

# Single Market Programme (SMP)

SMP-2023-TOURSME

Transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem –  
empowering tourism SMEs



## Deliverable 2.1

### Compendium on Best Practices and Lessons Learnt

[www.inspires-tourism.eu](http://www.inspires-tourism.eu)



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ERLEBNIS BREMERHAVEN GMBH (EBG) (Germany)

**Partners:**

TOERISME PROVINCIE ANTWERPEN (BE)

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY VRATSA SDRUZHENIE (BG)

CAMARA OFICIAL DE COMERCIO INDUSTRIA SERVICIOS Y NAVEGACION DE SEVILLA (ES)

PODKARPACIE WOJEWODZTWO (PL)

LAPIN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU OY (FI) EUROPEAN CULTURAL TOURISM NETWORK (BE)

**Contact:**

Franziska Stenzel, Helmut Berends, Claudia Harms Email: [INSPIRES@erlebnis-bremerhaven.de](mailto:INSPIRES@erlebnis-bremerhaven.de)

Website: [inspires-tourism.eu](http://inspires-tourism.eu)

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## List of Abbreviations

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European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency	<b>EISMEA</b>
Grant Agreement	<b>GA</b>
Partnership Agreement	<b>PA</b>
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## Project Partners



## Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 METHODOLOGY .....	3
3 OVERVIEW OF COLLECTED BEST PRACTICES.....	7
4 KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED.....	16
ANNEX 1.....	17

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: Investment range .....	7
Figure 2: Specific support needs addressed .....	7
Figure 3: Status of the initiative .....	9
Figure 4: Topics related to Best Practices .....	9
Figure 5: Key Strengths of the practices .....	12
Figure 6: Transferability of the practices .....	13

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is undergoing significant transformations driven by sustainability, digitalization, and resilience priorities. Small and Medium Enterprises (hereinafter SMEs) and Destination Management Organisations (hereinafter DMOs) play a crucial role in this transition, acting as catalysts of innovation and local development. In the framework of INSPIRES, identifying Best Practices in these areas is a future source of inspiration for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises to help to foster innovation, enhance competitiveness, and ensure long-term viability solutions.

Within the framework of Work Package (hereinafter WP) 2, the objective is to set a basis and a pool of concrete, relevant, replicable and relatable Best Practices for the next activities (WP3, 4 and 5) in the project.

The analysed Best Practices from SMEs and DMOs can enrich and serve as illustrative cases in the different training for trainers modules developed in WP3. Several of the Best Practices collected contribute to smart tourism approaches, particularly through the use of digital emerging technologies and solutions which improve destination management and visitors' experiences. These Best Practices will be particularly relevant for the training for trainers activities.

In total 47 best practices were collected through the questionnaire, of which 44 were considered valid and included in the analysis. The collection process did not include individual interviews, but was based on a structured online questionnaire that allowed respondents to provide detailed qualitative and quantitative information on their initiatives.

The collected practices cover a balanced range of thematic areas relevant to the tourism sector, including sustainability and circular economy, risk management and resilience, sustainable and regenerative tourism, diversity and inclusion, emerging technologies and digitalisation, as well as accessibility. Several practices address more than one thematic area, indicating cross-cutting innovation in tourism.

The cases provided in the compendium can also offer inspiration for the development of workshops and tailor made coaching programmes on sustainability, risk management and diversity and inclusion scheduled in WP4.

The examples included in the compendium can also be useful for SMEs applying in the call for proposals launched in WP5, showing successful experiences, what has been effective and what has been less successful and which challenges have been faced by SMEs.

Identifying Best Practices helps us to better understand the real context of companies in the tourism sector, how they address the green and digital transition, and which key aspects, challenges, and opportunities they identify for their business models, paying particular attention

to align with the European Commission's Transition Pathway for Tourism, specifically with the following topics:

- Topic 8: Green transition of tourism companies and SMEs
- Topic 16: support for digitalisation of tourism SMEs and destinations
- Topic 19: Awareness raising on skills needs for twin transition in tourism
- Topic 20: Awareness raising on changes in tourism demand and the opportunities of twin transition for tourism
- Topic 25: Enhancing accessible tourism services
- Topic 26: Tourism services for visitors and residents alike

These topics are reflected in the Best Practices identified and analysed in this document.

In addition to the topics reflected in the Best Practices identified and analysed in this document, the general framework consists of three main pillars:

- Green Transition: Adoption of environmentally sustainable practices
- Digital Transition: Integration of digital tools and technologies
- Resilience: Resilience and Adaptation to External Challenges

The collection and analysis of information takes place through a continuous interaction between the partners in order to guarantee the homogeneity and comparability of the information collected and on the other hand assure the increase of knowledge on specific Best Practices for green and digital transition and resilience in tourism.

This document aims to present the main results of the compendium of Best Practices collected, showcasing how businesses and Destination Management Organisations combine the main pillars of twin transition with community building, skills development, and accessibility to achieve both sustainable and competitive tourism models.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of best practise collection a template was designed in the format of a Google questionnaire in order ensure that each best practice is analysed according to a standard scheme divided into the following fields:

**The main activity code** (NACE- Statistical Nomenclature of Economic Activities in the European Community) that identifies the company/initiative. This helps us better understand and analyse the Best Practices in the context of the business type. Although NACE codes specific to the tourism sector are not mandatory in INSPIRES, it helps us to better know the nature and the scope of the initiative.

**Generic information about the initiative:** name, email, start date, is the initiative still ongoing?

**Total investment required for the initiative:** This information helps us understand the scale of the initiative rather than exact financial figures and assess the resources needed for potential transfer or replication by other businesses and/or organisations.

Respondents were not asked to specify the exact amount invested, but instead to indicate the investment range within which their initiative was developed.

The available options included predefined ranges (e.g. below 10.000€; 10.000€–50.000€; 50.000€–100.000€; 100.000€–200.000€, above 250.000€), allowing SMEs and DMOs to respond in a simple and comparable way while respecting confidentiality. This approach also supports a realistic assessment of transfer possibilities or replication based on resources needed.

**Descriptive information** including main goals, key activities, and impact on tourism sustainability, resilience, digitalization.

### 2.1 Topics addressed by the initiative

This classification helps us map the Best Practices to the most relevant thematic areas we target. INSPIRES is currently developing a “training for trainers” programme in WP3 with dedicated modules aligned to these topics, so the collected inputs will contribute directly to shaping and illustrating the content with real-life examples.

- Risk management and resilience
- Sustainability/Circular economy
- Sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings
- Diversity and inclusion in tourism

- Emerging technologies
- Accessibility
- Other

Although Smart Tourism<sup>1</sup> was not included as a separate topic in the proposed questionnaire, several Best Practices address smart tourism through the use of emerging technologies and digital solutions. This dimension will be further strengthened in the final version of the compendium and will also play a relevant role in the Training for Trainers programme and related activities (part of WP3).

## 2.2 What specific support needs were addressed?

This information indicates to us which are the main needs beyond the practices' owners.

- Energy or resource efficiency
- Digital tool adoption (e.g. booking, CRM)
- Promotion to foreign markets
- Value creation from local cultural/natural assets
- Networking with complementary service providers
- Staff upskilling
- Infrastructure or service innovation

## 2.3 What was the impact of the best practice?

In this section participants are asked to detail key results, benefits and changes that it has brought to tourism, such as improvements in sustainability, resilience, digitalization, or community engagement.

## 2.4 Key strengths of the initiative

Why is this a good example to share? What is particularly innovative, inspiring, or transferable?

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<sup>1</sup> "Smart tourism responds to new challenges and demands in a fast-changing sector, including the evolution of digital tools, products and services; equal opportunity and access for all visitors; sustainable development of the local area; and support to creative industries, local talent and heritage." ([smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu](https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu))

This helps us highlight what makes the best practice especially valuable, and identify the aspects that could be most inspiring or transferable to others in the tourism sector:

- Innovation
- Sustainability
- Community involvement
- Economic benefits
- Scalability
- Accessibility
- Other

### **2.5 Is the initiative transferable to other regions or SMEs' type?**

This question provides insight into the replicability and scalability of the initiative. It helps determine if the practice could be successfully adapted and implemented in other regions, contexts, or business types, beyond the original model. Understanding the potential transferability makes it easier to identify which Best Practices have potential impact, and which can serve as models or references for others in the sector. At an internal level, it enables us to determine which Best Practices are more likely to serve as examples in the training for trainers.

### **2.6 Challenges encountered (optional answers):**

This question enables us to identify challenges encountered and lessons learned during the process of implementation of the practice.

### **2.7 Future opportunities for development:**

This section provides information on how the practice could be expanded, improved or adapted to increase its impact and effectiveness. Participants are encouraged to share ideas, potential alliances, or areas of growth.

Overall, the questionnaire provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the Best Practices implemented, facilitating the identification of strengths, areas for improvement, lessons learned, and challenges.

### 3 OVERVIEW OF COLLECTED BEST PRACTICES

In this section, we address the Best Practices from different perspectives: statistical analysis of the Best Practices with graphs that show trends and patterns, and concrete examples when relevant.

#### 3.1 Statistics

47 Best Practices were submitted during this first collection phase, and 44 Best Practices were finally considered to be included in the analysis.

Majority of Best Practices come from INSPIRES countries: Finland, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and Spain. Additionally, as the collection of Best Practices activities is not restricted to the INSPIRES countries and regions, Best Practices from other countries such as Ireland, Cyprus, Rumania and Greece have also been included.

The majority of Best Practices come from SMEs initiatives but also from Destination Management organisations, DMOs, which, through their intermediary role, facilitates the green and digital transition of SMEs.

#### 3.2 Economic activity sectors

The collected Best Practices come from a wide range of tourism-related activities; including accommodation, food and beverage, nature-based activities, etc... This reflects the commitment of the tourism sector, specifically small organisations and SMEs from rural areas in many cases or working directly with rural areas, not only with digital and green transition, but also with innovation and resilience.

#### 3.3 Investment range

Almost half of the initiatives required a low investment : under 50.000€, confirming that uptaking innovative solutions in sustainability and digitalisation does not always require a large budget. However some initiatives required larger investments which also means a long-term commitment with digital and green transition. It could be also understandable that part of the respondents also may have understood the question as the whole investment required to set up and start their business.

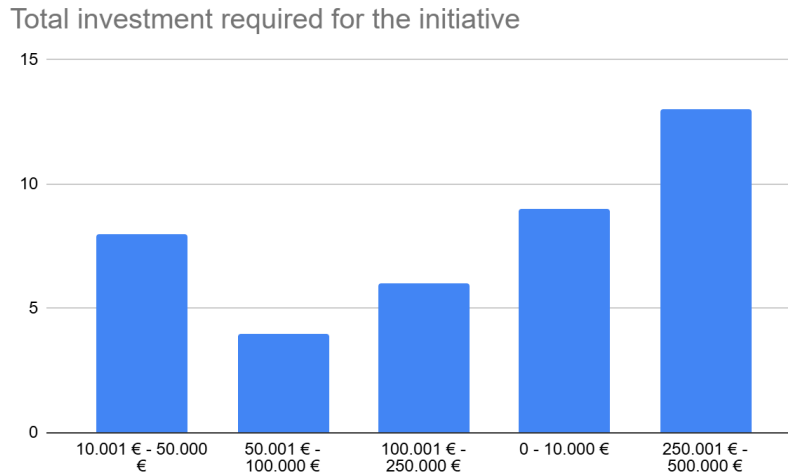


Figure 1: Investment range

### 3.4 Specific support needs addressed

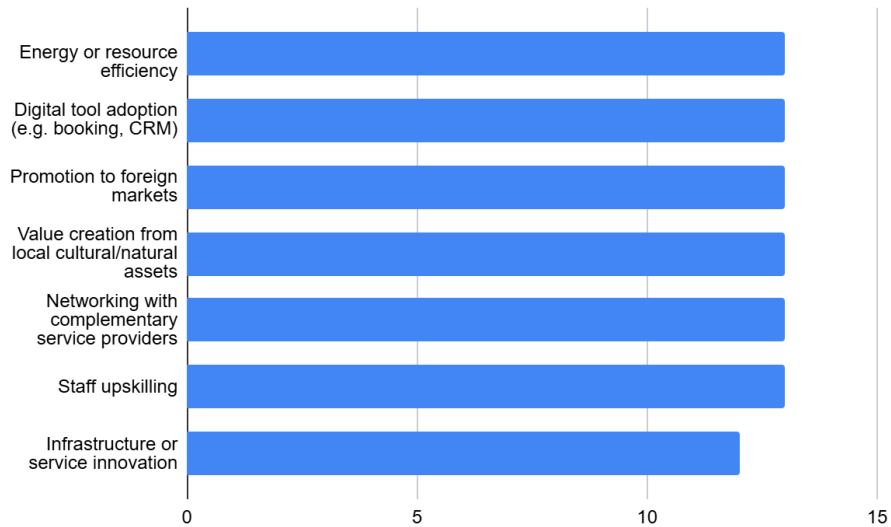


Figure 2: Specific support needs addressed

The number of specific support needs identified exceeds the total number of best practices analysed because this question was designed as a multiple-choice question with multiple answers allowed. Respondents were then able to select more than one support need to reflect the different types of assistance required for the successful implementation of their initiative.

The answers to this question were quite balanced, indicating that there is strong demand for support in different areas from the SMEs. Most respondents identified needs related to energy and resource efficiency, digital tool adoption, and value creation from cultural/natural assets which demonstrates that SMEs from the tourism sector are clearly including twin transitions as a cornerstone of their business model.

The answer corresponding to promotion in foreign markets, coupled with service innovation and staff upskilling is also an indicator that companies in the tourism sector are willing to prepare their business to evolve in a dynamic, globalized and constantly evolving environment.

The number of businesses indicating networking with complementary peers and service providers as specific needs to be addressed indicates the importance of strengthening the links with surrounding communities and the importance of establishing collaborations and that digital and green transition cannot be addressed nor achieved in an isolated way.

It also shows how tourism businesses seek to establish synergies with other sectors in order to offer a higher level of product and services to their customers.

### 3.5 Illustrative models from SMEs:

#### *Networking and collaboration:*

[Happy Weekends](#), a tour operator from Belgium, reports the importance of long-term collaborations with reliable partners as a benefit for their business and “improved resilience thanks to focus on specialization, close relationships and conscious investments.

#### *Sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings:*

[The Jolly Vintners](#), an initiative from Bulgaria which offers curated wine tourism experiences in Lyutibrod, combining boutique wine tastings with local foods, nature, and cultural storytelling. Set against the backdrop of the Iskar Gorge, it promotes low-impact tourism and supports rural revitalization. Key activities include guided tastings in natural and heritage sites, online bookings, and personalized guest interactions. The initiative enhances sustainability through local sourcing and eco-conscious vineyard practices, builds resilience by diversifying income beyond wine sales, and leverages digital tools for planning and outreach. It contributes to the visibility of Northwestern Bulgaria as a quality, experience-based destination.

### 3.6 Ongoing status of initiatives

A large proportion of the initiatives are still ongoing, confirming the dynamic nature of the sector and the continuous efforts in time of small and medium companies and DMOs to progress towards more sustainable and resilient business models.

Is the initiative still ongoing?

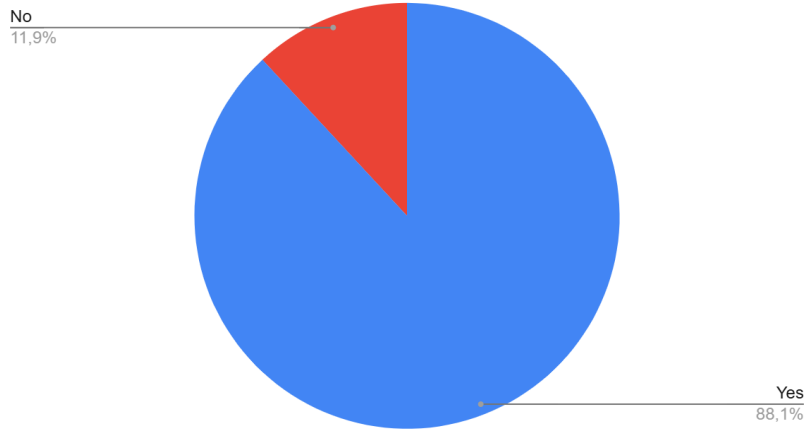


Figure 3: Status of the initiative

### 3.7 Topics related to the Best Practices

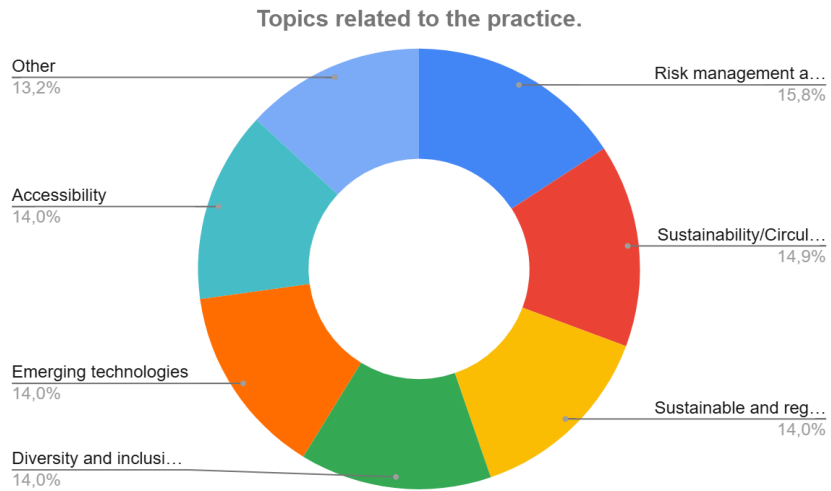


Figure 4: Topics related to Best Practices

TOPICS	Nº of SMEs
Risk management and resilience	18
Sustainability/Circular economy practices	17
Sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings	16
Diversity and inclusion in tourism	16
Emerging technologies	16
Accessibility	16
Other	15

The results to this question (with multiple answers allowed) show quite balanced results across the different thematic areas proposed, evidencing the multiple dimensions of innovation in the tourism sector. The most mentioned thematic area is Risk management and resilience, followed closely by Sustainable/circular economy.

It is worth mentioning that Diversity and Inclusion and Accessibility are also addressed by respondents, highlighting the increasing integration of these dimensions in the tourism strategies of SMEs.

Overall the results demonstrate that the tourism sector is approaching their strategies through a holistic approach combining environmental, social and technological practices to enhance resilience and sustainability in the sector.

**Illustrative models from SMEs on sustainability and circularity:**

[Naturanda](#), a guided tours SME from Spain states “NATURANDA transformed the pandemic’s challenges into an opportunity to embrace sustainability as the core of our tourism model. We’ve renewed our fleet with electric and hybrid vehicles to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, digitized operations to eliminate paper waste, and improved our offices with energy-efficient systems and eco-conscious practices. Every tour now integrates environmental education, raising awareness of nature’s value and fragility. Through daily activities in natural areas and partnerships with local communities, we ensure tourism has a positive environmental, social, and economic impact. For us, sustainability is not a trend but a lasting responsibility.”

[Yteri Resort & Camping](#) is located in one of Finland's most valuable dune habitats, protected under the Natura 2000 network. All development in Yteri follows strict sustainability principles. The resort offers 75 cottages, 130 caravan pitches with electricity, and 200 tent sites, along with saunas, a restaurant, and family activities. Committed to minimizing environmental impact, it holds the Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) label after completing a 7-step program. Key actions focus on improving energy efficiency, recycling, and guiding guests and staff to reduce water, electricity use, and waste.

#### **Illustrative model of sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings:**

Some examples which illustrate examples *from respondents that have included regenerative sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings:*

[Digital Platform for Sustainable Shopping Guide](#), from Bremerhaven, Germany, is a digital e-commerce platform that promotes sustainable shopping by linking consumers with environmentally friendly businesses in retail, gastronomy, crafts, and services. **Managed by the tourism destination**, it ensures accurate information, maintains the system, and fosters interaction between users and providers. Beneficiaries include consumers, who gain easier access to sustainable alternatives, and companies, which profit from higher visibility and targeted customers. **Improves networking with regional players, increases the visibility of SMEs and the accessibility of an audience focussed on sustainability.**

[Miętowe Wzgórze](#) from Poland, is an intimate retreat in harmony with nature, attracting loyal guests and hosting workshops and outdoor events that unite the community. It promotes the region as a hub for slow, eco-friendly tourism while supporting local suppliers and micro-businesses. It promotes strong community engagement through local food, crafts, and workshops strengthens identity and regional development.

#### **Illustrative model of accessibility and inclusivity tourism offerings:**

[Bielabe](#): Accessibility for everyone and employment for everyone, is a holiday destination where everyone is welcome without barriers. They provide the necessary support during holidays: medical care (doctor, physiotherapist), assistive devices, and guidance are arranged discreetly and professionally, without detracting from the holiday feeling. In addition, 60% of their employees are people who are at a disadvantage in the labor market. The model is supported by the Flemish government.

**Annex 1** lists all best practices by topic and will be made available to interested SMEs and DMOs via an online platform by the end of the first quarter of 2026.

### **3.8 Key Strengths of the Best Practices**

The results to this question show that innovation (27) and sustainability (26) are the most valued aspects by the respondents.

Community involvement (26) and economic benefits (24) are both equally important, which demonstrates that businesses are ready to combine positive social-community involvement with business viability.

The amount of Others strengths (21) is also relevant to confirm that transformation in tourism may take various forms.

Key strengths of the practices

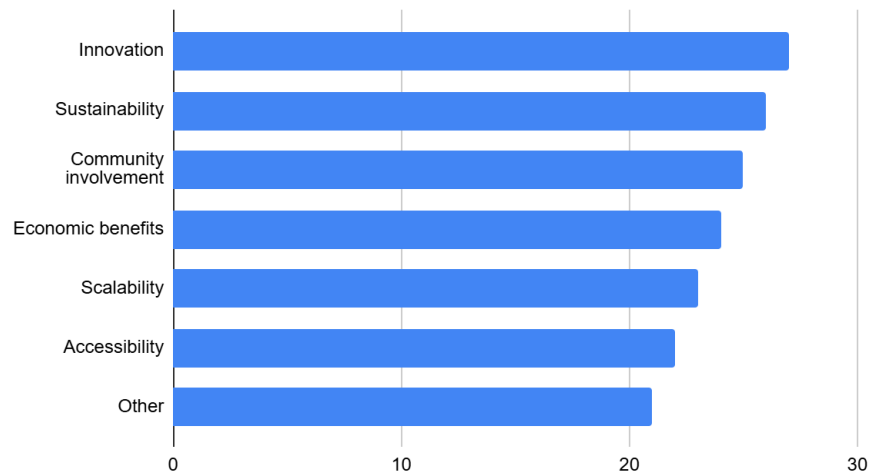


Figure 5: Key Strengths of the practices

The following table shows exact numbers of SMEs per each type of strength, taking into account that respondents had the option to choose more than one key strength to highlight their initiative.

KEY STRENGHT	RESULTS
Innovation	27
Sustainability	26
Community involvement	25
Economic benefits	24
Scalability	23
Accessibility	22
Other	21

### 3.9 Transferability of the Best Practices

As shown below in figure 6, answers to the question are clear and the vast majority of the participants consider that the different initiatives they have implemented in digital, green and resilient tourism could be applicable and successfully transferred to other businesses or in other territories.

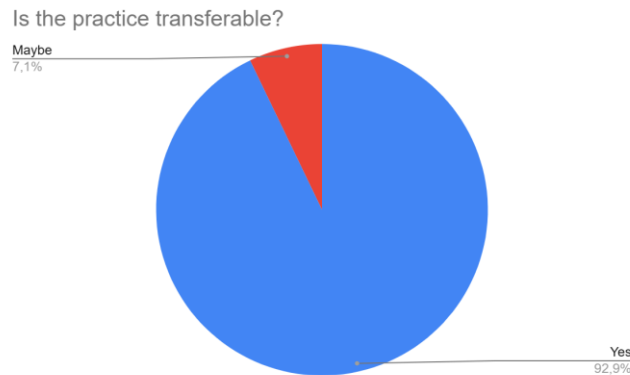


Figure 6: Transferability of the practices

### 3.10 Challenges encountered

Although the collected Best Practices demonstrate a high commitment to innovation, sustainability and resilience, respondents also identified several challenges during the design and implementation of their initiatives. These challenges reflect common and structural limitations faced by tourism SMEs, particularly when introducing new business models, innovative solutions, or working in innovative and collaborative environments, in particular such as:

- Financial and legal barriers: environmental regulation, difficulties to enter an innovative product in the market, obtention of permits, understanding of legal requirements
- Balancing user experience with a sustainable approach and remaining authenticity
- Coordination among multiple actors and co-creation with stakeholders.

**Illustrative challenges highlighted by respondents:**

[Rozino Organic Farm](#), from Bulgaria states: “One of the main challenges was managing the complexity of combining farming, food production, and tourism under one sustainable model. Ensuring consistent quality across all areas—especially in organic certification, animal welfare, and guest experience—required significant time, resources, and staff commitment. Another challenge was building eco-accommodation in a protected area, which involved navigating strict environmental regulations. “

[Berkovitsa experience](#), from Bulgaria, states: “One key challenge was coordinating multiple local actors—producers, cultural experts, and venues—while maintaining consistent quality and experience design. Logistics in rural areas, such as limited infrastructure or unpredictable weather, also posed operational difficulties.”

[Aurora Holidays](#), from Finland, explains that, when implementing their initiative *Regenerative fishing tourism in Teno River*, the main challenge lies in negotiations between countries regarding the legislation and regulation of fishing of pink salmon, as well as in reconciling decision-making and local views.

[Bieszczady Bicycle Trolleys](#), an initiative developed in Poland, states: “Due to its innovative nature, the product was difficult to introduce to the market - it was necessary to prepare documentation, regulations and, in cooperation with Polish Railway Lines, develop operating principles - which are now in force in bicycle rental companies being established in other parts of Poland.”

## 4 KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The analysis of the collected Best Practices demonstrate that tourism SMEs and DMOs are actively participating in the green and digital transformation of the tourism sector. They show the willingness to diversify their offer, strengthen their links and collaborate with the local communities to enhance competitiveness not only of their business but also benefit and expand it to the territory. Many initiatives combine sustainable and social goals, contributing to add value to both businesses and communities.

The Best Practices demonstrate how local businesses contribute to the larger goals of EU Transition Pathway for Tourism, especially regarding the digital transition of companies, skills development and improvement, and creation of experiences that combine inclusion and community network.

Common success factors include collaboration and networking, strong local identity, culture and use of natural heritage and resources as a source for innovation and resiliency, high potential for successful transfer and adaptation in other regions or contexts, and strong commitment with sustainability, including circular economy, energy efficiency, and environmental footprint reduction.

However challenges remain, mostly regarding financial and legal barriers such as environmental regulations, difficulties to enter an innovative product in a market due to obtention of permits and understanding of legal requirements. The technical skills gap also remains as one of the challenges encountered by SMEs.

## ANNEX 1

### Best Practices by Thematic Area

This table links each collected best practice to the relevant thematic criteria, showing how initiatives address sustainability, resilience, digitalization, inclusion, and other key areas.

Best Practice	Country	Sustainability/ Circular economy practices	Risk manage- ment and resilience	Sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings	Diversity and inclusion in tourism	Emerging technologies
Rubens Immersive Experience	Belgium		X			X
Profitroom AI Agent	Poland	X	X			X
Bieszczady Bicycle Trolleys	Poland	X		X	X	
Miętowe Wzgórze - oddech natury	Poland			X		
Naturanda as an example of good practices since 2020	Spain			X		
Rozino Organic Farm: Closed-Loop Dairy and Eco-Tourism in the Heart of the Balkans	Bulgaria	X	X	X		
Sineva Camping & Bubble Tents: Immersive Nature Stays in the Vratsa Balkan	Bulgaria	X	X	X	X	
Local Flavours, Lasting Connections – Berkovitsa Experience	Bulgaria	X	X	X	X	X
Wine Trails by the Iskar Gorge	Bulgaria	X	X	X		X
Destination Vratsa: Beauty in 360° – Virtual Reality Experience	Bulgaria			X	X	X
Integrating Robotics into Rural Fine Dining: Robcho	Bulgaria	X	X	X		X
Escultura Eventos – Modelo de Gestión Turística Sostenible e Inclusiva	Spain	X	X	X	X	X
Mystreetbook, rutas sostenibles	Spain			X		X
Camping Siesta /Ecotree – regenerative tourism	Belgium			X		
Digital Marketing Campaign for Pafos, Cyprus	Cyprus			X	X	X
Digital App: Dublin Discovery Trails -Story Telling	Ireland		X	X	X	X
Data-driven innovation for tourism SMEs in European Capitals of Culture	Europe		X	X	X	
Thessaloniki 2030 Resilience Strategy as a roadmap for Sustainable Tourism	Greece	X	X	X	X	
Virtual Reality Experience at Astra Museum, Sibiu, Romania	Romania			X	X	X
Hotel Nowy Dwor: Clean Energy - Investment in Photovoltaics	Poland	X	X	X		

Best Practice	Country	Sustainability/ Circular economy practices	Risk manage- ment and resilience	Sustainable and regenerative tourism offerings	Diversity and inclusion in tourism	Emerging technologies
Scrabble Bed and Breakfast: energy and resource efficiency	Belgium	X				
The Lapland Safety Network	Finland		X			
Zielona Perspektywa	Poland			X		
Leave No Trace Ethics	Finland	X		X		
Photovoltaik- Solar plus Wallbox for E-Autos	Germany	X	X	X		X
Bieszczady School of Creative Crafts	Poland	X		X	X	
“ImpactHub for Green Professions” at LandPark Lauenbrück: Experience nature, shape the future - through sustainable training and social participation	Germany			X	X	
Pop-up museum and gelato-making show	Poland	X				
Bielabe: Accessibility for everyone and employment for everyone.	Belgium				X	
Traseo — a map creator tailored to regional tourism and local businesses.	Poland	X		X	X	X
Happy weekends = strong growth and yet remained ourselves as tour operator/travel organisation	Belgium		X			
Saline Spa - Guided Tours	Spain	X		X		
Regenerative fishing tourism in Teno River	Finland			X		
Yyteri Resort & Camping - Sustainable Travel Finland Label	Finland	X				
Green classroom	Germany	X				
Digital Platform for Sustainable Shopping Guide	Germany	X		X		
IOPark (Smart access solutions for mobility, tourism, and accommodation)	Spain	X	X	X		X
Expansion of the swimming pool complex at Wioska Wakacyjna Radawa	Poland			X	X	
Velo San greenway concept	Poland			X	X	
Caro-Sichtbarkeit	Germany	X		X		
Hotel Caryńska Inn: a construction in accordance with local architectural tradition	Poland	X	X	X	X	X
meerzukunft <sup>3</sup> - The Bremerhaven intercompany apprenticeship	Germany	X	X	X		
Accessible Villa in Lapland	Finland				X	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>