INSPIRES
RESILIENT TOURISM

Initiatives for Sustainable Innovative Practices, Resilience, and Empowerment in Tourism SMEs

INSPIRES: DIGITALISATION, SUSTAINABILITY and Resilience in European Tourism

Interim Results, Collaborative Projects and Good Practices from six European Regions

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Experience Bremerhaven & City of Bremerhaven, Germany

ECTN ANNUAL CONFERENCE.
SKIATHOS, GREECE, 23.-26.09.2026

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WHY TOURISM SMES NEED TO BECOME MORE RESILIENT

European tourism SMEs are facing multiple transitions simultaneously..

Resilience is no longer a crisis response. Resilience has become a strategic need rather than a competitive advantage.

Key challenges

- Climate change
- Digital transformation
- Labour shortages
- Changing visitor expectations
- Rising operating costs
- Geopolitical uncertainty

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WHAT IS INSPIRES?

- Funded by EU Single Market Programme (SMP)
- 6 countries, 7 partners
- 36 months
- €1.9 million budget
- €1.14 mio SME funding for SME tourism projects
- 60 collaborative SME projects
- 180 SMEs in capacity building

INSPIRES supports tourism SMEs through knowledge, capacity building, financial support and European cooperation.

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A EUROPEAN LEARNING COMMUNITY

Every region contributes different tourism ecosystems, challenges and solutions. Instead of exchanging presentations, partners exchange practical experience.

PARTNER	ORGANISATION	TOURISM ECOSYSTEM
Germany	(LP) Experience Bremerhaven Ltd. + (AE) City of Bremerhaven	**Maritime** tourism, science and structural change
Belgium	Tourism Province of Antwerp	**Urban** and inclusive tourism
	European Cultural Tourism Network ECT	**European** network for cultural tourism
Bulgaria	Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vratsa	**Emerging** destination and SME transformation
Spain	Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Services and Shipping of Seville	**Cultural** and regenerative tourism
Finland	Lapland University	**Remote** and nature-based tourism
Poland	The Podkarpackie Voivodeship	**Rural** and border-region resilience

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How does it work?

INSPIRES in Practice

WE BUILD CAPACITIES

Best Practices
Training Modules
Tourism Labs

WE ENABLE INNOVATION

SME Coaching
SME Support
Collaborative Projects

WE STRENGTHEN COOPERATION

European Network
Peer Learning
Policy Recom-mendations

RESILIENCE grows through collaboration.

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What have we achieved?

INTERIM RESULTS

- 44 **Best Practices** analysed
- 1 **Policy Brief** published

- 5 **Training Modules** for multipliers
- 3 **Ideation jams**
- **Tourism Labs** under way in all partner countries

- 2 **Calls for SMEs** completed
- 60 **Collaborative Projects** funded
- **1,14 mio. €** directly funding SMEs

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60 COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS – 3 TRANSITION PATHWAYS

DIGITALISATION

- Artificial Intelligence
- Smart Digital Services
- Digital Visitor Experience
- Business Digitalisation

GREEN TRANSITION

- Carbon Management
- Energy & Resource Efficiency
- Sustainable Mobility
- Circular & Sustainable Operations
- Nature & Biodiversity

RESILIENT BUSINESS MODELS

- Business Diversification
- Year-round Tourism
- Inclusive Tourism
- Regional Cooperation
- Capacity Building

Digital. Green. Adaptable.
Three pathways towards resilient tourism SMEs.

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How did we work?

TOURISM LABS

SME LAB #DIVERSITY & INCLUSION
Co-designing accessible offers with tourism providers and target groups

SME LAB #CLIMATE FRESK
Turning sustainability challenges into investable business ideas

SME LAB #DIGISCAN
From digital diagnosis to an individual SME action plan

SME LAB #RISK MANAGEMENT
Practical tool to help businesses prepare for and respond to disruptive events

Ideation Jam #Resilience
Ideation Jam #Sustainability
Ideation Jam #AI/Digitalisation

Stakeholders jointly developed practical, innovative and transferable solutions for sustainability, digitalisation and resilience.

What works: practical tools, peer learning and direct application to the SME's own business

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Best Practices

Best practices show that resilient tourism solutions share four characteristics:

1. They respond to a specific local challenge.
2. They connect sustainability with economic value.
3. They involve more than one actor.
4. They can be adapted rather than simply copied.

Best Practice compendium will be updated with selected SME projects funded by INSPIRES

Download Best Practice Compendium

REGIONAL BEST PRACTICES

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Why transformation capacity matters
THE BREMERHAVEN EXAMPLE

Transformation has always been part of Bremerhaven's identity.

The city did not abandon its identity. Instead, it built on its existing strengths, reflecting both the city's history and its future.

Timeline

Fishing Harbour

Industrial Harbour

Science City

Climate City

Sustainable Tourism

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What we have learned

– AND WHAT POLICY SHOULD DO

Learnings from INSPIRES		Policy implication
SMEs need tailored guidance	→	Invest in SME capacity
Digital and green measures reinforce each other	→	Avoid separate transition policies
Collaborative projects create stronger solutions	→	Support regional ecosystems
Knowledge only matters when applied	→	Connect training with implementation funding

Download **Policy Brief**

Learn together. Shape better policies. Deliver resilient change.

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What we have learned

WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

What works	Lessons for future SDME support
Clear and tangible SME benefits	Keep SME participation time-efficient
Demand-driven activities	Ensure clear added value for every activity
Interactive, hands-on formats	Keep administrative requirements proportionate
Peer learning and best-practice exchange	Adapt support to regional contexts and SME readiness
Strong regional networks	Allow sufficient implementation flexibility
Targeted financial support	Combine funding with capacity building and mentoring

SMEs engage when support is relevant, practical and balanced — they disengage when effort outweighs value.

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Looking ahead

FROM IMPLEMENTATION TO RECOGNITION

IMPLEMENT

Monitor and support 60 SME projects through 2027

EVALUATE

Final assessment and nomination of 16 award candidates

RECOGNISE

Awarding 6 outstanding INSPIRES projects at the joint ECTN-INSPIRES conference in Bremerhaven. **15.-17.September 2027**

TRANSFER

SME Labs, updated Best Practice Compendium and final dissemination

Resilience grows when support becomes a continuous pathway rather than a series of isolated measures.

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Thank you for your attention!

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