral: un aborda os desequilibrios territoriais, o outro enriquece o contido con autenticidade e responsabilidade comunitaria.

4. COMO: A IMPLEMENTACIÓN

Esta estratexia debe implementarse a través dun conxunto de capítulos temáticos, que constitúen a columna vertebral dunha folla de ruta adaptable aos diversos contextos do Espazo Atlántico. Guiado por estes principios, o modelo operativo estrutúrase do seguinte xeito:

- **Formación de novos profesionais:** O turismo require novas habilidades para adaptarse á sostibilidade, á dixitalización e á participación comunitaria. Deste xeito, deben desenvolverse novos perfís profesionais ou reorientarse os xa existentes. Os programas de formación deberían capacitar os axentes locais, as pemes e os concellos para cocrearen experiencias e xestionaren os fluxos de forma eficaz.
- **Innovación nas prácticas do sector:** A innovación é necesaria non só nos produtos, senón tamén na gobernanza, na xestión e no márketing. Isto inclúe novos modelos de organizacións de xestión de destinos (OXD), a planificación participativa cos residentes e as prácticas coma a certificación ecolóxica, a supervisión dixital e a colaboración transfronteiriza.
- **Desenvolvemento da oferta:** Para diversificar a oferta turística e afastala de puntos críticos masificados, deben xurdir novos produtos turísticos. Algúns exemplos son o turismo de benestar e termalismo en zonas de interior, as rutas culturais e vinícolas, os circuitos gastronómicos ou os itinerarios transfronteirizos, todos eles na perspectiva do turismo de autor. Estes produtos atraen visitantes a lugares menos coñecidos e prolongan a tempada turística.
- **Desenvolvemento de novos servizos:** Os servizos de apoio deben satisfacer as expectativas en constante evolución. Tradúcense en estándares de hospitalidade máis altos, mellora da accesibilidade, ferramentas dixitais para os visitantes e servizos baseados na comunidade. Os servizos deberían reforzar a inclusión, garantindo que tanto os residentes coma os visitantes se beneficien da actividade turística.
- **Mellora da conectividade (dixital e física):** A conectividade é esencial para un turismo equilibrado. A inclusión dixital permite que os pequenos destinos sexan visibles e competitivos, mentres que a conectividade física —coma as conexións de transporte sostible, as rutas ciclistas e os sistemas de mobilidade locais— fai que as zonas rurais e do interior sexan máis accesibles. Ambas son fundamentais para integrar as rexións periféricas en redes turísticas máis amplas.
- **Sensibilización de turistas, residentes e responsables políticos:** A sostibilidade do turismo depende da concienciación. As campañas deberían fomentar un comportamento responsable entre os turistas, capacitar os residentes para que vexan o turismo como unha oportunidade en lugar dunha carga e informar os responsables políticos sobre os beneficios dos modelos inclusivos e policéntricos.

- **Información accesible e de elevada calidade:** Unha estratexia turística só pode ter éxito se está amparada por información transparente, fácil de usar e de gran calidade. Isto inclúe plataformas dixitais, bases de datos compartidas, iniciativas de narración de historias e sistemas de sinalización que garantan a accesibilidade e a inclusión a todas as persoas, incluídas as que teñen discapacidades.

O corazón operativo do modelo é a súa estratexia multinivel e multisectorial deseñada para crear novos centros: destinos alternativos que absorban a presión turística das zonas sobrecargadas e atraian novos fluxos ao mostraren activos distintivos.

A posta en funcionamento do modelo de turismo sostible policéntrico baséase no principio de **permeabilidade**, concibido como un instrumento político para mellorar a conectividade, a cooperación e a cohesión territorial en todo o Espazo Atlántico. A permeabilidade artículase a través de **cinco dimensións complementarias**: territorial, dixital, sociocultural, institucional e comunicativa; cada unha delas representa una capa específica que permite a interacción e o codesenvolvemento dos destinos.

Para traducir estas dimensións en accións, a estratexia define un conxunto de **medidas de permeabilidade** que funcionan como facilitadoras de políticas para a implementación coordinada:

- **A permeabilidade territorial** mellora a accesibilidade e a mobilidade, ao favorecer os fluxos equilibrados de visitantes e a integración das zonas interiores e costeiras.
- **A permeabilidade dixital** promove o intercambio de datos, a visibilidade dixital e as ferramentas intelixentes de xestión de visitantes que reforzan a competitividade e a innovación.
- **A permeabilidade sociocultural** apodera as comunidades locais a través da participación, a formación e a cocreación de experiencias turísticas auténticas.
- **A permeabilidade institucional** facilita a gobernanza multinivel e a aliñación de políticas transfronteirizas, fomentando así a xestión integrada do destino.
- **A permeabilidade comunicativa** garante unha marca coherente, unha promoción conxunta e unha comunicación transparente, esenciais tanto para a xestión de crises coma para a construción dunha identidade compartida.

Xuntas, estas dimensións e medidas constitúen a **columna vertebral estrutural** para a coordinación de políticas e a aplicación estratéxica do modelo POST. Permiten que as autoridades rexionais e locais poñan en práctica os principios de **policentricidade e sostibilidade**, reforzando así os obxectivos máis amplos da UE de equilibrio territorial, inclusión e transición ecolóxica dentro do sector turístico.

Para guiar a transición cara a un modelo de turismo sostible policéntrico, o proxecto define **seis eixes estratéxicos e 17 accións propostas**. En conxunto, proporcionan un marco flexible que apoia o desenvolvemento turístico equilibrado en diversos territorios. Anímase a que cada rexión escolla, adapte e priorice os eixes e as accións máis relevantes para as súas realidades, desafíos e ambicións específicos. Esta flexibilidade garante que a implementación se basee nos lugares e sexa realista, ao tempo que ofrece unha vía ambiciosa para avanzar paso a paso.

EIXE 1: Reforzo da oferta turística

Os pequenos destinos adoitan contar con activos culturais e naturais potentes, pero carecen de visibilidade ou coordinación. O turismo sostible policéntrico axuda a liberar este potencial ao crear novos puntos de interese —coma experiencias de benestar, itinerarios locais ou centros patrimoniais— que atraian visitantes e distribúan os fluxos de forma máis uniforme ao longo de todo o ano.

EIXE 2: Mellora das infraestruturas e da mobilidade

O turismo depende dunha mobilidade eficaz. Este eixe céntrase en solucións prácticas coma a mellora das conexións de transporte, as infraestruturas verdes e os sistemas de mobilidade alternativa. Estas medidas conectan zonas remotas, reducen a dependencia dos automóbiles e facilitan a exploración alén dos puntos críticos habituais.

EIXE 3: Transformación dixital

As ferramentas dixitais son esenciais para que os pequenos concellos poidan competir. O turismo sostible policéntrico promove o uso de datos, aplicacións e plataformas de narración de historias para aumentar a visibilidade, xestionar os fluxos e apoiar os pequenos provedores, garantindo que ningún destino quede atrás na transición dixital.

EIXE 4: Cooperación e asociacións

O turismo sostible policéntrico fomenta a cooperación interrexional e transfronteiriza para construír masa crítica, compartir custos e aumentar o impacto. Apoia a creación de marcas conxuntas, a aprendizaxe compartida e os modelos de gobernanza, que outorgan aos actores máis pequenos máis presenza e un mellor acceso a financiamento e redes.

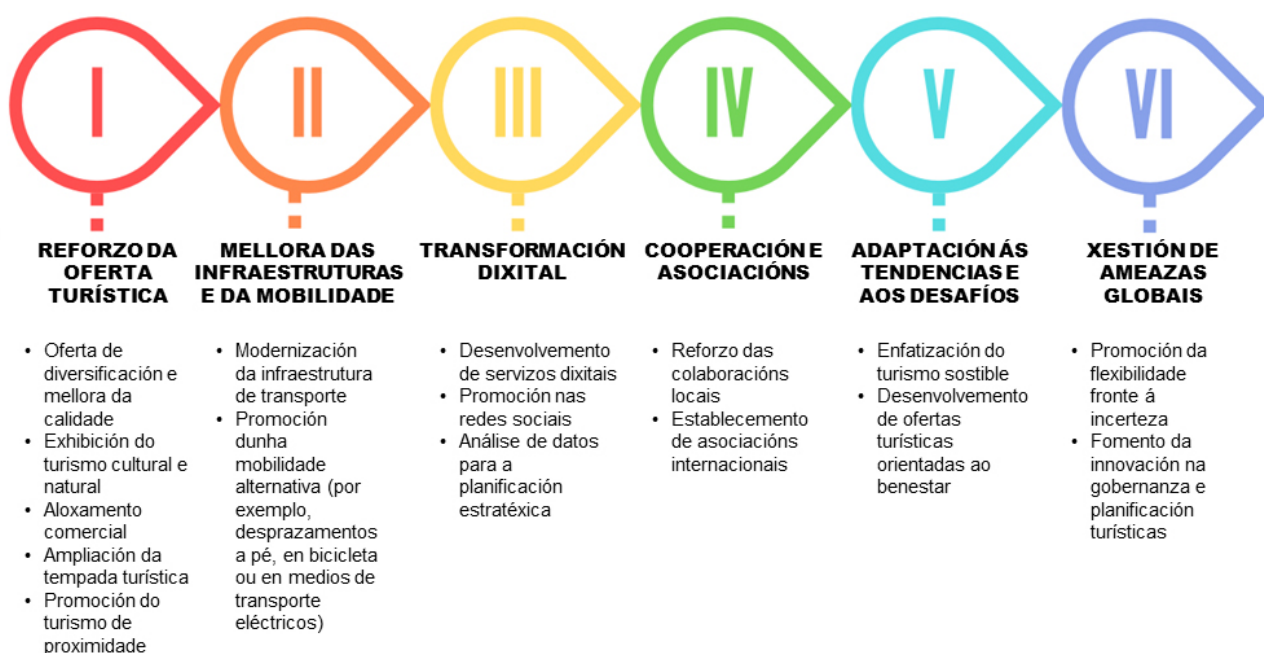
EIXE 5: Adaptación ás tendencias e aos desafíos

As tendencias turísticas están a mudar cara á autenticidade, o benestar e as viaxes máis lentas. O turismo sostible policéntrico axuda aos territorios a adaptarse á demanda cambiante, a ampliar a tempada e a aproveitar mellor os recursos existentes, ao tempo que reduce a presión sobre os lugares masificados.

EIXE 6: Xestión de ameazas globais

Os riscos climáticos, o declive demográfico e as crises globais afectan o turismo. O turismo sostible policéntrico dota as autoridades locais e rexionais de ferramentas de resiliencia, desde a adaptación climática ata a participación comunitaria, para que o turismo siga a apoiar o territorio mesmo en tempos de perturbación.

Estas accións serven tanto de intervencións prácticas coma de fontes de inspiración, ao ofrecer orientación a través de boas prácticas que poden replicarse ou adaptarse a cada contexto territorial. Xa sexa creando rutas de cicloturismo (eixe 2: mobilidade alternativa), modernizando as infraestruturas de transporte (eixe 2) ou desenvolvendo aplicacións locais de narración de historias (eixe 3: transformación dixital), a estratexia ofrece solucións personalizadas para cada tipo de destino.



5. PARA QUEN E POR QUEN? PARTES INTERESADAS E BENEFICIARIOS

A estratexia concíbese como un esforzo colaborativo que se basea na participación dun amplo ecosistema de actores. O seu éxito depende da responsabilidade compartida entre múltiples niveis de gobernanza, o sector privado, a sociedade civil e as comunidades que conforman e experimentan o turismo.

Gobernos locais e rexionais

Estes actores están na primeira liña da implementación. Son os responsables de incorporar enfoques de turismo sostible policéntrico nos documentos de planificación, nas estratexias de uso do solo e nos programas de financiamento. Os gobernos locais tamén garanten que o turismo sexa coherente coas necesidades dos residentes e que os investimentos fortalezan, en lugar de erosionar, o capital social e ambiental. Mentres tanto, as administracións rexionais proporcionan coordinación entre territorios, axudando así a integrar o turismo en axendas máis amplas de cohesión e desenvolvemento.

Residentes

As comunidades non son receptoras pasivas, senón protagonistas centrais neste modelo. O turismo debe mellorar, en lugar de diminuír, a súa calidade de vida. Os residentes son anfitrións e cocreadores de produtos turísticos exclusivos. Salvagardan o patrimonio inmaterial, as tradicións e a identidade da comunidade. Ao incluír os residentes na toma de decisións, a estratexia garante a lexitimidade, a sostibilidade a longo prazo e a aceptación social.

Pemes e emprendedores turísticos

As pequenas e medianas empresas, que van desde aloxamentos familiares ata establecementos de gastronomía, operadores culturais e artesáns, son a columna vertebral das economías turísticas territoriais. O apoio a estes actores é esencial para a innovación, a diversificación de produtos e a creación de emprego. A súa proximidade aos recursos e ás comunidades locais permítelles encarnar os principios de autenticidade e sostibilidade situados no centro da estratexia.

Consellos e consorcios turísticos

Os consellos turísticos desempeñan un papel primordial na promoción de ofertas sostibles e diversificadas, garantindo que a marca e o márketing do destino sexan acordes co equilibrio territorial a longo prazo. Os consorcios público-privados, así como as colaboracións no sector privado, son igualmente importantes para fomentar iniciativas conxuntas, compartir recursos e codesenvolver produtos turísticos que respondan tanto á demanda do mercado coma aos imperativos de sostibilidade.

Organizacións non gobernamentais, culturais e patrimoniais

As organizacións non gobernamentais e patrimoniais desempeñan un papel vital na protección das paisaxes, as tradicións e os bens culturais fronte á sobreexplotación. Ofrecen coñecementos especializados en conservación, interpretación e sensibilización, garantindo que o crecemento do turismo non menoscabe os valores patrimoniais a longo prazo. Tamén son actores clave na promoción da inclusión e a accesibilidade.

Redes transfronteirizas e institucións da UE

A estratexia é explicitamente transnacional. A cooperación no Espazo Atlántico (entre España, Portugal, Francia e Irlanda) garante que as solucións non sexan illadas, senón que se reforcen mutuamente e sexan transferibles a diferentes territorios. As redes transfronteirizas facilitan o intercambio de coñecementos, a creación de marcas conxuntas e a gobernanza compartida. As institucións da UE proporcionan os marcos políticos (por exemplo, o Itinerario de Transición para o Turismo, o Pacto Verde Europeo ou a Axenda 2030) que permiten a súa ampliación e replicación en toda Europa.

Ámbito académico e provedores de formación

As universidades, os centros de formación profesional e os centros de capacitación son partes fundamentais no novo enfoque das competencias. Desenvolven novos perfís profesionais, apoian a investigación e a innovación, e garanten que a forza laboral poida adaptarse aos modelos cambiantes de xestión turística.

Turistas

Aínda que a miúdo se ven só como consumidores, os turistas tamén son partes interesadas. As súas eleccións, comportamentos e expectativas configuran a demanda. Mediante a sensibilización e a oferta de opcións auténticas e responsables, convértense en aliados do turismo sostible e policéntrico.

6. CONCLUSIÓN

O turismo no Espazo Atlántico atópase nunha encrucillada. Para algúns territorios, converteuse nunha fonte de masificación, presión sobre a vivenda, degradación ambiental e diminución da satisfacción dos residentes. Para outros, representa unha oportunidade perdida, xa que as rexións rurais e do interior loitan contra o despoboamento, o estancamento económico e a falta de visibilidade. Esta dualidade corre o risco de afondar a desigualdade territorial e de prexudicar a cohesión.

Nesta situación, a **estratexia de turismo sostible policéntrico** é innovadora e distintiva porque:

- Foi deseñada para axudar aos territorios a adaptarse aos desafíos actuais máis urxentes, desde o cambio climático e a mobilidade cambiante ata as transicións demográficas e a evolución das expectativas dos visitantes. Ofrece unha resposta orientada ao futuro e baseada na capacidade local.
- Ao mesmo tempo, aborda ambos os dous lados do espectro: ofrece solucións para destinos masificados e apoia aqueles que carecen de turismo.

- A súa forza principal é a **permeabilidade**: a capacidade das rexións para conectarse (de xeito físico, dixital e institucional) tanto nacional coma internacionalmente. Esta conectividade fai que o turismo sexa máis equilibrado, inclusivo e circular, en particular en lugares a miúdo excluídos dos fluxos convencionais.
- Resulta **práctica**. Non ofrece unha solución única para todos. En cambio, apoia os territorios na toma de medidas impulsadas localmente a través de ferramentas flexibles e fáciles de usar (coma autoavaliacións, métodos participativos e modelos de gobernanza), todas elas adaptadas a concellos pequenos e medianos.

Resulta práctica. Non ofrece unha solución única para todos. En cambio, apoia os territorios na toma de medidas impulsadas localmente a través de ferramentas flexibles e fáciles de usar (coma autoavaliacións, métodos participativos e modelos de gobernanza), todas elas adaptadas a concellos pequenos e medianos.

O turismo sostible policéntrico reformula o turismo non como un fin en si mesmo, senón como unha ferramenta para o equilibrio, a resiliencia e a inclusión. Ao combinar os conceptos de turismo sostible policéntrico e turismo de autor, propón un novo paradigma que redistribúe os fluxos, diversifica produtos e garante que as comunidades locais permanezan no centro do desenvolvemento do turismo.

É importante salientar que o turismo non se pode demonizar, porque é extremadamente importante para o desenvolvemento económico nacional. Por exemplo, en países coma España e Portugal, o sector xera máis do 10 % do PIB e do emprego, polo que resulta indispensable para a prosperidade económica e a estabilidade social. O reto non é reducir ou rexeitar o turismo, senón remodelalo para que os seus beneficios sexan distribuídos de forma xusta, os seus impactos sexan xestionados e a súa contribución se axuste aos obxectivos de sostibilidade a longo prazo.

Esta estratexia sitúa os residentes como cocreadores de experiencias auténticas, apoia as pemes e os operadores culturais como motores de innovación, e capacita as autoridades locais e rexionais para incorporar a sostibilidade na súa planificación. Tamén se axusta ás prioridades europeas, desde o Itinerario de Transición para o Turismo ata o Pacto Verde Europeo e a Axenda 2030 para o Desenvolvemento Sostible, o que garante a súa relevancia máis alá do Espazo Atlántico.

En definitiva, o turismo pode dividir ou unir. Coa estratexia de turismo sostible policéntrico, convértese nun instrumento de cohesión, sostibilidade e innovación. Ao tratar **o PORQUÉ, o PARA QUE, o QUE e o COMO**, a estratexia proporciónalles aos territorios europeos unha visión e un marco para transformaren o turismo nunha panca para un futuro máis equilibrado e resiliente.

Retos e Solucións do Turismo Sostible Policéntrico



1. Sobreturismo

Reito: A masificación turística mídese, principalmente, a través de indicadores cuantitativos, que non teñen en conta a percepción dos residentes. As autoridades actúan de xeito reactivo en lugar de ser proactivas.

Solución POST: Planificación proactiva con indicadores cualitativos, xestión territorial equilibrada, e prevención antes de que se dea a saturación.



2. Impacto na Comunidade

Reito: Presión sobre a vivenda, os servizos públicos e a identidade cultural. Xentrificación e perda de autenticidade.

Solución POST: Redistribución de fluxos de turistas, empoderamento de comunidades locais e distribución xusta dos beneficios económicos coas áreas colindantes.



3. Falta de Planificación Territorial Integrada

Reito: As inversións do sector turismo moitas veces ignoran os impactos que teñen sobre a xestión da auga, os refugallo, a mobilidade ou as infraestruturas.

Solución POST: Inclusión de previsións ambientais e sociais no planeamento e reforzo da cooperación entre destinos turísticos.



4. Desigualdades Rexionais

Reito: Forte desequilibrio entre destinos na costa, moitas veces saturados, e áreas rurais despoboadas e ignoradas.

Solución POST: Redes policéntricas que creen novos polos turísticos, dinamicen o rural e reduzan as asimetrías territoriais.



5. Cooperación Institucional Débil

Reito: Coordinación limitada entre autoridades nacionais, rexionais e locais.

Solución POST: Gobernanza colaborativa, compartir datos, e acción conxunta entre destinos consolidándose emerxentes.



6. Comunicación Irresponsable

Reito: Promoción non controlada de lugares fráxiles, a menudo intensificados polos creadores de tendencias dixitais.

Solución POST: Comunicación responsable e dirixida, creación de fluxos alternativos, e novas narrativas locais.

01

INTRODUCTION

01

01

INTRODUCTION

Overtourism is currently a major constrain affecting not only tourism destinations (and its communities) but also the sustainable development of these destinations' regions all over the world. The Atlantic Area is no exception with Spain is "leading" the protests movement against the negative impact of overtourism on the local communities and the quality of life of residents.

At the same time, the unbalanced distribution of tourism flows in the Atlantic Area is generating territorial development inequalities leaving the Atlantic "non-coastal" areas unequipped to deal with demographic ageing, scarcity of qualified human resources, and limited innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Tourism is a sector that must transform the resources of the territory into sustainable economic activity. To achieve this objective, POST project partnership had developed the concept of "Polycentric Tourism" which is the base for the strategy detailed in the following chapters. This strategy aims at constituting an innovative approach that seeks to redistribute tourism in inland territories through measures that favours the permeability of tourist flows, especially from the overcrowded areas to the less developed territories.

The strategy of a new tourism model: Polycentric Sustainable Tourism reflects the results of knowledge exchange between tourism experts from the Atlantic Area countries and was draft taking into consideration the specific realities the different territories of those countries are facing.

In **chapter 2** (the first technical content chapter) includes a detailed description of the methodology followed not only for the drafting of this document but also for defining the **Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model** that will be tested and (hopefully) validated with the implementation of POST project.

In **chapter 3** it will be discussed the abovementioned specificities of the project territories to assure that the model answers to the needs and is applicable to all the Atlantic area territories despite of its characteristics or the development stage of its tourism activity.

The conclusions for chapter 3, completed with a literature review of the previous knowledge about the state of play of the tourism in the Atlantic Area, will allow to perform a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the tourism activity and of its impacts in that territorial cooperation area. This analysis, presented in **chapter 4**, will be the base to set the defining the Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model logical framework.

Chapter 5 includes the core content of this technical report as it presents the model itself. It includes not only a detailed explanation of the definition Polycentric Sustainable Tourism, but also the intervention axis of the **Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model**. It also includes the discussion of good practices that could be adapted as part of the model itself as well as the description of proposals of actions for implementing the Polycentric Sustainable Tourism concept through the model. In addition, it will detail a set of measures the generation of permeability in the tourism flows (acting in favor of a more balance tourism developed on the Atlantic Area as a whole) and the tools the regional tourism stakeholders can use to apply the model.

A set of recommendations about the **Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model** will also be presented to make as accessible (and easier) as possible the model implementation.

This report ends with an **executive summary** that will serve as a guide/road map for the implementation of the model.

In summary, the current report is a technical document which describes and justifies the **Polycentric Sustainable Tourism** framework and discusses how it can transform current challenges of mass tourism into sustainable economic and territorial opportunities.

02

METHODOLOGY

02

02

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodological approach and tools for developing the POST project phases mentioned in the introduction, being that methodology is a set of research methods that make it possible to achieve certain objectives in a given field of study (Bisquerra, 1989).

The definition of the methodology for the elaboration of the Technical Report on the Polycentric Tourism Strategy Proposal has been established on the basis of a pre-selection of very simple tools and methods that allow the development of this work by partners of different nature (territorial, academic, etc.) and finally, to ensure the production of an adequate strategic proposal, practical and applicable to the partners territories and potentially transferrable to other Atlantic Area territories.

This methodological proposal also notes and recognizes that there is not much scientific literature on the subject and the different casuistry of the partners and taking into account the following challenges:

- The interdisciplinary nature of tourism and the broad spectrum of key stakeholders.
- A comprehensive approach to policymaking for both public and private sectors.
- Adherence to different legal frameworks.
- Scientific support for developing a polycentric sustainable tourism model.
- Effective monitoring of results across AA territories.

The project's methodological approach recognizes the need to emphasize inter-regional learning and exchange of best practices, allowing partners to benefit from shared experiences and expertise while implementing pilot actions across all project territories.

Given the complexities and interdependence of transport, accommodation, events, and attractions across mature and emerging destinations, in-depth insights from key stakeholders are essential. Therefore, qualitative research is particularly useful in tourism because it allows researchers to gain rich insights into the subjective experiences, social relationships, and cultural contexts that shape tourist behaviour and destination development (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004).

Qualitative data analysis involves “a process of identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns or themes found in the data. Interviews and focus groups are particularly effective at uncovering in-depth insights, as they allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words” (Bryman, 2012, p. 568).

The qualitative analysis will be essential to identify the current scenarios in each territory and the good practices that should be followed.

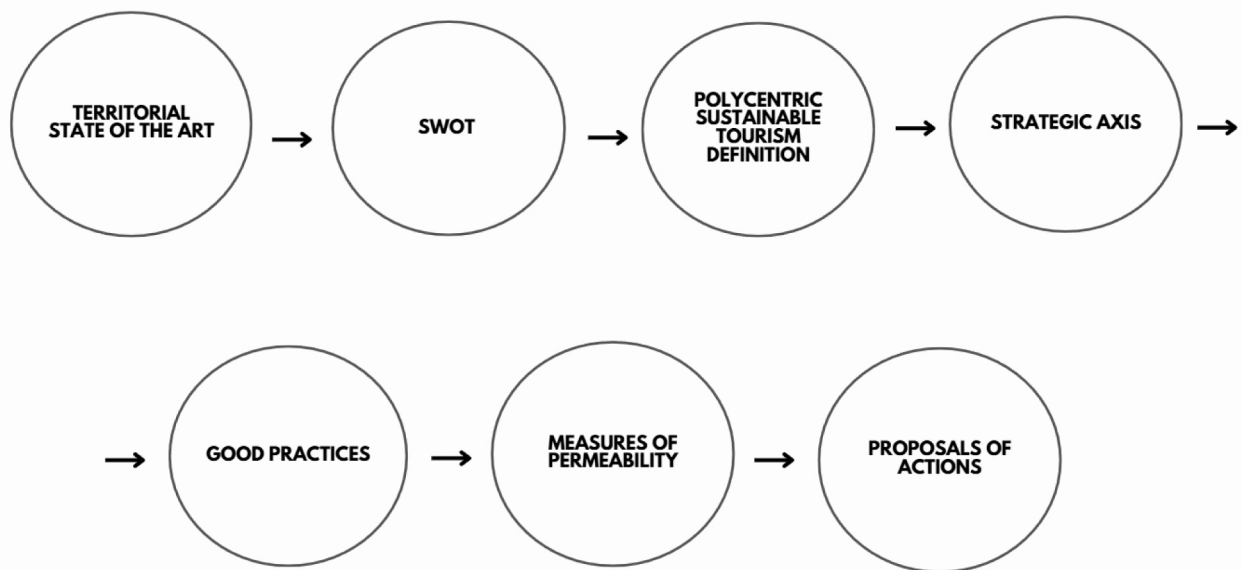


Fig 1.
Methodology tasks.

Project tasks are executed either individually or collaboratively. For tasks assigned to pairs, weekly meetings are held to discuss progress and coordination. Tasks common to all partners are addressed in monthly expert group meetings, where implementation strategies and progress are presented and deliberated. Upon completion, all prepared task deliverables are presented to the POST team and discussed in detail where necessary changes can be adopted if deemed necessary through the open collaborative process. Once this has been completed the deliverables such as the territorial state of art or best practice will be uploaded to the project shared folder to facilitate constant monitoring and communication throughout the POST project.



Fig 2. Methodology tools.

Territorial State of the Art

A state of the art describes the subject under study by analysing similar or related published work and provides a comprehensive overview of what has been done in the field and what should be investigated further. It is the highest degree of development of an art or technique at a certain point in time (Ridley, 2008).

Participant observation is a qualitative research method where the researcher becomes actively involved in the daily activities of the participants. This allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the social dynamics and context in which the participants operate (Spradley, 1980, p. 53). This approach helps researchers understand the unique characteristics of the area, allowing for the development of adapted tourism strategies. Experts applying this method are better positioned to advise on sustainable tourism policies that reflect the real dynamics of a given location (Jennings, 2010, p. 182). In other words, through participant observation, partners with this task can understand the local environment.

The tools that should be used to carry out the Territorial State of Art are participant observation, hence the need for each partner to carry out their own territorial state of art, desktop, literature and secondary data analysis.

The desktop analysis consists of identifying the literature, theories, data and previous research that contributed to the choice of research topic. Literature can be used to support the identification of a problem to be investigated and to illustrate the existence of a gap in research that needs to be filled (Ridley, 2008).

According to Heaton (1998) and Vartanian (2011), secondary data analysis involves “using existing data collected for another purpose to answer new research questions, offering cost-effective insights and allowing researchers to investigate trends or phenomena without the need for primary data collection”. Those responsible should ask the partners in each territory for data such as tourist density, tourist intensity, seasonality rate and points of greatest tourist load in the region.

Each project partner conducted an **individual State of the Art** analysis in their respective territories. The following topics had to be answered:

- Main tourism policies/strategies.
- Key tourism data and indicators for the destinations.
- Incorporate key destination maps identifying infrastructure such as transport attractions, etc. (...).
- Main tourism products/resources.
- Main tourism stakeholders.
- Stressed tourism areas and main characteristics (overcrowded tourism areas).
- Undervalued areas/areas with potential characteristics (Areas with the capacity and attractiveness to capture exceeding tourist).
- Main tourism problems.
- Main tourism opportunities.
- Post challenges.

These individual reports were later consolidated into a comprehensive State of the Art, summarizing key findings and trends across regions.

SWOT

SWOT analysis is one of the most frequently used methods in strategic management. It is employed to build an overall development strategy (general) as well as functional strategies (fractional), concerning a function to be performed by a state, a local government unit or an enterprise (marketing, finance, logistics, etc.) (Gierzzewska & Romanowska, 2002, pp.235).

The POST methodology will use the SWOT analysis to evaluate internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats within the project destinations. The internal analysis helps identify inherent resources, capabilities, and advantages, while the external analysis examines opportunities and threats posed by external factors, such as competitive environments, trends, and broader contextual influences. The goal of SWOT analysis is to leverage knowledge of both internal and external conditions to develop strategies that align with the realities of the environment being analysed (Galea & Bonnici, 2015).

The SWOT diagnostic for territorial development focuses on assessing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that a particular region faces. This method is essential for identifying internal advantages and limitations, while also evaluating external factors such as potential growth opportunities or challenges posed by the surrounding environment (Ferreira et al., 2019, p. 134).

The tools that should be used to draw up the SWOT analysis are:

- Analysis of the territorial state of art drawn up.
- At least two interviews per territory. Interviews are a key method in qualitative research, allowing for deep exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences, which can yield rich, detailed data that quantitative methods may not capture (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The aim of the interviews is for each pilot territory to carry out a mini-SWOT ad hoc, so the interview must help identify the territory's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in what concerns polycentric tourism definition. We suggest that the interview should not exceed one hour. It must be conducted one interview with the private sector representative and one with the public sector with the mayor of the pilot municipality (or equivalent in terms of representation/power/decision-making capacity or whoever they delegate). The closest partner should be interviewed, and all territories should have a SWOT, which means four SWOT analyses in total. Each expert will have to draw up a mini-SWOT of their territory, the result of analysing the literature, the state of the art and the interviews. The partners in charge of the general SWOT will make a final report with the common elements from the mini swots. It is also recommended that the SWOT analysis that should be taken into account to first define the axes and then the actions, is the common SWOT. The proposed interview scripts are included as an appendix to this document (Appendix 1 and 2).
- Guidelines proposal for the interpretation of the results of the interviews in order to have homogenous mini-swot are proposed in Appendix 3.

Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Definition

The methodology for defining the concept of polycentric sustainable tourism must take as its starting point an exhaustive analysis of the literature, centred on theories and frameworks relevant to the development of polycentric tourism.

In this context, the partners who are higher education institutions should work together to develop a definition of what 'polycentric sustainable tourism' should entail.

The concept of Polycentric Tourism must be defined, respecting the necessary elements and through discussions with the experts 'group. This collaborative process will ensure a scientifically grounded and consensual definition for the project.

Strategic Axes

The strategic axes essentially define the sources of value to a business and destination, and how the stakeholders could reposition themselves in changing environment. Strategic axes not only define what an organisation does, but the extent to which it does it. Examples of strategic axis could include connectivity, intramodality, innovation, and socio-demographic development, tourism indicators, sustainability, geographical parameters, tourist flows etc. To develop the strategic axes, the methodology to be used should be based on the SWOT analysis that should be tackled by the polycentric sustainable tourism including, at least, the following pillars: connectivity, sustainability, intramodality, innovation, and socio-demographic development.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a collective conversation or group interview. The size of the group may vary from small (6 persons) to large (12 persons) and may or may not be guided by a facilitator. The main purpose of a focus group discussion is to obtain in-depth information relating to concepts, perceptions and practices in the context of the subject from members of the group (Morgan, 1998). Ideally this is not a question-and-answer session but an opportunity to gain insight on the subject from the point of view of experts, practitioners and stakeholders in a purely interactive session.

In order to develop the strategic axis, the partner responsible for this phase will define the proposals and validate them organizing an online discussion group with the participation of the partners (if possible, 1 participant per partner or, at least, 1 participant per territory).

Collection of good practices

The good practices can be strategies, approaches and/or activities that, through research and evaluation, have been shown to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable and that reliably lead to a desired outcome (European Commission, 2021).

Benchmarking is “the process of identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices from organizations anywhere in the world to help an organization improve its performance” (Kumar et al., 2006). Benchmarking is considered a tool for identifying and comparing processes in a given sector among its competitors, in an environment that is constantly changing (Hong et al., 2012). This tool is also perfectly valuable and applicable to territories. In order to identify good practices, benchmarking can't go beyond the Atlantic area.

For this task, it will be essential to research existing good practices, the objectives of the practice and a brief description, the relative indicators and results achieved, the budget and funding, their relevance to polycentric tourism and their potential for transfer. These good practices aim to address the challenges highlighted by the expert group, providing actionable solutions and examples that can be adapted to the project's objectives.

Measures of permeability

In this phase, partners responsible for this chapter, has to reflect about the different casuistic of Atlantic territories and elaborate the recommendation to make possible the execution of the strategy in them. The measures of permeability must recommend certain aspects to the territories so that they can successfully implement the defined strategy. There is no specific methodological tool, but a list of minimum guidelines establishment for territories for permeability:

- It will be essential to have a sustainable planning strategy/guideline/document (depending on laws and governance in the various regions) for the destination (or to develop it).
- Map with timeline the process of integration of these strategy/document/guidelines into the policy instruments of the destination municipalities.
- Have a destination management organization (or to create it, not necessarily juridically).
- Have previous background of common work in the tourism sector with other institutions/territories.
- Have in the region a preemptive process identified through the policy instruments to absorb the overloaded destination needing measures to manage that massification, so being possible to apply the concept of polycentric tourism.
- To communicate and share the outcomes of POST to allow for scalability to the Atlantic region and broader EU.

Proposals of actions

The methodology for action proposals must follow the following aspects.

The proposals of actions should be based on the SWOT analysis, i.e. leveraging strengths and opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and threats. The partners in charge of this task will have to draw up proposals of action, within the axes previously defined, and hold an online focus group with the local support groups to validate their proposals. Proposals also have to be validated with the stakeholder working group within the destination. Then, they have to be brought back to the expert working group for collaborative input and sign off. Not all the members of the local support groups have to take part, but there must be a sufficient representation - a sample that can be considered enough to have a “rich” focus group. Due to the distance between the project’s partner territories, this focus group should be held online. If, due to linguistical constraints, a sole focus group is not possible, the proposal of the swot phase can be followed (a focus group per territory, with the organization and presence of the partner/s in charge of this phase).

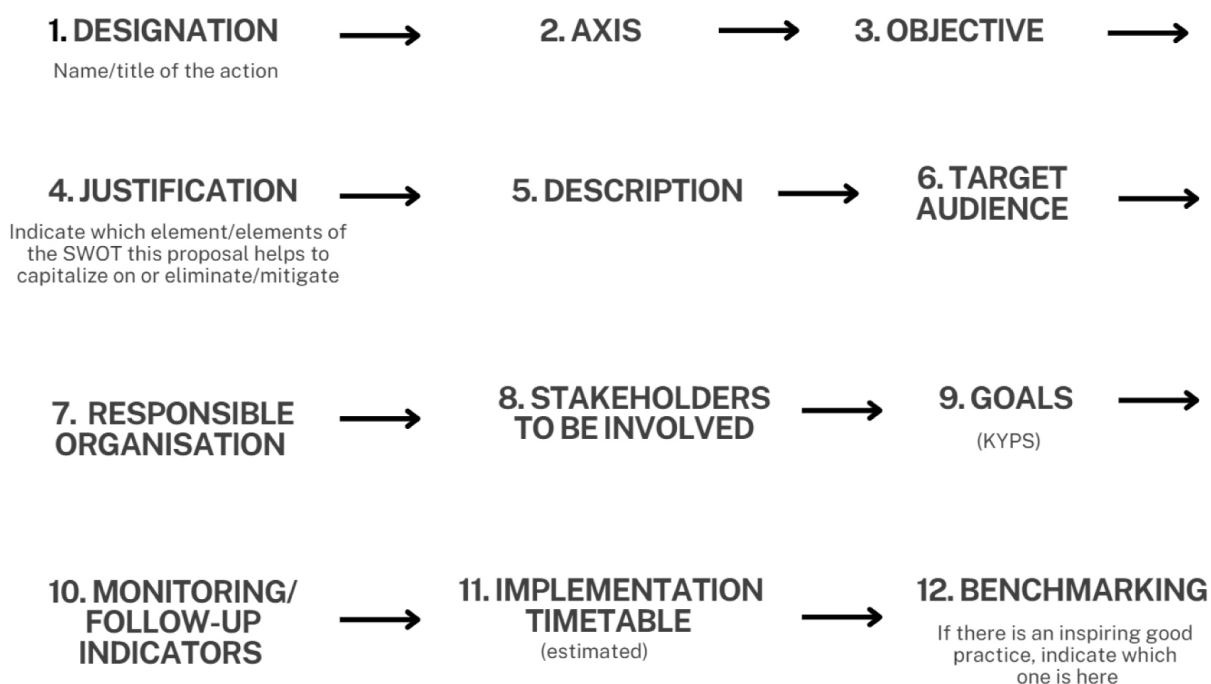


Fig 3. Proposals of actions structure.

These aspects form part of an action sheet and constitute the minimum homogeneous information that must be provided for each proposal.

Main conclusions and recommendations

This chapter has described the methodological process for the POST project. It has identified the need for this methodology to be accessible to a wide variety of destination and project stakeholders. The research tools have to be selected to maximise the potential to deliver polycentric tourism and integrate this into the appropriate destination policy instruments to allow destination address overtourism which is a considerable challenge within key destination around the region. The polycentric approach has focused on key pillars one of which is suitability to allow destination to also meet the net zero challenge for tourism destinations.

03

**TERRITORIAL STATE OF ART:
THE PROJECT
TERRITORIES
CHARCATERIZATION**

03

03

TERRITORIAL STATE OF ART: THE PROJECT TERRITORIES CHARCATERIZATION

The four pilot territories – Province of Ourense, Galicia (Spain, with the Comarca de Valdeorras/Ribeira Sacra as the pilot area), North of Portugal region (Portugal, with Braga as the pilot area), Dublin, Ireland, (with Laoghaire-Rathdown as the pilot area), and PETR Ouest Charente – Pays du Cognac (France, with Cognac city as the pilot area) - offer a geographically and culturally diverse foundation for testing and implementing a polycentric tourism model. Their selection responds not to similarity but to contrast - each territory is at a different stage of tourism activity development and faces distinct challenges and opportunities. These differences provide a valuable laboratory for building a replicable and flexible model, adapted to the realities of the Atlantic Area.

The overarching goal of this model is to balance territorial development, diversify tourism flows, reduce the overtourism phenomena in the Atlantic Area and promote sustainability by leveraging regional identities, improving connectivity, and empowering under-visited destinations.

Province of Ourense, Galicia (Spain)

Ourense province is a clear example of a region with high tourism potential but low visibility. With an estimated 340,000 overnight travellers in 2023, most activity concentrates in summer and during cultural events like Entroido (Galician traditional carnival) and Easter. Despite its strategic position within Galicia and its rich offering in thermal waters, wine tourism, and cultural routes (including several *Camino de Santiago* paths), the province remains largely underexplored by international tourists. Most overnight stays concentrate in specific summer and festival periods, and the region suffers from acute seasonality and demographic decline.

However, Ourense is already taking significant steps toward smart and sustainable tourism. Its strategy incorporates the Spanish Agenda 2030, promoting circular economy practices, accessibility, and digitalization. Strategic infrastructure has begun to shift this dynamic. The AVE high-speed train connects Ourense to Madrid in just over 2 hours, and the province is within 1 to 1,5 hours of three major airports (Santiago, Vigo, Porto).

Its status as an inland destination places it at a disadvantage compared to coastal Galicia, but this also positions Ourense as a prime candidate for polycentric development. Rather than aiming to compete with coastal icons, it can anchor a complementary inland network. Despite demographic challenges and weak marketing visibility, Ourense's province initiatives like the Silver Way Business Academy or immersive post-Camino cultural experiences position it well to serve as an inland tourism hub in a polycentric network.

North of Portugal Region

The North of Portugal offers a duality that is essential for testing the polycentric approach.

Porto, as the region's main urban hub, is already under visible pressure by the tourism activity, especially in its historic centre, where visitors' numbers have grown noticeably. Braga, selected as the pilot site within this territory, also receives high visitor numbers during peak periods, like the São João Festival and Holy Week, but has not yet reached saturation. In contrast, vast areas of the region—such as Montesinho Natural Park or the historical villages of Bragança (or even in the surroundings of bigger cities like Póvoa do Lanhoso or Terras de Bouro) - remain undervalued and disconnected from mainstream tourism flows.

The North of Portugal region offers a duality that is essential for testing the polycentric approach. These emerging pressure points highlight the need for proactive planning to avoid future demand. Meanwhile, large parts of the region's inland territory — particularly its historic villages, rural landscapes, and natural parks — remain undervalued and largely disconnected from dominant tourism flows, despite their cultural richness and potential to diversify the region's tourism offer.

The North of Portugal region benefits from excellent infrastructure and cross-border connectivity with Galicia, supporting both overtourism and new segments like eco-tourism and health tourism. The region adheres to strategic frameworks like Portugal's Tourism Strategy 2027 and cross-border plans (2022–2024), which aim to reposition the region through sustainable growth. Nature tourism, religious routes, wine and gastronomy are central products, supported by growing infrastructure and marketing strategies.

Notably, the region receives a significant share of Portugal's total international arrivals and has diversified products including gastronomy, religious routes, and nature tourism. North of Portugal region exemplifies how a polycentric model can respond to the need for deconcentration, activating underutilized assets while managing overcrowding in iconic areas.

The Northern Portugal *Camino de Santiago* routes can be diversified, linked to less-known villages and parks, and enriched through curated slow-tourism experiences, promoting connectivity, storytelling, and shared benefits across the territory.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (Ireland)

As part of the Dublin Region, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) is a strategically located coastal territory that functions as both a suburban hinterland and a stand-alone destination. While 350,000+ people visit top attractions like Airfield Estate and Dalkey Castle annually, the area struggles with low overnight stays—offering only 11 registered accommodation properties with around 1,285 hotel rooms, the lowest supply in the Dublin region.

DLR excels in infrastructure: it is accessible by train (DART), bus, bike, and ferry, and boasts a wide range of public parks, cultural heritage, and mountain/coastal trails. Initiatives like the Dublin Mountains Way, the Coastal Mobility Route, and curated thematic trails (e.g. Dalkey Heritage Trails) support its ambition to offer integrated nature and culture-based experiences.

Tourism strategies in DLR aim to redistribute flows away from Dublin's congested centre, enhance sustainable mobility, and promote family- and activity-oriented tourism. The challenge lies not in attracting visitors—but in retaining them, extending stays, and increasing local spend.

From a polycentric perspective, DLR can serve as a buffer and connector, alleviating pressure on Dublin city while offering gateway access to coastal and mountain assets. Its experience in soft mobility, event programming, and community branding makes it a model for other peri-urban areas in the Atlantic region.

Cognac/PETR Ouest Charente (France)

The PETR Ouest Charente, anchored by the city of Cognac, is an inland territory with a strong brand identity shaped by the global success of its namesake spirit. The area's international image is dominated by the Cognac industry: in 2022–2023, Cognac exports generated €3.1 billion in revenue, with leading *maisons* (e.g., Hennessy, Martell) offering thematic tours and river-facing experiences. This shows how the tourism ecosystem is dominated by high-end wine and spirits tourism, concentrated around the major Cognac houses and river-facing cultural sites. Yet this upmarket focus risks excluding younger and family segments.

Despite this, the region faces multiple structural challenges: modest tourism flows, a fragmented accommodation offer, and weak intermodality between train, bike, and bus transport. Heritage sites are often privately owned and under-leveraged, and there is little diversification in products beyond luxury and tasting experiences.

However, the region’s strengths lie in its natural and river-based potential. The Flow Vélo cycling route and the Charente River offer a compelling canvas for slow tourism development. The area’s relative tranquillity, scenic beauty, and growing events calendar (e.g., Cognac Blues Festival, Ban de la Distillation) offer fertile ground for attracting families, cyclists, and cultural explorers.

Polycentric tourism here would mean repositioning Cognac beyond a luxury niche, using the river as a unifying axis to activate surrounding rural communities and diversify products. Its slower pace and authenticity complement more intensive tourism hubs on the Atlantic coast.

Taken together, these territories illustrate the flexibility and necessity of a polycentric tourism model for the Atlantic Area. While their profiles differ—urban/suburban, inland/coastal, emerging/consolidated—their trajectories intersect at key challenges, that become the territory’s main priorities:

Territory	General Indicators	General Overview	Main Tourism Products	Main Challenges
Province of Ourense (Spain) (Pilot area: Comarca de Valdeorras/Ribeira Sacra)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total area: 7.273 km² - Population: 309.293 (2021) - Overnight stays: 0,7 million (2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inland - Low visibility - Emerging destination with natural hot springs, wine and Camino assets - Cross-border region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thermalism - Wine Tourism - Camino de Santiago - Cultural Heritage - Natural outdoor activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seasonality - Aging population - Weak marketing - Limited infrastructure and workforce
North of Portugal Region (Pilot area: Braga)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total area: 21.278 km² - Population: 3.692.842 (2024) - Overnight stays: 14,1 million (2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dual profile: saturated urban centres (e.g. Porto and Braga) vs. undervalued rural inland - Cross-border region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature & Landscape Tourism - Religious Routes - Gastronomy & WineCity Breaks - Cultural Tourism - MICE segment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uneven tourist distribution - Potential risk of future saturation in urban hubs - Weak internal connectivity - Rural depopulation - Labour shortages
Dublin, (Ireland) (Pilot area: Dun Laoghaire Rathdown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total area: 6.986 km² - Population: 2.082.605 (2022) - Overnight stays: 4,16 million (2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coastal-suburban area of Dublin - High visitor numbers but low overnight retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outdoor Recreation - Maritime Heritage - Coastal Walks - Festivals - Adventure Sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short stays - Poor east-west transit - Limited accommodation - Fragmented branding

Territory	General Indicators	General Overview	Main Tourism Products	Main Challenges
Cognac / PETR Ouest Charente (France) (Pilot area: Cognac)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total area: 1.042 km² - Population: 79.818 (2019) - Overnight stays: 1,5 million (2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inland brand-led region, driven by Cognac - Low volume - Upmarket positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wine & Spirits Tourism - River Charente cruise - Flow Vélo cycling - Cultural Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low intermodality - Brand image limits audience - Underused heritage - Lack of diversity

Table 1.
State of Art overview.

- From under-tourism (as Cognac is an example) to over-tourism (as example Dublin/Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown is an example).
- From inland destinations seeking recognition to urban regions needing decongestion.
- From highly visited icons to hidden cultural or natural heritage.

Each region reveals different tools and constraints: the Province of Ourense shows the value of rural revitalization; North of Portugal region, a proactive approach to redistribute visitor flows; Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, the challenge of suburban retention; and Cognac, the importance of thematic diversification.

A polycentric tourism model for the Atlantic Area must be adaptive, data-informed, and collaborative, drawing from the strengths of these territories to form a network of interdependent nodes. Rather than replacing existing dynamics, it should layer new connections, reinforce cultural and ecological resilience, and offer a roadmap towards more inclusive, balanced, and sustainable regional tourism.

04

SWOT ANALYSIS

04

04

SWOT ANALYSIS

This SWOT analysis of the tourism activity in the Atlantic area highlights the sector's strengths and potential opportunities while also addressing the challenges that must be overcome to ensure a sustainable tourism development.

This analysis brings together the main characteristics found in each of the SWOT analysis of the project's partner territories and then applies it to the entire Atlantic area. It is therefore possible that certain characteristics do not apply perfectly to all Atlantic area territories, but only to certain specific regions of a partner territory.

4.1

STRENGTHS

Touristic environment

- Rich cultural and historical heritage.
- Diversity of natural resources.
- Preservation of rural landscapes and community life: authenticity.
- Renowned quality of gastronomy and wines.

Offer

- Already some touristic activities and services (accommodations, restaurants...)
- Already some outdoor activities.

Demand

- Proximity to major urban centers (but sometimes bad connectivity with them).

Tourism industry

- Tourism is already a key economic sector with positive impacts (jobs, services...)

Fig 4.
Strengths of the Atlantic Area.

The Atlantic area destinations benefit from several strengths, particularly when it comes to their environment and surroundings. They boast **a rich cultural and historical heritage, alongside a diversity of natural resources** – forests, beaches, mountains - which are frequently one of the main reasons why tourists choose a destination.

The preservation of rural landscapes and community life that can be found in the majority of the destinations adds **authenticity**, which is also something that tourists look for. The renowned **quality of their local gastronomy** and wines can also attract an important number of visitors.

Additionally, most Atlantic area destinations are close to **major urban centres** which is an advantage, because the potential number of tourists, even for a day trip, is very high. However, in some cases, transport connections with these urban centres should be improved for that proximity to become a real strength.

In terms of offer, there are **already some established tourist activities and services**, including accommodation and restaurants, which contribute positively to the tourism sector.

As a matter of fact, tourism is already a key economic sector in the Atlantic area, with significant positive impacts, including the creation of jobs and the development of services. In some regions, tourism is even the leading economic activity, providing the majority of jobs.

4.2

WEAKNESSES

Offer

- Lack of a range of segmented tourist experiences.
- Lack of diversity in accommodations: some destinations with a lack of high-quality accommodations and others with a lack of accommodations for families...

Demand

- Seasonality: concentration of tourist venues during only a few months.

Tourism industry

- Fragmented and limited mobility infrastructures:
 - Inadequate roads to support the tourist flow.
 - Irregular bus services, insufficient railway networks...
- Difficulties to hire qualified people in tourism industry.
- Lack of information for tourists / tourist signage.
- Lack of digital services for tourists + lack of data to understand.
- Lack of co-operation and networking between touristic stakeholders.

Fig 5.

Weaknesses of the Atlantic Area.

However, the Atlantic area destinations face several weaknesses.

The most notable issue is **seasonality**, with the concentration of tourist activity occurring during only a few months of the year. The summer months and school holidays are the high season. The difference in visitor numbers between these periods and the rest of the year can be very marked, jeopardizing the economic balance of some activities. This weakness is less important in major touristic urban centres of the Atlantic area where seasonality is less pronounced. Dependence on occasional tourist events is also a major threat to tourist destinations in the Atlantic area.

In terms of tourist offers, there is a **lack of a broad range of segmented tourist experiences in some regions, and accommodation diversity** remains sometimes limited. Some areas lack high-quality accommodation, while others do not offer family-friendly options. Greater diversity in accommodation would attract a wider variety of tourist profiles.

Furthermore, **tourism infrastructure is fragmented and insufficient in some of the regions**: inadequate road conditions, irregular bus services, and an underdeveloped railway network, which can hinder the smooth movement of tourists. Yet, mobility is a key issue, as a tourist is by definition a person who has to travel to an area other than the one in which they live.

Additionally, all the Atlantic area tourism destinations face **difficulties in hiring qualified staff** in the tourism sector. These difficulties have existed for a long time but were exacerbated after the covid-19 pandemic. At the time, many seasonal tourist workers had to work in a different sector, because tourism was at a complete standstill. However, many never returned to work in tourism in the following years.

A number of weaknesses also stand out in the ability of destinations to keep tourists well informed. Tourists face a **lack of information, tourist offices and signage**. The **small number of digital services** for tourists makes also it harder for visitors to access relevant information in real time.

A last weakness is the **limited cooperation and networking between different tourism stakeholders**, which prevents the development of a cohesive tourism experience in the Atlantic area destination.

4.3

OPPORTUNITIES

Touristic environment

Capitalization on tourists already present during high season:

- To encourage them to come back in low season – enlargement of the touristic season.
- To encourage them to come back year by year.

Proximity to others major touristic sites on adjacent territories.

Possibility to attract those tourists in a nearby destination.

Offer

Still some unknown activities or monuments in rural areas that can become attractive for tourists.

Demand

Changes in tourist preferences and behaviors:

- Search for healthy habits and well-being.
- Search for authentic, less mass-marketed destinations.
- Growth in holidays close to home.

Tourism industry

National strategies for the development of low-carbon mobilities: Train, electric cars, public transportation, bike roads...

Digitalization of economy:

- Creation of new touristic experiences.
- Convenience to communicate with tourists.
- Convenience for tourists to book online or to search for information.

Fig 6.
Opportunities of the Atlantic Area.

On the other hand, there are several opportunities that the Atlantic area as a tourism destination could leverage. One major opportunity is to **capitalise on the tourists already travelling during the high season** by encouraging them to return in the low season, thereby extending the tourist season. Creating incentives for repeated visits year after year is another potential strategy. It's easier and more cost-effective to bring back tourists, than attracting people who have never been to the destination before.

Additionally, there are still some lesser-known activities and monuments in rural areas that could be promoted to attract a higher number of tourists. By **broadening the offer**, the number of people potentially interested in visiting the destination increases, and so does the probability of increasing the average length of stay for existing tourists.

Changes in tourist preferences present further opportunities. There is a growing trend for healthier lifestyles and well-being, as well as a demand for more authentic destinations that have been impacted less by commercialisation. This is a major opportunity for rural destinations.

Also, there is **an increasing tendency for people to vacation closer to home**, either for economic or environmental reasons. As most of the Atlantic area destinations are close to major urban centres, this is an important opportunity to attract urban people who want to go on holidays in places close(r) to home.

As it has been argued above, mobility is a key issue for the tourism industry. Most of the countries in the Atlantic area set up **national strategies focused on the development of low-carbon mobility**, including the promotion of trains, electric cars, public transport, and bike lanes: this means another significant opportunity to make it easier for tourists to come to a destination and get around once they are there.

An additional opportunity is **the ongoing digitalisation of the economy, which allows** to create new tourist experiences, improve communication with visitors, and makes it more convenient to book online and access relevant information. For example, the development of a digital platform like Airbnb makes it easier to increase the number of accommodation options available in rural areas, even if it can be a source of conflict in urban areas.

4.4

THREATS

Touristic environment

- Impact of climate changes.
- Natural disasters, heatwaves, floods...
- Risks of over-tourism in some specific areas of high natural and heritage value.

Demand

- Competition
 - With close destinations with better infrastructures and offerings.
 - With destinations with similar offers.
- Economic, financial and security uncertainty in Europe.

Tourism industry

- Aging population and depopulation of rural areas.
- Negative impacts of tourism on environmental issues.

Fig 7.
Threats of the Atlantic Area.

Despite these strengths and opportunities, the Atlantic area destinations face several threats. The first one is of course **climate change**, which is certain to affect all aspects of tourism: increased likelihood of heatwaves, higher risk of flooding, rising sea levels, limited water resources, etc. These will only worsen in the years to come. All tourism stakeholders must act now to initiate strategies to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and, at the same time, put in place strategies to adapt to the current and future effects of climate change.

At a time when protecting **the environment** is an increasingly important concern for Europeans, tourism could suffer from **the negative impacts** it can generate. Tourism is not only affected by the effects of global warming; it is also responsible for greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change. Aviation, for example, is increasingly put into question as one of the fastest-growing global sources of CO₂ emissions. This could raise a serious threat to destinations heavily dependent on-air travel.

In certain areas of high natural and heritage value or in some urban centres, there is also **the risk of over-tourism**, which could lead to the degradation of the resources and of the quality of visiting. However, it is important to note that only a handful of destinations do face in fact the problem of over-tourism, and mainly for limited periods of time.

Another threat is **the competition from nearby locations** with better infrastructure and offerings, as well as from other destinations **with similar tourist propositions**. While some tourists like to return to the same holiday destination every year, many others change regularly and go where the offer is best, particularly in terms of value for money.

Furthermore, in the context of the war in Ukraine, the rise of the far right in Europe, and the results of the recent US elections, there are considerable **economic, financial, and security uncertainties** in Europe that could affect travel patterns.

Finally, **the aging population and depopulation of rural areas** could pose a long-term threat to tourism, as there are already difficulties to hire qualified people.

	TOURISTIC ENVIRONMENT	OFFER	DEMAND	TOURISM INDUSTRY
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich cultural and historical heritage. - Diversity of natural resources. - Preservation of rural landscapes and community life: authenticity. - Renowned quality of gastronomy and wines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Already some touristic activities and services (accommodations, restaurants...) - Already some outdoor activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proximity to major urban centers (but sometimes bad connectivity with them). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism is already a key economic sector with positive impacts (jobs, services...)
WEAKNESSES		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of a range of segmented tourist experiences. - Lack of diversity in accommodations: some destinations with a lack of high-quality accommodations and others with a lack of accommodations for families... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seasonality: concentration of tourist venues during only a few months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fragmented and limited mobility infrastructures: - Inadequate roads to support the tourist flow. - Irregular bus services, insufficient railway networks... - Difficulties to hire qualified people in tourism industry. - Lack of information for tourists / tourist signage. - Lack of digital services for tourists + lack of data to understand. - Lack of co-operation and networking between touristic stakeholders.

	TOURISTIC ENVIRONMENT	OFFER	DEMAND	TOURISM INDUSTRY
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capitalization on tourists already present during high season: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To encourage them to come back in low season - enlargement of the touristic season. - To encourage them to come back year by year. - Proximity to others major touristic sites on adjacent territories. - Possibility to attract those tourists in a nearby destination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still some unknown activities or monuments in rural areas that can become attractive for tourists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in tourist preferences and behaviors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for healthy habits and well-being. - Search for authentic, less mass-marketed destinations. - Growth in holidays close to home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National strategies for the development of low-carbon mobilities: Train, electric cars, public transportation, bike roads... - Digitalization of economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of new touristic experiences. - Convenience to communicate with tourists. - Convenience for tourists to book online or to search for information.
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact of climate changes. - Natural disasters, heatwaves, floods... - Risks of over-tourism in some specific areas of high natural and heritage value. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition - With close destinations with better infrastructures and offerings. - With destinations with similar offers. - Economic, financial and security uncertainty in Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aging population and depopulation of rural areas - Negative impacts of tourism on environmental issues.

Table 2.
Atlantic area SWOT Summary.

05

**POLYCENTRIC
SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM MODEL**

05

05

POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL

To answer to the Atlantic Area sustainable tourism challenge, in the following subchapters discuss what we called the “Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model” which is based on the different contexts and needs of the above-mentioned area aiming at to establish a collaborative and joint strategy to (re)balance Atlantic Area tourism flows contributing not only to reduce territorial inequalities but also to a better quality of life for all Atlantic area residents, especially in the territories facing over and non-sustainable tourism.

The model we propose is a collaborative model that should support sustainable tourism development both in overcrowded tourism destinations and underdeveloped tourism destinations.

The model establishes general guidelines for those destinations that should be adapted to the specific territorial contexts they face.

5.1

POLYCENTRIC TOURISM APPROACH

Tourism plays a crucial role in the development and vitality of a destination. When managed well, tourism can enrich a destination and its community, but it must balance growth with sustainability to avoid negative impacts.

POST project has detected that negatives impacts are not always so easy to avoid.... And aims to explore innovative ways to make tourism in the Atlantic Area sustainable through the development of this new concept.

POST is the name of the project that Spain, France, Ireland and Portugal have been working on for exactly one year, and whose acronym refers to the concept of polycentric tourism. Supported by Atlantic Area funding and coordinated through cross-border cooperation (Eixo Atlántico del Noroeste Peninsular), the project brings together regions where tourism represents a significant share of GDP and relies heavily on natural and cultural heritage. These regions face imbalances between coastal and inland, urban and rural areas, reinforcing the need for a more sustainable and territorially balanced tourism offer. All the partner regions have a large number of resources and attractions, but they are dispersed, unlike the major international tourist centres which concentrate all the heritage in one city.

Polycentric Tourism strategy

POST project identifies and develops the concepts of **signature tourism and polycentric tourism**, with the aim of generating tourism products of excellence that not only capture the attention of the quality and purchasing power market, but also redistribute tourist flows and spending throughout the territory, relying on real networking.

Over-tourism challenges

Over-tourism is currently one of the main constraints affecting not only tourist destinations (and their communities), but also the sustainable development of the regions of these destinations around the world; it's true that in this region (as well as in the partner regions), seen globally, 'from a bird's eye view...' this problem doesn't seem to exist; but this isn't absolutely true, because when we 'zoom in' we have points with too much pressure and isolated measures (in some cases, very poorly thought out at municipal level) trying to mitigate it. In general, the Atlantic Area is no exception either, and Spain (or rather, Spanish residents) are 'leading' the protest movement against the negative impact of over-tourism on local communities and residents' quality of life.

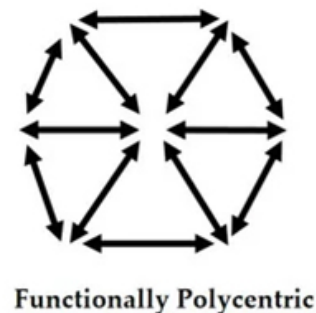
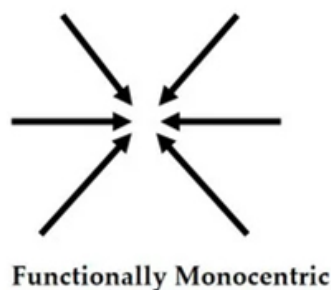
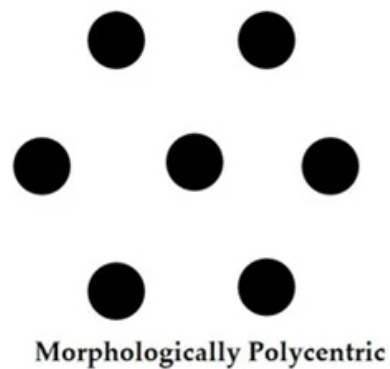
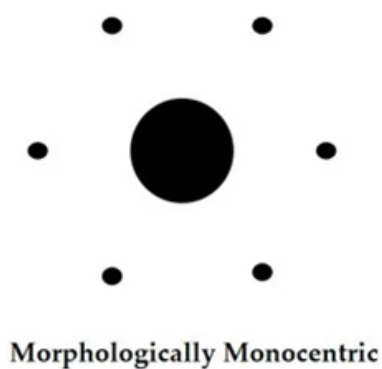
Redistributing tourism flows

On the other hand, and on the opposite side of the scale, but in very close territories, the unbalanced distribution of tourist flows in the Atlantic area is generating inequalities in territorial development, leaving the 'non-coastal' Atlantic areas without the tools to deal with their ageing populations, a shortage of qualified human resources and fewer capacities and opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. But, fortunately, with great 'aptitudes' for tourism as a result of the excellent resources, attractions and, also fortunately, well-crafted products that already exist. In other words, everything is ready and designed to welcome tourists with open arms.

Why Polycentric Tourism?

Traditional tourism models often focus on a single central destination, leading to overcrowding and environmental strain:

- Polycentric tourism offers a more balanced and sustainable alternative by encouraging the development of multiple interconnected destinations.
- This approach aligns with modern sustainability goals and regional economic development strategies.
- It helps distribute tourist flows, reducing pressure on over-visited areas while boosting lesser-known destinations.



Key ideas

- Network Approach: Strengthening connections between destinations rather than competition.
- Sustainability: Reducing overcrowding and promoting responsible tourism.
- Regional Development: Enhancing economic opportunities across multiple locations.
- Visitor Experience: Offering diverse attractions and experiences across the region.
- Resilience: Creating a more adaptable and crisis-resistant tourism model.

5.2

POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEFINITION

Taking into consideration the current moment of the tourism industry and the increase of conflict situation between tourism business, tourists and residents, which is making more and more visible the negative impacts of mass tourism, POST aims at being a possible solution to address both the problems and the opportunities this phenomenon generates.

The following proposal of polycentric tourism is based on the principle that tourism can and should be a key tool not only for a sustainable regional development but mainly for a territorial balanced development (facing inequalities and asymmetries between neighbouring territories). This approach requires addressing different contexts and territorial needs, considering diverse tourism ecosystems, value chains, and governance frameworks.



Fig 9.
Mass tourism destination.

Polycentric tourism development is an innovative approach that aims to enhance regional appeal and promote **sustainability** by fostering **connections between multiple micro destinations** within a region. This model moves away from the traditional focus on a single central destination, instead emphasizing the **creation of networks among several destinations**. The model thus acts as a mechanism **to redistribute tourist flows**, alleviating pressure in highly visited areas while strengthening destinations with growth potential.

5.3

STRATEGIC AXES AND INTERVENTION AIMS

The first step for implement the Polycentric Sustainable tourism is to define the strategic axis that establishes the **main objectives and goals** that will allow to advance on a more balanced tourism flows in the concerned territory.

As a guide, the model has defined the following ones, implementers must select from and finetune according to the territory needs and challenges. Each axe is desegregated in subitems (interventions aims) that should be prioritized and/or addressed with a more or less intensity level according with the territory previews swot analysis.

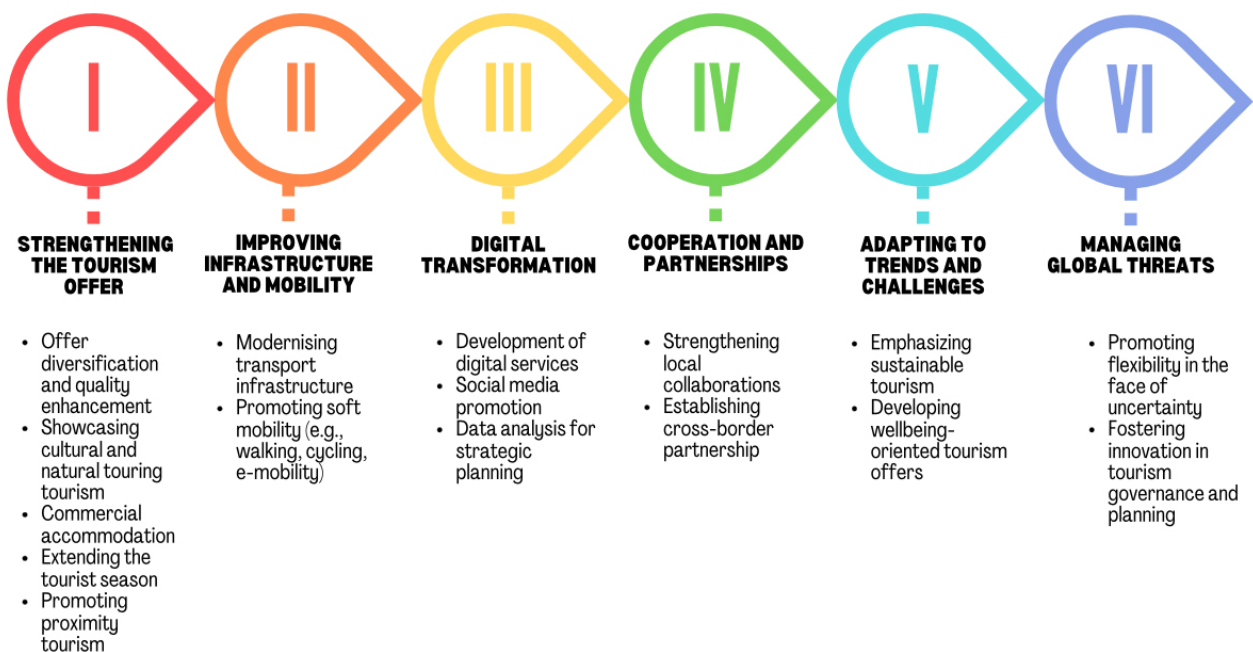


Fig 10. Polycentric strategic framework.

5.3.1 AXIS I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER

Offer Diversification and Quality Enhancement

To boost the attractiveness of destinations, it is essential to diversify approaches centred on existing strengths, adopting a more experiential perspective. This can include initiatives such as eventisation, digitalisation, and gamification, which modernise and enrich traditional tourist offerings. For example, immersive or interactive tours can transform a standard visit into an unforgettable experience. In the fields of gastronomy and wine tourism, it is equally crucial to explore new approaches. Initiatives such as culinary workshops, sensory trails, or thematic events can highlight local expertise and attract a diverse clientele.

Showcasing Cultural and Natural Heritage

Promoting lesser-known heritage sites, such as hidden historical landmarks, authentic landscapes, or local traditions, is vital. Targeted communication strategies and collaboration with local communities can strengthen appeal. For example, organising festivals centred on such heritage can serve as a powerful lever. Natural environments, such as rivers and waterways, can be at the heart of new tourist offerings. Activities like river cruises, guided hikes, or biodiversity discovery workshops can create unique memories for visitors and be ecofriendly too.

Touring/cycling Tourism

The development of cycling tourism and hiking routes is a major opportunity. With Western Europe seeing a surge in the popularity of EuroVelo routes, destinations can capitalise on this trend by creating infrastructures like secure cycling paths, charging stations for electric bikes, and associated services (bike rentals, repair points).

Commercial Accommodation

Commercial accommodation is a cornerstone of tourism attractiveness. It is necessary to identify local strengths and weaknesses to encourage innovation. Unique or eco-friendly accommodations, such as cabins, transparent domes, or floating houses, sometimes known as glamping (a type of camping that is more comfortable and luxurious than traditional camping), can attract visitors seeking distinctive experiences.

Extending the Tourist Season

To maximise economic benefits, it is important to develop strategies aimed at extending the tourist season. This can include organising off-season events (winter festivals, craft markets) or creating offers targeting specific demographics, such as seniors or child-free couples.

Proximity Tourism

Proximity tourism, targeting clientele within 1 to 2 hours of travel, is an underutilised lever. By creating immersive experiences and short-duration activities (treasure hunts, thematic hikes), regions can attract regular visitors and foster local dynamics.

5.3.2 AXIS II - IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOBILITY

Modernising Transport Infrastructure

Investing in safe roads, modernised rail services, and efficient bus networks is essential to improve access to destinations. Special attention must be given to intermodal transport, creating smooth connections between different means of transport.

Promoting Soft Mobility

The development of secure cycling paths, expanding charging points for electric vehicles, and establishing car-sharing services are priority measures. Routes should be designed as standalone tourism products in collaboration with professionalised local stakeholders.

5.3.3 AXIS III - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Development of Digital Services

Intuitive platforms for booking, information, and activity planning should be mobile-friendly. For instance, a unified application integrating transport schedules, personalised itineraries, and booking options can enhance the visitor experience.

Social Media Promotion

Interactive campaigns and collaborations with influencers can increase a destination's visibility. Creating unique hashtags and encouraging visitors to share their experiences can boost engagement.

Data Analysis

The collection and analysis of data on tourist behaviour (overnight stays, mobility, spending) enable the adjustment of offerings and better resource management while avoiding overcrowding.

5.3.4 AXIS IV - COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthening Local Collaborations

Joint initiatives between accommodation providers, restaurateurs, and cultural stakeholders can lead to thematic itineraries combining different activities. For example, a cluster bringing these actors together can pool resources and create beneficial synergies.

Cross-Border Partnerships

Promoting global destinations through collaboration with neighbouring, culturally-alike regions (e.g., the Basque Country, Flanders, Galicia-North of Portugal Euro-region) bypasses administrative boundaries and attracts international visitors.

5.3.5 AXIS V - ADAPTING TO TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Sustainable Tourism

Waste management, natural resource preservation, and the promotion of eco-labels should be central to strategies.

Wellbeing Offers

Responding to the growing demand for wellbeing-focused activities, such as yoga, thermal spa treatments, or immersive stays in nature, can strengthen attractiveness.

5.3.6 AXIS VI - MANAGING GLOBAL THREATS

Flexibility in the Face of Uncertainty

Developing resilience plans to respond to economic or climatic crises is essential. For example, diversifying activities seasonally and investing in infrastructure adapted to extreme conditions.

Innovation

Investing in technologies like virtual reality to enrich tourist experiences and remain competitive internationally is key.

5.4

MEASURES FOR PERMEABILITY

This chapter introduces **permeability** as a **key element** for the successful implementation of all six axes of the POST strategy for polycentric tourism development. Permeability is presented not just as a conceptual tool, but also as a practical **driver of change**. It refers to the capacity of territories to facilitate seamless and dynamic flows of people, knowledge, services, and resources across diverse destinations and institutions, supporting more connected and resilient tourism ecosystems (Reid et al. 2024; Yang, 2024). Recent work has also questioned the extent to which tourism practices truly reflect the principles of polycentricity, calling for more critical engagement with what makes tourism “polycentric” in practice (Bellato et al., 2024).

In the context of polycentric tourism, **permeability** refers to how easily visitors can move, whether within a single destination or across regional and national borders. It concerns the smoothness of these movements and the many factors that shape them, such as infrastructure, accessibility, regulations, information quality, and the level of cooperation between places. For example, a visitor travelling between coastal towns along the Atlantic coast encountering seamless signage, integrated mobility services, and consistent digital information would be experiencing high territorial and digital permeability in practice. When these elements are well aligned, they create a more welcoming and connected tourism experience. When misaligned, however, they become actual barriers to flow and integration.

Promoting permeability is therefore essential to achieving coordinated governance, inclusive stakeholder engagement, innovation, and territorial cohesion. It enables tourism destinations to function as part of an interconnected and mutually reinforcing network. This aligns with recent OECD recommendations, which stress the role of multilevel coordination and territorial resilience in building stronger and more adaptive tourism systems (OECD, 2025).

To operationalise this concept, this chapter presents a set of permeability measures across **five key dimensions**: territorial, digital; sociocultural; institutional, and communicational. These measures are designed to support the implementation of the POST strategy by promoting interregional coordination and facilitating real-world transformation across destinations. They do not constitute a rigid set of rules, nor do they assume that all regions are starting from the same point. Instead, they offer a set of minimum conditions and practical guidelines that each destination, with its own particularities, can gradually work toward to strengthen its permeability and better align with the overall polycentric tourism strategy.

Accordingly, the chapter aims to:

- Clarify the meaning of permeability in the context of polycentric tourism development.
- Highlight its strategic importance across the model strategic axes.
- Present concrete dimensions and measures that operationalise permeability in a structured and practical way.

In doing so, the chapter establishes permeability as a fundamental tool for effective strategy delivery, innovation, and long-term impact.

The strategic role of permeability

As introduced in the previous chapter, the Polycentric Tourism Model strategy is built around six strategic axes (see chapter 5.3), each reflecting a vital aspect of developing sustainable tourism in a balanced and interconnected way across the Atlantic territories. Although each axis has its own focus, they are all interconnected, and they have the greatest impact when carried out together. At the same time, it is recognised that different regions have different ways of planning, governing and working, highlighting the need for cooperation at multiple levels of governance. Recent empirical research has shown that polycentric governance structures - especially when driven by local and private actors - can effectively manage cross-border resources and institutional complexity, strengthening collaboration across territories (Clark & Nyaupane, 2024).

In this shared framework, permeability emerges as a vital enabler. It acts as the connective tissue that links destinations through shared practices, knowledge, flows of people and resources, and co-developed solutions. Table 1 below summarises how permeability contributes to each of the six axes of the POST strategy.

MODEL STRATEGIC AXES	ROLE OF PERMEABILITY
Axis I – Strengthening the Tourism Offer	Supports the diversification of tourism offerings through improved access and co-creation.
Axis II – Improving Infrastructure and Mobility	Enables physical and digital connectivity between destinations.
Axis III – Digital Transformation	Facilitates integrated communication and visitor services through digital tools.
Axis IV – Cooperation and Partnership	Promotes institutional alignment and collaborative governance.
Axis V – Adapting to Trends and Challenges	Supports sustainable visitor management and adaptive response.
Axis VI – Managing Global Threats	Enables real-time communication and adaptive responses to risk.

Table 3.
Role of permeability within each strategic axis.

As observed, permeability cuts across all six strategic axes, helping to transform the Polycentric Tourism Model vision into practical interconnected solutions. It should be noted, however, that the enabling role of permeability extends beyond the strategic level. It becomes tangible through the specific actions associated with each axis. These actions, detailed in the following chapter, are not isolated initiatives. Rather, they are designed to reinforce one another and activate different dimensions of permeability in practical terms. For instance, an improved transport network (axis II) combined with a shared cultural branding strategy (axes I and IV) not only enhances mobility but also amplifies visitor awareness and regional coherence.

In short, permeability is the underlying force that ties the strategy together. It supports open systems, collaborative thinking, and innovation across all axes.

5.4.1 DIMENSIONS OF PERMEABILITY

To support effective implementation of the POST strategy, permeability is structured around five operational dimensions. Each represents a distinct way in which destinations can strengthen their connections, whether by improving physical mobility, enhancing digital tools, aligning governance, fostering social engagement, or communicating more effectively. These dimensions are:

Territorial Permeability

This dimension refers to the ease with which visitor can travel between locations. It depends on practical elements such as well-integrated transport systems, signage, shared infrastructure, and soft mobility options (e.g. cycling lanes, pedestrian routes) that make journeys more accessible.

Digital Permeability

Digital permeability refers to technologies and tools that link destinations and enhance the visitor experience. This includes joint platforms, mobile apps, open data, digital guides, and gamification strategies (e.g. earning points for visiting lesser-known sites) that enable seamless and intelligent travel.

Sociocultural Permeability

Focusing on people and participation, this dimension promotes community involvement in planning, supports local training, and encourages co-creation of authentic experiences that reflect local identity, values and traditions.

Institutional Permeability

This dimension focuses on governance models that help align local policies and strategies across different regions. It includes cross-border collaboration, joint decision-making, and the shared implementation of tourism strategies (e.g. Joint Tourism Action Plan). Examples include cross-border working groups, integrated destination management boards, or joint tourism masterplans.

Communicational Permeability

This dimension concerns how destinations communicate and promote themselves. It includes storytelling, collaborative promotional campaigns, social media engagement, and shared narratives that resonate across regions. These efforts strengthen visibility, build trust, and support collaboration across networks. In times of crisis, aligned communication channels ensure coherent messaging, supporting risk mitigation strategies under axis VI.

The five dimensions of permeability offer a practical framework for action. When viewed in relation to the six strategic axes of the POST model, their relevance becomes even clearer. The table below illustrates how each dimension supports the implementation of the strategy, highlighting how different aspects of permeability take shape on the ground.

PERMEABILITY DIMENSIONS	KEY ELEMENTS	ALIGNED WITH THE MODEL STRATEGIC AXES
Territorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transport integration - Signage - Shared infrastructure - Soft mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Axis I - Strengthening the Tourism Offer - Axis II - Improving Infrastructure and Mobility
Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint digital platforms - Tourist apps - Real-time data - Digital guides - Gamification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Axis III - Digital Transformation - Axis VI - Managing Global Threats
Sociocultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community involvement - Local Training - Co-creation of experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Axis I - Strengthening the Tourism Offer - Axis V - Adapting to Trends and Challenges
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance models - Local and cross-border partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Axis IV - Cooperation and Partnership - Axis V - Adapting to Trends and Challenges
Communicational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destination storytelling - Shared promotional campaigns - Influencer marketing - Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Axis I - Strengthening the Tourism Offer - Axis III - Digital Transformation - Axis IV - Cooperation and Partnership

Table 4.
Alignment between Permeability dimensions and the POST strategic axes.

Building on this alignment, it is important to recognise how the strategic actions associated with each POST AXIS also reflect and reinforce the permeability dimensions in practical and concrete ways. These actions are, in fact, interconnected rather than isolated, with many contributing to more than one dimension. This reinforces the integrated nature of the model and underscores its potential to foster meaningful change across multiple levels of the tourism system.

The five dimensions of permeability offer a practical framework for action. When viewed in relation to the six strategic axes of the POST model, their relevance becomes even clearer. The table below illustrates how each dimension supports the implementation of the strategy, highlighting how different aspects of permeability take shape on the ground.

5.4.2 PERMEABILITY MEASURES

To translate strategy into coordinated action, the POST model links its strategic axes and related actions (presented further at chapter 5.5) to five permeability dimensions. These are grouped into four practical permeability measures, each representing a strategic cluster of actions that work together to support implementation.

The five permeability dimensions enables the grouping of actions into four broader permeability measures. These are not additional or standalone initiatives, but rather strategic clusters that illustrate how various actions work together to support the effective implementation of the model.

Each measure integrates multiple permeability dimensions to create a more holistic approach. Rather than operating in isolation, each measure complements one another, enhancing mobility, strengthening governance, improving communication, and fostering cooperation across destinations. These permeability measures serve as practical implementation pathways.

They reflect cross-cutting efforts that activate several dimensions simultaneously, making the strategy more actionable and adaptable to the diverse contexts found across the Atlantic Area.

In total, **four permeability measures** are proposed, contributing to transformation across territorial, digital, institutional, sociocultural, and communicational levels.

To reflect the shared vision and spirit of collaboration behind the Polycentric Tourism model, each measure includes the term “**Atlantic**”. This reinforces the idea that, although each measure responds to local needs and contexts, they are all part of a broader, collaborative effort to build stronger connections and promote a more sustainable tourism landscape across the Atlantic region.

The four proposed permeability measures are:

Atlantic Territorial Network & Accessibility

This measure primarily draws on the territorial, institutional, and digital dimensions. It focuses on improving physical connectivity (e.g., transport systems, soft mobility), shared infrastructure, and cross-border/cross-region coordination. It supports better visitor flow, territorial integration, and policy alignment among destinations.

Atlantic Thematic Routes

Centred in the institutional, digital, and communicational dimensions, this measure connects destinations through shared themes, whether cultural, natural, or historical. It requires collaborative governance, connecting digital platforms, and alignment promotional efforts to turn thematic routes into tangible experiences. Pilot themes could include maritime heritage routes, connecting ports, museums, and coastal communities.

Atlantic Join Digital Marketing Campaigns

This measure mobilises the communicational, sociocultural, and territorial dimensions. It includes joint branding efforts, coordinated social media campaigns, partnerships, and storytelling initiatives that allow destinations to share a common voice while also highlighting the uniqueness of their local identities and values.

Atlantic Tourism Training

Built on the institutional and communicational dimensions, this measure strengthens capacity building through cross-border training, peer learning, and professional development. It helps tourism stakeholders align their efforts, improve coordination, and build a shared understanding of the POST strategy. Training modules should evolve in response to new technologies, visitor trends, and environmental considerations.

These measures offer a practical way to organize implementation and promote alignment across regions. Each provides a common direction, helping territories coordinate their efforts while responding to local needs.

The following table summarizes the four proposed permeability measures, their strategic focus, activated dimensions, and the main expected impacts in the implementation of the polycentric tourism strategy. These measures should not be seen as isolated initiatives, but rather as instruments for activating that model, fostering synergies between local power and the shared goal of a more cohesive, sustainable, and balanced tourism system.

PERMEABILITY MEASURE	STRATEGIC FOCUS	KEY DIMENSIONS	TYPES OF ACTIONS	EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION/ IMPACTS
Atlantic Territorial Network & Accessibility	Strengthen physical and functional connectivity between destinations	Territorial, Institutional, Digital	Transport services, mobility networks, regional planning	Reduction of geographic barriers, improved interregional access, policy alignment, and strengthened territorial integration
Atlantic Thematic Routes	Create cross-border tourism products around shared themes	Digital, Communicational, Institutional	Trails, digital tools, shared governance	Promotion of regional shared identity, valorisation of underused cultural and natural resources, and diversification of tourism flows
Atlantic Joint Digital Marketing Campaigns	Promote shared branding and storytelling	Territorial, Sociocultural, Communicational	Campaigns, influencer outreach, narrative building	Increased visibility of underpromoted destinations, cohesion in cross-regional messaging, and stronger authenticity and community engagement
Atlantic Tourism Training	Build institutional and professional capacity	Communicational, Institutional	Training, peer-learning, webinars	Empower stakeholders, improved shared governance, stronger alignment in the application of the POST strategy, and a common language among tourism stakeholders

Table 5.

Overview of Permeability Measures and Expected Impacts.

Taken together, these measures provide a clear framework for coordinated implementation, aligning local strategies under a shared strategic vision.

5.4.3 IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT AND EVALUATION

Successful implementation of these measures requires specific support structures to be in place. They include:

Practical tools and frameworks

Self-assessment guides, planning templates with checklists, toolkits, and other resources to assess current permeability status and develop structured improvement plans.

Capacity building

Training sessions, webinars, and peer-learning initiatives that equip local and regional actors with the knowledge and skills needed to implement the measures with confidence and consistency.

Pilot initiatives

The identification and support of lead regions or destinations that can serve as pilots for on the ground implementation, generating valuable insights and replicable models across the Atlantic Area.

Multi-Level partnerships

Strong collaboration among public authorities, destination management organisations (DMOs), NGOs, academia, and businesses to co-design, implement, and sustain the measures in real-world scenarios.

To ensure the effective implementation of the polycentric tourism strategy, it is also important to track progress, evaluate impact, and support adaptive management across the permeability dimensions. For this purpose, the following table provides an overview of a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), organised by permeability measure and aligned and monitoring frequency.

PERMEABILITY DIMENSIONS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)	MONITORING FREQUENCY
Territorial Permeability	- % of tourist routes with multimodal transport connections - Number of soft mobility networks implemented	Annually
Digital Permeability	- Number of shared digital platforms - Number of real-time data tools deployed - User engagement with digital services	Quarterly
Sociocultural Permeability	- Number of community-led tourism initiatives - % of co-created experiences involving local stakeholders	Quarterly
Institutional Permeability	- Number of cross-border cooperation agreements - Participation rates in governance and joint decision-making forums	Quarterly
Communicational Permeability	- Reach and impressions of joint promotional campaigns - Engagement rate on shared social media - Number of joint storytelling initiatives	Bi-annually

Table 6.
KPIs Framework: Permeability Measures.

5.4.4 EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

By implementing permeability measures, the Polycentric model strategy is expected to generate a wide range of outcomes across the Atlantic Area. Specifically, these include:

- **Stronger connectivity and coordination** between destinations, making it easier for visitors to explore multiple locations.
- Smarter and **more efficient use of resources**, through better aligning of policies and efforts across various regions and institutions.
- An **enhanced overall visitor experience**, enabling seamless multi-stop journeys and reducing friction during travel.
- **Greater innovation** within tourism systems, increasing their flexibility and responsiveness to change.
- A reinforced **shared regional identity** and deeper cross-border collaboration, helping to position the Atlantic Area as a unified and diverse destination.
- **Reduce the negative impact of overtourism** promoting at the same time a more cohesive and harmonious regional development within the Atlantic Area.

To conclude, permeability is more than a technical concept - it represents a fundamental shift in mindset toward openness, connection, and shared growth. When embedded into tourism planning and action, permeability transforms the POST strategy from a structural framework into a dynamic catalyst for real change. Ultimately, this approach is what makes polycentric tourism development not only possible but sustainable. By fostering cooperation among multiple centres rather than concentrating efforts in a few hotspots, **permeability enables a more balanced distribution of visitors, benefits, and responsibilities.** With the right structures, partnerships, and vision in place, territories across the Atlantic have a unique opportunity to lead the way in building more inclusive, resilient, and truly polycentric tourism systems.

5.5

PROPOSALS OF ACTIONS AND INSPIRING GOOD PRACTICES

The first step for implementing the Polycentric Sustainable Tourism is to define specific actions aiming at leading to achieve the objective and results stated in the previously presented strategic axes. As a guide, the model has defined the following typology of actions implementers can choose from (and adapt) to materialize those axes at a specific territorial level. The types of actions proposed below were drafted to:

- Allow the implementers to choose the actions answering to the specific challenges and opportunities their territory is facing (e.g., based on their SWOT analysis or on priority issues requiring intervention).
- Select the type of key-actions according with their legal competences and intervention areas as well as the available resources (the action selected should be adapted to the available budget, technical team and to the type of entity the implementer represents).
- Also, KIPs, target groups and monitoring system should be adapted to the real follow-up capacity. All of these variables may evolve and be reviewed during the implementation process.

As in the previous chapters this one was developed as a part of new tourism model – the polycentric sustainable tourism model. With this regard, the proposed actions should be wider and generic enough to be used (dully adapted) by any region of the Atlantic Area. Application to a concrete neighbour, city or region should be supported by the model tools kits and the model must be able to generate tourism strategies designed to the specificities of that territory. In this context, each proposed action has been drafted to present a concrete answer to one specific dimension (intervention aim) of the proposed axes. The final output should be interpreted as catalogue of possible actions from which implementers can select and adapt, according to their local conditions. The structure of the action proposals answers to the methodology established for the model (chapter 2).

5.5.1 ACTION I – IMMERSIVE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

STRATEGIC AXIS
I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER
INTERVENTION AIMS
A1.a - Offer Diversification and Quality Enhancement
OBJECTIVE
Strengthening the tourism offer throughout the design and implementation of immersive, sensory-rich visitor experiences that deepen emotional connection, enhance satisfaction, and reflect the destinations unique culture and heritage.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Most Atlantic Area destinations are close to major urban centres which is an advantage, because the potential number of tourists destinations boast a rich cultural and historical heritage. To boost the attractiveness of destinations, it is essential to diversify approaches centred on existing strengths, adopting a more experiential perspective. This can include initiatives, which modernise and enrich traditional tourist offerings. For example, immersive or interactive tours can transform a standard visit into an unforgettable experience.</p> <p>In the fields like heritage, gastronomy and wine tourism, for example, it will be essential to explore new approaches. Initiatives such as culinary workshops, sensory trails, or thematic events can highlight local expertise and attract a diverse clientele.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most Atlantic area destinations are close to major urban centres which is an advantage, because the potential number of tourists destinations boast a rich cultural and historical heritage - The renowned quality of their local gastronomy and wines can also attract an important number of visitors - The preservation of rural landscapes and community life that can be found in the majority of the destinations adds authenticity, which is also something that tourists looks for - Rich cultural and heritage assets - The type of actions here included capitalises on destinations unique cultural identity and storytelling traditions by transforming them into immersive, engaging experiences that reflect local people, places, and customs - Strong sense of place and authenticity - The focus on emotional connection and sensory engagement enhances the already strong appeal of authentic destinations, reinforcing what visitors value most-real, meaningful encounters <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In terms of tourist offers, there is a lack of a broad range of segmented tourist experiences in some regions - Over-Reliance on Traditional or Passive Tourism Models. The action reimagines the visitor experience, shifting away from static displays and passive tours, addressing the lack of innovation in some attractions. - Limited Visitor Engagement and Dwell Time. Immersive elements extend visitor engagement, encourage repeat visits, and increase time spent at the attraction—supporting higher economic yield.

Opportunities seized:

- Growth of experiential and sustainable tourism, with visitors seeking authentic, heritage-based stays.
- There are still some lesser-known activities and monuments in rural areas that could be promoted to attract a higher number of tourists. By broadening the offer, the number of people potentially interested in visiting the destination increases, and so does the probability of increasing the average length of stay for existing tourists.

Threats mitigated:

- In certain areas of high natural and heritage value or in some urban centres, there is also the risk of over-tourism, which could lead to the degradation of the resources and of the quality of visiting
- Negative Environmental or Cultural Impacts of Tourism. By focusing on meaningful, slower, and more respectful experiences, the model supports sustainable practices and helps protect both cultural and natural assets.
- The threat of competition from nearby locations with better infrastructure and offerings, as well as from other destinations with similar tourist propositions.

DESCRIPTION

Today's tourists seek meaningful connections with the places they visit—its culture, its people, and its stories. They no longer want to be passive observers. Instead, they crave rich, authentic experiences that surprise and engage them, sparking curiosity and emotional connection.

Immersion lies at the heart of this desire. It's a key driver of visitor satisfaction, shaping how memorable and impactful a visit becomes. As a visitor attraction developer, your challenge is to design experiences that go beyond the surface—inviting guests to participate, explore, and feel part of something unique.

An immersive experience captivates the imagination, making the visitor feel fully involved and emotionally invested.

True immersion happens when all the senses are engaged—when sight, sound, smell, touch, and even taste play a role. To achieve this, transform your attraction's stories into living experiences—create action, foster interaction, and encourage conversation. These elements build emotional resonance and create lasting memories.

Clearly communicate how your experience will make the visitor feel—what sets it apart, why it matters, and how it's unlike anything else. For maximum impact, highlight what makes the experience unique and authentic—its heritage, landscapes, or traditions—making it not just memorable, but meaningful.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Story Mapping & Content Development

- Identify core stories of the place—local legends, community history, cultural practices, natural features.
- Co-create narratives and storytelling with local communities, artists, historians, and cultural custodians.
- Emphasise authenticity and emotional relevance in storytelling.

2. Sensory Design Integration

- Design experiences that engage the senses.
 - Visual storytelling, costumes, scenic views.
 - Sound: Live music, ambient soundscapes, spoken word.
 - Touch: Tactile elements (craft, tools, artifacts).
 - Taste: Local food, flowers, herbs, ...
 - Smell: sea breeze, greens and wood, ...
- Use sensory triggers to create memory anchors.

3. Interactive Experience Creation

- Develop opportunities for hands-on participation (e.g. traditional craft, cooking, dancing, foraging).
- Include guided conversations, story circles, and visitor-led exploration.
- Utilise technology (AR/VR, apps) where appropriate to enhance, not replace, human interaction.
- Create immersion offers in the territory's life (encourage farmers and winers to create offer with accommodation, and live their life, producing cheese or wine, shaving sheep, etc.)

4. Staff Training & Community Involvement

- Train front-line staff in storytelling, emotional engagement, and cultural sensitivity.
- Engage local communities as experience hosts, interpreters, and cultural ambassadors.

5. Brand Positioning & Communication

- Develop messaging around how the experience will make visitors feel.
- Highlight what makes the experience uniquely - not just where it is, but why it matters.
- Promote values: authenticity, sustainability, participation, and memory-making.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Tourists / Visitors.
- Local Communities.
- Local Businesses (e.g., crafts, food, hospitality, transport).
- Visitor Attraction Developers & Managers.
- Cultural Practitioners & Creative Professionals.
- Policymakers & Tourism Boards.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- The National Destination Management Organisation.
- Local Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) / Regional Tourism Offices.
- Local Authorities/ Municipalities (e.g., Municipalities, Heritage Offices).
- Industry Partners (Visitor Attractions, Experience Developers, Tour Operators).
- Community & Cultural Organisations.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- National tourism strategy, funding, and experience development support.
- Local Authorities/ Municipalities.
- State Management of heritage sites and assets.
- Sustainable tourism bodies.
- Local development companies and LEADER programme bodies – Rural development funding and support.
- Cultural advocacy groups – Ensuring inclusivity, authenticity, and cultural preservation.
- Visitor attractions – Direct delivery of immersive experiences.
- Accommodation providers – Integration of experiences into visitor stays.
- Tour operators and guides – Promotion, delivery, and storytelling.
- Craft producers, food & drink vendors.
- Local residents and cultural custodians – Co-creators of authentic content.
- Minority groups.
- Youth groups, schools, Universities and Institutes of Technology.
- Cultural and heritage studies departments.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Increase in Visitor Satisfaction Score increasing rating in post-visit surveys.
- Measured Increase in average time spent at the attraction and repeat Visitation Rate.
- Local Business Revenue Growth by increase in sales related to the tourism experience and Visitor Spend Per Head.
- Increase in the number of Local Suppliers Engaged through experience components sourced locally.
- Sustainable Travel Adoption through visitors using green transport options.
- Development of immersive tourism experiences across multiple regions within two years.
- Growth in visitation to under-promoted destinations implementing immersive formats.
- Creation of regional gamification or digital storytelling projects launched collaboratively.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Carbon & Sustainability Audits using established tools (e.g., GHG Protocol).
- CRM/Booking System Analytics to monitor visitor patterns and repeat visits.
- Visitor flow and time-spent data, gathered via mobile apps or ticketing systems.
- Feedback from local providers and municipalities on economic and social impact.
- Analysis of content reach and user engagement (e.g., digital trail usage, video views, AR interactions).
- Sustainability and carrying capacity monitoring to ensure experiences remain low-impact.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (1–6 months): Conduct audience research and sensory audits of current experiences. Facilitate community workshops to identify local stories and resources.
- Phase 2 (6–12 months): Create experience blueprints with sensory elements and interaction points. Collaborate with designers, artists, and cultural practitioners.
- Phase 3 (12–15 months): Build physical and interpretive infrastructure. Develop and deliver immersive training modules for staff and guides.
- Phase 4 (12–18 months): Soft-launch pilot experiences with feedback loops. Begin targeted marketing, emphasising emotional and cultural uniqueness.
- Phase 5 – (Ongoing): Evaluation & Evolution Gather visitor feedback and make iterative improvements. Explore seasonal and thematic variations for return visits.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices

- TERRA AVENTURA (FRANCE): A geo-gamified trail system that transforms rural discovery into a playful, story-rich adventure, promoting lesser-known towns.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration

- BASQUE CULINARY CENTER (SPAIN): Uses participatory food labs and educational tasting journeys to position gastronomy as an immersive asset.
- MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA (WELLINGTON, NZ): World leader in immersive storytelling and bicultural interpretation, Te Papa blends Māori culture, community voices, and interactive technology to create emotionally powerful exhibits. Story-driven cultural immersion with authenticity and respect.
- EPIC: THE IRISH EMIGRATION MUSEUM (DUBLIN, IRELAND): Example of an interactive, tech-enhanced visitor experience rooted in heritage. EPIC uses touchscreens, projections, and personal stories to bring Irish emigration to life. Using technology to enrich immersive heritage storytelling.
- LA FERME DE FILLES (CAPTIEUX, FRANCE)- Example of immersive offers in the territory's life/traditions.
- EN IMMERSION (FRANCE) - Example of micro-immersions of 3 to 6 days to discover the terroirs.

5.5.2 ACTION 2 - HERITAGE HUB: SHOWCASING AND PROMOTING CULTURAL AND NATURAL SITES

STRATEGIC AXIS
I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER
INTERVENTION AIMS
A1.b - Showcasing Cultural and Natural Heritage
OBJECTIVE
<p>To enhance the visibility, accessibility, and value of cultural and natural heritage across the territory by creating a collaborative, digital platform that brings together diverse heritage resources—especially lesser-known sites—under a unified identity. This initiative aims to encourage tourism flow redistribution, attract new visitor profiles, and foster stronger community involvement in heritage stewardship and sustainable tourism development.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich cultural and historical heritage, with a diversity of natural landscapes. - Authenticity of rural landscapes and community traditions. - Presence of existing tourism services (accommodations, restaurants, outdoor activities). <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of a segmented range of tourist experiences. - Insufficient digital services and tourist information. - Limited collaboration between tourism stakeholders. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing demand for authentic, lesser-known destinations. - Digitalization trends facilitating tourist information and booking. - National strategies promoting low-carbon mobility, increasing accessibility to rural heritage sites. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition from better-equipped destinations. - Risks of over-tourism in certain high-traffic areas by promoting alternative locations. - Depopulation of rural areas by integrating local communities into tourism development.

DESCRIPTION

The Heritage Hub initiative will develop a comprehensive, user-friendly database of cultural and natural heritage sites in the territory. The database will categorize sites based on:

- Type (historical, cultural, natural, gastronomic, experiential, etc.).
- Certifications and awards (e.g., UNESCO, European Heritage Label).
- Accessibility level.
- National recognition labels
- Entry fees, opening hours, and available services.
- Available experiences (e.g., guided tours, local festivals, workshops).

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Data Collection & Categorization

Local authorities will collect and manage information from the private sector (accommodations, restaurants, tour operators) and public sector resources (museums, archaeological sites, natural parks).

2. Digital Platform Development

Creating an interactive, multilingual website and mobile app with personalized recommendations and real-time updates.

3. Community Engagement & Capacity Building

Training local businesses and tourism operators on digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices.

4. Strategic Marketing & Promotion

Targeted campaigns focusing on lesser-known sites, using social media, travel influencers, and digital storytelling.

5. Event Organization & Seasonality Management

Supporting local festivals and off-season events to attract tourists beyond peak months.

6. Packaging

Creating tourism offers/packages that allow to enjoy the territories heritage.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Tourists (domestic and international, cultural enthusiasts, sustainable travellers).
- Local businesses (hotels, restaurants, tour operators, local artisans).
- Cultural and environmental organizations.
- Municipalities and regional governments.
- Academia and research institutions (for documentation and conservation strategies).

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Local authorities and regional governments – In charge of collecting and updating information from both the private and public sectors.
- National tourism boards – Providing support and coordination at a higher level.
- Public institutions managing cultural/natural heritage – Ensuring accurate and up-to-date information on museums, archaeological sites, national parks, etc.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Local authorities and municipalities (data collection, updating information).
- UNESCO and heritage protection organizations (heritage site recognition and certification).
- Travel and tourism associations (collaborating on marketing and promotion).
- Private sector (hotels, tour operators, restaurants, etc.) – Providing business data and participating in promotional efforts.
- Technology providers (for digital platform development and maintenance).
- Universities and research centres (for heritage documentation and conservation strategies).

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Digital database of heritage points of interest populated across participating regions. Number of sites or resources identified and included in it.
- Launch of multilingual web/app platform.
- Increase in visitation to featured lesser-known sites.
- Local stakeholders trained in storytelling and sustainable tourism.
- Off-season events supported and promoted through the platform.
- Number of local businesses and tourism operators trained to participate in and use the platform.
- Number of users and platform visitors (web and mobile).
- Reach and engagement of social media campaigns launched, measured through impressions, shares, click-throughs, and hashtag usage.
- Visitor satisfaction rate for digital usability and overall experience (measured through surveys and feedback forms).

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Event participation numbers (local festivals, workshops).
- Feedback from local businesses and communities.
- Website and app analytics: Number of visitors, interactions, itinerary generation.
- Site visitor data collected via tourism boards or integrated ticketing.
- Engagement from SMEs and cultural actors (participation rates).
- Visitor satisfaction and qualitative feedback on platform usability.
- Media impact: Shares, mentions, and campaign reach across digital channels.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-12): Research, data collection, stakeholder consultations.
- Phase 2 (Months 12-18): Development of digital database and platform.
- Phase 3 (Months 12-18): Launch of marketing campaigns and event partnerships.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Monitoring, feedback, and iterative improvements.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices

- GEODESTINOS (GALICIA, ESPAÑA)- This would be at a local level but can be extrapolated (the way they include different types of attractions and services to the territory promotion).
- TERRA AVENTURA (FRANCE) – The database creation for the sites categorization. It can be used as a model to activate sites listed in the Heritage Hub with a digital, playful layer.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration

- EUROPEANA – A digital platform showcasing Europe’s cultural heritage.
- “SPIRIT OF THE HIGHLANDS” (SCOTLAND) – Uses digital storytelling to connect smaller heritage sites and distribute visitor interest away from hotspots.
- CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE – Multi-country thematic routes that promote slow tourism and lesser-known heritage.

5.5.3 ACTION 3 – GREENWAYS

STRATEGIC AXIS
I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER
INTERVENTION AIMS
A1.c - Touring Tourism
OBJECTIVE
Attracting visitors away from the busy traditional tourist centres and into rural communities and the associated job creation potential in local tourism and hospitality businesses.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Greenways of scale and appropriate standard that have significant potential to deliver an increase in activity tourism and are regularly used by overseas visitors, domestic visitors and locals thereby contributing to a healthier society through increased physical activity. Greenways that provide a substantially segregated offroad experience linking towns and villages, showcasing places of interest, recreation and leisure in areas with beautiful scenery of different types with plenty to see and do.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The preservation of rural landscapes and community life that can be found in the majority of the destinations adds authenticity, which is also something that tourists are looking for. - Destinations boast a rich cultural and historical heritage, alongside a diversity of natural resources – forests, beaches, mountains - which are frequently one of the main reasons why tourists choose a destination - The renowned quality of their local gastronomy and wines can also attract an important number of visitors. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In terms of tourist offers, there is a lack of a broad range of segmented tourist experiences in some regions. accommodation diversity remains sometimes limited - Tourism infrastructure is fragmented and insufficient in some of the regions: inadequate road conditions, irregular bus services, and an underdeveloped railway network, which can hinder the smooth movement of tourists. - The limited cooperation and networking between different tourism stakeholders, which prevents the development of a cohesive tourism experience. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in tourist preferences present further opportunities. There is a growing trend for healthier lifestyles and well-being, as well as a demand for more authentic destinations. - Mobility is a key issue for the tourism industry. Most of the countries in the Atlantic area set up national strategies focused on the development of low-carbon mobility, including the promotion of trains, electric cars, public transport, and bike lanes - By broadening the offer, the number of people potentially interested in visiting the destination increases. - Growth of experiential and sustainable tourism, with visitors seeking authentic, heritage-based stays.

Threats mitigated:

- Protecting the environment is an increasingly important concern for Europeans, tourism could suffer from the negative impacts it can generate.
- The aging population and depopulation of rural areas could pose a long-term threat to tourism, as there are already difficulties to hire qualified people.
- In certain areas of high natural and heritage value or in some urban centres, there is also the risk of over-tourism, which could lead to the degradation of the resources and of the quality of visiting.
- Another threat is the competition from nearby locations with better infrastructure and offerings, as well as from other destinations with similar tourist propositions.

DESCRIPTION

This action focuses on developing high-quality, greenways that offer a predominantly off-road, safe, and scenic experience connecting towns and villages. Designed to attract both international and domestic visitors, as well as local users, these greenways promote physical activity and contribute to a healthier society. By showcasing diverse landscapes, cultural landmarks, and recreational opportunities, they serve as a compelling alternative to traditional tourist hotspots, drawing visitors into rural areas. This shift supports the revitalisation of local communities and stimulates job creation in tourism, hospitality, and related sectors.

Local consultation:

In order to ensure a successful Greenway development, it is vital that those who are proposing such developments do so in such a way as to ensure, in so far as is possible, that there is buy in and support locally. Early engagement, with the local community and particularly landowners that may be affected either directly or indirectly, before any decisions regarding route selection, is vital.

Land access for Greenways:

The preferred model for future Greenways is to use lands already in the undisputed ownership or control of the State, either through Government Agencies, Government Departments or Local Authorities. The advantages that this model provides include certainty of permanent unrestricted access, clarity in relation to liability for any insurance claims and certainty of responsibility for maintenance and upkeep.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this initiative includes a diverse range of users, from international and domestic tourists seeking active and nature-based experiences to local residents looking for accessible recreation options. Key segments include cycling and hiking enthusiasts, families, older adults, and wellness-focused travellers who value sustainable and scenic travel opportunities. Additionally, the greenways appeal to educational groups, Nature based-tourists, and cultural explorers interested in discovering rural heritage and lesser-known destinations. By catering to this broad audience, the initiative supports inclusive tourism growth while fostering community engagement and healthier lifestyles.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Local authorities and regional development agencies play a central role in planning, funding, and maintaining the infrastructure.
- National tourism bodies and transport departments contribute strategic guidance and promotional support to ensure alignment with broader tourism and mobility goals. Environmental and heritage organisations help ensure that routes are developed sustainably and highlight local natural and cultural assets.
- Additionally, partnerships with local businesses, community groups, and landowners are essential to foster local ownership, enhance visitor experiences, and maximise the economic benefits for rural areas.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Local and regional authorities responsible for infrastructure and land use planning, as well as national government departments overseeing tourism, transport, and environmental protection.
- Local communities and residents are key stakeholders, offering insights into the needs and values of the area while benefiting from improved amenities and economic opportunities.
- Tourism operators, hospitality providers, and small businesses play a vital role in delivering services and enhancing the visitor experience.
- Environmental and cultural heritage groups ensure the routes are developed in a way that respects and promotes the natural and cultural assets of the region.
- Additionally, cycling and hiking advocacy organisations contribute expertise on user needs and best practices in trail design and safety.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Increased Visitor Numbers: Achieving year-on-year growth in both domestic and international tourists using the greenways.
- Local Economic Impact: Boosting revenue for local tourism and hospitality businesses, with a specific focus on rural job creation.
- Health and Wellbeing: Encouraging regular use by local residents, contributing to increased levels of physical activity and overall community health.
- Sustainable Mobility: Promoting eco-friendly travel by providing viable alternatives to car-based tourism, especially through cycling and walking.
- Sustainable Tourism Indicators:
 - Modal Shift: Reduction in car travel to and within tourist areas through promotion of cycling and walking.
 - Carbon Footprint: Measurement of reduced CO₂ emissions due to eco-friendly travel alternatives.
 - Environmental Quality: Preservation or enhancement of local biodiversity and natural landscapes along routes.
 - Waste Management: Availability and usage of waste and recycling facilities along greenways.
 - Sustainable Business Practices: Increase in number of tourism businesses adopting eco-certifications or sustainable operations.
- User Satisfaction: Maintaining high levels of visitor satisfaction through well-maintained infrastructure, signage, amenities, and accessibility.
- Environmental Stewardship: Ensuring that greenway development preserves and enhances the natural and cultural environment, meeting sustainability and conservation standards.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Visitor Numbers and Demographics: Regular tracking of user counts (e.g. through counters or surveys) and profiling of visitors (local vs. tourist, age groups, etc.).
- Economic Impact Metrics: Monitoring increases in local business revenues, overnight stays, and tourism-related employment in areas served by the greenways.
- Usage Frequency by Locals: Measuring the extent to which residents use the greenways for commuting, recreation, and exercise.
- Health Outcomes: Collaborating with health agencies to assess changes in physical activity levels and related health indicators in local populations.
- Sustainability Metrics: Monitoring environmental indicators such as biodiversity impact, carbon savings from reduced car travel, and maintenance of natural landscapes.

- Infrastructure Quality: Regular audits of trail conditions, signage, safety features, and user amenities to ensure high standards are maintained.
- User Satisfaction: Conducting periodic surveys and collecting feedback to gauge user experiences and identify areas for improvement.
- Community Engagement: Tracking involvement of local stakeholders in planning, promotion, and maintenance activities.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Phase 1: Planning and Consultation (Months 1–6)

- Stakeholder engagement and community consultation
- Feasibility studies and route selection
- Environmental assessments
- Initial funding applications and budget planning

Phase 2: Design and Approvals (Months 7–12)

- Detailed route design and engineering plans
- Securing planning permissions and land agreements
- Finalising partnerships with key organisations
- Procurement planning for construction and services

Phase 3: Construction and Development (Months 13–24)

- On-ground construction of trails, signage, amenities, and support infrastructure
- Installation of safety features and eco-friendly facilities (e.g. e-bike stations, waste bins)
- Landscaping and integration of recreational and heritage features

Phase 4: Launch and Promotion (Months 25–30)

- Soft launch for community use and feedback
- Marketing campaigns targeting domestic and international visitors
- Collaboration with tourism operators and local businesses for launch events

Phase 5: Monitoring and Continuous Improvement (Months 31 onwards)

- Ongoing performance monitoring and user feedback collection
- Regular maintenance and upgrades
- Adaptive management based on indicator data and stakeholder input

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- EUROVELO NETWORK (EUROPE): Benchmark route design, signage standards, and integration with public transport systems.
- GREAT WESTERN GREENWAY (IRELAND): use as a model for rural regeneration through tourism and community engagement.
- THE NETHERLANDS & DENMARK CYCLE ROUTES: Learn from their world-class infrastructure, user safety measures, and integration with urban and rural planning.
<https://www.visitdenmark.com/denmark/things-do/cycling/cycling-routes-denmark>

- THE IRON PATH (SALAMANCA, SPAIN): pedestrian route that runs along a section of the railway line closed to traffic and upgraded, which combines the grandeur of the most representative civil engineering of the 19th century with nature.
- LA LOIRE À VÉLO (FRANCE): cycle path through the cradle of the Renaissance and the French way of life, crisscross a UNESCO World Heritage site, discover the history and exceptional riches of the Loire castles, marvel at the spectacle of nature, ride through towns and villages to the beaches of the Atlantic.
- FLOW VÉLO® (FRANCE): A 400 km cycle route linking the Atlantic to the Périgord via the Périgord to the Atlantic.

5.5.4 ACTION 4 – EXPLORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL-SCALE ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

STRATEGIC AXIS
I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER
INTERVENTION AIMS
A1.d - Commercial Accommodation
OBJECTIVE
To enhance the quality, diversity, and sustainability of commercial accommodations across the Atlantic Area by promoting historic, eco-friendly, and unique lodging options. This initiative supports the renovation of heritage buildings (e.g., mansions, rural estates, lighthouses, monasteries), the development of innovative accommodation models (e.g., glamping, floating cabins, transparent domes), and the creation of an interconnected network of distinctive stays that contribute to balanced tourism flows and rural revitalization.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Accommodation is a cornerstone of tourism attractiveness. As highlighted in the SWOT analysis, many regions lack a diversified offer, limiting their appeal to different visitor segments. Some areas are underserved in high-quality or family-friendly options, while others depend on traditional models that no longer match emerging visitor preferences. Expanding and diversifying accommodation types can transform short-stay or day-trip visitors into overnight guests, increasing local economic impact and extending the tourism season. Moreover, innovative and sustainable accommodation formats, such as glamping or adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, offer immersive experiences that align with the growing demand for authentic, eco-conscious travel.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich architectural and cultural heritage that can be adapted for tourism use. - Authenticity of rural landscapes and community life, which enhances accommodation appeal. - Existing tourism infrastructure, including growing demand for experiential stays. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of accommodation diversity in some regions (e.g., high-end vs. budget-friendly, family-friendly vs. boutique). - Seasonality of tourism, which impacts profitability for accommodation providers. - Limited digital presence and booking options for small, unique accommodations. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growth of experiential and sustainable tourism, with visitors seeking authentic, heritage-based stays. - Innovation in commercial accommodations, including eco-lodging, historic renovations, and immersive experiences. - Cross-sector collaboration, linking accommodation providers with gastronomy, culture, and nature-based tourism.

Threats mitigated:

- Competition from international destinations with better-developed unique lodging offerings.
- Environmental degradation, by encouraging sustainable renovation and eco-friendly accommodations.
- Depopulation of rural areas, by stimulating investment in small communities through tourism-led revitalization.

DESCRIPTION

This action will support the development of alternative accommodation models that meet the evolving needs of visitors and align with sustainability and heritage conservation goals. The initiative includes the creation of a practical guide, financial and technical assistance, capacity building, and the launch of a digital platform that promotes these unique stays. Key goals include:

- Transforming heritage buildings into viable tourism assets.
- Promoting innovation in eco-lodging and immersive experiences.
- Empowering rural communities to participate in the hospitality economy.
- Enhancing discoverability and booking efficiency through digital tools.
- Leverage digital tools, enhancing discoverability and booking efficiency.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Identification and Mapping of Unique Accommodations

Cataloging historic buildings (e.g., castles, monasteries, rural estates, lighthouses) with tourism potential. Identifying eco-friendly and innovative lodging concepts (e.g., glamping, floating cabins, treehouses, transparent domes).

2. Financial and Technical Support

Offering grants, tax incentives, or low-interest loans for the restoration and adaptation of historic buildings into accommodations. Providing technical expertise on sustainable construction and energy efficiency for eco-lodging development.

3. Development of a Digital Platform

Creating a user-friendly website and mobile app to promote and facilitate bookings for historic and unique stays. Integrating interactive storytelling features showcasing the history and cultural significance of each accommodation.

4. Creation of Thematic Tourism Packages

Linking accommodations with gastronomic experiences, cultural heritage sites, and nature-based activities. Developing seasonal and off-peak tourism packages to extend the tourism season.

5. Capacity Building and Training for Accommodation Providers

Conducting workshops on digital marketing, guest experience innovation, and sustainable hospitality practices. Providing business training to small-scale accommodation providers to enhance competitiveness.

6. Joint Promotional Campaigns

Partnering with national and regional tourism boards for coordinated marketing efforts. Collaborating with travel influencers and digital content creators to showcase unique stays.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Travellers (heritage lovers, eco-conscious tourists, luxury and boutique travellers).
- Accommodation providers (hotels, guesthouses, glamping operators, rural lodges).
- Cultural heritage institutions (owners of historic estates, monasteries, castles, lighthouses).
- Local and regional governments (tourism boards, economic development agencies).
- Private investors and developers interested in sustainable tourism.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Local and regional authorities – Identifying eligible properties and managing funding programs.
- Tourism and cultural heritage organisations – Supporting development and promotion.
- Private sector investors & hospitality groups – Investing in unique accommodations.
- Sustainability organizations and experts – Ensuring standards for new accommodations.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Cultural heritage foundations & UNESCO representatives – Identifying restoration opportunities.
- Hospitality industry & tourism clusters – Developing unique stay experiences.
- Real estate & restoration specialists – Supporting adaptive reuse of buildings.
- Technology providers – Developing the booking platform & marketing tools.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Completion of an audit of existing alternative accommodations and their occupancy levels.
- Production of a market research report on demand, trends, and growth potential of the sector.
- Development of a digital platform promoting unique accommodations.
- Increase of historic buildings adapted for tourism and eco-lodging/glamping options available.
- Growth in off-season occupancy rates across participating properties.
- Production of a Guide to Alternative Accommodation Development.
- Increased reach and engagement metrics for social media campaigns.
- Increase in online searches, interest, and bookings from international markets.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Review booking data and visitor reviews collected via the digital platform.
- Conduct economic impact assessments (revenue, job creation).
- Surveys of operators on business performance and skills needs.
- Develop oversight reports and feedback from tourism committees.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Identify heritage and eco-lodging sites, development of a value proposition and a “How to Guide” for potential investors / land owners.
- Phase 2 (Months 6-12): Develop a programme of support grants and investment incentives, stakeholder engagement.
- Phase 3 (Months 12-24): Launch digital platform, begin renovations, publish guide.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Monitor, evaluate, and scale promotion and partnerships.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- PARADORES DE ESPAÑA (SPAIN): A state-run network of historic hotels in castles, palaces, and monasteries.
- POUSADAS DE PORTUGAL: A similar concept in Portugal, integrating luxury hospitality with historic preservation.
- THE LANDMARK TRUST (UK & EU): A nonprofit restoring and renting historic buildings as holiday stays.
- TREEHOTEL (SWEDEN): A collection of sustainable, architecturally unique lodges in nature.
- QUINTA DA PACHECA (LAMEGO, PORTUGAL): Wine house hotel that added to their regular hotel accommodation offer a successful model for sustainable wine barrel glamping in the vineyards.
- FAIRBNB - Airbnb alternative, which takes local impact in count: <https://fairbnb.coop/fr/>

5.5.5 ACTION 5 - SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGHTTIME ECONOMY FESTIVALS & OFF-SEASON EVENTS

STRATEGIC AXIS
I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER
INTERVENTION AIMS
A1.e - Extending the Tourist Season
OBJECTIVE
<p>To support the development of night-time and off-season events and experiences as strategic levers to extend the tourism season, distribute tourism more evenly throughout the year, and enhance the attractiveness of under-visited destinations. This action focuses on designing cultural, gastronomic, and leisure-based programming that caters to targeted audiences and stimulates local economies beyond peak periods.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Tourism seasonality is a major challenge across many destinations, where high levels of visitation during a few months are often followed by prolonged periods of low activity. Equally, many local economies operate on a limited daily timeframe, missing opportunities for added value through evening experiences and extended business hours. As demand for more flexible, immersive, and culturally rich travel increases, developing a diversified evening offer and activating low-demand periods through curated festivals and events can significantly increase dwell time, revenue, and off-peak visitation. This approach allows each territory to respond to its unique seasonality patterns—whether weekly, monthly, or annual—while enhancing quality of life for residents and reinforcing the visitor appeal of both urban and rural destinations.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most Atlantic area destinations are close to major urban centres which is an advantage, because of the potential number of tourists. - Destinations boast a rich cultural and historical heritage, - The renowned quality of their local gastronomy and wines can also attract an important number of visitors. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In terms of tourist offers, there is a lack of a broad range of segmented tourist experiences in some regions. - Tourism infrastructure is fragmented and insufficient in some of the regions: inadequate road conditions, irregular bus services, and an underdeveloped railway network, which can hinder the smooth movement of tourists. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating incentives for repeated visits year after year is another potential strategy. - The ongoing digitalisation of the economy, which allows to create new tourist experiences, improve communication with visitors, and makes it more convenient to book online and access relevant information. - Growth of experiential and sustainable tourism, with visitors seeking authentic, heritage-based stays.

Threats mitigated:

- In certain areas of high natural and heritage value or in some urban centres, there is also the risk of over-tourism, which could lead to the degradation of the resources and of the quality of visiting
- Another threat is the competition from nearby locations with better infrastructure and offerings, as well as from other destinations with similar tourist propositions.

DESCRIPTION

This action aims to extend tourism activity beyond peak seasons and standard daytime hours by coordinating a calendar of night-time events and festivals across the Atlantic Area. Developed in collaboration with a cluster of local venue owners and stakeholders, these 2–3 days events will feature themes such as music, comedy, food, wine, dance, art, and local history, activating bars, restaurants, and cultural spaces during low-demand periods.

To support implementation, a financial and technical assistance scheme will help organisers plan, manage, and promote these events. A dedicated promotional campaign will boost visibility and attract visitors, while thematic tourism packages will link festivals with accommodations and multi-day itineraries—encouraging longer stays and greater economic impact. By transforming the evening offer into a strategic asset, this action supports the transition from an 8-hour to a 16-hour tourism economy, helping destinations thrive year-round.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Creation and Support of Off-Season Events and Festivals

- Facilitate and fund the launch or expansion of autumn/winter events, local celebrations, food markets, and seasonal concerts.
- Encourage collaborative event calendars across municipalities and regions.

2. Development of Night-Time Leisure and Cultural Offers

- Support after-dark activities such as illuminated heritage tours, night markets, open-air cinema, and late museum openings.
- Improve urban lighting, safety, and transport coordination to support night-time circulation.
- Contribution to flow redistribution: Increases visitor dwell.

3. Targeted Packages for Specific Demographics

- Create seasonal offers tailored to seniors, adult couples, and local cultural tourists, including wellness retreats, culinary weekends, and quiet cultural getaways.
- Integrate accommodation, activities, and local food experiences into curated off-season packages.

4. Collaborative Branding and Campaigns

- Launch promotions around off-season travel (e.g., “Atlantic Nights”, “Winter Warmth Trails”).
- Use digital storytelling and influencer collaborations to promote year-round experiences.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Senior travellers and empty nesters/DINK (doble income no kids couples) seeking calm, quality experiences.
- Urban dwellers looking for weekend getaways and night-time activities.
- Local communities and second-home owners interested in cultural and social engagement.
- Domestic and nearby international tourists traveling off-peak.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Regional and local tourism boards coordinating events and promotions.
- Municipal cultural departments and chambers of commerce, supporting logistics and business involvement.
- Creative and event agencies, delivering high-quality experiences.
- Transport authorities, improving off-peak mobility.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Local Authority Representatives
- Local Authority Councillor's
- National and Regional tourism bodies
- Business Associations /Chamber of Commerce
- Interested Venue Owners
- Local Tourism Committees
- Hospitality businesses offering themed packages and extended hours.
- Cultural institutions, artists, and musicians, animating the night-time economy.
- Artisan and food producers, participating in seasonal markets and workshops.
- Local media and influencers, promoting low-season offerings.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIS)

- Increase in the number of events created and included in the calendar. Including establishes events and newly created events.
- Increase on the number of different venues participating / hosting festivals & events. Showing a good range and spread of participation be venue owners.
- Document the number of tickets sold - documenting the level of economic activity as a result-
- Increase in the number of visitors staying overnight in hotels / accommodation providers.
- Increase in average visitor spending per trip, particularly from longer stays.
- Visitor satisfaction rate for off-season and night-time experiences.
- Increase in overnight stays in off-peak periods within two years in participating destinations.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Accommodation and event attendance rates during shoulder months.
- Business feedback and revenue data during off-season.
- Digital engagement metrics (event promotion reach, hashtag use, clicks).
- Resident surveys on perceived quality of life and impact of events.
- Repeat visitation indicators tied to festivals or seasonal offers.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1(1 – 3 Months): Establish a Nighttime Festivals & Events project committee.
- Phase 2 (3 – 6 Months): select one or two thematic festivals to develop (Comedy / Music)
- Phase 3 (3 Months): develop a promotional campaign for new festival or event.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Evaluate the success of the event.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices

- LA ROCHELLE'S "NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM" SERIES (FRANCE): Extends cultural engagement into evening hours, promoting year-round access.
- PORTUGAL'S ENOTOURISM WEEKENDS (PORTUGAL): Packages combining wine tasting, artisan food, and local stays, drawing off-peak visitors.
- DUBLIN'S BRAM STOKER FESTIVAL (IRELAND): A Halloween-themed event blending literature, performance, and tourism.
- BASQUE CULINARY AUTUMN TRAILS (SPAIN): A campaign that markets autumn as a gourmet discovery season.

5.5.6 ACTION 6 – PROXIMITY TOURISM

STRATEGIC AXIS
I - STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM OFFER
INTERVENTION AIMS
A1.f - Proximity Tourism
OBJECTIVE
Through the development of local festivals and events, encourage local citizens to explore destinations within a relatively short distance (same region/country or cross-border regions) from their home or origin which emphasizes local destinations, shorter distances, and lower-carbon transportation methods.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>There is an increasing tendency for people to vacation closer to home, either for economic or environmental reasons. As most of the Atlantic area destinations are close to major urban centres, this is an important opportunity to attract urban people who want to go on holidays in places close(r) to home. Creating incentives for repeated visits year after year is another potential strategy. It's easier and more cost-effective to bring back tourists, than attracting people who have never been to the destination before.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The preservation of rural landscapes and community life that can be found in the majority of the destinations adds authenticity, which is also something that tourists are looking for. - Destinations boast a rich cultural and historical heritage, alongside a diversity of natural resources – forests, beaches, mountains - which are frequently one of the main reasons why tourists choose a destination. - The renowned quality of their local gastronomy and wines can also attract an important number of visitors. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In terms of tourist offers, there is a lack of a broad range of segmented tourist experiences in some regions. Accommodation diversity remains sometimes limited. - A notable issue is seasonality, with the concentration of tourist activity occurring during only a few months of the year. - Tourism infrastructure is fragmented and insufficient in some of the regions: inadequate road conditions, irregular bus services, and an underdeveloped railway network, which can hinder the smooth movement of tourists. - The limited cooperation and networking between different tourism stakeholders, which prevents the development of a cohesive tourism experience. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in tourist preferences present further opportunities. There is a growing trend for healthier lifestyles and well-being, as well as a demand for more authentic destinations. - Mobility is a key issue for the tourism industry. Most of the countries in the Atlantic area set up national strategies focused on the development of low-carbon mobility, including the promotion of trains, electric cars, public transport, and bike lanes. - By broadening the offer, the number of people potentially interested in visiting the destination increases. - Growth of experiential and sustainable tourism, with visitors seeking authentic, heritage-based stays.

Threats mitigated:

- Protecting the environment is an increasingly important concern for Europeans, tourism could suffer from the negative impacts it can generate.
- The aging population and depopulation of rural areas could pose a long-term threat to tourism, as there are already difficulties to hire qualified people.
- In certain areas of high natural and heritage value or in some urban centres, there is also the risk of over-tourism, which could lead to the degradation of the resources and of the quality of visiting.
- Another threat is the competition from nearby locations with better infrastructure and offerings, as well as from other destinations with similar tourist propositions.

DESCRIPTION

The proposal is to develop a grant scheme aimed at supporting the development of festivals and participative events which attract local and drive domestic tourism and help to improve the visitor experience by animating destinations.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Small Grants to support and foster activities targeting neighbouring regions tourists

The introduction of a small-scale grant will encourage local organisations and associations in the development of local festivals and events which will attract local residents and domestic visitors. This will allow for the creation of a regional calendar of creative local events and festivals in towns and villages.

- Develop a grant guidelines document outlining the aims and objectives of the Scheme. This document should outline the eligibility and qualifying conditions for the scheme. Having a previous approved tourism strategy for the territory should be a must for being eligible for this new funding.
- Develop a simple application form which is easy to complete.
- Advertise the opportunity early in the year (January) to attract as many applications as possible in the calendar year.
- Assess all applications and ensure they are compliant with the guidelines of the grant scheme.
- Publish the list of successful applications.
- Produce a calendar of festivals and events.
- Develop a local marketing campaign to create awareness of these events.
- Gather a post event report from each festival / event documenting attendance levels and participation of local businesses and residents.
- Evaluate the scheme to see which events were successful and identify opportunity for innovation and development.
- Implementation of a coordinate approach to ensure that granted events are complementary to each other (and with other pre-existing ones) avoiding unnecessary competition between hosting territories.

2. Mutual-promotion and cross-selling

Create and use the local partnerships (including cross-border partnerships) to work together (especially with nearby towns and locations) in mutual-promotion activities organizing fairs or cross-events that encourage people visiting destinations near home generating proximity tourism and encourage all-year tourism.

3. Existing products and assets-based promotion

Capitalize all activities already on-going within the territory (in different surrounding sites): events, festivals, fairs, concerts, attraction, etc. towards the creation of neighbouring tourism flows between. This can be done through the development of new dissemination products like online guides and joint promotion documents to widespread all the events already planned.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Local Citizens.
- Local employees.
- Visiting family and friends.
- Domestic visitors.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Business Networks / Associations
- Community Organisations
- Chamber of Commerce
- Event Promoters
- Tourism Organisations
- Cultural Organisations

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Local Authorities/ Municipalities
- State Management of heritage sites and assets
- Sustainable tourism bodies
- Local development companies and LEADER programme bodies – Rural development funding and support
- Cultural advocacy groups – Ensuring inclusivity, authenticity, and cultural preservation
- Visitor attractions – Direct delivery of immersive experiences
- Accommodation providers – Integration of experiences into visitor stays
- Tour operators and guides – Promotion, delivery, and storytelling
- Craft producers, food & drink vendors
- Local residents and cultural custodians – Co-creators of authentic content
- Indigenous and minority groups
- Youth groups, schools, Universities and Institutes of Technology
- Cultural and heritage studies departments

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Number of grants awarded per year
- Level of Financial Investment per year
- Number of new festivals & events organized
- Number of attendees
- Number of businesses / Venues involved

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Recommend attendance at each festival or event funded to ensure compliance with the scheme.
- A post event report should be completed for each festival or event including event dates, times, attendance, local participation, and a number of event photographs.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

This action should be implemented annually.

- Advertised in January.
- Grants assessed by February.
- Advertising and promotion throughout the year.
- Scheme reviewed and evaluated by November.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

- Expocidades Fair (SPAIN & PORTUGAL) – An exhibition cross-border fair which main objective is to promote Proximity tourism, by presenting to neighboring regions the tourism offer and traditional products available in their territories.
- Tourist guide 2022: What to do in Eixo Atlantico! (SPAIN & PORTUGAL) – a tourism guide that promotes proximity tourism by offering tourism routes/experience that residents of the Euroregion Galicia North of Portugal do in a two hours range.
- Tourism Festivals and Participative Events Grant of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (IRELAND).
- Fingal County Council's Festival & Event Funding Scheme (IRELAND).

5.5.7 ACTION 7 - LOCAL TRANSPORT SERVICES FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

STRATEGIC AXIS
II - IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOBILITY
INTERVENTION AIMS
A2.a - Modernising Transport Infrastructure
OBJECTIVE
To improve rural mobility for residents and tourists by enhancing community-based rural transport services, supporting polycentric tourism (dispersed tourism across multiple towns and rural areas), and reducing social isolation and transport disadvantage.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Modernising Transport Infrastructure requires heavy investing in safe roads, modernised rail services. However, this action focuses on efficient rural bus networks playing an essential role to improve access to destinations.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most Atlantic area destinations are close to major urban centres which is an advantage, because the potential number of tourists, even for a day trip, is very high. However, in some case, transport connections with these urban centres should be improved for that proximity to become a real strength. - Builds on the existing scheduled network to expand services efficiently. - Reinforces the community-driven mission by enhancing access for socially excluded groups. <p>Opportunities Seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobility is a key issue for the tourism industry. Most of the countries in the Atlantic area set up national strategies focused on the development of low-carbon mobility, including the promotion of trains, electric cars, public transport, and bike lanes: this means another significant opportunity to make it easier for tourists to come to a destination and get around once they are there - Responds to growing rural transport needs by improving coverage and service quality. - Aligns with government priorities for social inclusion to secure support and funding. - Opens potential for incorporating technology (e.g., apps, route tracking) to modernize the service. <p>Weaknesses addressed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism infrastructure is fragmented and insufficient in some of the regions: inadequate road conditions, irregular bus services, and an underdeveloped railway network, which can hinder the smooth movement of tourists. Yet, mobility is a key issue, as a tourist is by definition a person who has to travel to an area other than the one in which they live. - Proposes marketing or outreach to raise awareness and boost ridership. - Suggests greater flexibility in service models (e.g., adding demand-responsive options). <p>Threats Mitigated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhances rural quality of life to combat depopulation. - Improves public transport appeal versus private car use. - Justifies ongoing funding by demonstrating clear social and economic benefits.

DESCRIPTION

This action aims to modernise and expand local and rural transport services to improve access to tourism experiences across the Atlantic Area, particularly in peripheral and under-visited destinations. By connecting villages, heritage sites, and local businesses through inclusive and tourist-friendly public transport, the initiative supports polycentric tourism development and reduces reliance on private vehicles. It focuses on enhancing service coverage, integrating mobility with tourism offers, leveraging digital tools, and engaging communities to position public transport as a sustainable and attractive option for visitors and residents alike. The following key activities outline the core components of this integrated approach.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Service Expansion and Optimisation

- Extend and design routes that connect multiple rural attractions, heritage sites, and villages to promote polycentric tourism.
- Adjust scheduling to align with local events, seasonal tourism peaks, and operating hours of local attractions.
- Introduce hop-on/hop-off options or tourist-friendly passes to encourage multi-destination visits.

2. Tourism Integration and Community Engagement

- Collaborate with local tourism offices, hospitality providers, and cultural sites to map out tourist circuits.
- Create bilingual (or multilingual) route maps, brochures, and on-board audio guides highlighting key attractions and local culture.
- Engage local communities to become ambassadors and promote the service as part of the rural tourism experience.

3. Technology Integration

- Incorporate a user-friendly trip planner that includes rural tourism stops and visitor information.
- Enable tourists to buy tickets, plan routes, and get live updates via a mobile app or tourism websites.
- Use tourism data analytics (visitor numbers, seasonal trends) to dynamically adjust service offerings.

4. Marketing and Awareness Campaigns

- Launch a targeted campaign promoting Local Link as a green and convenient way to explore rural/inland neighbouring areas
- Highlight eco-tourism and slow travel benefits to appeal to environmentally conscious travellers.
- Partner with tour operators, accommodation providers, and influencers to reach tourists before and during their stay.

5. Staff Training and Capacity Building

- Train drivers and support staff to assist tourists, provide local insights, and handle diverse customer needs.
- Offer training in basic foreign language phrases and cultural awareness.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

- Track tourist ridership, popular routes, and service satisfaction through surveys and booking data.
- Include tourism impact metrics (e.g. increased visits to lesser-known villages or attractions) in evaluations.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Tourists without private vehicles (youth, seniors, eco-conscious travellers).
- Residents in rural areas, gaining access to leisure, services, and social inclusion.
- Destination managers and local governments seeking sustainable mobility solutions.
- Cultural institutions and tourism businesses in rural destinations.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Regional Transport Authorities
- Local Authorities/Municipalities
- Regional Tourism Organisations
- Tourism Networks and Local Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)
- Community organisations and Voluntary Groups
- Private Sector organisations

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- National and regional transport authorities, local governments, and destination management organisations.
- Local tourism businesses, hospitality providers, chambers of commerce, and regional tourism networks.
- Transport operators, contractors, and rural development networks.
- Voluntary organisations, disability and inclusion advocates, and environmental NGOs.
- Universities, research centres, and cultural or heritage site managers.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Increase in Route Coverage through the number of rural towns/villages served.
- Increase frequency on key routes where demand exists.
- Increase in passenger numbers within the first year (baseline compared to the previous year).
- Enhanced Social Inclusion Reach by serving new passengers identified as from priority groups (e.g. elderly, persons with disabilities, low-income households, or isolated areas).
- Increase in visitor numbers at attractions connected by community-based rural transport routes (tracked via partnerships or ticket data).
- Service Adaptation by changing services based on community or tourist feedback.
- Reduction in emissions through modal shift from private cars to public transport (to be assessed through transport modelling).

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Capture visitor motivation, experience with transport services, and feedback on rural tourism routes through surveys.
- Stakeholder feedback through regular check-ins with community groups, local businesses, and public bodies.
- Data logged from community-based rural transport services own ticketing and scheduling systems (e.g. passenger counts, GPS tracking).
- App and website analytics for trip planning and ticket booking usage.
- Collaborate with sustainability researchers or transport modelers to estimate modal shift and emissions reductions.
- Track any changes in private vehicle use in service areas through local surveys or national datasets.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1–3): Stakeholder mapping and consultations. Needs assessments (community and tourism-related). Identification of priority routes and tourism assets. Establishment of governance and project coordination teams.
- Phase 2 (Months 4–6): Finalisation of routes and timetables. Technology integration (e.g. trip planner, GPS tracking, booking systems). Development of marketing materials and tourist information tools. Training for staff (customer service, accessibility, tourism awareness).
- Phase 3 (Month 7): Public launch of enhanced services and promotional campaign. Community and media events to raise awareness. Rollout of tourism-friendly features (hop-on/hop-off, info guides).
- Phase 4 (Months 8–10): Ongoing data collection on ridership, satisfaction, and feedback. Adjustments to routes/timetables as needed (based on early feedback). Continued outreach and promotion through local businesses and tourism channels.
- Phase 5 (Months 11–12): Impact assessment (social, economic, tourism, environmental). Final stakeholder consultations and report preparation. Planning next phase or potential scaling of the programme.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- LOCAL LINK KERRY (IRELAND): Local Link Kerry has been a leading example of integrating rural public transport with social inclusion and tourism initiatives. It offers both scheduled and demand-responsive services across remote parts of the county. Proves that combining rural mobility and tourism development can work effectively within the Local Link model.
- GO RURAL SCOTLAND (SCOTLAND): A collaborative tourism initiative connecting rural Scottish communities through public and community-based transport, promoting slow travel and access to off-the-beaten-path destinations. Demonstrates how polycentric tourism can thrive when well-connected by public transport and marketed effectively.
- SBB “GRAND TRAIN TOUR OF SWITZERLAND”: This is a tourism-focused public transport route developed by Swiss Railways (SBB), combining regular public train services into scenic, visitor-friendly routes across rural and alpine regions. Shows how regular public transport can be rebranded and repackaged to deliver a premium tourism experience.
- PERMANENT ACTIVITY STRUCTURES OF ALDEIAS HISTÓRICAS (PORTUGAL): The integration of walking and cycling infrastructure in Aldeias Históricas illustrates how targeted mobility investments can connect remote heritage villages and support polycentric tourism.
- MOBILIDADE URBANA SUSTENTÁVEL NA REDE ALDEIAS HISTÓRICAS (PORTUGAL): The provision of free electric vehicles and coordinated transfers from nearby train stations illustrates how inclusive, low-emission transport solutions can connect rural.

5.5.8 ACTION 8 - LIVING STREETS "DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MOBILITY TRAILS"

STRATEGIC AXIS
II - IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOBILITY
INTERVENTION AIMS
A2.b - Promoting Soft Mobility
OBJECTIVE
To promote soft mobility by designing and implementing integrated, accessible, and sustainable mobility trails that connect key visitor experiences, heritage sites, and local services. These trails will serve both as standalone tourism products and as tools to enhance local accessibility, reduce environmental impact, and support balanced tourism flow across regions.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Mobility is a key issue for the tourism industry. Most of the countries in the Atlantic area set up national strategies focused on the development of low-carbon mobility, including the promotion of trains, electric cars, public transport, and bike lanes: this means another significant opportunity to make it easier for tourists to come to a destination and get around once they are there. The development of secure mobility paths, expanding charging points for electric vehicles, and establishing car-sharing services are priority measures. Routes should be designed as standalone tourism products in collaboration with professionalised local stakeholders.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich architectural and cultural heritage that can be adapted for tourism use. - Atlantic area destinations are close to major urban centres which is an advantage. - There are already some established tourist activities and services, including accommodation and restaurants, which contribute positively to the tourism sector. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a lack of a broad range of segmented tourist experiences in some regions. - Tourism infrastructure is fragmented and insufficient in some of the regions: inadequate road conditions, irregular bus services, and an underdeveloped railway network. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capitalise on the tourists already travelling during the high season by encouraging them to return in the low season. - Lesser-known activities and monuments in rural areas could be promoted to attract a higher number of tourists. - Most of the countries in the Atlantic area set have national strategies focused on the development of low-carbon mobility. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage the risk of over-tourism, which could lead to the degradation of the resources and of the quality of visiting. - Competition from nearby locations with better infrastructure and offerings, as well as from other destinations with similar tourist propositions.

DESCRIPTION

This action will coordinate the planning, development, and promotion of soft mobility routes that encourage walking, cycling, and other low-impact transport across Atlantic Area destinations. These trails will be designed in collaboration with local planners, engineers, business owners, and tourism stakeholders, ensuring that routes are practical, scenic, inclusive, and visitor-oriented.

Each trail will connect key cultural, natural, and service nodes such as historic sites, accommodation clusters, markets, and public spaces. The project will also explore the development of multi-day itineraries, thematic signage, and user-friendly digital navigation tools. A dedicated scheme of financial and technical support will be established to help municipalities and communities plan, upgrade, or extend infrastructure, including safe bike lanes, electric vehicle charging points, rest areas, and junction upgrades. Trails will be promoted as part of a larger campaign to position sustainable mobility as a tourism experience, complemented by thematic tourism packages that include accommodation, gastronomy, and local experiences.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Identification and Mapping of Priority Routes

Define strategic mobility corridors that connect key tourism assets, services, and transport nodes, prioritising underserved or high-potential areas.

2. Design and Development of Infrastructure

Construct or upgrade soft mobility infrastructure such as cycling paths, pedestrian walkways, crossings, and traffic-calming measures to improve safety and connectivity.

3. Enhancement of Public Spaces and Visitor Amenities

Improve the aesthetic and functional quality of routes by integrating elements like seating, bicycle parking, lighting, rest areas, and landscape improvements.

4. Integration with Tourism Services and Local Experiences

Align mobility trails with nearby accommodations, restaurants, cultural sites, and nature-based attractions to support multi-stop, experience-driven travel.

5. Financial and Technical Support Scheme

Provide resources to local governments and stakeholders for planning, infrastructure development, and maintenance, including grants or expert guidance.

6. Development of Wayfinding and Interpretation Tools

Install signage and create printed/digital materials to help users navigate routes and understand the cultural, natural, or historical significance of each segment.

7. Creation of Thematic Tourism Packages

Design multi-day itineraries or bundles combining mobility trails with lodging, gastronomy, and leisure activities to encourage longer stays.

8. Marketing and Promotion

Launch targeted campaigns using digital channels, social media, and stakeholder partnerships to position the trails as eco-friendly, immersive tourism products.

9. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Involve residents, local businesses, and planners in co-design processes to ensure local ownership and alignment with community needs.

10. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Track usage, visitor satisfaction, environmental impact, and business performance to guide future enhancements and ensure sustainability.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Visitors: Eco-conscious travellers, active tourists, families, and urban day-trippers.
- Local residents and commuters: Seeking better transport options and active living environments.
- Enterprises: Local businesses located along trails.
- Public authorities and planners: Interested in sustainable infrastructure and tourism development.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Local and regional authorities: Leading project coordination, planning, and implementation.
- Tourism boards: Integrating trails into regional promotional strategies.
- Transport departments: Ensuring technical compliance and infrastructure quality.
- Environmental and mobility NGOs: Supporting soft mobility and inclusive design principles.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Local planners and transport engineers.
- Municipal councils and elected representatives.
- Community organisations and resident groups.
- Local business networks and hospitality providers.
- Tourism agencies and destination management organisations.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Length of new or improved soft mobility infrastructure (e.g., cycling lanes, pedestrian routes) developed across participating destinations.
- Number of new connections established between key tourism sites, services, and mobility nodes (e.g., train stations, cultural attractions, accommodation clusters).
- Improvement in accessibility and safety features, measured by the number of new pedestrian crossings, signage installations, and traffic-calming interventions.
- Number of public realm enhancements completed, such as upgraded rest areas, bicycle parking, seating, lighting, and landscaping along mobility trails.
- Number of stakeholders (local authorities, businesses, community groups) engaged in the planning, design, and implementation process.

- User satisfaction rate, collected through surveys evaluating experience, safety, and ease of navigation along the routes.
- Increased usage of mobility trails, tracked through digital counters, app usage, or manual counts (pedestrians, cyclists, etc.).
- Number of tourism packages or itineraries developed that integrate mobility trails with accommodations, cultural activities, and local experiences.
- Number of promotional campaigns or materials created to market the mobility trails as tourism products.
- Reduction in private vehicle use or increase in sustainable transport modal share among visitors (based on local monitoring where available).

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Trail usage data (pedestrian and cyclist counts via sensors or manual logs).
- Visitor feedback on safety, signage, and experience.
- Occupancy rates in accommodations along or near the route.
- Business impact assessments of trail-adjacent enterprises.
- Environmental impact indicators, such as car-use reduction or carbon savings.
- Surveys of resident satisfaction with infrastructure and mobility access.
- Progress reports on construction, permitting, and trail promotion milestones.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1–6): Feasibility studies, route mapping, stakeholder engagement.
- Phase 2 (Months 6–12): Final design, procurement, and initial works.
- Phase 3 (Months 12–24): Construction, signage installation, public realm improvements.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Monitoring, maintenance, and promotional efforts.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- MOBILIDADE URBANA SUSTENTÁVEL NA REDE ALDEIAS HISTÓRICAS (PORTUGAL): The provision of free electric vehicles and coordinated transfers from nearby train stations illustrates how inclusive, low-emission transport solutions can connect rural communities and improve visitor mobility across dispersed destinations.
- PERMANENT ACTIVITY STRUCTURES OF ALDEIAS HISTÓRICAS (PORTUGAL): Successfully developed long-distance and local walking and cycling trails, combining soft mobility with tourism experiences and strategic signage to enhance rural accessibility and attractiveness.
- EUROVELO ROUTES (EU): European-wide network of long-distance bike trails with integrated tourism services.
- CAMINO NATURAL DE LA RUTA DEL CANTÁBRICO (SPAIN): Multi-regional soft mobility trail connecting cultural and coastal destinations.
- LA LOIRE À VÉLO (FRANCE): Bicycle route model linking accommodations, heritage sites, and local experiences.

5.5.9 ACTION 9 – SMART VISITOR EXPERIENCE: COLLABORATIVE DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FLOW MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC AXIS
III - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
INTERVENTION AIMS
A3.a - Development of Digital Services
OBJECTIVE
<p>To develop intuitive, mobile-friendly digital platforms that integrate real-time tourism information, transport connectivity, itinerary planning, and booking functionalities in a collaborative model that improves visitor experience and supports the redistribution of tourism flows. These platforms should empower tourists to discover and choose less-saturated, alternative destinations, while enhancing coordination between stakeholders and elevating the quality of life in both overburdened and underdeveloped regions.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Overcrowded destinations experience degradation in infrastructure, environment, and resident well-being, while many peripheral or mid-sized destinations remain under-visited despite having high potential. Digital services—when designed collaboratively and inclusively—can become a strategic tool to rebalance tourism, guiding visitors toward sustainable travel choices, improving accessibility to peripheral destinations, and ensuring that residents benefit from more balanced, planned, and data-informed tourism flows.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The presence of rich, under-promoted tourism resources across rural and peri-urban regions. - Proximity to urban centres, allowing for convenient day or weekend trips. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of digital services for visitors, especially in non-urban destinations. - Fragmented information systems and disjointed booking platforms. - Limited tourist signage and lack of real-time, localized information. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digitalization of tourism and transport services, enabling personalized, informed travel. - Growing preference for self-guided, flexible trips, especially among younger and sustainability-oriented travellers. - Potential for data collection to inform destination planning and crisis management. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism in popular areas, by offering timely, location-aware alternative suggestions. - Underperformance of lesser-known destinations, which lack visibility and access. - Inequitable development, where only certain regions benefit from tourism activity.

DESCRIPTION

This action will develop a unified, collaborative digital platform that empowers visitors to plan, book, and navigate their journey across the territory in a way that is sustainable, equitable, and seamless. The tool will promote real-time information-sharing, interoperability across regions, and joint management by public and private stakeholders to better distribute tourism activity and improve service quality in all destinations.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Digital Service Infrastructure & Integration

- Deploy high-speed internet and 5G connectivity in key tourism areas, including rural and natural destinations.
- Standardize digital systems for integration between hotels, transport providers, and tourism offices.
- Establish secure, interoperable platforms for online booking, digital ticketing, and payments.

2. Development of Smart Tourism Platforms

- Create unified digital portals or apps offering maps, real-time updates, local guides, and itinerary planners.
- Integrate transport, accommodation, events, and emergency alerts into one user-friendly interface.
- Enable push notifications for personalized experiences and updates.

3. Digital Experience Innovation (AR/VR/AI)

- Develop AR apps for self-guided cultural and historical tours using smartphones (to the and within the new polycentric centralities).
- Create immersive VR experiences of unexplored/underdeveloped destination.
- Provide apps for real-time crowd monitoring and suggestions for off-peak or alternative routes.

4. Business Digitization & E-Commerce Support

- Offer toolkits and grants for local tourism SMEs to build multilingual websites, booking engines, and e-payment systems.
- Provide training programs for tourism professionals on digital tools, data privacy, and content creation.

5. Communication & Stakeholder Engagement

- Share digital service data (usage rates, performance metrics) with destination managers and local authorities.
- Co-design digital initiatives with community input to ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Destination planners and policymakers (national, regional, and municipal).
- Tourism boards and industry stakeholders (hotels, tour operators, attractions).
- Technology providers (smart tourism platforms, AI-driven analytics, mobility companies).
- Local businesses (hospitality, cultural, and nature-based tourism providers).

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Regional tourism boards and intermunicipal councils leading development and stakeholder coordination.
- Digital innovation agencies or tourism-tech companies building the platform.
- Transport authorities and operators integrating their services into the system.
- Cultural and natural site managers contributing content and availability.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Hospitality and activity providers, offering booking inventory and updates.
- Local and regional governments, supporting public service integration and funding.
- Chambers of commerce, representing SMEs and artisans.
- Academic institutions, contributing UX design and data analytics expertise.
- Civil society organizations, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Deploy high-speed internet and 5G connectivity in key tourism areas.
- Development of integrated tourism app/portal offering real-time and multilingual services.
- Development of an app-based crowd monitoring and visitor flow guidance system operational.
- Adoption of e-commerce solutions.
- Reduction in congestion in overtourism areas during peak times..

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Evaluation of the coverage in target areas.
- Tracking of business and stakeholders with digitalized business models.
- Analysis the impact (at least the number of users) of the created digital experiences.
- Monitor the satisfaction rate on the provided digital services.
- User analytics and flow data showing behavioural changes in itinerary choices.
- Booking and mobility data tracking visitor redistribution patterns.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Stakeholder consultation, co-design workshops, and needs assessment.
- Phase 2 (Months 7-12): Platform development, pilot region integration, UX testing.
- Phase 3 (Months 13-18): Full launch, training sessions, and promotional campaign.
- Phase 4 (Months 19-36): Regional expansion, real-time data integration, and iterative improvements.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- MY OCEAN BEACHES (FRANCE): tool that integrates real-time information on tourism flows (app for real-time crowd monitoring)
- TERRAAVENTURA(FRANCE): gaming app that provides digital experiences on unexplored/underdeveloped destinations.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- KALIO TOOL (FRANCE): Hotel management digital tool that evolved to a multi-actor tourism tool that currently are being used by policy makers to make informed decisions on new hotels investments.
- SCOTLAND'S SMART DESTINATION STRATEGY (SCOTLAND): Uses digital dashboards and visitor data to optimize flow management and regional tourism distribution.
- DUBROVNIK VISITORS' APP (CROATIA): Predicts congestion and offers alternative visit times to reduce overcrowding.

5.5.10 ACTION 10 - COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS FOR VISIBILITY AND REDISTRIBUTION

STRATEGIC AXIS
III - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
INTERVENTION AIMS
A3.b - Social Media Promotion
OBJECTIVE
<p>To design and implement collaborative social media strategies that promote equitable tourism flow redistribution, leveraging the power of interactive campaigns, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content to increase the visibility of underexplored destinations and alleviate pressure on overcrowded sites. This initiative supports sustainable tourism development and aims to elevate the quality of life for residents by fostering a shared narrative of the territory diverse and lesser-known attractions.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>In the digital era, social media shapes travel behaviour and destination choices. However, current promotion efforts often favour already saturated locations, intensifying overtourism and territorial imbalances. By applying targeted, collaborative, and inclusive social media promotion, stakeholders can strategically redirect tourism flows toward polycentric alternatives, reinforcing sustainability, local identity, and regional cohesion.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High-quality cultural, gastronomic, and natural assets across the Atlantic Area. - Existing digital infrastructure and growing content creator networks. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of visibility of under-visited destinations in digital channels. - Fragmentation of promotional efforts and lack of coherent regional identity online. - Difficulties to hire qualified people in the tourism industry. - Lack of information for tourists / tourist signage. - Lack of digital services for tourists + lack of data to understand - Lack of cooperation and networking between touristic stakeholders. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global rise in interest for authentic, slow, and sustainable travel experiences. - Potential of social media to influence real-time visitor decisions and off-peak travel patterns. - Growth in eco and culturally-oriented travel communities. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism-related protest movements, especially in well-known areas (e.g., urban Spain). - Uneven economic benefits of tourism across regions. - Environmental pressure and loss of local acceptance due to unchecked mass tourism.

DESCRIPTION

This initiative proposes a cross-regional and collaborative social media strategy designed to boost the visibility of lesser-known and sustainable destinations through creative storytelling and digital engagement tactics. It encourages real-time visitor behaviour change, fostering more balanced and respectful tourism flows by appealing to sustainability-minded and experience-driven travellers. Interactive campaigns and collaborations with influencers can increase a destination's visibility. Creating unique hashtags and encouraging visitors to share their experiences can boost engagement.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Strategic Content Planning & Branding

- Develop a clear content strategy aligned with the polycentric model principles.
- Design content calendars with seasonal themes, events, and storytelling angles that connects overtourism destinations with the new centralities that are being developed by the model.
- Design campaigns to highlight lesser-known destinations, promoting off-season and off-the-beaten-path experiences.

2. Multi-Platform Content Creation

- Produce high-quality multimedia content (videos, reels, stories, infographics, and live streams) showcasing the relation between the overtourism destinations and the new centralities.
- Highlight the new centralities local culture, experiences, testimonials, and "hidden gems" through engaging formats.

3. Influencer & Content Creator Collaborations

- Partner with local and international travel influencers to reach wider audiences.
- Organize press trips or fam tours for content creators to generate authentic content.
- Identify and collaborate with content creators, micro-influencers, and thematic ambassadors (e.g., slow travellers, nature lovers, cultural advocates).

4. Audience Engagement & Community Building

- Encourage user-generated content through contests, hashtags, and repost campaigns.
- Creation of regional hashtag campaigns launching destination-specific and regional hashtags (e.g., #HiddenAtlantic, #SlowTravelNorth, #BeyondPorto).
- Respond actively to comments, messages, and reviews to build trust and loyalty.
- Create polls, Q&As, and interactive stories based on the relationship between overtourism destinations and the new centralities to engage users and gather feedback.

5. Stakeholder Collaboration & Training

- Train local businesses and tourism offices on effective social media use and content co-creation.
- Create shared content libraries and guidelines for consistent destination promotion.
- Encourage regional collaboration to amplify messages and cross-promote destinations.

6. Paid Social Advertising & Targeting

- Run targeted ad campaigns to specific markets or tourist segments (e.g., adventure travellers, cultural tourists).
- Allocate budget id by seasonality, regional focus, or event promotion needs.

7. Crisis Communication & Reputation Management (peak or crisis periods)

- Use social media for real-time updates during emergencies or disruptions (weather, health, transport) and on the problematic places of the overtourism destinations.
- Quickly respond to misinformation or negative reviews with transparent communication.
- Promote safety guidelines and responsible travel behaviour.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Destination planners and policymakers (national, regional, and municipal).
- Regional governments and communication departments seeking tourism flow management tools.
- Businesses and tourism offices on effective social media use and content co-creation.
- Local businesses and entrepreneurs providing authentic, low-impact experiences.
- International travel influencers, micro-influencers and content creators.
- Travelers in general and experience-seeking, sustainability-minded tourists (travellers in the overcrowded destinations and travellers seeking less crowded destinations). Millennial and Gen Z travellers, highly influenced by digital media.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Interregional tourism consortia or networks (e.g. regional DMOs).
- Creative agencies or digital marketing consultants with tourism expertise.
- Local governments supporting visibility and data sharing.
- Content creators and influencer collectives aligned with sustainable travel.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Tourism boards and DMOs providing destination insights.
- Cultural and heritage organizations contributing narratives.
- Transport providers supporting mobility-focused promotions.
- Sustainability NGOs ensuring alignment with low-impact travel.
- Tourism SMEs and cooperatives, especially in underpromoted areas.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Influencer activations featuring under-visited destinations.
- Creation and viral use of new regional hashtags.
- Increase in digital impressions and engagement for under-promoted regions.
- Increase in visitor numbers to featured alternative destinations.
- Satisfaction rate among stakeholders trained in digital content creation.
- Enhanced user participation and content sharing.
- Strengthened the peripheral destination branding.
- Reduction in misinformation or reputational risks.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Monitor impressions and engagement for content related to under-visited areas.
- Tracking of influencers and stakeholders content production.
- Hashtag use and post volume by tourists and influencers.
- Engagement rates (likes, shares, comments, saves) by geography. Monitor the number of visitors promoting the new centralities (peripheral) destinations.
- Traffic to booking platforms and local DMO websites linked to social campaigns.
- Visitor sentiment analysis, through reviews and social listening tools.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1–3): Stakeholder coordination, influencer mapping, campaign theme definition.
- Phase 2 (Months 4–9): Launch of regional campaigns, real-time promotions, hashtag roll-out.
- Phase 3 (Months 10–18): Expansion to additional destinations, influencer and content scaling.
- Phase 4 (Months 19–24): Training programs, co-created content library, evaluation.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- THE PORTUGUESE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO (DE)MARKETING STRATEGIES (PORTUGAL): There are several social networks profiles showcasing the tourist experiences in the Portuguese paths.
- TERRA AVENTURA (FRANCE): Uses gamified digital experiences and geocaching to promote rural tourism through fun, shareable content.
- DUBLIN COASTAL TRAIL (IRELAND): Developed an integrated brand and campaign to spread visitors along lesser-known coastlines via digital storytelling.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- VISIT PORTUGAL – INTEGRATED MULTI-PLATFORM CAMPAIGNS WITH EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING. It creates tailored content for Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and TikTok, optimizing formats, tone, and timing for each. E.g. #PortugalIsNotJustLisbon: A national campaign highlighting alternative cities and countryside, with influencer partnerships and user content. #CoolCascais (Portugal): A local social campaign positioning Cascais as a lifestyle and wellness destination through creator storytelling.

5.5.11 ACTION II – SMART TOURISM FLOW MANAGEMENT: LEVERAGING DATA ANALYSIS FOR SUSTAINABLE VISITOR REDISTRIBUTION

STRATEGIC AXIS
III - DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
INTERVENTION AIMS
A3.c - Data Analysis
OBJECTIVE
<p>To analyse tourism data using digital tools and AI-driven analytics to identify overcrowded destinations and under-visited areas, enabling policymakers to develop strategies that redistribute visitor flows. By understanding visitor profiles, behaviours, and motivations, decision-makers can guide tourism towards less-developed areas, reducing the negative impacts of overtourism while fostering regional economic balance.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>As tourism pressure increases in high-density areas, many Atlantic Area destinations face the dual challenge of overcrowding in popular sites and underutilization of less-known regions. Traditional planning models often lack the detailed, real-time data needed to manage these flows effectively. With advances in digital technologies and AI, there is now a clear opportunity to use data-driven tools to monitor visitor behaviour, anticipate congestion, and guide tourists toward alternative destinations. This action seeks to leverage these tools not only to mitigate the negative impacts of overtourism but also to foster balanced territorial development, improve visitor experience, and inform more responsive, inclusive tourism strategies.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing tourism demand in the territory, providing a solid data base for analysis. - Presence of digital infrastructure, allowing for real-time data tracking and AI applications. - Availability of alternative destinations that can accommodate redirected tourism flows. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of precise visitor data, making it difficult to optimize flow management. - Limited technological integration in destination planning. - Inequalities in regional tourism development, with inland areas struggling to attract visitors. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advancements in data analysis and AI, allowing real-time monitoring of tourist density. - Shifting traveller preferences, with growing interest in less crowded, authentic experiences. - Potential for predictive modelling, helping destinations prepare and adjust visitor distribution. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism protests and backlash, by providing data-driven solutions to ease congestion. - Territorial imbalances, by creating sustainable tourism distribution models. - Environmental degradation in high-density areas, by offering viable alternative travel options.

DESCRIPTION

The Smart Tourism Flow Management initiative will develop a digital system to track, analyse, and predict visitor behaviour in the Atlantic Area. The collected data will inform decision-making strategies to redistribute tourists from overcrowded locations to lesser-known, underdeveloped areas.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Data Collection & Integration

- Deploy digital sensors, GPS tracking, and mobile app check-ins to measure real-time visitor flows.
- Integrate tourism data from hotels, airlines, tour operators, and online travel agencies (OTAs).
- Analyse social media trends and geotagged posts to understand visitor behaviour.

2. Development of a Smart Tourism Dashboard

- Create an interactive data visualization platform for policymakers and destination managers.
- Provide real-time updates on tourist congestion and visitor distribution.
- Use AI-driven predictive models to suggest optimal tourism flow strategies.

3. Visitor Profile & Market Segmentation Analysis

- Identify key tourist segments, including preferences, motivations, and spending behaviours.
- Analyse seasonal trends and travel patterns to anticipate demand shifts.
- Match tourist segments with alternative destinations, ensuring better tourism flow distribution.

4. Destination Strategy Recommendations

- Highlight overcrowded areas needing decongestion efforts.
- Suggest under-visited locations with potential for tourism development.
- Recommend tailored marketing strategies to attract visitors to less-explored regions.

5. Communication & Stakeholder Engagement

- Provide destination managers with real-time data insights for policy adjustments.
- Develop digital campaigns to educate tourists on sustainable travel routes.
- Collaborate with local businesses and regional governments to implement redistribution measures.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Destination planners and policymakers (national, regional, and municipal).
- Tourism boards and industry stakeholders (hotels, tour operators, attractions).
- Technology providers (smart tourism platforms, AI-driven analytics, mobility companies).
- Local businesses and community organizations (hospitality, cultural, and nature-based tourism providers).
- Travelers seeking less crowded, more authentic experiences.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Local and regional tourism authorities – Leading data collection and strategy implementation.
- National and international tourism boards – Supporting funding and best practice dissemination.
- Research institutions and universities – Analysing data and providing predictive insights.
- Technology partners and digital platforms – Developing smart analytics tools.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Public sector policymakers – Ensuring integration into tourism planning frameworks.
- Private sector travel companies – Contributing visitor data for analysis.
- Sustainability organizations – Advising on environmental impact mitigation strategies.
- Local communities – Providing feedback on tourism impacts and redistribution strategies.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Development of a real-time tourism data dashboard with integrated data sources.
- Identification of high-density tourism areas requiring redistribution strategies.
- Identification or creation of alternative tourism offer in peripheral areas with visitor potential.
- Increase in visitor numbers in under-visited areas within 2 years.
- Reduction in visitor congestion in massified areas during peak seasons.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking of visitor movements through smart tourism data.
- Analysis of seasonal visitor redistribution trends.
- Evaluation of economic impact in previously under-visited areas.
- Continuous stakeholder feedback and policy adjustments.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Data integration, sensor deployment, AI model development.
- Phase 2 (Months 6-12): Smart tourism dashboard launch, stakeholder training.
- Phase 3 (Months 12-24): Implementation of data-driven tourism redistribution strategies.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Monitoring, evaluation, and refinement of strategies.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- AMSTERDAM'S DIGITAL VISITOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: Uses real-time data to divert tourists to less crowded areas.
- SMART DESTINATIONS INITIATIVE (SPAIN): Leverages AI and big data to analyse visitor patterns and improve distribution.
- JAPAN'S KYOTO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN: Uses smart tracking and digital guides to reduce tourist congestion.
- PORTUGAL'S SMART TOURISM HUBS: Integrate visitor data analytics with tourism marketing strategies.
- ATMs IN ALDEIAS HISTORICAS (PORTUGAL): Through structured coordination and monitoring, the ATM initiative in Aldeias Históricas supports data-informed rural revitalization strategies that balance tourism access with improved local services.
- Partnership between the GPS application Waze and a French destination (PACA): uses real-time data to redirect tourists to less crowded area.

5.5.12 ACTION 12 – POLYCENTRIC TOURISM CLUSTERING: STRENGTHENING LOCAL COLLABORATIONS FOR VISITOR FLOW REDISTRIBUTION

STRATEGIC AXIS
IV - COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS
INTERVENTION AIMS
A4.a - Strengthening Local Collaborations
OBJECTIVE
<p>To create regional tourism clustering efforts that bring together accommodation providers, restaurateurs, cultural institutions, and experience-based tourism operators in less-visited areas, fostering thematic itineraries that redirect tourist flows from overcrowded destinations. By pooling resources and coordinating marketing efforts, these clusters will provide diverse and high-quality tourism experiences, strengthening regional economic development while mitigating overtourism in saturated areas.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich cultural and natural heritage in inland and underdeveloped areas. - Existing tourism actors (hotels, restaurants, museums, artisans) that can collaborate. - Authentic rural and nature-based experiences that appeal to slow travellers. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of integrated tourism offers in inland and lesser-known areas. - Fragmented business efforts, preventing a cohesive tourism experience. - Limited tourism infrastructure in underdeveloped areas, which can be improved through collaboration. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing demand for thematic and sustainable travel, such as heritage, gastronomy, and wellness tourism. - Potential for cross-sector partnerships, enhancing value-added tourism experiences. - Shift in traveller preferences, favouring less crowded and more immersive tourism destinations. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism in coastal and urban hotspots, offering well-organized alternatives in inland areas. - Economic decline in non-coastal regions, by redistributing tourism revenue and job opportunities. - Territorial imbalances, ensuring more equal regional development through tourism.
DESCRIPTION
<p>The Polycentric Tourism Clustering Initiative will establish coordinated tourism networks that develop and promote integrated experiences across accommodations, food services, and cultural sites. These clusters will be designed to increase the attractiveness of less-visited regions while providing structured alternatives to overcrowded areas.</p>

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Formation of Regional Tourism Clusters

Bringing together hoteliers, restaurateurs, cultural institutions, and nature-based tourism operators. Establishing coordinated visitor services, including joint ticketing, package deals, and shuttle services. Creating business-to-business (B2B) cooperation models, such as profit-sharing agreements.

2. Development of Thematic Itineraries

Designing routes centred around gastronomy, cultural heritage, eco-tourism, and adventure tourism. Linking historic sites, rural accommodations, and local businesses to create multi-stop visitor experiences. Aligning seasonal tourism offerings to attract off-season visitors.

3. Marketing & Digital Promotion

Creating joint promotional campaigns showcasing thematic itineraries. Leveraging influencers, digital storytelling, and social media campaigns to reach new audiences. Developing a multilingual digital platform to promote the clusters, featuring online booking, interactive maps, and personalized recommendations.

4. Capacity Building & Business Training

Providing workshops and training for local businesses on digital marketing, customer experience, and sustainable tourism practices. Encouraging collaboration between urban and rural businesses, allowing for cross-promotion.

5. Infrastructure & Service Improvements

Enhancing transport connectivity between tourism hubs and lesser-visited areas (e.g., bike-sharing, EV rentals, shuttle buses). Improving visitor information centres and signage to guide tourists through new routes.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Local and regional tourism businesses (hotels, restaurants, museums, outdoor tour operators).
- Destination management organizations and policymakers.
- Travelers seeking immersive and sustainable tourism experiences.
- Cultural heritage organizations and local artisans.
- Transport providers and mobility companies (e.g., shuttle services, bike-sharing programs).

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Regional and local governments – Facilitating partnerships and ensuring infrastructure development.
- National tourism boards – Providing funding, guidelines, and strategic oversight.
- Business associations and hospitality groups – Coordinating collaboration between tourism providers.
- Sustainability organizations – Supporting the integration of eco-friendly tourism practices.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Tourism associations & chambers of commerce – Encouraging participation from private sector businesses.
- UNESCO and cultural heritage organizations – Supporting certification and promotional efforts.
- Technology providers – Developing the digital platform and online booking tools.
- EU and national funding bodies – Financing cluster formation and infrastructure improvements.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Establishment of tourism clusters within the first 2 years.
- Increase in visitor numbers in under-visited areas through cluster-based initiatives.
- Development of thematic itineraries, incorporating multiple tourism sectors.
- Growth in collaboration agreements between local businesses.
- Launch of a shared digital platform promoting polycentric tourism routes.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking visitor flows and analysing the impact of clusters on tourism distribution.
- Economic performance of businesses within the clusters (visitor spending, job creation).
- Sustainability assessments, ensuring environmental and social balance.
- Feedback from travellers and businesses, refining itineraries and services accordingly.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Identification of potential clusters, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure needs assessment.
- Phase 2 (Months 6-12): Development of tourism clusters, business agreements, and itinerary planning.
- Phase 3 (Months 12-24): Launch of digital platform, marketing campaigns, and visitor tracking.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Monitoring, refinement, and expansion of cluster-based tourism initiatives.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- THE PORTUGUESE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO (DE)MARKETING STRATEGIES (PORTUGAL): Encourages collaboration between municipalities, tourism operators, and pilgrim associations.
- LA ROCHELLE Océan Pass (FRANCE): Requires cooperation between multiple DMOs and transport providers to be successful.
- DUBLIN COASTAL TRAIL (IRELAND): Connects local councils, tourism operators, and transportation services.
- GEODESTINATION TERRAS DE CELANOVA-SERRA DO XURÉS (SPAIN): Facilitates business networking and mentorship.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- THE SILK ROAD (ASIA): A multi-country heritage and trade route that integrates cultural and commercial tourism.
- THE BALTIC SEA CULINARY ROUTE (NORTHERN EUROPE): A cross-border gastronomic tourism initiative promoting local products across multiple countries.
- THE TRANSNATIONAL VIKING ROUTE (SCANDINAVIA & UK): A heritage tourism initiative that unites museums, cultural sites, and local businesses.
- FRANCE'S "VILLAGES DE CARACTÈRE" PROGRAM – A network of charming rural villages promoting local tourism.
- THE "PUEBLOS MÁGICOS" INITIATIVE (MEXICO) – A government-led effort to develop and market unique cultural destinations.
- THE DOURO WINE TOURISM ROUTE (PORTUGAL) – A collaborative tourism initiative linking wineries, accommodations, and cultural sites.
- THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO EXPERIENCE CLUSTERS (SPAIN) – Business partnerships enhancing tourism services along pilgrimage routes.

5.5.13 ACTION 13 - STRENGTHENING CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIPS FOR POLYCENTRIC TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC AXIS
IV - COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS
INTERVENTION AIMS
A4.b - Cross-Border Partnerships
OBJECTIVE
<p>To promote cross-border tourism partnerships that foster polycentric tourism development, allowing adjacent but administratively, geographically, or culturally divided regions to position themselves as shared destinations. This initiative aims to bypass administrative barriers, attract international and regional visitors, and ensure a balanced redistribution of tourism flows by enhancing cooperation between major urban centres and their peripheral destinations.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Overtourism in major destinations often overshadows smaller, culturally rich areas that have the potential to attract visitors and contribute to economic development. Meanwhile, regions with shared heritage, culture, or geography remain disconnected due to administrative or marketing barriers. By fostering cross-border partnerships, whether between countries or within the same nation, this initiative will create multi-destination travel circuits that improve regional balance and sustainability.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich cultural and historical heritage shared across administrative or national borders. - Proximity of secondary destinations to major urban centres, making them ideal for redistributing tourism flows. - Existing infrastructure (e.g., train connections, highways) facilitating regional tourism cooperation. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited cross-border cooperation in tourism marketing and infrastructure planning. - Inefficient regional tourism management due to fragmented governance structures. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential to attract international visitors with well-developed multi-destination experiences. - Development of regional travel circuits, reducing congestion in major tourism hubs. - Creation of multi-regional tourism products, improving economic stability for smaller destinations. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism in major cities, which negatively impacts local communities and infrastructure. - Underdevelopment of culturally rich, mid-sized destinations, leading to economic disparity. - Competition between destinations rather than collaborative tourism strategies, weakening their international appeal.

DESCRIPTION

This initiative fosters cross-border tourism cooperation by linking major hubs with culturally and geographically connected peripheral destinations. Through joint marketing, infrastructure investment, and multi-destination packages, these partnerships enhance regional travel experiences while supporting sustainable tourism redistribution.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Creating Multi-Destination Travel Circuits

Develop joint tourism packages connecting major hubs and secondary destinations, emphasizing shared cultural heritage and accessible transportation options. This type of effort could encourage travellers to extend their stay beyond main urban centres, ensuring tourism benefits reach secondary locations.

2. Infrastructure and Mobility Coordination

Improve regional rail and road connectivity to support seamless multi-destination travel. Promote interregional public transport passes, allowing visitors to travel effortlessly between partnered regions. Facilitates movement between regions, preventing congestion in primary destinations and making smaller locations more accessible.

3. Joint Tourism Marketing and Branding

Establish a unified marketing identity for cross-border destinations, promoting cultural similarities over administrative divisions. Encourages international and domestic visitors to explore multiple regions rather than concentrating on a single city.

4. Shared Events and Festivals Across Regions

Develop cross-border cultural and gastronomic events, reinforcing historical and cultural connections. Attracts visitors to less-explored areas, ensuring economic benefits are distributed across multiple locations.

5. Collaborative Investment in Sustainable Tourism

Align sustainability policies across regions, including eco-certifications, waste management, and low-carbon mobility initiatives. Ensures long-term viability of tourism expansion while promoting responsible practices.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Tourists interested in multi-destination experiences.
- Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) coordinating cross-regional marketing.
- Local businesses seeking tourism revenue growth beyond major hubs.
- Transportation authorities' improving connectivity.
- Cultural and heritage institutions fostering shared tourism narratives.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Regional tourism boards: To facilitate cross-border partnerships.
- Municipalities and local governments: Supporting infrastructure and business initiatives.
- National tourism agencies: Funding and promoting international appeal.
- Transport providers: Ensure multi-destination accessibility.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Hospitality and tourism businesses: Development of cross-border packages.
- UNESCO and cultural heritage organizations: Recognition of historical connections.
- Public and private transport operators: Creation of interregional travel solutions.
- Marketing and media agencies: Driving promotional campaigns.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Increase in multi-destination travel within participating regions.
- Development of cross-border tourism circuits within three years.
- Expansion of rail and transport connectivity between major tourism hubs and secondary cities.
- Growth in overnight stays in secondary destinations, reflecting improved tourism flow distribution.
- Successful joint branding campaigns, measured through digital engagement and visitor surveys.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking visitor flows and analysing the impact of the joint tourism package and shared events and festivals on tourism distribution.
- Economic performance of the joint tourism packages and shared events and festivals (visitor spending, job creation).
- Tracking positioning and notoriety.
- Tracking sustainability policies impact.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Stakeholder engagement, partnership agreements, and initial planning.
- Phase 2 (Months 7-12): Infrastructure coordination and marketing campaign development.
- Phase 3 (Months 13-24): Pilot launch of cross-border tourism products and joint travel circuits.
- Phase 4 (Months 25-36): Expansion, evaluation, and continuous optimization of partnerships.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- EIXO ATLÁNTICO (GALICIA-NORTHERN PORTUGAL) through its Tourism Thematic Group joins together tourism decision-takers/policy-makers of Eixo's cities and provinces aiming at to promote a sustainable and balance tourism development in Eixo Atlántico Urban System as an whole and to develop and to promote the Galicia-North of Portugal Euroregion (under the slogan Two Countries One Destination).
- LA ROCHELLE Océan Pass (FRANCE): Implements a regional tourism pass, encouraging visitors to travel beyond major hubs.
- DUBLIN COASTAL TRAIL (IRELAND): Uses cross-regional branding to promote smaller coastal towns as alternatives to urban tourism.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- BASQUE COUNTRY & NAVARRE CROSS-BORDER TOURISM AGREEMENT: Establishes joint cultural experiences bridging the French-Spanish border.
- SCOTLAND'S "SPIRIT OF THE HIGHLANDS" INITIATIVE: Develops multi-region travel packages, reducing congestion in Edinburgh.

5.5.14 ACTION 14 – IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES TO MITIGATE OVERTOURISM AND PROMOTE REGIONAL BALANCE

STRATEGIC AXIS
V - ADAPTING TO TRENDS AND CHALLENGES
INTERVENTION AIMS
5.a - Sustainable Tourism
OBJECTIVE
<p>To develop and implement sustainable tourism strategies that address overtourism in popular destinations and promote the development of under-visited regions. This involves effective waste management, preservation of natural resources, promotion of eco-labels, assessment of carrying capacities, and the application of adaptive tourism taxes to regulate visitor flows. Identifying the thresholds at which stricter sustainability measures must be implemented to prevent site overloading while promoting alternative destinations with strong environmental policies and sustainability credentials. The aim is not to empty one destination and saturate another, but to redistribute flows equitably, ensuring economic benefits are shared while maintaining the ecological and social well-being of both primary and peripheral regions.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Tourism demand is evolving, with travellers actively seeking low-impact, environmentally responsible destinations. By leveraging sustainability practices as a competitive advantage, peripheral destinations can attract responsible travellers who prioritize eco-conscious tourism policies.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich natural and cultural heritage in less-visited areas presents an opportunity for sustainable tourism development. - Existing tourism actors (hotels, restaurants, museums, artisans) that can collaborate. - Authentic rural and nature-based experiences that appeal to slow travellers. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overreliance on mass-tourism hubs, leading to regional disparities in tourism benefits. - Lack of environmental infrastructure and sustainability measures in alternative destinations. - Limited awareness and adoption of eco-certifications in the tourism sector. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing demand for thematic and sustainable travel, such as heritage, gastronomy, and wellness tourism. - Digital advancements enabling efficient waste management and conservation tracking. - Shift in traveller preferences, favouring less crowded and more immersive tourism destinations. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental degradation due to mass tourism, particularly in overcrowded heritage sites and coastal areas. - Climate change effects increasing pressure on natural resources.

DESCRIPTION

The initiative aims to implement comprehensive sustainable tourism practices to balance tourist distribution, preserve environmental and cultural resources, and enhance the quality of life for local communities.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Sustainable Destination Positioning

Create destination-wide sustainability branding, using certifications as a marketing tool to attract eco-conscious travellers. This can be achieved by efforts related to:

- a. Develop integrated waste management plans by collaborating with local authorities and businesses to establish efficient waste collection, recycling, and disposal systems tailored to tourist activities.
- b. Promote low-impact tourism models, such as nature-based experiences, agrotourism, and eco-lodging, positioning alternative destinations as environmentally superior choices.
- c. Encourage tourism operators to adopt practices that reduce water and energy consumption, aligning with sustainable tourism principles.
- d. Support tourism businesses in obtaining recognized eco-labels and certifications that ensure their commitment to environmental sustainability.
- e. Provide visitor education campaigns, highlighting eco-certified accommodations, attractions, and restaurants, influencing traveller decision-making.

2. Assessment of Carrying Capacity

Implement advanced methodologies, such as those developed by ESPON, to evaluate the environmental, social, and infrastructural limits of destinations. These assessments will provide critical insights into a territory's ability to sustainably accommodate tourism, ensuring that visitor numbers align with the area's long-term viability. To support this, real-time monitoring systems will be established to continuously track visitor density, environmental impact indicators, and community sentiment. This data-driven approach will enable proactive decision-making, facilitating the redistribution of tourism flows to prevent overburdening high-traffic areas while promoting under-visited regions.

3. Adaptive Tourism Taxes and Demand Management

Implement dynamic tourism tax models that adjust based on occupancy rates and carrying capacity assessments, ensuring a balanced distribution of visitor flows while generating revenue for sustainability initiatives. By increasing taxes during peak congestion periods and reducing them during off-peak seasons, destinations can incentivize travel outside of high-demand areas. Additionally, strategic tax incentives and targeted marketing campaigns should be employed to encourage tourists to explore lesser-known regions, alleviating pressure on overcrowded sites while fostering economic growth in peripheral areas.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Tourists: Encouraged to engage in sustainable behaviours and explore diverse destinations.
- Local and Regional Authorities: Responsible for policy implementation and infrastructure development.
- Tourism Businesses and Operators: Key players in adopting sustainable practices and obtaining eco-certifications.
- Local Communities: Beneficiaries of improved environmental quality and economic opportunities.
- Environmental organizations: Promoting conservation initiatives.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Destination Management Organizations (DMOs): Lead the coordination and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies.
- Environmental Agencies: Provide expertise and oversight on conservation efforts.
- Tourism Associations: Facilitate industry engagement and compliance with eco-label standards.
- Local Governments: Enforce regulations, manage infrastructure, and allocate resources effectively.
- Private sector tourism operators: Leading industry adoption of eco-certifications.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Hospitality and Service Providers: Implement sustainable practices and participate in certification programs.
- Community Organizations: Ensure that tourism development aligns with local interests and cultural preservation.
- Transportation Providers: Enhance connectivity to peripheral areas and promote lowcarbon mobility options.
- Educational Institutions: Conduct research and provide training on sustainable tourism practices.
- Eco-tourism and sustainable travel associations: Partnering in certification and awareness campaigns.
- Academic institutions: Conducting research and monitoring environmental impact.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Increase in Eco-Certified tourism businesses obtaining eco-labels.
- Reduce tourism-related waste in targeted destinations.
- Increase tourist visits to under-visited peripheral areas with strong sustainability policies.
- Tourist satisfaction ratings on sustainability efforts in surveyed visitors.
- Policy taxes implemented.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking of waste production trends, identifying intervention points.
- Annual review of water and energy efficiency measures in tourism businesses.
- Surveying visitor perceptions of sustainability efforts.
- Regular audits on eco-certification adoption rates.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Stakeholder engagement, data collection, waste management assessments.
- Phase 2 (Months 7-12): Policy development, pilot sustainability initiatives, training programs.
- Phase 3 (Months 13-24): Rollout of waste reduction strategies, certification programs, promotional campaigns.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and policy refinement.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- LA ROCHELLE OCÉAN PASS (FRANCE): Integrated waste-conscious tourism policies and public transport incentives to reduce visitor impact.
- DUBLIN COASTAL TRAIL (IRELAND): Promoted peripheral destinations through conservation-focused tourism marketing.
- TERRA AVENTURA (FRANCE): Used eco-friendly gamification strategies to attract visitors to less-explored, nature-based experiences.
- SUSTAINABLE ECO-EXPERIENCES IN THE GEODESTINATION TERRAS DE CELANOVA-SERRA DO XURÉS (SPAIN): Emphasizes eco-friendly practices and local resource preservation.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- DUBROVNIK SMART DESTINATION STRATEGY (CROATIA): Implemented dynamic tourism taxation, adjusting fees based on visitor load to redistribute tourism pressure.
- COSTA RICA'S ECO-CERTIFICATION MODEL (COSTA RICA): A globally recognized program positioning sustainable tourism as a competitive advantage.

5.5.15 ACTION 15 – WELLBEING OFFERS

STRATEGIC AXIS
V - ADAPTING TO TRENDS AND CHALLENGES
INTERVENTION AIMS
5.b - Wellbeing Offers
OBJECTIVE
<p>To position alternative tourism destinations as wellness-oriented retreats, leveraging natural resources, hospitality, and sustainability to attract health-conscious travellers seeking relaxation, mental and physical rejuvenation, and immersive nature experiences. This initiative aims to balance tourism flows by strengthening peripheral destinations as wellness hubs, redistributing visitors from overcrowded areas while fostering a high-quality tourism experience.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Wellbeing tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors globally, as travellers prioritize mental and physical wellness, stress reduction, and immersive natural experiences. Destinations that successfully integrate wellness infrastructure, quality hospitality, and environmental harmony can distinguish themselves in the market, increasing their attractiveness while ensuring long-term sustainability.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diverse natural landscapes (forests, mountains, coastal areas) ideal for wellness activities. - Established hospitality and gastronomy sectors that can adapt to wellness-driven experiences. - High-quality local products, such as organic food, thermal waters, and artisanal goods. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of segmentation in tourism offers, requiring differentiation through wellness-focused branding. - Fragmented transport and mobility services, making remote wellness sites difficult to access. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing demand for slow, mindful travel experiences, shifting interest away from mass tourism. - Rising interest in sustainable, eco-conscious tourism, aligning wellness with environmental conservation. - Expansion of medical and wellness tourism, attracting international visitors seeking health-oriented stays. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism in traditional resort areas, allowing alternative destinations to divert visitor flows. - Environmental degradation and pollution, which negatively impact wellness experiences.

DESCRIPTION

This initiative develops holistic wellbeing tourism by strengthening local wellness offers, environmental quality, and accessibility. The goal is to transform select destinations into wellness-centred hubs, making them so attractive and peaceful that visitors experience wellbeing simply by being there.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Identifying and Mapping Wellness-Focused Resources

Conduct a market analysis of global wellness trends and identify potential tourist segments (e.g., wellness retreats, digital detox travellers, spa-goers). Map existing wellness establishments in peripheral areas, such as thermal spas, yoga centres, organic farms, and nature lodges. This aims to highlight alternative destinations with strong wellness potential. Creating a structured wellness network, will make secondary regions more competitive.

2. Developing Wellness-Focused Travel Packages

- Curate multi-day wellness travel itineraries, incorporating treatments, meditation retreats, and local gastronomy experiences.
- Establish partnerships between accommodations, spas, and local activity providers to create holistic, all-inclusive experiences. This encourages long stays in lesser-visited areas, alleviating congestion in major destinations and transforming underdeveloped regions into high-value tourism hubs.

3. Improving Destination Appeal Through Sustainability and Quality of Life

Enhance waste management, visual and noise pollution control, and green mobility, ensuring a peaceful and clean environment. Promote biophilic urban planning (nature-integrated design) in small towns to enhance walkability and relaxation zones. This may make smaller towns more liveable and attractive to wellness travellers, while strengthening long-term tourism sustainability, ensuring low environmental impact.

4. Strengthening Accessibility and Infrastructure for Wellbeing Travelers

Improve transportation links (rail, shuttle services) between major cities and wellness-focused rural destinations. Ensure easy access to medical services, reinforcing confidence among international health-conscious travellers. Removing mobility barriers, making peripheral regions more attractive to visitors lead to wellness destinations that are well-connected and accessible.

5. Marketing and Branding of Wellness Destinations

Create a unified branding strategy for wellness tourism, emphasizing natural beauty, relaxation, and sustainability. Launch targeted digital campaigns aimed at key wellness tourism markets (e.g., Northern European slow travellers, North American wellness seekers). Promoting alternative destinations as primary wellness hubs, shifts tourism demand from congested resort areas. By expanding the region's international market reach, it will make it easier to attract high-value, low-impact travellers.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Wellness-focused travellers: Those seeking mental and physical relaxation.
- Destination Management Organizations (DMOs): Promotion of alternative tourism strategies.
- Hospitality and wellness service providers (spas, yoga centres, eco-lodges, organic farms).
- Local governments and urban planners: Improvement of environmental quality in tourism areas.
- International travel agencies: Specialization in wellness tourism.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- National and regional tourism boards: Overseeing wellness tourism development.
- Wellness associations and medical tourism organizations: Ensure service quality.
- Sustainability and environmental agencies: Ensure eco-conscious destination management.
- Local municipalities: introducing in their territorial planning the tourism activity impact on the public infrastructures and public services provision (for example: waste management and pollution control according with the number of users – tourist and inhabitants).

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Wellness professionals (yoga instructors, spa operators, holistic health practitioners).
- Eco-tourism and nature retreat businesses.
- Transport and mobility providers ensuring smooth travel to wellness destinations.
- Local communities engaged in sustainable tourism practices.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Increase in wellness tourism arrivals in selected regions.
- Development of wellness travel packages integrating multiple services.
- Expansion of wellness service providers, ensuring a robust industry ecosystem.
- Reduction of waste and pollution in wellness-focused destinations.
- Higher visitor satisfaction ratings, measured by improved wellness experience perception.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking wellness visitor numbers, ensuring balanced growth.
- Assessing environmental improvements in wellness areas (waste reduction, air quality).
- Analysing booking trends for wellness experiences, identifying high-performing services.
- Surveying visitor satisfaction, refining offerings based on feedback.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Research on wellness market trends, identification of regional wellness assets.
- Phase 2 (Months 7-12): Infrastructure and service quality improvements, waste management strategies.
- Phase 3 (Months 13-24): Launch of wellness tourism packages, branding campaign rollout.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Performance tracking, refinement, and market expansion.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- DUBLIN COASTAL TRAIL (IRELAND): Used nature immersion to promote stress-free, slow travel experiences.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- COSTA RICA'S "BLUE ZONE" WELLNESS STRATEGY (COSTA RICA): Successfully positioned wellness tourism through nature-focused well-being experiences.
- ICELAND'S GEOTHERMAL SPA NETWORK (ICELAND): Developed a high-value wellness sector leveraging natural hot springs, attracting visitors year-round.

- SWITZERLAND'S ALPINE WELLBEING TOURISM (SWITZERLAND): Integrated medical and wellness tourism, strengthening regional economic resilience.
- EIXO ATLÁNTICO THERMALISM FORUM (SPAIN & PORTUGAL): Thematic thermal springs cities that work collaboratively in managing and positioning their thermalism offer. One of the actions jointly developed by them was the "Thermal Guide of Eixo Atlántico"
- EIXO ATLÁNTICO CROSS-BORDER URBAN AGENDA (SPAIN & PORTUGAL): Example of urban agenda that includes tourism as one key-element of the urban planning and that envisage tourism activity impact in the different areas of the city management.

5.5.16 ACTION 16 – RESILIENT DESTINATION PLANNING

STRATEGIC AXIS
VI - MANAGING GLOBAL THREATS
INTERVENTION AIMS
6.a - Flexibility in the Face of Uncertainty
OBJECTIVE
Overtourism is a growing challenge in key destinations, putting excessive pressure on infrastructure, natural resources, and local communities. To develop resilience plans for tourism destinations that enable them to adapt to economic downturns and climatic crises through seasonal diversification, adaptive infrastructure investment, and proactive crisis management strategies. By ensuring that tourism remains viable year-round and under extreme conditions, destinations will enhance long-term sustainability and visitor attractiveness.
JUSTIFICATION
<p>By implementing resilience strategies, destinations can become year-round tourism options and absorb visitor flows more effectively, easing overcrowding in peak destinations while strengthening regional economic stability.</p> <p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich cultural and natural heritage that can be adapted for year-round tourism. - Existing tourism infrastructure that can be reinforced against climate challenges. - Proximity to major urban centres, allowing for diversified tourism flows. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seasonality of tourism, with high dependence on peak seasons. - Fragmented tourism infrastructure, not always adapted to extreme weather conditions. - Limited cooperation between stakeholders, reducing capacity to respond to crises effectively. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing demand for off-season travel experiences, including wellness, ecotourism, and cultural tourism. - Investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, ensuring destinations remain operational despite weather-related disruptions. - Use of digital solutions to monitor and anticipate climate risks and visitor trends. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate change impacts, including extreme weather events, heatwaves, floods, and rising sea levels. - Economic instability, which can reduce tourist spending and impact local businesses. - Over-reliance on a single type of tourism (e.g., beach tourism), making destinations vulnerable to disruptions.

DESCRIPTION

The Resilient Destination Planning initiative plays a crucial role in polycentric tourism development by enhancing alternative destinations' capacity to attract visitors year-round, ensuring they are climate-resilient, economically sustainable, and well-positioned to handle fluctuating tourism demand. Below is a breakdown of how each key activity supports tourism flow redistribution, demassifying overcrowded areas while strengthening peripheral destinations.

TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Diversifying Seasonal Tourism Activities

- Develop alternative tourism offers for off-peak seasons (e.g., wellness retreats, cultural festivals, adventure tourism). By diversifying tourism activities, these locations become viable options for visitors year-round, helping to relieve congestion in overcrowded peak-season areas.
- Promote winter tourism in traditionally summer-focused destinations and vice versa. Encouraging seasonal counterbalancing prevents tourist flows from concentrating in one place at the same time. Destinations heavily dependent on summer beach tourism can introduce skiing, hiking, or spa tourism in the offseason, providing alternative experiences to visitors from urban centres.
- Encourage gastronomy and local craft experiences, which are less affected by weather changes. Culinary and craft-based tourism has high potential for attracting visitors in all seasons. Local food festivals, traditional markets, and artisanal workshops serve as compelling tourism products without overwhelming the natural environment.

2. Investing in Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

- Adapt hotels, transport hubs, and attractions to withstand extreme weather conditions (e.g., flood-resistant structures, cooling stations for heatwaves). Many coastal and urban destinations face extreme weather challenges (heatwaves, storms, flooding). By investing in climate-adapted infrastructure in alternative destinations, these locations become more reliable tourism options, attracting visitors even when major tourist cities are affected by climate disruptions.
- Lack of accessibility is a major barrier to tourism flow redistribution. Enhancing railway connectivity, bike-sharing systems, and low-carbon mobility options makes peripheral destinations easier to reach, reducing over-reliance on citycentre tourism. Expand eco-friendly transport networks (e.g., EV-friendly routes, pedestrian zones, cycling paths) to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Ensure disaster preparedness for tourism operators, including evacuation plans and emergency communication systems. Tourists seek security and reliability, often avoiding destinations perceived as vulnerable to crises (natural disasters, power outages, heatwaves). Strengthening resilience planning in alternative destinations makes them appealing, trustworthy options, encouraging travel beyond conventional tourist hubs.

2. Implementing Economic Resilience Strategies

- Offer financial incentives for tourism businesses to diversify their products and services. Economic incentives encourage hotels, tour operators, and restaurants in under-visited areas to develop new experiences that redirect tourism flows from overcrowded regions.
- Encourage public-private partnerships for long-term tourism investment; since private investment in alternative destinations can create compelling tourism offerings, reducing dependency on saturated markets.

4. Leveraging Data and Technology for Crisis Management

- Use real-time climate monitoring tools to anticipate risks and inform visitors. Destinations with real-time risk monitoring can adapt tourism flows dynamically, guiding visitors to alternative options when extreme weather strikes.
- Develop AI-driven demand forecasting to adjust visitor flows based on economic and climate conditions. Big data can identify peak congestion points and adjust promotional efforts in real time, preventing overcrowding.
- Implement digital platforms to provide real-time updates on weather-related travel disruptions. Smart digital tools ensure travellers can make informed decisions, making them more likely to choose alternative destinations when primary hotspots are overloaded.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Local and regional governments responsible for tourism and climate adaptation policies.
- Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) coordinating crisis response efforts.
- Hospitality and tourism businesses investing in climate-adaptive solutions.
- Local communities reliant on tourism revenue for economic stability.
- Sustainability and urban planning organizations guiding infrastructure investments.
- Travelers seeking sustainable, less congested travel options.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- National and regional tourism boards – Overseeing strategic implementation.
- Climate resilience and urban development agencies – Ensuring infrastructure adaptation.
- Economic development organizations – Providing funding and investment incentives.
- Technology providers – Supporting AI-based monitoring and digital platforms.
- Sustainability-focused NGOs advising on eco-friendly initiatives.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Public and private tourism businesses – Ensuring a collaborative approach to adaptation.
- Transportation operators – Developing climate-proof mobility solutions.
- Cultural institutions and event organizers – Supporting seasonal diversification efforts.
- Local environmental organizations – Ensuring sustainable tourism practices.}
- Academic and research institutions conducting visitor flow analysis and resilience assessments.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIS)

- Increase in off-season tourism in participating destinations.
- Increase in visitor numbers in peripheral destinations with resilience plans.
- Reduction in tourism-related climate disruptions through infrastructure adaptation.
- Creation of new climate-resilient tourism experiences per region.
- Implementation of real-time data tracking in destinations for climate risk management.
- Training of tourism operators in crisis preparedness and adaptation strategies.
- Implementation of AI-driven visitor flow management of major tourism destinations.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking seasonal visitor distribution trends.
- Assessing infrastructure resilience against extreme weather events.
- Evaluating economic performance of tourism businesses before and after adaptation.
- Monitoring digital engagement with climate risk communication tools.
- Surveying visitor satisfaction regarding climate-adaptive tourism offerings.
- Economic performance reports, tracking investment and revenue growth in alternative regions.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-6): Research on climate impacts and economic vulnerabilities in tourism destinations.
- Phase 2 (Months 6-12): Development of adaptation plans and pilot infrastructure projects.
- Phase 3 (Months 12-24): Implementation of seasonal diversification strategies and business support programs.
- Phase 4 (Ongoing): Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and policy adjustments.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- LA ROCHELLE Océan Pass (FRANCE): Integrated sustainable transport with tourism diversification.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- SCOTLAND'S CLIMATE-RESILIENT TOURISM STRATEGY (SCOTLAND): Includes climate-proof infrastructure investments.
- NORWAY'S SUSTAINABLE WINTER TOURISM INITIATIVE (NORWAY): Created offseason experiences to reduce peak tourism impact.
- JAPAN'S AI-BASED DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT FOR TOURISM (JAPAN): Uses real-time data to adjust visitor flows in response to climate threats.

5.5.17 ACTION 17 - LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC AXIS
VI - MANAGING GLOBAL THREATS
INTERVENTION AIMS
6.b - Innovation
OBJECTIVE
<p>To enhance the resilience and competitiveness of tourism destinations by integrating advanced technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and real-time data analytics, into tourism management and visitor experiences. This initiative aims to provide immersive experiences and real-time information to tourists and policymakers, facilitating informed decision-making and sustainable tourism practices.</p>
JUSTIFICATION
<p>Strengths leveraged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich cultural and natural heritage that can be showcased through immersive technologies. - Existing technological infrastructure that can support advanced data analytics and VR applications. - Established tourism industry with stakeholders open to adopting innovative solutions. <p>Weaknesses addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcrowding in popular tourist sites, leading to resource strain and diminished visitor experiences. - Limited data-driven decision-making, hindering effective tourism management. - Seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals affecting economic stability. <p>Opportunities seized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advancements in VR and data analytics offering new avenues for enhancing tourist experiences and management. - Growing demand for personalized and immersive travel experiences among modern travellers. - Availability of open-source data that can be harnessed for real-time tourism management. <p>Threats mitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overtourism leading to environmental degradation and resident dissatisfaction. - Global economic fluctuations impacting tourist arrivals and revenues. - Climate-related challenges necessitating adaptive and resilient tourism strategies.
DESCRIPTION
<p>The initiative focuses on integrating virtual reality and real-time data analytics into tourism strategies to enhance visitor experiences and optimize destination management.</p> <p>TYPES OF KEY ACTIVITIES</p> <p>1. Development of Virtual Reality Experiences</p> <p>Create virtual tours of attractions, allowing potential visitors to explore destinations remotely, aiding in trip planning and marketing. Another alternative would be to implement VR storytelling to showcase cultural heritage and historical narratives, enriching the visitor experience.</p>

2. Implementation of Real-Time Data Analytics

Develop a real-time monitoring system to track visitor numbers, available parking spaces, and queue lengths at attractions, assisting in crowd management. Utilize open-source data to provide tourists with live updates on site congestion, enabling informed decisions and dispersing crowds.

3. Integration of User-Friendly Platforms

Create mobile applications and interactive dashboards that deliver real-time information to tourists and policymakers, enhancing experience and management.

4. Stakeholder Training and Collaboration

Conduct training sessions for tourism stakeholders on utilizing these technologies effectively. Foster partnerships between tech companies, local authorities, and tourism businesses to ensure seamless integration and operation.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Tourists seeking enriched and informed travel experiences.
- Destination management organizations (DMOs) aiming for efficient tourism oversight.
- Local businesses and tourism operators looking to enhance services.
- Technology providers offering solutions for the tourism sector.
- Policy makers focused on sustainable tourism development.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION(S)

- Local and regional tourism boards overseeing implementation.
- Technology firms developing VR content and data analytics tools.
- Academic institutions providing research and expertise.
- Tourism associations facilitating stakeholder engagement.

STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

- Tourism operators and service providers integrating new technologies.
- Local communities participating in content creation and benefiting from improved management.
- Environmental agencies ensuring sustainable practices.
- Visitors utilizing the tools for enhanced experiences.

KEY PERFORMANCE GOALS (KPIs)

- Development and launch of VR experiences for major attractions.
- Implementation of a real-time data monitoring system covering key tourist sites.
- Reduction in overcrowding incidents at popular sites.
- Increase in tourist satisfaction scores related to information accessibility and experience quality.
- Training of local tourism operators in utilizing new technologies.

MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP INDICATORS

- Tracking engagement with VR platforms and real-time data tools.
- Visitor movement and distribution analytics, measuring congestion reduction.
- Stakeholder feedback surveys on digital tourism integration effectiveness.
- Economic performance of alternative tourism sites, indicating improved visitor flow.

ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- Phase 1 (Months 1-3): Planning and stakeholder consultations.
- Phase 2 (Months 4-8): Development of VR content and data analytics infrastructure.
- Phase 3 (Months 9-12): Pilot testing and refinement of technologies.
- Phase 4 (Months 13-18): Full-scale implementation and marketing.
- Phase 5 (Months 19-24): Monitoring, evaluation, and adjustments.

BENCHMARKING & BEST PRACTICES

Project inspiring good practices:

- LA ROCHELLE OCÉAN PASS (FRANCE) – A smart tourism pass integrating public transport, attractions, and digital ticketing, encouraging visitor distribution.
- DUBLIN COASTAL TRAIL (IRELAND) – Uses real-time visitor flow data to promote alternative coastal destinations beyond the city centre.
- TERRA AVENTURA (FRANCE) – A gamified geo-tourism initiative, spreading visitor traffic to rural areas through interactive digital storytelling.
- MY OCEAN BEACHES (FRANCE) – Uses real-time data on beach occupancy to redirect visitors to less crowded locations.

Other good practices to be used as source of inspiration:

- DUBROVNIK REAL-TIME VISITOR MONITORING SYSTEM (CROATIA): Implemented surveillance cameras at city entrances to monitor visitor numbers within the city walls. Data is updated every 15 minutes and displayed using a traffic light system to indicate congestion levels.
- DUBROVNIK'S SMART PARKING INITIATIVE(CROATIA): Utilized IoT technology to provide real-time information on parking availability, integrating data into Google Maps for user convenience.
- DUBROVNIK PASS (CROATIA): Transitioned from physical cards to a fully digital city pass, allowing tourists to access attractions and public transport through QR codes.
- DUBROVNIK VISITORS' APPLICATION (CROATIA): Developed an application predicting the number of visitors in the Old Town using machine learning, providing real-time congestion information to users.
- VIRTUAL TOURS BY QANTAS AIRLINES (AUSTRALIA): Developed VR experiences of destinations to assist travellers in planning and decision-making.
- APULIA'S METAVERSE PLATFORM (ITALY): Created a virtual environment for tourism promotion, allowing users to explore the region digitally.

5.6

SUMMARIZING THE POLYCENTRIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

As presented in the previous chapters, the logical framework of the polycentric sustainable tourism model raises from the methodology discussed in Chapter 2. It also raises from the common SWOT that highlights Atlantic area tourism sector’s strengths and potential opportunities and also the challenges that must be overcome.

In this context, the basic problem to be solved by the model is overtourism (that is affecting the most known Atlantic area destinations) by taking advantage not only of the international recognition of those destinations but also of their demand interest in knowing other nearby less know destinations.

The main goal is to contribute to more balance, cohesive and sustainable regional development based on the concept of permeability (as defined at chapter 5.4). The model defined 6 strategic axes, 17 intervention aims and 5 permeability dimensions, all of them are converging in the proposal of strategic actions detailed in chapter 5.5 as presented in the following table.

ACTION	STRATEGIC AXES	INTERVENTION AIMS	MAIN PERMEABILITY DIMENSION				
			Territorial	Digital	Sociocultural	Institutional	Communicational
Action 1 – Immersive Tourist Experience	I - Strengthening the Tourism Offer	I.a - Offer Diversification and Quality Enhancement	✓	✓	✓		✓
Action 2 – Heritage Hub: Showcasing and Promoting Cultural and Natural Sites		I.b - Showcasing Cultural and Natural Heritage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Action 3 – Touring Tourism		I.c - Touring Tourism	✓	✓		✓	✓
Action 4 – Explore the development of Small-Scale Alternative Accommodation		I.d - Commercial accommodation	✓		✓		✓
Action 5 – Supporting the development of Nighttime Economy Festival & Events		I.e - Extending the Tourist Season	✓		✓		✓
Action 6 – Proximity Tourism		I.f - Proximity Tourism	✓		✓		✓

ACTION	STRATEGIC AXES	INTERVENTION AIMS	MAIN PERMEABILITY DIMENSION				
			Territorial	Digital	Sociocultural	Institutional	Communicational
Action 7 – Local Transport Services for everyone, everywhere	II - Improving Infrastructure and Mobility	II.a - Modernising Transport Infrastructure	✓				✓
Action 8 – Promoting Soft Mobility Networks		II.b - Promoting Soft Mobility	✓			✓	
Action 9 – Smart Visitor Experience: Collaborative Digital Platforms for Equitable and Sustainable Tourism Flow Management	III – Digital transformation	III.a – Development of Digital Services		✓		✓	✓
Action 10 - Collaborative Social Media Campaigns for Visibility and Redistribution		III.b – Social Media Promotion		✓	✓	✓	✓
Action 11 – Smart Tourism Flow Management: Leveraging Data Analysis for Sustainable Visitor Redistribution		III.c – Data Analysis		✓		✓	
Action 12 – Polycentric Tourism Clustering: Strengthening Local Collaborations for Visitor Flow Redistribution	IV – Cooperation and Partnerships	IV.a – Strengthen Local Collaborations			✓	✓	
Action 13 - Strengthening Cross-Border Partnerships for Polycentric Tourism Development		IV.b – Cross-border partnerships				✓	
Action 14 – Implementing Sustainable Tourism Practices to Mitigate Overtourism and Promote Regional Balance	V - Adapting to Trends and Challenges	V.a – Sustainable Tourism	✓		✓	✓	
Action 15 – Wellbeing Offers		V.b - Wellbeing Offers			✓		✓

ACTION	STRATEGIC AXES	INTERVENTION AIMS	MAIN PERMEABILITY DIMENSION				
			Territorial	Digital	Sociocultural	Institutional	Communicational
Action 16 - Resilient Destination Planning	VI - Managing Global Treats	VI.a - Flexibility in the Face of Uncertainty	✓	✓		✓	
Action 17 - Leveraging Technological Innovation for Sustainable Tourism Management		VI.b - Innovation		✓		✓	

Table 7.
Mapping strategic actions to permeability dimensions.

Throughout the permeability dimensions action are directly linked to the proposed permeability measures, contributing also to those measures' implementation.

It is important to note that these five dimensions are not rigid categories but rather practical entry points that help stakeholders identify where action is needed. They offer a flexible framework that can be adapted to different realities across the Atlantic Area. Although developed within the scope of POST project, the dimensions are broad enough to support other territories in assessing barriers, spotting opportunities, and designing locally tailored actions that boost connectivity, cooperation, and strategic coherence throughout the tourism ecosystem.

5.7

POLYCENTRIC TOURISM MODEL MAIN TOOLS

To successfully transition from strategic planning to practical application, territories with use a large set of tools.

The following proposed instruments are designed to address the diverse challenges and needs of governmental entities, local stakeholders, and tourism actors, providing a flexible framework that can be tailored to each territory's unique context.

By integrating these tools into the implementation process, the polycentric tourism model can achieve greater coherence, community engagement, and resilience, ultimately contributing to balanced and sustainable tourism development:

- **Territory readiness questionnaire:** A self-assessment tool designed for municipalities or local stakeholder groups to evaluate their current capacities, resources, and challenges. This helps identify strengths and gaps, enabling targeted planning and more realistic goal setting. It encourages local ownership and ensures that actions are adapted to the specific readiness level of each territory.
- **FAQ Sheet:** A concise, user-friendly document addressing common questions and doubts encountered during the planning and implementation phases. It serves as a quick reference that reduces confusion, streamlines communication, and accelerates decision-making by clarifying expectations and procedures.
- **Training sessions:** Structured educational content for tourism actors, local authorities, and facilitators to build foundational knowledge on polycentric tourism principles, sustainable practices, and collaborative approaches. Training empowers stakeholders with the skills and confidence needed to implement and sustain the model effectively.
- **Participatory workshop guide:** A step-by-step manual for organizing community-led workshops focused on co-creating tourism experiences. This tool promotes inclusive engagement, fosters local creativity, and ensures that the tourism offer reflects authentic local identity and meets community needs.
- **Sample governance model:** A practical framework outlining roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among different stakeholders involved in the polycentric tourism network. This model supports transparent decision-making, efficient resource management, and long-term sustainability by formalizing partnerships and collaboration.
- **Environmental management guidelines:** An analytical toolset aimed at defining environmental objectives to safeguard natural and cultural heritage while accommodating tourism growth. Instruments such as carrying capacity studies and environmental monitoring enable destinations to balance visitor demand with conservation, ensuring sustainable tourism development.
- **Awareness-raising campaign:** Communication initiatives targeting residents, visitors, and businesses to promote responsible tourism behaviours, highlight best practices, and encourage social participation. These campaigns build community support, reduce negative impacts, and create a shared sense of stewardship essential for the model's success.

- **Hackathons:** A collaborative, time-limited event where people from different backgrounds - such as tourism professionals, developers, designers, marketers, entrepreneurs, and students - come together to create innovative solutions for challenges in the tourism sector. In this particular case, challenges to be addressed should be linked to overtourism/unbalance tourism regional tourism development, that is to say, to polycentric tourism development.
- **Strategic tourism toolkits:** Practical set of resources, guides, templates, and tools designed to help tourism stakeholders in planning, implementing, and managing tourism strategies effectively and sustainably. In this particular case, the model has two toolkits to provide + practical guidance, resources, and frameworks needed to turn plans into action:
 - The **strategy toolkit** to support the model implementers in shaping their local strategies to enable the permeability of the tourism flows in the destinations.
 - The **communication toolkit** to support the communication and tourism promotion aiming at facilitating the permeability of the tourism flows in the destinations. It supports the communication at the internal and external destination level, of the polycentric tourism products and experiences.

5.8

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.8.1 MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Following the documentary analysis, it becomes evident that the work carried out highlights the **need to move towards a replicable model for sustainable and polycentric tourism development**, jointly created with local stakeholders through a combination of territorial diagnosis, participatory mapping, experience design, piloting, and strategic coordination. The **proposed model is flexible and adaptable to regional factors** and characteristics, enabling it to respond to the diverse tourism realities of the Atlantic Area.

The proposal of a scalable and adaptable model represents a significant contribution, **offering a framework that allows each territory to address specific challenges based on sustainability**. Depending on the case, this may involve reducing the overexploitation of saturated destinations or increasing the visibility of emerging areas. This document seeks to highlight the importance of regional cohesion so that economic opportunities in less-visited areas can be harnessed.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that the basis of **polycentric tourism lies in the rebalancing of tourist demand flows, avoiding the saturation of certain territories while promoting lesser-known and under-visited areas**. The orientation of the model reinforces a genuine network-based system, where interterritorial cooperation, diverse experiences, and sustainability foster regional cohesion. This stands in contrast to a competitive model, as experiences are jointly designed and shared, generating benefits for tourism activity and strengthening resilience across destinations.

The work has been guided by principles of sustainability and demonstrates complementarities with the European Union's strategy and Multiannual Indicative Programme.

The main conclusions derived from the analysis of the current state of the territory have allowed for a detailed characterization, based on data from the associated regions. This in-depth territorial analysis was essential in demonstrating that the Atlantic Area territories differ widely in terms of geography, culture, tourism maturity, infrastructure, and visitor dynamics. **By mapping and highlighting these contrasts, the current model ensures it is not "one-size-fits-all" but rather flexible and adaptable to multiple contexts**. This diversity forms the foundation for designing a polycentric approach that can be replicated across the Atlantic Area.

It was also confirmed that **each territory faces different challenges**, such as over-tourism (Porto), lack of tourism (Ourense, Cognac), seasonality peaks (Braga), low visitor retention (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown), infrastructure deficiencies, and demographic decline. Understanding these specific challenges allowed the model to address real weaknesses— from congestion to rural depopulation— rather than applying generic solutions, while also identifying opportunities and assets to be leveraged.

By contrasting inland and coastal, urban, and rural, emerging, and consolidated destinations, the analysis helps define model priorities such as dispersing visitor flows, strengthening connectivity, mobility, and diversifying products.

Finally, the diagnosis showed how tourism pressure, economic benefits, and environmental sustainability are currently unbalanced. This situation justifies the core objective of the polycentric model: to create a more balanced, sustainable, and resilient Atlantic tourism system through collaboration, connectivity, and cultural and ecological respect.

The SWOT analysis revealed that despite the heterogeneity of the Atlantic Area, there are common problems such as seasonality, fragmented infrastructure, limited accommodation diversity, staff shortages, weak promotion, and poor stakeholder collaboration, alongside risks such as climate change, over tourism in hotspots, and demographic shifts. At the same time, significant opportunities were identified: extending the tourism season, promoting lesser-known attractions, advancing sustainable mobility, and leveraging digitalization. **These strengths and opportunities can become strategic levers for achieving more balanced and sustainable tourism—the fundamental basis of this work.**

The SWOT analysis also revealed that Atlantic territories provide a valuable basis for guiding the implementation of the Polycentric Sustainable Tourism Model. Opportunities point towards slow, authentic, and sustainable tourism trends that can be leveraged through digitalization, enhanced promotion, and improved mobility, while threats are linked to global crises and more localized pressures. **The strategy must therefore incorporate tools for resilience, innovation, and territorial adaptation.**

The study identified the crucial role of stakeholders and agents. It is therefore essential to involve the public sector, private enterprises, social organizations, academic institutions, and local communities, as they are key to the viability of the proposed model. **Shared governance thus emerges as a fundamental element for the success of a polycentric tourism strategy.**

In conclusion, **the model is more than just a diagnostic and planning tool; it should function as an operational instrument** that provides a framework for action and enables territories to improve innovation, cross-border cooperation, and progress towards tourism development goals such as sustainability, resilience, and balanced growth. The model has the capacity to detect critical issues and opportunities in the studied destinations while being replicable elsewhere. One of its main contributions is demonstrating that regional diversity can be turned into a driver of cooperation and equilibrium.

In the public sphere, the participation of international, national, regional, and municipal bodies is essential for planning, regulating, and monitoring tourism development. **Municipalities, due to their proximity to the territory and regulatory powers, play a key role in tourism management,** coordinating with higher-level authorities and ensuring comprehensive and locally adapted action. **The involvement of specialized public bodies is also highly relevant in areas such as natural space management, heritage conservation, tourism promotion, consultancy, and digitalization.**

Private stakeholders—including accommodation, restaurants, and leisure providers— are fundamental in applying polycentric tourism measures, following public guidelines, and adopting certifications and good practices that strengthen their commitments. Non-profit institutions, local action groups, NGOs, community organizations, and rural development agencies also play an important role in protecting and promoting local resources, raising awareness, and leading participatory processes. **Sectoral networks and consortia foster collaborative development and enhance destination competitiveness.**

Local communities are particularly relevant, as they safeguard authenticity and the local origin of the destination. Educational, training, and research institutions—both public and private— are equally relevant to the implementation of a polycentric tourism strategy. They generate knowledge, methodologies, and analytical tools required to support sustainable tourism strategies. Tourism schools and academic institutions that pilot innovative approaches are crucial for ensuring scientific and technical rigor, supporting decision-making, training, and independent research.

It can therefore be stated that the **polycentric tourism model emerges as a strategy that can be promoted by diverse agents**: public institutions, private actors, higher education institutions, and the resident population that receives tourism demand.

One of the **model's proposals is to guarantee meaningful application** by selecting territories for **adoption according to shared criteria**, such as:

- **Presence of internal tourism imbalances** (e.g., over tourism in some areas and underutilization in others), measurable through indicators such as visitor density per km² or overnight stays per area.
- **Commitment to sustainability**, demonstrated by existing strategies aligned with the SDGs, and assessed through KPIs (e.g., percentage of tourism companies with sustainability certifications, or greenhouse gas emissions per tourist).
- **Governance capacity and collaboration mechanisms**, such as inter-municipal cooperation or active tourism clusters, measurable through the number of joint initiatives per year, existence of formal governance agreements, or participation in EU projects.
- **Community participation and fair benefit-sharing**, including participatory planning processes and local economic retention, measurable through the percentage of tourism revenue retained locally or the number of supported community initiatives.
- **Data availability and digital readiness**, ensuring the territory can monitor tourism flows and implement smart solutions, evaluated through the availability of real-time visitor data—a challenge still common across destinations.

Such criteria and indicators help adapt the model to local contexts while maintaining a common framework for comparability, replication, and long-term impact monitoring.

Within this context, the proposed strategy, complemented by specific tools to be developed, offers territories a flexible and action-oriented pathway to operationalize the model. This ensures that each destination can harness its unique potential while contributing to a more balanced, connected, and sustainable tourism network.

Although not all variables can be controlled, it is advisable—through a polycentric model—to establish tools that strengthen responsiveness to global challenges such as climate change, health crises, or geopolitical disruptions.

The strategic structure defined for implementing the polycentric model suggests six strategic axes, providing an integrated framework that supports territorial needs, enhances visitor experience, and ensures resilience:

- **Axis I: Strengthening the tourism offer through diversification and enrichment of products across destinations**, with an emphasis on experiential, cultural, and proximity tourism to highlight local uniqueness and extend the season.
- **Axis II: Improving infrastructure and mobility** through investment in transport networks and sustainable, seamless mobility solutions to ease movement within the polycentric network.
- **Axis III: Digital transformation** through integrated platforms and data-driven approaches to support visitor planning, marketing, and sustainable resource management.
- **Axis IV: Cooperation and partnerships** through strong collaboration among stakeholders and cross-border regions, fostering synergies, coordinated offers, and coherent marketing essential for cohesion and competitiveness.
- **Axis V: Adapting to trends and challenges** by aligning tourism products with sustainability and well-being trends, responding to market demands while preserving natural and cultural assets.
- **Axis VI: Managing global threats by building resilience** through flexible strategies and innovative technologies, enabling the polycentric network to adapt to economic, environmental, and social uncertainties.

About the findings of permeability measures, we can conclude that its practical application is structured around **five dimensions –territorial, digital, sociocultural, institutional, and communicational–** which, when combined, strengthen regional cohesion and the resilience of tourism systems. These dimensions are translated into four strategic measures: the creation of Atlantic accessibility networks, the development of shared thematic routes, joint digital marketing campaigns, and cross-border tourism training programs. Together, these actions facilitate mobility, foster innovation, support shared governance, and build a common Atlantic identity. **The expected outcomes include a more integrated visitor experience, better use of resources, greater adaptability to global challenges, and more balanced territorial development.**

For the countries participating in the project (Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland), these measures are particularly valuable as they directly address long-standing challenges of integration and cohesion. The accessibility network helps overcome physical and mobility barriers; thematic routes diversify and distribute visitor flows around a shared cultural and natural heritage; joint campaigns reinforce international positioning with a unified voice; and training strengthens professionalization and coordinated work across borders.

In this way, permeability not only transforms the POST strategy into a true catalyst for change, but also offers the Atlantic countries a unique opportunity to consolidate themselves as a polycentric, sustainable, and inclusive destination at the European and international scale.

In conclusion, this polycentric approach provides a strategic, flexible foundation that promotes territorial cohesion, balanced development, enhanced visitor experience, and long-term sustainability in the Atlantic Area's tourism destinations.

5.8.2 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on prior conclusions of the document for a polycentric tourism model application, the following general recommendations can be proposed:

- Maintain **inter-territorial cooperation**, through the collaboration of the partner territories, by means of meetings where the experiences made, the results obtained, and the application of good practices are exchanged. The transfer of knowledge between the areas that have participated in the project would be positively valued, so that the results of the application of polycentric tourism measures in the different pilot territories are known.
- Regarding this proposal, a viable option that ensures the continuity of the project is the **periodic updating of data on each territory**, on tourism demand, improvement of tourism resources, improvement of infrastructures. And to see how these data have affected decision-making and the design of action strategies.
- **Storytelling as a driver**. To connect **diverse** destinations and **experiences**, storytelling must serve as a common thread. It allows territories to present their identity in a coherent, authentic, and emotionally engaging way, turning fragmented attractions into meaningful journeys.
- **Tourism as a tool for territorial cohesion**. Tourism should be understood as a vehicle for territorial revitalization and rebalancing, especially in rural and inland areas. When coordinated with education, culture and entrepreneurship policies, tourism becomes a key factor in demographic sustainability and innovation. Ensure the co-participation of public and private entities to promote cooperation in employability and entrepreneurship, through tools that can be designed to improve the economic and labour development of the territories analysed.
- **Capacity building**. In line with the previous recommendation, it would be important to develop a **system of training and/or capacity building** for the local population, to improve the professionalism of the sector, where a polycentric tourism model would be applied.

- **Cross-cutting cooperation.** Collaboration should extend across sectors and disciplines: tourism, culture, environment, education, innovation, and agriculture, among others. Cross-sectoral cooperation enhances resilience and leads to higher quality multifunctional experiences.
- **Common governance model to ensure sustainability.** To sustain polycentric systems over time, clear governance models need to be developed, including roles, responsibilities, and coordination structures. These should promote shared ownership, transparency, and adaptability across the network. They should encourage the participation of all stakeholders so that transparency in decision-making is enhanced.
- **Dissemination.** Dissemination through specific communication materials, such as good practice guides, action guides, etc., should not be ruled out, as well as giving visibility to the results through publications or specialized congresses, so that the experience is known and can, if necessary, be applied to other territories.
- **Implement evaluation and monitoring models.** To analyse results and identify possible deviations, so that action strategies can be readapted, objectives modified, and deviations corrected with more realistic objectives.



Fig 11.
Eighth Keys for the Continuity of the Model.

Recommendations for each stakeholder

To ensure the long-term impact and scalability of the model, the following recommendations are proposed and should be somewhat specific to each stakeholder both public and private, so that their involvement in the polycentric tourism model is in line with the objectives.

- **For International, national, regional/autonomous, and local/provincial public bodies:** It is recommended that they seek ways of coordinating actions, leading on the one hand to the implementation of tourism planning measures and on the other to accompanying regulatory measures that make the activity visible, regulate and protect it. They are also the funders of experimentation, innovation, and knowledge transfer.

These actions should **support the drawing up or, where appropriate, updating of strategic plans at the different levels of management**, thus supporting leadership at a long-term political level, giving greater added value to the sustainability of the tourism model. It is recommended to implement governance models that encourage public-private collaboration, where the participation of the business fabric, the local population and specific community organisations should be involved in decision-making. Some actions:

- **Creating a multilateral working group** with representatives from all the municipalities involved, we could even talk about a strategic group focused on polycentric sustainable tourism. It is important that, given their proximity to the territory, local councils are given a more prominent role, so that in the strategic plan they can define their strategies according to the real needs of the destination.
- **Encourage proactive discussion forums** or meetings, for shared decision making.
- Allocate enough budget of tourism-related budgets to inter-municipal collaboration initiatives.
- Develop mobility plans that support multimodal circuits and/or review it aiming at assuring connectivity with the peripheral destinations included in the polycentric tourism regional strategy.
- **Consortia and public-private strategic alliances can design** sustainable products, promotion and visibility campaigns for new tourism products that are sensitive to local identity, elaborate codes of ethical behaviour and good practices.
- **Awareness-raising campaigns:** awareness-raising campaigns for residents and visitors, dissemination of good practices, social participation, or development of codes of conduct for businesses and tourists.

- **Integrate polycentric tourism into national/regional** tourism strategies.
- **Prioritize funding for actions** that combine tourism with heritage, agriculture, education and sustainability.
- **Promote** interregional exchange programs **and visibility at EU** level (e.g. Interreg, Erasmus+, COSME).
- **For private entities: companies, tourism technicians and planners and non-profit institutions.**: They are entities dedicated to the co-creation of tourism products and narratives, custodians of cultural and natural heritage and promoters of innovation and authenticity. Through their actions in the tourism system, they give a voice to the local community, promoting social cohesion and awareness of the long-term protection and maintenance of territorial tourism resources.

Regarding private entities, we can say that they are responsible for creating an offer adapted to demand, carrying out the functions of innovation and diversification of both products and services, in fact they would be the ones that would most help to redistribute tourism flows, which is why they must actively collaborate with the public model of cogovernance. In this line, non-profit institutions, due to their interests and socio-local involvement, act as sensitizers, inclusive and participatory in the promotion of social cohesion, local identity, tourism impact monitoring and awareness-raising, among other tasks. Finally, tourism technicians are the facilitators of multi-territorial and sustainable tourism policies, which, among other objectives, seek rural regeneration through tourism. In this case, the recommended actions are:

- **Participate** in pilot experiences with tourism feedback loops.
- **Actively participate in the management of tourism resources** and the promotion of the maintenance of the differential local identity, and the immersion of the tourist in it.
- **Holding events to enhance the value** of the territory.
- **Apply the polycentric model framework as a flexible** toolkit, not as a fixed template.
- **Design periodical cross-cutting thematic routes.**
- **Integrate visitor feedback systems** (QR, surveys, digital forms) into the design of the experience.
- **Ensure seasonality management** through the allocation of calendars.

- **For training, research and educational institutions (higher and secondary):** They are relevant because it is in these institutions that rigorous analysis is carried out on tourism-related topics, specifically polycentric sustainable tourism. The training given in these institutions is in line with the demand of the labour market and the industry, therefore they are the best reference for training in polycentric tourism, as an innovative strategy applicable to both.

In this case, it is recommended that these actors consider the possibility of implementing **specific training for the qualification of professionals** through formulas for those over 18 years of age, such as specialization, expert or master's courses, or for those over 25 years of age through micro-credentials. The formalization of networks for knowledge exchange and control of transfer results is also relevant.

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