



# Sustainable Tourism Partnership

## Urban Agenda for the EU



# Greening tourism SMEs: A practical Handbook

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# EUROPEAN URBAN INITIATIVE



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This document was prepared in the context of evolving EU regulatory frameworks. Notably, the Green Claims Directive—aimed at ensuring that environmental claims are reliable, comparable, and verifiable—saw its first reading approved by the European Parliament in March 2024, and a general approach reached by the Council in June 2024. Trilogue negotiations began in January 2025 but are currently on hold following a cancelled meeting in June 2025. Pending resolution of political and administrative obstacles, the Directive may be finalized late 2025, with Member States required to transpose it within 18–24 months (likely mid-2027), though its future remains uncertain. Meanwhile, the Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (EU 2024/825), in force since March 2024, already imposes significant restrictions on unsubstantiated or misleading environmental claims and must be transposed by Member States by March 2026.

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# Objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership

The Sustainable Tourism Partnership seeks to advocate for sustainable tourism by raising awareness and educating stakeholders, citizens, and policymakers about its benefits and challenges. The overarching goal is **to leverage the economic, social, and environmental opportunities of sustainable tourism to foster a balanced and resilient recovery, promote inclusiveness, and drive innovation**. A key focus is addressing the unique challenges of urban tourism, recognizing its critical role in fostering sustainable socioeconomic development within urban environments.

To achieve these objectives, the partnership promotes collaboration among Member States, cities, the European Commission, and other stakeholders. This collaborative framework aims to develop effective policies to address the specific needs of urban areas, as highlighted in the Pact of Amsterdam (2016). The partnership emphasizes a co-creation and co-implementation process, as outlined in the Transition Pathway for Tourism, with a commitment to fully implement strategies that are co-developed.

Recognizing tourism's pivotal role in urban policy, the partnership advocates for tailored strategies for sustainable urban tourism that consider local characteristics and needs. Due to the complexity of urban tourism, the partnership calls for a multi-level governance approach involving stakeholders at different scales. On a broader level, the partnership seeks to strengthen the joint vision of the EU's multilevel, multi-stakeholder cooperation framework on sustainable tourism, as outlined in the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the European Tourism Agenda 2030.

In line with the European Commission's principles of Better Regulation and the Pact of Amsterdam, the partnership has developed an Action Plan aimed at helping cities implement existing EU initiatives. The Action Plan focuses on streamlining access to EU funding (Better Funding), promoting combined financing from EU funds, enhancing the knowledge base on urban tourism issues, and facilitating the exchange of best practices (Better Knowledge). Through these efforts, the partnership aims to support cities in adopting sustainable tourism practices and driving positive change at both local and EU levels.

# Table of contents

<b>1. A brief introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Understanding sustainability certifications in tourism .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Objectives .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 General objective.....	9
3.2 Specific objectives.....	9
3.3 Contribution to Action 2 of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership ..	10
<b>4. Methodological approach .....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Guiding principles and rationale .....	11
4.2 Case identification process .....	12
4.3 Typology of certifications considered .....	14
4.4 Scope and limitations .....	14
<b>5. Case Studies .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Annex 1 – Collection tool: Case Studies desk research .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Key References .....</b>	<b>37</b>

## List of acronyms and abbreviations

**ACV** – Austria Center Vienna

**COE** – Spanish Olympic Committee

**COSME** – Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

**CST** – Certificate of Sustainable Tourism

**CSRD** – Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive

**DMO** – Destination Management Organization

**ECST** – European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

**EMAS** – Eco-Management and Audit Scheme

**EMFAF** – European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund

**ESG** – Environmental, Social and Governance

**ETGG2030** – Ecological Transition of the Tourism Sector in Europe Towards 2030 (project)

**ETIS** – European Tourism Indicators System

**EU** – European Union

**EUI** – European Urban Initiative

**FEE** – Foundation for Environmental Education

**GDS** – Global Destination Sustainability

**GDP** – Gross Domestic Product

**GSTC** – Global Sustainable Tourism Council

**INTERREG** – European Regional Development Fund – European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) strand

**IURC** – International Urban and Regional Cooperation

**ISO** – International Organization for Standardization

**JRC** – Joint Research Centre (of the European Commission)

**KPI** – Key Performance Indicator

**MED** – Mediterranean

**MICE** – Meetings, Incentives, Congresses and Events

**NGO** – Non-Governmental Organization

**PEFCR** – Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules

**PORTICO** – EUI Platform for knowledge sharing on sustainable urban development

**PPP** – Public-Private Partnership

**ROI** – Return on Investment

**SDG** – Sustainable Development Goal

**SETAC** – Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry

**SME** – Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

**SUD** – Sustainable Urban Development

**T4T** – Tourism for Tomorrow (*WTTC Award / thematic label*)

**TCI** – The Competitiveness Institute Network

**TTDI** – Travel & Tourism Development Index

**UN** – United Nations

**UNWTO** – United Nations World Tourism Organization

**URBACT** – EU Programme for Sustainable Urban Development

**WEF** – World Economic Forum

**WTTC** – World Travel & Tourism Council

## 1. A brief introduction

In recent years, **sustainability certifications** have emerged as a critical tool to **guide, measure, and promote** responsible practices within the tourism sector. As Europe transitions toward greener, more transparent, and resilient tourism models, the role of certifications becomes increasingly strategic—not only to enhance environmental and social accountability, but also to support SMEs in meeting evolving regulatory requirements and market expectations.

Tourism SMEs represent the backbone of the sector across Europe, making up over 90% of tourism-related businesses. Yet, their participation in certification processes remains uneven due to barriers such as limited resources, knowledge gaps, and complex compliance requirements. Destinations play a key enabling role in overcoming these obstacles by creating supportive ecosystems that encourage certification adoption through technical assistance, incentives, public-private partnerships, and digital tools.

This paper is produced within the framework of **Action 2 of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership**, which aims to strengthen the capacity of tourism destinations to support SME certification and sustainability transitions. The initiative is aligned with a broader EU policy context that includes Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (EU 2024/825), the EU Transition Pathway for Tourism, the CSRD, and forthcoming regulatory (like the EU Green Claims Directive) and institutional changes such as the relocation of tourism policy competences from DG GROW to DG MOVE.

The report presents the methodology of selecting **10 representative case studies** that showcase successful pathways and strategies adopted by tourism destinations across Europe to facilitate sustainability certification for SMEs. These cases not only highlight the potential for certifications to drive impact at the local level but also offer practical models that can be adapted and replicated in other urban destinations.

Furthermore, the paper responds to an urgent need to align tourism certification with key EU goals:

- **Meeting climate neutrality targets under the European Green Deal.**
- **Promoting transparency and integrity in environmental claims.**
- **Enhancing digital transformation and innovation in tourism governance.**
- **Strengthening public-private cooperation at the destination level.**

By collecting and analysing these best practices, the paper seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, DMOs, certification bodies, and tourism operators, helping to shape the future of sustainable tourism across the EU.

## 2. Understanding sustainability certifications in tourism

Sustainability certifications are structured mechanisms designed to **evaluate, recognize, and communicate** a tourism business or destination's commitment to environmental, social, and economic responsibility. They provide a credible way to signal compliance with specific sustainability criteria and help differentiate responsible actors in the marketplace.

In the tourism sector, certifications serve several complementary purposes:

- **Guiding businesses** in adopting more resource-efficient, inclusive, and transparent practices.
- **Enabling market recognition** and access to sustainability-oriented consumer segments.
- **Facilitating regulatory alignment**, especially in the context of evolving EU policies such as Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).
- **Supporting destination-level strategies** to transition towards greener, more resilient tourism models.

The landscape of sustainability certifications is diverse, ranging from internationally recognized schemes to sector-specific or regional initiatives, voluntary commitments, and emerging digital self-assessment tools. Within this landscape, the **EU Ecolabel** stands out as an official EU-wide certification for products and services, including tourist accommodations and campsites, recognised for its rigorous environmental criteria and alignment with the European Union's sustainable consumption and production objectives.

As included in the **Action Plan of the Urban Agenda for the EU under the Sustainable Tourism Partnership (October 2024)**, certification is recognised as a strategic mechanism to promote credible, transparent, and verifiable sustainability efforts within the tourism sector. According to the **International Organization for Standardization (ISO)**:

***“Certification is the provision by an independent body of written assurance (a certificate) that the product, service, or system in question meets specific requirements.”***

<https://www.iso.org/certification.html>

In the context of tourism, the **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)** further defines:

***“Certification for a tourism enterprise is a voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise for conformity to a standard.”***

<https://www.gstccouncil.org/gstc-criteria/glossary/>

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)** establishes and manages global standards for sustainable tourism, known as the GSTC Standards. These Standards provides criteria that serve as the baseline framework for both:

- **Industry certifications** (for hotels, tour operators, MICE, Attractions and in the future gastronomy).
- **Destination certifications** (for public authorities).

Many leading certification schemes used by SMEs and destinations in Europe are aligned with recognized Standards by GSTC, which ensures international comparability, transparency, and credibility.

In this context, certification is not only a voluntary effort toward improvement, but also a strategic enabler of policy compliance, reputational value, and systemic transformation in the tourism sector.

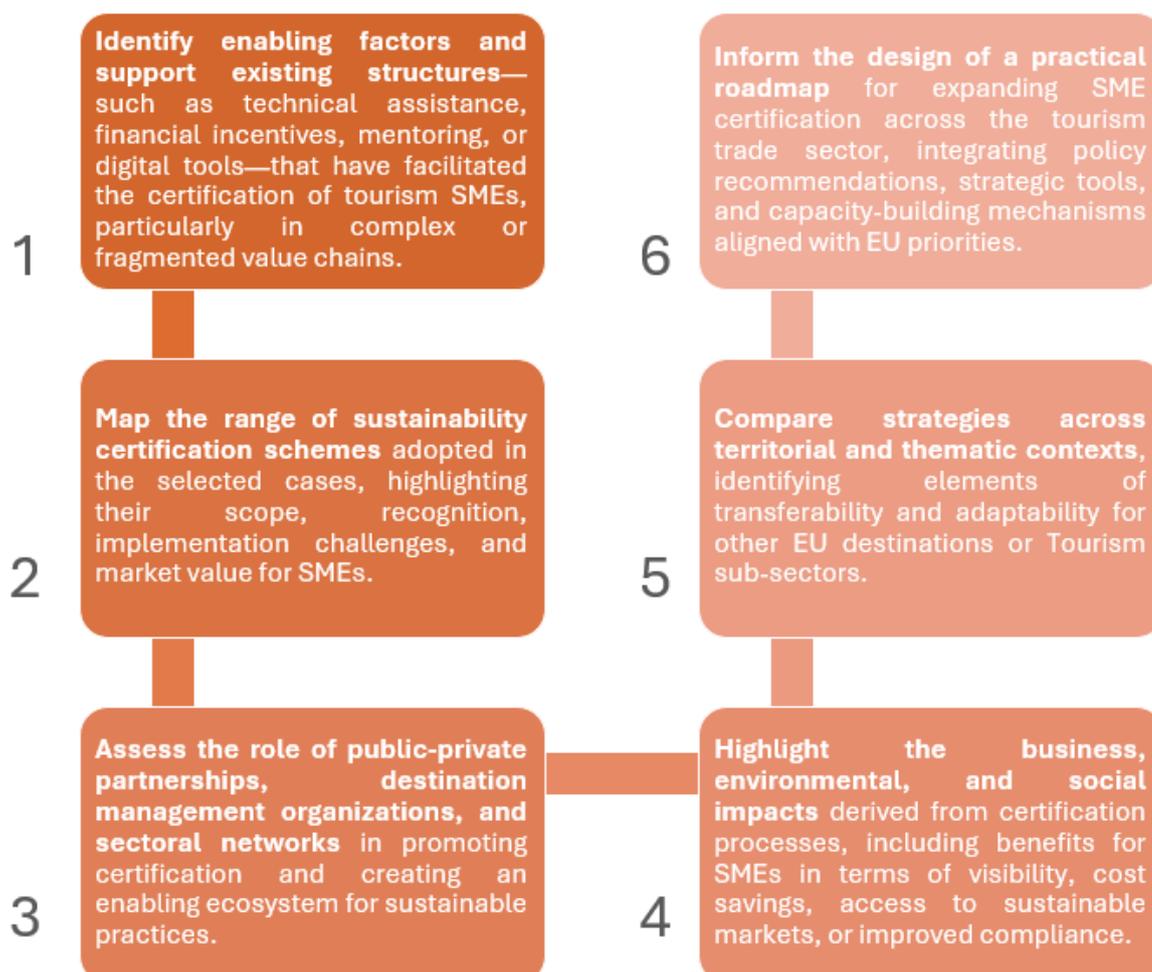
### 3. Objectives

#### 3.1 General objective

The main objective of this paper is to contribute to the design and implementation of **effective, scalable strategies that facilitate and accelerate the certification process of tourism SMEs across the European Union**, in alignment with EU sustainability policies and market demands.

To achieve this, **11 (eleven) successful cases** of SME certification in sustainable tourism across diverse EU territories have been analysed, showcasing destination-level or sector-driven mechanisms that have effectively supported the uptake of recognized sustainability standards.

#### 3.2 Specific objectives



### 3.3 Contribution to Action 2 of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership

This paper supports **Action 2** by:

- Offering concrete, **field-based evidence** to inform EU-level dialogue on SME certification pathways.
- Strengthening the **knowledge base** for destinations aiming to deploy systemic approaches to sustainability.
- Fostering the creation of **multi-level governance models** that connect local action with EU frameworks such as the European Consumer Protection Directive, CSRD, Fit for 55, and the European Urban Initiative and future Green Claims Directive.

By focusing on selected cases with proven results, the paper aims to **bridge the gap between policy ambition and operational implementation**, promoting a just, inclusive, and regenerative transition for Europe's tourism sector.

## 4. Methodological approach

This section outlines the methodological process followed to identify, screen, and select exemplary case studies that reflect effective pathways for the certification of tourism SMEs in sustainability, across various EU countries and thematic areas.

The approach was defined as part of the work developed under the Working Group on Environment within Action 2 – Plan Implementation of the Urban Agenda Partnership on Sustainable Tourism. It builds on the Partnership’s collective efforts to support tourism SMEs in their green transition and certification processes. The methodology integrates key selection principles aligned with EU sustainability priorities and draws upon previously identified sectors and case clusters. This ensures that the selected cases are not only impactful and diverse but also relevant to policy and practice in the evolving EU landscape.

### 4.1 Guiding principles and rationale

The selection of case studies has been guided by the need to ensure both **diversity** and **relevance**. The overarching aim was to build a portfolio of successful experiences that could serve as **reference models** for destinations and SME networks seeking to replicate or adapt certification processes aligned with EU policy frameworks.

The criteria reflect a commitment to:

- **Thematic balance** across the tourism value chain, including accommodation, gastronomy, retail and services, cultural and nature tourism, and circular economy practices.
- **Certification diversity**, covering a broad spectrum of labels and standards, from internationally recognized schemes to emerging digital tools and voluntary initiatives (e.g. [UN SME Climate Hub](#)).
- **Geographic and contextual representativeness**, ensuring a spread across EU Member States, with inclusion of cases from both well-established destinations and less mature tourism ecosystems (e.g., rural, insular or post-industrial areas).
- **Policy and funding alignment**, with preference for cases that have emerged within or been supported by **EU-funded programmes and initiatives** such as COSME, Interreg, Horizon Europe, and the European Urban Initiative, ensuring synergies with Action 2 of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership.

## 4.2 Case identification process

The identification of the 10 selected case studies followed a **multi-step process**:

### 1- Compilation of list of successful initiatives

Drawing on prior mapping exercises, previous outputs of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership, existing EU projects, and curated databases (e.g., [ETIS](#), [NECSTouR](#), [TCI Network](#)), a total of 50 case studies were initially shortlisted. Each case had demonstrated some level of impact or innovation in supporting SME certification.

### 2- Categorization by thematic area

These cases were grouped into nine thematic categories to ensure balanced representation:

-  Strategic and cross-cutting approach
-  Events & MICE  
(meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions)
-  Accommodation sector
-  Food & beverage sector
-  Attractions & cultural venues
-  Tour & activity operators
-  Transport providers (tourism-focused)
-  Coastal and nature-based services
-  Retail and services linked to tourism

### 3- Screening for certification type and results

For each case, the type of certification used (environmental, social, climate-related, holistic sustainability) was analysed and the **level of SME uptake and results** achieved, considering both quantitative outputs (e.g., number of certified SMEs) and qualitative outcomes (e.g., improved awareness, green procurement, reputational gains).

## 4- Selection of Case Studies

The eleven selected case studies reflect diverse approaches to enabling sustainability certification for tourism SMEs across Europe. Their selection was based on a structured evaluation of key dimensions that correspond to the six specific objectives of the paper (see Section 2), including:

- ✓ The **enabling ecosystem** and types of support provided to SMEs.
- ✓ The **recognition, scope, and applicability** of the certification schemes used.
- ✓ The **existence and strength of multi-stakeholder collaboration**, including public-private partnerships and destination-level networks.
- ✓ The **demonstrated impacts** in terms of business performance, environmental outcomes, and social value.
- ✓ The **potential for replication and transferability** across different territorial and thematic contexts.
- ✓ The **alignment with EU policy priorities**, such as the European Consumer Protection Directive, Transition Pathway for Tourism, CSRD and the Green Claims Directive - the latter currently under discussion and pending formal adoption at EU level.

## 5- Validation and complementary data collection

Where necessary, additional data was gathered from project interviews, websites, policy briefs, and relevant publications to complete each case profile with updated or contextual information.

### 4.3 Typology of certifications considered

The selected cases represent a wide array of certification approaches:

#### Public-led schemes

- E.g., EU Ecolabel, EMAS, ISO, Non-EU Members Scheme.

#### Private sector and NGO-led standards

- E.g., GSTC Standards, Green Key, Biosphere, Travelife, Earthcheck.

#### Digital platforms and voluntary commitments

- E.g., UN SME Climate Hub, other frameworks that are aligned with GSTC framework.

#### Integrated territorial strategies

- Where sustainability certification is part of a broader destination or cluster strategy.

This typological diversity aims to illustrate the **plurality of tools and approaches** available for SMEs, responding to varying capacities, sectors, and territorial realities.

### 4.4 Scope and limitations

While the paper seeks to provide a robust and representative overview, it is important to note certain barriers:

- Some cases may have limited long-term impact data available at the time of writing.
- The selection does not aim to be exhaustive but illustrative, with the potential for expansion in future iterations of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership.

## 5. Case Studies

The following section presents a structured summary of **eleven (11) selected case studies**, developed according to the methodological framework previously described. These cases were chosen to ensure **diversity across thematic areas, geographic contexts, and types of sustainability certification schemes**. Rather than showcasing the “best” or most advanced examples, they represent a balanced sample of relevant practices and successful experiences that may inspire replication and upscaling across the EU tourism ecosystem.

In addition to desk research, **interviews were conducted with key representatives and practitioners** involved in several of the selected cases, providing first-hand insights into implementation processes, success factors, and ongoing challenges. This combined approach enhances the reliability and relevance of the findings.

Overall, the analysis supports consistency and helps to identify enabling conditions and cross-cutting factors that allow tourism SMEs to engage successfully in sustainability certification processes.

The table below summarizes the alignment between the selection criteria and the full list of references reviewed, serving as the basis for identifying the most suitable examples across the different thematic sectors. This research provides a solid framework for knowledge transfer and replication across diverse European contexts.

Num	Name	Urban tourism destination	Country	Ecosystem & Support	Certification Recognition	Stakeholder Collaboration	Impacts	Transferability/ Replication	EU Policy Alignment
<b>Strategical and cross-cutting approach</b>									
1	Slovenia Green Tourism Program	Ljubljana	Slovenia	National program with tailored guidance and incentives	Green Key & Slovenia Green recognized at EU level	Gov't + boards + certifiers	85% of tourism SMEs now certified	Easily replicable national model	Aligns with EU Green Claims & national strategy
2	Barcelona Region Commitment to Sustainable Tourism	Barcelona Provincial Council	Spain	County-level support via SDG-based workshops	Local SDG-based certification	Counties + chambers + SMEs	1,043 certified entities	Method transferable to other regions	Aligned with SDGs and EU tourism goals
3	Support for acquiring Green Key	Visit Estonia	Estonia	Training + 50% audit cost subsidy	Green Key recognized across Europe	Public-private with auditors	From 10 to 90 certifications in 3 years	Substantial growth potential	Compliant with Green Claims and FEE
4	Island Sustainable Tourism Action through Resilient SMEs (I-STARS)	Multiple islands (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain)	EU (multi-country)	Grants + tailored SME pathway	Green Key & EMAS adapted to islands	EU chambers + tourism SMEs	Uptake + improved efficiency	Model suited to other islands	Aligns with EU taxonomy and CSRD
5	TourINN-act	Cross-border EU regions	EU (multi-country)	Vouchers + support for 60 SMEs	ISO, EMAS, EU Ecolabel support	Tech-tourism transnational partnerships	Smart tech and resource tracking	Replicable across EU regions	Supports Green Claims and digital shift
6	fuTOURiSME	Experiential tourism SMEs	EU	Tools + tailored training + action plans	EU Ecolabel, ISO 20121, Travelife	Trainers + funders + SMEs	Better SME performance post-COVID	Ideal for micro-SMEs in EU	Tied to CSRD and transition strategies
7	CopenPay Green Tourism Initiative	Copenhagen	Denmark	Visitor incentive scheme	Green Key-inspired reward model	City + tourism businesses	+29% bike use, more certified visits	Applicable to other cities	Climate-neutrality & EU transport goals
8	Tourism4SMEs	EU-wide	EU	€2M grants, upgrades for 50 SMEs	EU Ecolabel + EMAS rollout plan	EC + SME networks	20% more green bookings, cost savings	Scalable to 5,000 SMEs	Aligns with DNSH and Green Claims
9	MEDSUSTAIN Sustainable Destination Development	Rhodes, Dubrovnik & 13 others	Mediterranean	Funding for energy/water upgrades	SME-targeted eco-certification	Community and destination leaders	-25% energy use, +15% revenue	Strong Med-region replicability	Fits EU missions and circularity goals
10	Costa Rica – Certificate of Sustainable Tourism (CST) 2023–2024	National	Costa Rica	Long-standing SME certification model	National CST (4-level system)	Gov't + tourism operators	400+ SMEs certified, better profits	Expanding to new sectors	N/A
11	EarthCheck Certified Destinations (global)	Multiple urban destinations	Global	Destination-level SME audits	EarthCheck multi-criteria system	Managers + hospitality providers	Sustainability benchmarking at SME level	Applied in urban clusters worldwide	Aligns with EU climate/biodiversity targets
12	EURO-EMOTUR	Cross-border EU regions	EU	Digital prototyping for SMEs	Digital readiness for future labels	Universities + SMEs + tech	Improved digital services & SDG fit	Scalable digital-first model	Prepares for EU environmental standards
13	Tourism4SDG (Interreg Europe)	Coimbra + 9 EU regions	EU	Common metrics for SME sustainability	SDG-aligned indicators	Authorities + SMEs in key sectors	Framework for future certification	Harmonized measurement	Supports SDG + EU implementation
14	Croatia Green Tourism Campaign	National	Croatia	Training for 500, certification for 200	Government-backed green label	Tourism board + businesses	-8% carbon, +12% low-season visits	Fast and scalable campaign model	Meets EU tourism transition objectives
15	Lisbon Sustainable Tourism Action Plan	Lisbon	Portugal	City-funded hotel certification incentives	EU ecolabels integrated	City + hotels + auditors	-15% emissions, +10% satisfaction	Urban policy easily replicable	Green Claims + CSRD integration
16	Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program	Istanbul	Turkey	National mandate + structured SME support	GSTC – nationally mandatory by 2030	Gov't-GSTC partnership	Legal compliance + nationwide adoption roadmap	First-of-its-kind model in EU-neighbouring country	Full alignment with Green Claims & ESG directives
<b>Events &amp; MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions)</b>									
17	Golf Open Tournament in Spain (European Tour) – Sustainable Events Strategy	Madrid	Spain	Mandatory supplier sustainability clauses; KPIs tracked	High – ISO 20121 applied to full event chain	Strong PPPs with SMEs in supply chain	Waste & energy KPIs tracked yearly; circular economy model	Transferable to large-scale sports events	Aligned with ISO & EU decarbonization goals
18	Spanish Olympic Committee – Sustainability Seal for Events	Spain (National)	Spain	Low-barrier ESG framework tailored to SMEs	National – official, third-party verified seal	Collaboration with local federations & Budo Veritas	Enables entry-level compliance; inclusive reach	Highly replicable for small/medium events	Strongly aligned with Green Claims Directive
19	Zentropy MICE – Valencia Urban Authority (European Urban Initiative)	Valencia	Spain	Access to certifications + public incentives & tools	ISO, EU Ecolabel, carbon & circular frameworks	Multi-stakeholder, city-level engagement	Urban innovation, green infrastructure, SME integration	High replication potential – urban labs	Fully aligned with Green Claims & climate neutrality
20	CIFFT-UNWTO Partnership – Promoting Sustainable Festival Tourism	Global	International	Global awareness + training support for SMEs	ISO 20121 promoted internationally	High-level UN-public-private collaboration	Builds SME capacity; fosters sustainability in cultural events	Global model for scaling SME certification	Aligns with SDGs, Paris Agreement, EU principles
21	Blue Meetings® Format – Linz	Linz	Austria	Certification encourages SME venue adaptation	High – custom Blue Meeting standard	Cross-sector integration: wellness + sustainability	Health, sustainability, and social cohesion outcomes	Applicable in wellness/urban event tourism	Extends EU sustainability to social dimensions
22	IT.A.CÀ Festival of Responsible Tourism	Bologna + 14 Italian Regions	Italy	Awareness-raising and SME integration; no certification	None formalized (under development)	Deep local involvement across 14 regions	Promotes sustainability culture, inclusive tourism	Potential for SME certification pilot expansion	Supports SDG-aligned grassroots tourism

23	Green Key Festivals & Cruise Certification	Utrecht, Groningen + other European cities	Netherlands + Europe	Provides SMEs tools, audits, and training	Widely recognized Green Key standard	Destination-wide stakeholder buy-in	Measurable impacts on waste and SME practices	Strong scalability across EU destinations	Compliant with Green Claims & circular principles
<b>Accommodation sector</b>									
24	Green Key Awards in Spain	Multiple Cities	Spain	Financial & technical SME support	Green Key – nationally scaled	Collaboration with regional tourism boards	€1.5M saved; 70% eco-tourist growth	Goal: 25% SME cert. by 2030	Aligns with climate, circular economy, and competitiveness goals
25	ETGG2030 – European Tourism Going Green Project	Austria, Germany, Croatia	EU Multi-Country	EU-funded capacity building, coaching	EU Ecolabel – EU-wide applicability	Cross-border consortium support	15 SMEs certified + promoted online	Replicable EU support model	Full fit with EU Green Deal & eco-labelling schemes
26	Paradores de Turismo de España	Multiple Cities	Spain	PPP with SME procurement clauses	ISO 14001, EMAS, Biosphere	Suppliers aligned with certification requirements	Circular procurement + energy transition	Replicable for heritage hotels in EU	Strong compliance with EU taxonomy and circular economy
27	Zero Plastic Programme for Tourist Accommodations	San Sebastián	Spain	Municipal audit & SME outreach	Local label aligned with EU circular policy	Local gov't & hotel engagement	Elimination of single-use plastics	Transferable to any urban destination	Matches EU directives on plastics and local transition
28	Ecosello Buenos Aires	Buenos Aires	Argentina	City-tiered system supports SME onboarding	Progressive seal aligned with GSTC/ISO standards	Public-private SME coaching	Reporting, incentives, awareness tiers	Flexible entry-to-advanced pathway	Excellent alignment model for SME evolution in cities
<b>Food &amp; beverage sector</b>									
29	Green Michelin “Green Star”	Multiple Cities (e.g. Bilbao, Paris, Copenhagen)	EU-wide	SME kitchens supported through best practice guides	Michelin label + ISO/Green Key options	Michelin + restaurant networks	Up to 50% energy savings, low food waste	Replicable in cities & hospitality	Supports climate and circular goals
30	Peskesi restaurant and farm	Heraklion, Crete	Greece	Restaurant, regenerative farm, cultural heritage, training centre	DIO & Dimitra Organic Certification; EU Organic Award 2025; German verification of carbon absorption	Local farmers, restaurant team, educational institutions, EU award bodies	98% local partnerships; circular zero-waste farming; reduced water use; cultural revival of Cretan diet; award-winning EU-wide recognition	Model transferable to other Mediterranean regions seeking farm-to-fork and regenerative gastronomy strategies	Strongly aligned with EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy, Green Deal, and Organic Action Plan
31	EU ECO-TANDEM – City Pension Košice	Košice	Slovakia	SME mentoring & eco-audit	Internal/pre-certification steps	SME + EU COSME + Cyrkl startup	Elimination of plastics, circular switch	Strong for micro-enterprises	EU Green Transition tools pilot
<b>Attractions and cultural venues</b>									
32	Green Museum certificate	Estonia	Estonia	Training & tools for cultural SMEs	National label for museums	SEI Tallinn + ICOM + museum sector	20+ museums certified	Scalable in heritage contexts	Aligns with cultural and green transition
33	Austria Center Vienna – Green Conference & Cultural Venue	Vienna	Austria	SMEs in supply chain supported	Austrian Ecolabel + venue-level	Venue + suppliers + event orgs	Circular catering, green meetings	High for event/culture venues	EU Taxonomy and Green Claims aligned
34	Congress Centrum Alpbach – Green Meeting & Cultural Hub	Alpbach	Austria	Public-private SME engagement	Multiple (UZ 62, klimaaktiv, Globe)	Local gov + SMEs + certifiers	Low-emission events, reuse systems	Alpine-wide replication model	Fit for mountain/climate tourism plans
<b>Tour &amp; activity operators</b>									
35	ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR	West Mediterranean (Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Tunis, Morocco)	Italy / WestMed	SMEs trained on low-impact practices	Aligned with EU maritime policies	EU + cruise SMEs + NGOs	Training underway, pilot itineraries	In progress; strong cross-border logic	EMFAF & sustainable coastal mobility
36	Green & Fair Experiences – TUI Group	Multiple EU destinations	Multi-country (DE, ES, PT, GR)	Corporate-led initiative integrating sustainability in excursions and partner SMEs	“Sustainably Certified” suppliers which are aligned with GSTC framework	TUI Group + local SMEs + certification partners (Travelife, Green Key)	70% of excursions certified as sustainable; improved local SME inclusion	Model replicable by major operators to boost SME certification	Supports EU Green Deal & SME Strategy for Sustainable and Digital Europe
37	Colombian Journeys – Sello de Paz (Peace Seal)	Multiple regions (e.g. Antioquia, Córdoba)	Colombia	Supports local micro-SMEs	Peace Seal – national benchmark	Tour operator + post-conflict orgs	Inclusive itineraries, local jobs	Strong social model for post-crisis areas	Links social equity + eco-tourism
38	SUSTOUR – COSME Programme for Tour Operators	Multiple (Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Finland, Croatia)	EU (COSME Countries)	600+ SMEs supported	Travelife, EMAS, ISO	EU COSME + tour agents + certifiers	Benchmarking, e-learning results	Proven EU-wide tour operator reach	Supports Green Claims Directive
<b>Transport providers (tourism-focused)</b>									
39	MOVELETUR (Interreg Spain-Portugal)	NW Spain & North Portugal (e.g., Bragança, Sanabria, Montesinho)	Spain & Portugal	Local SMEs linked to e-mobility	ISO 14001/50001 indirectly	Interreg + mobility + tourism SMEs	18 routes, solar EV infra built	Replicable in rural natural areas	EU Green Mobility and Interreg goals
40	Fahrrad2Go program	Stuttgart Region	Germany	Regional transport authority (VRS), bus operators,	No formal tourism certification; aligned with	VRS, VVS, transport operators, regional	Expanded modal connectivity; improved leisure/tourism access;	Replicable in other peri-urban/tourism-heavy regions with bus networks;	Supports EU Urban Mobility Framework, Green Deal, Fit for

				Hochschule Esslingen students	Baden-Württemberg mobility standards	government, community engagement	cost-effective bike transport retrofitting; harmonised fares	adaptable for seasonal or permanent services	55, and sustainable tourism mobility goals
41	Alpine Pearls	Alpine network (e.g., Werfenweng, Cogne, Bohinj, Bad Reichenhall)	Austria, Italy, France, Germany, Slovenia, Switzerland	SMEs benefit from soft mobility standards	Green Key, ISO, Ecolabel	Alpine cities + SMEs + operators	Eco-mobility access to resorts	Mature replicable cross-border model	Fits EU Alps and mobility missions
<b>Coastal and nature-based services</b>									
42	European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in Protected Areas	Estonia	Estonia	SMEs onboarded via park authorities	EUROPARC ECST Part 2	Parks + SMEs + national agencies	3-year action plans in Estonia	EU-wide transfer model active	Strong NATURA & Biodiversity alignment
43	Costa Rica – Reforest the Tropics Program	Costa Rica (various eco-lodges and hotels)	Costa Rica	SMEs offset via carbon credits	Supports ISO 14064	Hotels + farmers + NGOs	50,000 tons CO <sub>2</sub> offset	International transfer to eco-lodges	Aligned with net-zero & offset frameworks
44	NaTour4CChange (Interreg Euro-MED)	Mediterranean coastal destinations (e.g., Portugal, Spain, Italy, France)	Multiple Mediterranean regions	SMEs co-develop NBS plans	Prep model aligned to GSTC framework	SMEs + DMOs + MED partners	Tools for eco-cert prep deployed	Ideal for MED coastal areas	Supports Blue Economy, climate adaptation
45	Blue Flag Beach Certifications	Marina Alta, Málaga, Lagos, Malta, Gozo, Greece, Ireland, Romania, Poland	EU and Associated Countries	SMEs align with beach/marina standards	Internationally recognized (Blue Flag)	Local gov + SMEs + FEE	600+ sites in 2024	Highly transferable in coastal tourism	Coastal health, water quality, SDGs
46	Eifel National Park Visitor Centres	Eifel National Park (North Rhine-Westphalia)	Germany	SMEs trained, operations guided	Green Key, EU Ecolabel-ready	Regional gov + SMEs + educators	Eco-certified shops, cafés, tours	Strong national park model	Biodiversity & education missions support
<b>Retail and services linked to tourism</b>									
47	Saaremaa EHTNE	Visit Saaremaa	Estonia	Local SMEs promoted through label	Local artisan label (non-accredited)	Entrepreneurs + DMO	Widely adopted in Saaremaa	Strong identity-linked model	Supports sustainable consumption
48	Hiiumaa Roheline märgis	Visit Hiiumaa	Estonia	SME access with eco-criteria	Regional green label	Visit Hiiumaa + Ecolands legacy	146 SMEs/products involved	Ideal for island contexts	Supports island resilience, eco-trade
49	Greener Põlvamaa	South Estonia Tourism Cluster	Estonia	SMEs network via regional badge	Beaver badge – local origin focus	SA Põlvamaa + SMEs	Greener ops, low-impact goods	Transferable as value-based scheme	Eco-identity + rural development
50	ACCIONA Program for SME Decarbonization – UN Certification Pathway	National scope (Spain)	Spain	SMEs onboarded via procurement	UN SME Climate Hub	ACCIONA + 50+ subcontractors	Climate targets + digital tools	Model for corporate SME engagement	Supports net-zero procurement policies

Source: Own elaboration, Sustainable Tourism Partnership – Action 2.

The following selected **Case Studies** have been analysed through a shared framework to facilitate comparison, highlight key insights, and support peer learning across destinations.

# 1

Strategical and cross-cutting approach

## Tourism Sustainability Commitment Programme | Barcelona-Spain

### Summary

Led by the **Barcelona Provincial Council**, together with the City of Barcelona and the collaboration of the Chamber of Commerce, it supports SMEs and public entities to embed sustainability as a public value.

The programme combines training, peer-to-peer sessions, and technical guidance.

- **Integrated governance model** across local–regional–provincial levels.
- **Certification / Verification:** Commitment to Sustainability diploma + Biosphere certification.



### Challenges and solutions

**Time investment:** SMEs struggled to allocate time for audits and evidence.

**Complexity of requirements:** Difficulties in understanding procedures and measuring carbon footprint.

**Financial constraints:** Certification processes perceived as costly and resource intensive.

**Personalised consultant support** (2 sessions + counties-level assistance).

**Tailored training** and step-by-step guidance.

The programme provided **provincial budget** (~€200,000/year) mainly dedicated to capacity building, personalised advisory services, and collective training sessions, enabling SMEs to **progress toward certification**.

### Results and impact

**+1,140 SMEs**

certified since 2017

**10% dropout**

High retention after initial engagement

### Lessons learned and transferability

- **Digital platform** with evidence checks ensures consistency.
- **Strong governance model** (municipality–counties–province) sustains engagement.
- **Public coverage of certification costs** was critical to success.

**Relevant links:** [Tourism Sustainability Commitment Barcelona](#)

## Green Tourism Campaign Croatia

### Summary

The Croatian Ministry of Tourism and Sports is leading an ambitious tourism reform to ensure sustainable development until 2030. The reform introduces **regulations** on acceptable capacity, destination management plans, and a tourism sustainability index, balancing tourism growth with the well-being of residents and ecosystems. Complementing these efforts, the **National Tourism Board** has rolled out programmes to **empower and train small and medium-sized enterprises** and **foster public-private collaboration**, accelerating the adoption of sustainable practices.



### Challenges and solutions

<b>Seasonality</b> and over-concentration of tourism. Run <b>GSTC Assessment</b> (2019) and <b>GSTC Re-Assessment</b> (2024).	<b>Development of special tourism product</b> ; Investing in <b>infrastructure and diversification</b> ; Repositioning <b>marketing</b> .
<b>Fragmented governance</b> and lack of coordinated management.	Transformation of tourist boards into <b>DMOs</b> ; Enacting of a <b>new Tourism law</b> ; Implementation of <b>capacity limits</b> .
<b>Limited resources and knowledge among SMEs</b> .	<b>Financial incentives</b> ; Training and <b>certification support</b> ; Promotion of <b>PPPs</b> .

### Results and impact

#### SME-led hotels

13 % → 17 % by 2027

#### Four & five-star hotels

51 % → 65 %

#### TTDI (WEF):

Human resources 73 → ≤60

Business environment 108 → ≤80

ICT readiness 5.3 → 5.7

### Lessons learned and transferability

- **Use of a satellite account** to track environmental, social, and economic impacts.
- **National legal framework** to limit new permits when exceeded municipal capacity.
- **Transformation of tourist boards into DMOs** with clear mandates.
- **Dedicated incentives and training programmes**.
- **Systematic use of indicators** and capacity assessments for data-driven decision-making.

**Relevant links:** [Tourism reform in Croatia](#) ; [Blue Europe analysis](#) ; [Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2030](#) ; [National Plan for the Development of Sustainable Tourism and Action Plan \(2025-2027\)](#)

# Sustainable Tourism Program

## Türkiye

### Summary

Launched in 2022 by the **Ministry of Culture and Tourism** in collaboration with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (**GSTC**), Türkiye has implemented a **nationwide Sustainable Tourism Program**, becoming the first country in the world to apply GSTC-certification at a governmental level. The program adopts a **three-stage framework** enabling accommodation facilities to progressively align with international sustainability standards. The program's key strengths include **independent third-party auditing**, a **digital CRM system**, and a **Carbon Footprint Monitoring System**. By 2030, all accommodation facilities are targeted to meet international standards.



### Challenges and solutions

**Inclusive national framework:** Adapting international standards to **81 provinces** and **all accommodation types**.

Enhancing the **knowledge capacity of accommodation facilities**.

**Legal alignment** by connecting each stage compliance of the National Scheme with Licensing Process.

**A three-stage certification system** (comprising 14, 29, and 42 criteria respectively), ensuring **gradual and comprehensive compliance**.

**A Carbon Footprint Monitoring System**, guidance tools, and CRM platform with call-centre support.

**Ministerial circulars** made the program legally binding, ensuring strong public-private coordination.

### Results and impact

**+2,000 Accommodation**  
facilities GSTC-certified

**+19,000 verifications**  
& certifications (covering 1.7 M beds)

Visibility and promotion: **GoTürkiye**

### Lessons learned and transferability

- Digital CRM system enables **national-scale tracking and transparency**.
- **Government leadership and legal mandates** accelerate adoption.
- **Supporting documents and manuals** remove barriers for SMEs and ensure rapid adoption.
- The criteria (TR-I) recognized by GSTC ensure **credibility and visibility** for all types of accommodation facilities across all 81 provinces of Türkiye.

Events & MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions)

## Spanish Open Golf Tournament Madrid |Spain

### Summary

This DP World Tour event has positioned itself as one of the world's most sustainable golf tournaments. Over the past three years, it has pursued a **regenerative event design strategy under ISO 20121 Sustainable Event Management**, aligned with the Madrid 360° city environmental strategy. A strong public-private partnership was established, involving Madrid Trophy Promotion as event organiser, Madrid City Council, Venue manager Club de Campo Villa de Madrid, Spanish Golf Federation, and ACCIONA as sustainable sponsor. This alliance ensured that sustainability was embedded in planning, operations, and legacy.



### Challenges and solutions

**Major impact from mobility** (visitors, staff, logistics).

**Alliance** with major stakeholders, **mobility awareness campaigns**, improved charging infrastructure.

**Resource use** (water, energy, materials).

Positive water footprint via desalination offsets; renewable energy integration; **sustainable procurement**.

**Measuring and tracking** sustainability performance.

**Life Cycle Assessment methodology** with defined baselines, annual KPIs covering Scopes 1, 2, and 3, water footprint, and waste.

### Results and impact

**25.6%**

reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> per attendee

**€19.4M +647 jobs**

generated for the city of Madrid

### Lessons learned and transferability

- **LCA methodology and digital KPIs** tracking as a replicable tool for other major events.
- **Integration with Madrid 360° strategy**, linking the strategy with city-wide climate goals.
- **PP model ensured ambitious sustainability measures** were financed and implemented.

**Relevant links:** [ACCIONA Open – Sustainability](#)

## ETGG2030 European Tourism Going Green Austria, Germany, Croatia, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria

### Summary

ETGG2030 is an **EU-COSME funded initiative** across six EU countries to help tourism SMEs “go green” via training, digital tools, and **support for third-party certification**. The project’s Pilot SME Programme (2022-2023) selected 70 tourism SMEs to receive capacity building, mentoring, audits, and certification assistance (primarily **EU Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation**). Key focus areas include energy & water efficiency, sustainable procurement, eco-communication, and improving market access through visibility tools.



### Challenges and solutions

**Knowledge barrier & capacity gaps** among SMEs.

**Tailored mentoring, self-assessment tools** (“R U Ready for Certification”), online training and peer-to-peer workshops.

**Financial and logistical cost of certification (auditing, possible investment in upgrades).**

**Cost of training and tools covered;** free access to the Going Green system; financial support to third-party verification.

**SMEs may get certified but** not be known or chosen by customers for it.

**Promotion via Green Travel Maps** (Tourism2030.eu), networking, best practices.

### Results and impact

**70 SMEs certified**

**15 EU Ecolabel**

hotels and campsites

**Better sustainable procurement** among participating SMEs

**Qualitative gains in guest and staff satisfaction**

### Lessons learned and transferability

- The Going Green System enables **scalable support across countries**.
- Using **EU-recognised certification** (EU Ecolabel) **gives credibility**.
- **Visibility tools** help SMEs better market themselves and possibly recoup investments.

**Relevant links:** [ETGG2030 Official Site](#) ; [ETGG2030 Programme — SME Call & Certified SMEs](#); [Tourism2030 News: 15 SMEs with EU Ecolabel](#)

## Peskesi Restaurant and Farm Heraklion |Greece

### Summary

Peskesi is a **farm-to-fork restaurant and regenerative farm** in Heraklion, Crete, focused on reviving Cretan **culinary heritage** while applying **sustainable agricultural practices (DIO Greek Organic Certification)**. The restaurant implements zero-waste management and educational programs, training staff and visitors in sustainable practices. Peskesi integrates nutritional guidance, traditional cooking methods, and fair-trade principles, offering a holistic circular economy approach, community engagement, and the preservation of local culture.



### Challenges and solutions

**Organic and biodynamic farming complexity**  
– Dependence on lunar cycles, limited access to biodynamic fertilizers.

**On-site composting** from restaurant waste enriches soil, reduces water use, and produces fertilizers.

**Maintaining cultural and nutritional integrity**  
– Combining authentic Cretan culinary heritage, and health-focused diets.

**Nutritional planning** guided by certified dietician; vegetarian and local recipes reduce health risks. On going **certification for the new GSTC Food & Beverage Standard**.

**Visibility and trust for sustainable practices**  
– Communicating complex farm-to-fork systems to visitors and stakeholders.

**Educational programs**, farm tours, and trainings; **engaging local community and schools** to raise awareness.

### Results and impact

**98% local ingredients**

most of them produced on-site

**EU Organic award'25**

Best EU Organic Restaurant/  
Food Service

### Lessons learned and transferability

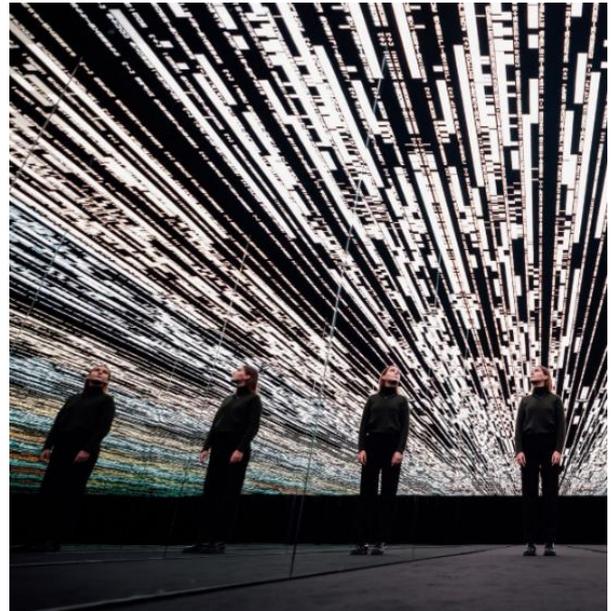
- Implementing zero-waste management ensures that all resources are reused, creating a **sustainable cycle for future generations**.
- **Awards and certifications enhance visibility** and enable educational initiatives.
- Combining farm-to-fork philosophy, regenerative agriculture, and educational programs promotes **community engagement**.

**Relevant links:** [Peskesi Official Website](#)

## Estonian National Museum Tartu | Estonia

### Summary

The Tartu Museum and Exhibition Centre (10,000 sqm) integrate exhibitions, collections, conferences, and events with a strong circular economy approach. Since its opening in 2016, sustainability has been central—from soil remediation of its former military airfield site to innovative passive storages for collections. Staff-driven motivation led to adoption of the **Green Museum label**, now complemented by the Green Key certification process. The museum also acts as a platform for knowledge-sharing, engaging schools, universities, SMEs, and local providers.



### Challenges and solutions

**Lack of incentives and funding** to implement actions.

**Cultural Ministry support, integration of sustainability clauses in funding calls.**

**Maintaining motivation:** difficult to sustain engagement and new ideas over time.

**Museum awards, recognition programmes, and biannual stakeholder meetings.**

**Energy-related impacts:** electricity-based carbon footprint not reduced due to events.

**Plans for self-consumption solutions** to lower dependency.

### Results and impact

**+50 SMEs**

engaged in sustainable joint strategy

Increased visibility through exhibitions showcasing sustainable efforts and actions

### Lessons learned and transferability

- **Practical solutions** in waste reduction, green catering, and exhibition management.
- **Key institutional support** by the Ministry of Culture requiring green labels in financing calls.
- Access to funding remains a bottleneck, but **recognition schemes** push enhance uptake.
- The Green Museum label is easy to adopt and highly **replicable for small cultural and tourism institutions across Europe.**

**Relevant links:** [Estonian Green Museum Label](#)

## Green & Fair Experiences – TUI Group

### Multiple EU destinations

#### Summary

The *Green & Fair Experiences* programme, developed by **TUI Group** as part of their global sustainability agenda, integrates sustainability verification across the value chain of destination experiences — from local transport to cultural and nature excursions. In the absence of a certification for “destination experiences,” TUI created a **bespoke verification system** based on **GSTC criteria**, adapting them to local SMEs. Through a user-friendly online platform, suppliers are assessed, guided through improvement plans, and integrated into TUI’s “green & fair” portfolio.



#### Challenges and solutions

**Lack of a specific certification framework** for destination experiences.

TUI collaborated with GSTC to adapt its criteria to tourism services, creating its **own verification model to fill the regulatory gap**.

**Complex and fragmented value chain** with limited SME capacity.

A **multisite audit process** and **online self-assessment tool** enabled scalable verification, allowing SMEs to participate with minimal cost and training barriers.

**Low awareness and technical language** barriers.

The criteria were translated into **9 languages + online best practice guidelines**, workshops, and continuous feedback loops.

#### Results and impact

**1,824 local suppliers**  
evaluated and verified  
**+ 1.6M** customers/year

**TUI portfolio:** verified SMEs  
report higher quality ratings  
Alignment with GSTC principles

#### Lessons learned and transferability

- Adapting **global sustainability standards to local realities** ensures higher participation.
- An **accessible platform and flexible verification process** are key for scalability.
- **Continuous feedback and co-creation** enhance ownership, and long-term engagement.
- **Large operators can act as sustainability enablers for SMEs** through practical and inclusive verification mechanisms.

**Relevant links:** [TUI Green & Fair Experiences](#) | [GSTC Criteria](#) | [TUI Sustainability Strategy](#)

## "Fahrrad2Go" program Stuttgart Region | Germany

### Summary

The Stuttgart Region in Germany promotes eco-friendly mobility, through coordinated regional planning and sustainable transport solutions led by Verband Region Stuttgart (VRS). In partnership with the state, districts, and cities, VRS integrates commuter rail and bus networks, enabling seamless connections and bicycle transportation across the region. A key initiative, the "Fahrrad2Go" program, equips buses with bike racks and interior adaptations to carry up to 10 bicycles, improving intermodality and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The project, supported by VRS, involves collaboration with the Rems-Murr district, Omnibus-Verkehr Ruoff (OVR), Verkehrs- und Tarifverbund Stuttgart (VVS), and Hochschule für Technik Esslingen (FHTE).



### Challenges and solutions

**Limited capacity** on buses for transporting bicycles.

**Increasing capacity** to accommodate bikes, modifying buses to include interior bike racks and external bike holders.

**Ensuring the safety and security** of bicycles during transport.

Implementation of **secure bike racks and monitoring systems** to prevent theft and ensure safe transportation.

### Results and impact

**2019 Winner of German Bike Award**  
**2025 Winner of the Public Transport Innovation Award**

△ bicycle usage ▽ CO<sub>2</sub> emissions  
Enhanced public awareness

### Lessons learned and transferability

- **Supportive regional policies and targeted investment** were key for implementation.
- **Integration of bike transport into public transport tariffs** increases accessibility.
- **Monitoring systems** to track usage and reduced car trips could further strengthen future programmes.

**Relevant links:** [Verband Region Stuttgart: Bike & Ride](#) ; [Fahrrad2Go – Innovatives Klimaschutzprojekt startet im Rems-Murr Kreis](#) ; [Stuttgart Transport and Tariff Association \(VVS\)](#) ; [F2Go\\_INet2\\_1\\_.pdf](#)

## European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas | Estonia

### Summary

In Estonia, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST) is awarded by the **EUROPARC Federation** to protected areas and their associated tourism businesses. It aims to ensure **quality tourism that respects nature and culture, involving stakeholders** through a joint sustainable strategy over a 5-year period. Matsalu, Lahemaa, and Soomaa National Parks have achieved the Part I certificate. The initiative is characterized by a strong cooperation platform, the leadership role of local organizations (LEADER Action Groups, DMOs), is key to drive marketing, networking, and certification processes.



### Challenges and solutions

<b>Low initial awareness</b> among tourism business of ECST / other certifications.	<b>Cooperation platform</b> and targeted <b>capacity building</b> (study trips, trainings).
<b>Time and money constraints:</b> side activity for many SMEs + high taxation and seasonality.	Development of <b>low-season events</b> (e.g. festivals). Peer mentoring and <b>networking</b> .
<b>Ensuring ongoing participation</b> and maintenance of standards over time.	<b>Renewals &amp; continuous monitoring;</b> periodic awarding of Part II to businesses.
<b>Lack of national conservation funding.</b>	Use of EU funds: LEADER, INTERREG.

### Results and impact

**28 businesses** (ECST Part II)

Green Destination cert. Lahemaa National Park (highest level)

SMEs resilience- none closed + **Green key and new Hiker-Friendly label**  
**EUROPARC** re-awarding in process (Matsalu 3rd, Lahemaa ja Soomaa 2nd time)

### Lessons learned and transferability

- **Strong leaders and a “family-like” collaborative approach** are critical to mobilize stakeholders, secure funding, and maintain engagement over time.
- **Structured, systematic activities** -peer learning, annual showcases, and renewal cycles- keep momentum alive, ensure accountability, and inspire innovation across SMEs.
- **Clear guidance on “dos and don’ts”** use of certification schemes and visible awards increase SME visibility, competitiveness, and adoption of sustainable practices.

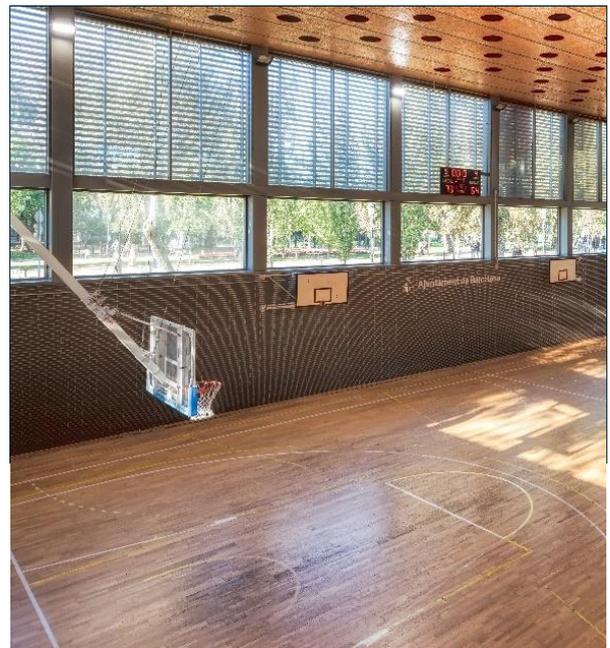
**Relevant links:** [Estonia Sustainable Tourism – Kaitsealad \(Protected Areas\)](#) ; [“Nine Estonian tourism businesses received recognition for sustainable nature tourism”](#); [EUROPARC – ECST in Protected Areas](#)

Retail and services linked to tourism

## DEPOROCIO – Decarbonisation Strategy within ACCIONA’s Value Chain | Spain

### Summary

DEPOROCIO, a company with over 30 years of experience in managing sports, cultural, and leisure facilities, has joined ACCIONA’s **Supplier Decarbonisation Programme**, extending its climate commitments to its supply chain (Scope 3 emissions, representing 51%). The pilot focuses on the CEM Parc de la Ciutadella in Barcelona (4,000 m<sup>2</sup> facility with pools, gym, basketball court, and technical areas). The process included the **Carbon footprint measurement** (Scopes 1 and 2 - GHG Protocol) and registering in the **SME Climate Hub**. The plan adopts the **SBTi initiative**, aligning with 1.5°C pathways, aiming for climate neutrality.



### Challenges and solutions

**Limited internal expertise** on carbon accounting.

**Experts guided** in mapping activities, processes, and emission sources.

**High dependency on energy-intensive installations** (pool, HVAC).

Defined a mix of **energy efficiency measures** and electrification strategies (SGE, heat pump alternatives, refrigerant substitution).

**Cost of upfront investments.**

Combination of quick-win measures with medium/long-term capital investments, complemented by **financial/funding sources**.

### Results and impact

Baseline inventory

Carbon reduction roadmap -

**SME Climate Hub** recognised

**4.2% linear reduction**

### Lessons learned and transferability

- Digital monitoring systems are key for identifying inefficiencies and prioritising actions.
- Alignment with international frameworks ensures consistency
- Action plans allow to combine low-cost behavioural changes with staged investments, making the transition feasible.

**Relevant links:** [ACCIONA – Supplier Decarbonisation Programme](#); [SME Climate Hub – A UN-backed initiative for SMEs](#)

## Annex 1 – Collection tool: Case Studies desk research

N.	Name	Urban tourism destination	Country	Contact person	Thematic area	Certification Framework	Overview/summary	Observations	Source/links	Contributor
<b>Strategical and cross-cutting approach</b>										
1	Slovenia Green Tourism Program	Ljubljana	Slovenia	Ana Novak	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	National Certification Scheme, based on global standards	The Slovenia Green Tourism Program is a national initiative supporting tourism SMEs in obtaining Green Key and other sustainability certifications. It provides tailored guidance, certification roadmaps, and financial incentives to help SMEs meet sustainability standards. The program aligns with Slovenia's national sustainable tourism strategy and EU Green Claims regulations.	Strong government support has led to 85% of tourism SMEs in Slovenia obtaining sustainability certifications.	<a href="https://www.slovenia.info/en/stories/slovenia-green-tourism">https://www.slovenia.info/en/stories/slovenia-green-tourism</a>	Ljubljana Tourism Board
2	Barcelona Region Commitment to Sustainable Tourism	Barcelona Provincial Council	Spain	Josep Rodríguez	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration	Local / Regional Certification Scheme	The Barcelona Region Commitment to Sustainable Tourism is a certification programme addressed to companies, services, and public bodies of the province of Barcelona that wish to improve their sustainable tourism management and their positioning within the tourism sector. The programme recognises companies, services and organisations that are committed to respectful management of the environment, culture as well as the social and financial return of tourism activities in the counties of Barcelona. It does so by basing its methodology on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. The programme is promoted since 2017 by the Barcelona Provincial Council, the Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce and is implemented in the territory through the counties' tourism management bodies. Currently, the programme incorporates 1.043 entities certified. The programme has developed its own methodology to involve companies and services within the global sustainability based on capacity building, collective workshops and awareness raising actions.		<a href="https://turismesostenible.barcelona/en/comarques-de-barcelona/12/improve-the-position-of-your-entity-bring-it-to-the-forefront-of-sustainabletourism">https://turismesostenible.barcelona/en/comarques-de-barcelona/12/improve-the-position-of-your-entity-bring-it-to-the-forefront-of-sustainabletourism</a>	Barcelona province
3	Support for acquiring Green Key	Visit Estonia	Estonia	Liis Läte	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Green Key - FEE	Visit Estonia is the National Operator of the Green Key programme in Estonia. We offer tourism companies support in applying for the Green Key eco-label by providing free training seminars and workshops, written guideline materials to encourage potential new companies to join the Green Key programme and we assist them in the application process. They also support companies financially (governmental support) by covering 50% of the audit costs, which is necessary to pass to obtain the label.	Strong support scheme has led to a remarkable increase in the number of Green Key eco-label owners, rising from 10 Green Key owners to 90 Green Key eco-label owners in the last 3 years.	<a href="#">Green Key   Puhka Eestis</a>	VisitEstonia
4	Island Sustainable Tourism Action through Resilient SMEs (I-STARS)	Multiple islands (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain)	EU (multi-country)	CCCI Cyprus	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Public-Private Partnerships	EU-recognized ecolabels, tailored certificates	The I-STARS project supports tourism SMEs in island destinations on their path toward sustainability and resilience. It combines in-depth capacity-building with a financial grant scheme, awarding up to €5,600 per SME. Beneficiaries are guided through a two-step pathway: first, tailored training in sustainable tourism principles and business management; second, expert-supported implementation of sustainability measures and certification processes. Many participating businesses pursue ecolabels like the Green Key or EMAS, integrating responsible water, waste, and energy practices into their operations.	Enables SME access to expert guidance and certification; scalable seed model.	<a href="https://ccci.org.cy/istars-project/">https://ccci.org.cy/istars-project/</a>	
5	TourINN-act	Cross-border EU regions	EU (multi-country)	TourINN-act project team	Technology & Digital Tools; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Support towards EU Ecolabel, GSTC Standards, Green Key	TourINN-act aims to enhance sustainability and innovation in tourism SMEs through transnational cooperation. It offers direct financial support (vouchers) and training to at least 60 SMEs to implement smart technologies and resource-efficient solutions. The project includes the adoption of eco-innovation practices and structured guidance on achieving sustainability certifications such as ISO 14001, GSTC Standards, EU Ecolabel, and EMAS. TourINN-act integrates digital auditing tools and performance tracking to assist SMEs in managing data related to carbon emissions, energy consumption, and social responsibility.	Blends digitalization & sustainability to enhance SME certification readiness.	<a href="https://tourinnact.eu/">https://tourinnact.eu/</a>	
6	fuTOURiSME	Experiential tourism SMEs	EU	fuTOURiSME project team	Technology & Digital Tools; SME Certification Integration	Sustainability self-assessment & certification (ISO, EU labels, GSTC Standards)	fuTOURiSME is a European project that fosters the twin transition (green and digital) for experiential tourism SMEs. Through a dedicated sustainability self-assessment tool, SMEs analyse their environmental and social performance, identifying pathways for improvement. The project delivers customized training modules on international certification systems such as the EU Ecolabel, GSTC Standards, ISO 20121, and Travelife. Support is provided to create action plans, calculate baselines (e.g., carbon, water), and connect businesses to funding and advisory networks. The goal is to make sustainability certifications more accessible, especially for microenterprises affected by COVID-19 impacts.	Digital and sustainable twin transition, supporting financially constrained SMEs.	<a href="https://www.futourisme.eu/">https://www.futourisme.eu/</a>	

7	<b>CopenPay Green Tourism Initiative</b>	<b>Copenhagen</b>	Denmark	Wonderful Copenhagen	Destination SME Certification Integration; Tech & Digital Tools	Rewards-based sustainable behaviour (proto Green Key)	Tourist rewards (free bike rental, museum entry) tied to train travel and longer stays. Pilot led to +29% bike use, elevated engagement with certified attractions.	Experiences show public incentive models can nurture certification uptake.	<a href="https://globetrender.com/2025/06/09/copenhagen-amps-up-green-tourism-initiative/">https://globetrender.com/2025/06/09/copenhagen-amps-up-green-tourism-initiative/</a>	
8	<b>Tourism4SMEs</b>	<b>EU-wide</b>	EU	EU DG-Environment	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications; Regulatory Compliance in Green Claims	EU Ecolabel, EMAS guidance, vouchers	2023 pilot granted €2M to 50 SMEs for green upgrades (solar, low-flow tech), yielding 15% cost savings and 20% increase in sustainable bookings. Plans a €100M rollout to 5,000 SMEs by 2026 with training for 10,000 managers.	Demonstrates significant SME uplift from targeted funding; blueprint for certification rollout.		
9	<b>MEDSUSTAIN Sustainable Destination Development</b>	<b>Rhodes, Dubrovnik &amp; 13 others</b>	Mediterranean	Interreg Euro-Med	Destination SME Certification Integration; Facilitating SME Certifications	Eco-certification for SMEs	Certified 150 SMEs in energy/water upgrades (-25%) and delivered 15% increase in local tourism expenditure. Governance included community-led events and visitation caps to relieve overtourism.	Championship model of certification tied to destination strategy.		
10	<b>Costa Rica – Certificate of Sustainable Tourism (CST) 2023–2024</b>	<b>National</b>	Costa Rica	ICT Costa Rica	Facilitating SME Certifications; Regulatory Compliance	CST (4-level)	Long-standing CST scheme expanded in 2023-24 adding ‘Elite’ tier and new sectors (museums, car rentals). Over 400 SMEs certified, widely recognized by tourists, and tied to improved operations and profitability.	Mature and trusted model for hotels, tours, restaurants, transport, expanding to museums and spas.	TicoTimes / Nicuesa lodge	
11	<b>EarthCheck Certified Destinations (global)</b>	<b>Multiple urban destinations</b>	Global	EarthCheck team	Destination SME Certification Integration; Tech & Digital Tools	EarthCheck certification	Applies 119 qualitative and 265 quantitative indicators across destination SMEs for energy, waste, emissions, and social metrics. Certified venues include boutique hotels and convention centres.	Provides replicable urban-SME certification ecosystems.	EarthCheck reports	
12	<b>EURO-EMOTUR</b>	<b>Cross-border EU regions</b>	EU	EURO-EMOTUR team	Facilitating SME Certifications; Tech & Digital Tools	Digital/ecotourism certification pre-work	2021–24 initiative supporting SMEs in emotional tourism and neuromarketing via digital prototyping. Prepared SMEs for environmental certifications by improving digital service quality and sustainability alignment.	Foundation-building for certification through digital readiness.	EURO-EMOTUR site	
13	<b>Tourism4SDG (Interreg Europe)</b>	<b>Coimbra + 9 EU regions</b>	EU	Tourism4SDG team	Regulatory Compliance & Destination Strategies	SDG-aligned monitoring readiness	Regional authorities and SMEs adopted common sustainability metrics aligned with UN SDGs. Sectors covered: gastronomy, events, cultural services—providing harmonized measurement for future certification.	Integrated certification readiness within sustainability measurement frameworks.	Interreg Europe site	
14	<b>Croatia Green Tourism Campaign</b>	<b>National</b>	Croatia	Croatian National Tourism Board	Destination SME Certification Integration; Public-Private Partnerships	National green certification	Certified 200 SMEs (accommodations & attractions) in one year, trained 500 workers, achieved -8% carbon and +12% off-season bookings. Public-private rollout enabled rapid scale-up.	High uptake shows the impact of campaign-driven certification adoption.	Campaign summary news	
15	<b>Lisbon Sustainable Tourism Action Plan</b>	<b>Lisbon</b>	Portugal	Turismo de Lisboa	Destination SME Certification Integration; Regulatory Compliance	Green certification incentives (EU Ecolabel, Green Key)	2023 plan included low-carbon transport, pedestrianisation, and incentives for hotel ecolabels. Result: -15% tourism emissions, +10% satisfaction. SME incentives funded accreditation and energy audits.	Urban policy aligning infrastructure and incentives to drive SME certification.	Lisbon action plan	
16	<b>Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program</b>	<b>Istanbul</b>	Turkey	Mehmet Yıldız	Regulatory Compliance & Alignment with EU Green Claims Legislation	GSTC-Accredited Certification Bodies Certification, based on GSTC Standards	Türkiye has developed a comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Program in collaboration with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The program mandates that all tourism accommodations obtain GSTC-recognized certification by 2030. It includes government support, financial incentives, and structured guidelines for SMEs to comply with sustainability regulations.	Türkiye is the first country to implement a nationwide mandatory GSTC-certification system for tourism businesses (Accommodation, TO, MICE, Attractions, Gastronomy). 21 July 2025, the number of accommodation facilities under the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program is as follows: * 1,918 facilities Certified (Equivalent to GSTC Certification) and 17.626 facilities verified	<a href="https://tga.gov.tr/sustainable-tourism-program/">https://tga.gov.tr/sustainable-tourism-program/</a>	<b>Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA)</b>
<b>Events &amp; MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions)</b>										
17	<b>Golf Open Tournament (European Tour) – Sustainable Events Strategy</b>	<b>Madrid</b>	Spain	ACCIONA Sustainability Team	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Public-Private Partnerships; Regulatory Compliance	ISO 20121 – Sustainable Event Management	The ACCIONA Open de España integrates ISO 20121 standards into its event operations, embedding sustainability into all facets: venue management, supplier contracts, procurement, energy efficiency, transport, and waste management. The strategy requires suppliers and subcontractors, many SMEs, to adopt sustainability clauses aligned with the event’s decarbonization and circular economy targets. Annual tailored sustainability action plans track KPIs such as waste reduction, energy consumption, and emissions, ensuring continuous improvement and transparent reporting. This approach fosters a collaborative sustainability transition across the event’s full value chain, empowering SMEs to enhance their environmental and social performance.	Exemplifies strong public-private collaboration enabling SMEs’ active role in event sustainability. Acts as a benchmark for major sports and cultural events seeking systemic certification adherence.	<a href="#">ACCIONA Golf Open Sustainability</a>	

18	Spanish Olympic Committee – Sustainability Seal for Events	Spain (National)	Spain	Comité Olímpico Español (COE)	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Compliance & Alignment with EU Green Claims	Spanish Olympic Committee Sustainability Seal (verified by Budo Veritas)	Launched in 2024, this seal provides a simplified yet rigorous sustainability certification for sports events, focusing on accessibility for smaller federations and local SMEs. The seal balances environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria tailored to event scale, emphasizing mobility, water, energy, and waste management best practices. Reporting requirements are reduced compared to ISO 20121, lowering barriers for smaller organizations while ensuring credible performance evaluation through independent audits by Budo Veritas. This initiative fosters wider adoption of sustainable event management practices at grassroots and national levels.	Provides an alternative certification framework for smaller-scale events and SMEs, increasing inclusiveness and fostering sector-wide sustainability progress.	<a href="#">COE Sustainability Seal</a>	
19	Zentropy MICE – Valencia Urban Authority (European Urban Initiative)	Valencia	Spain	Valencia City Council / European Urban Initiative	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration; Public-Private Partnerships; Technology & Digital Tools	ISO 20121; EU Ecolabel; Carbon Footprint Monitoring; Circular Economy frameworks	Zentropy MICE is a pioneering project transforming the MICE sector into a driver for urban sustainability in Valencia. It mobilizes SMEs across event catering, hospitality, logistics, mobility, and cultural sectors, supporting them in accessing sustainability certifications (ISO 20121, EU Ecolabel) and adopting carbon and circular economy management tools. The project promotes green public procurement, invests in sustainable event infrastructure, and fosters stakeholder engagement to build long-term social cohesion and urban innovation legacies. Valencia serves as a living lab, showcasing replicable strategies to embed sustainability certification into the MICE ecosystem on the city scale, aligned with EU Green Claims and climate objectives.	A comprehensive model integrating SME certification with urban sustainability goals, driving systemic transformation in event tourism.	<a href="#">Zentropy MICE Project</a>	
20	CIFFT-UNWTO Partnership – Promoting Sustainable Festival Tourism	Global	International	CIFFT / UNWTO	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Public-Private Partnerships	ISO 20121 Sustainable Event Certification	This partnership leverages CIFFT's international tourism media network and UNWTO's normative capacity to promote sustainable practices in festivals and event tourism worldwide. The initiative encourages festival organizers, event production companies, and local SMEs to pursue certifications such as ISO 20121. By raising awareness, providing guidance, and facilitating access to certification frameworks, it supports responsible event management, environmental stewardship, and socio-economic benefits for host communities. The program also fosters capacity building and knowledge exchange, particularly benefiting SMEs involved in event delivery and cultural services.	Highlights the power of global public-private cooperation in advancing SME sustainability certification in the event sector.	<a href="#">CIFFT &amp; UNWTO</a>	
21	Blue Meetings® Format – Linz	Linz	Austria	Linz Convention Bureau	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Blue Meeting® Certification (Beyond Green Meetings)	Linz has developed the Blue Meeting® certification, which goes beyond traditional environmental criteria by integrating attendee well-being across three pillars: individual (health and comfort), venue (sustainable infrastructure), and programme (engaging and responsible content). This holistic certification framework requires event organizers and their SME partners to comply with environmental sustainability standards while enhancing social and wellness outcomes. Blue Meetings® aims to position Linz as a leader in responsible event hosting, boosting demand for certified venues and service providers and encouraging SMEs to adopt integrated sustainability and wellbeing standards.	Unique approach combining sustainability certification with attendee wellness, broadening the scope of event certification.	<a href="#">Blue Meetings Linz</a>	
22	IT.A.CÀ Festival of Responsible Tourism	Bologna + 14 Italian Regions	Italy	IT.A.CÀ Festival Coordination	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Destination-Level Strategies	Not specified (exploring SME certification possibilities)	IT.A.CÀ is an annual, multi-regional responsible tourism festival combining cultural tours, food experiences, exhibitions, bike tours, and film screenings aligned with EU and UN SDG values. The festival actively involves local SMEs in cultural, hospitality, and transport sectors to promote sustainable practices and social inclusion. Although no formal certification process is yet implemented for participating SMEs, the festival provides a valuable platform for awareness-raising and capacity building, potentially setting the stage for future SME certification integration across regions.	Opportunity for developing formal SME certification guidelines linked to sustainable tourism festivals and cultural events.	<a href="#">IT.A.CÀ Festival</a>	
23	Green Key Festivals & Cruise Certification	Utrecht, Groningen + other European cities	Netherlands + Europe	Green Key	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Destination-Level Strategies	Green Key Festival and Cruise Certification	Green Key's festival and cruise certification programs promote sustainable event management through strict criteria on waste management, energy use, water conservation, and attendee engagement. Certified festivals such as Liberation Festival Utrecht and Noorderzon Groningen integrate local SMEs into their sustainability efforts, encouraging circular economy practices and reducing environmental footprints. The program supports SMEs in adopting recognized sustainability standards, enhancing their market competitiveness and contributing to broader destination sustainability goals.	Well-established certification linking festivals and event SMEs to recognized sustainability frameworks, with clear environmental performance requirements.	<a href="#">Green Key Festivals</a>	
<b>Accommodation sector</b>										
24	Green Key Awards in Spain	Multiple Cities	Spain	Fundación para la Educación Ambiental (FEE Spain)	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Compliance; Destination-Level Strategies	Green Key	Green Key-certified hotels in Spain have made significant strides in resource efficiency. In 2023, 500 accommodations collectively reduced water consumption by 1.2 million Liters and energy use by 10%, saving approximately €1.5 million. Certified hotels also saw a 70% increase in bookings from eco-conscious travellers, demonstrating a strong link between sustainability certification and market competitiveness. These results underpin national and regional efforts to promote	Demonstrates clear ROI from certification for SMEs and cities; supports climate and tourism policy goals.	<a href="#">Green Key Spain</a>	

							Green Key as a tool for SME transformation in the accommodation sector, targeting 25% SME certification by 2030.			
25	ETGG2030 – European Tourism Going Green Project	Austria, Germany, Croatia	EU Multi-Country	Project Coordination Team (ETGG2030)	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Technology & Digital Tools	EU Ecolabel	The ETGG2030 project supported 15 hotels and campsites in obtaining the EU Ecolabel through intensive coaching and EU-funded capacity building. Participating SMEs were promoted on Green Travel Maps, improving visibility in sustainability-oriented markets. The initiative focused on energy, water efficiency, and sustainable food procurement, while also encouraging reporting and eco-communication practices. The model showcases how tailored assistance can enable SMEs to access EU certification and enhance their competitiveness in eco-tourism.	Effective EU-funded model demonstrating cross-border SME support and green market access through certification.	ETGG2030 Project	
26	Paradores de Turismo de España	Multiple Cities	Spain	Paradores Sustainability Dept.	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Public-Private Partnerships	ISO 14001; EMAS; Biosphere	Paradores is a public-private initiative preserving heritage buildings while applying high environmental standards. Renovated monasteries, castles, and palaces operate sustainably—integrating renewable energy, circular procurement, and SME inclusion in supply chains. Certifications (ISO 14001, EMAS, Biosphere) demonstrate accountability and performance. SMEs providing food, linen, and other services are expected to align with these certifications.	Iconic example of sustainability mainstreaming in hospitality, with positive ripple effects on SMEs and destinations.	Paradores Sustainability	
27	Zero Plastic Programme for Tourist Accommodations	San Sebastián	Spain	City of San Sebastián – Environment Department	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration	Local Criteria Aligned with EU Green Claims	In 2021, San Sebastián launched a Zero Plastic campaign targeting local hotels and guesthouses. Measures included offering tap water instead of plastic bottles, eliminating single-use toiletries, and guest awareness through signage. Hotels commit to regular audits and community engagement. The city-level approach aligns with EU sustainability and circular economy policies and encourages local SMEs to embrace certification-readiness.	Model for municipal-level certification campaigns promoting SME transition and city-wide performance.	Zero Plastik San Sebastián	
28	Ecosello Buenos Aires	Buenos Aires	Argentina	Buenos Aires Tourism Board	Destination-Level Strategies; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Ecosello City Label	Ecosello is a city-led sustainability seal with progressive levels—Committed, Active, Advanced, and Excellence—designed to support tourism SMEs in Buenos Aires on their sustainability journey. The system includes technical assistance, communication support, and simplified reporting. It enables SMEs to gradually align with global standards like GSTC and ISO, using Ecosello as a stepping-stone.	Adaptive, tiered model supports SMEs of various maturity levels in progressing toward certification.	Ecosello Buenos Aires	
<b>Food and beverage sector</b>										
29	Green Michelin “Green Star”	Multiple Cities (e.g. Bilbao, Paris, Copenhagen)	EU-wide	Michelin Sustainability Department	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Compliance & Alignment with EU Green Claims; Destination-Level Strategies	Michelin Green Star; ISO 14001 (when integrated in hospitality)	Introduced in 2020, the Michelin “Green Star” recognizes restaurants demonstrating exceptional sustainability practices. Selected restaurants—such as Azurmendi in Spain—lead in environmental innovation, including bioclimatic architecture, circular kitchen practices, water and energy efficiency (50% energy savings), and local sourcing. Many recipients integrate additional standards like ISO 14001 or Green Key as part of broader hotel-restaurant operations. These certifications extend sustainability to the food and beverage SMEs, contributing measurable environmental data (e.g. waste, energy use, carbon reduction) to urban-level dashboards and tourism sustainability metrics.	Adds SME-level engagement in gastronomy; signals growing certification relevance for restaurants within tourism destinations.	Michelin Guide - Green Star	
30	Peskesi restaurant and farm	Heraklion, Crete	Greece	Panagiotis (Owner)	Sustainable gastronomy, farm-to-fork, organic farming	DIO Greek Organic Certification, Dimitra Certification, EU Organic Certification; verified by German auditors	Peskesi is a leading organic and biodynamic restaurant and farm that regenerates Cretan culinary heritage. It applies zero-waste principles, produces most of its ingredients on-site (wine, vegetables, meat, olives), and uses compost from restaurant leftovers for soil enrichment, reducing irrigation needs. It also offers training, educational programmes, and revives traditional cooking methods. In 2025, it received the EU Organic Award (Category 6: Best Organic Restaurant/Food Service in Europe).	Recognised as a model for the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy. Key lesson: “Do not destroy anything, preserve it for the next generation” → a radical zero-waste philosophy. Strong role in cultural and dietary heritage (Cretan diet recognised as “mother of Mediterranean region”).	EU Organic Awards – Peskesi / Peskesi Website / Facebook	Greece / EU
31	EU ECO-TANDEM – City Pension Košice	Košice	Slovakia	EU ECO-TANDEM Project Consortium	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Technology & Digital Tools; Circular Economy	Internal SME Audit + EU Green Transition Tools	As part of the EU-funded ECO-TANDEM program, City Pension Košice—a small hospitality SME—partnered with green innovation startup Cyrkl to reform its food waste and cleaning practices. Measures included a full kitchen audit, bio-waste separation systems, the elimination of single-use plastic containers, and the transition to refillable packaging for cleaning supplies. Employees were trained on sustainable procurement and circular practices. Though not yet certified, these actions represent a critical phase in the pre-certification journey for SMEs in the food and accommodation sector. This pilot sets an example of how customized technical support can facilitate green transformation at micro-enterprise level.	A tangible case of cross-sector circularity and green practice mainstreaming, leading toward certification readiness.	ECO-TANDEM Košice	

Attractions and cultural venues										
32	Green Museum certificate	Estonia	Estonia	Kertu Uibolet	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Local / Regional Certification Scheme	Stockholm Environmental Institute Tallinn Centre (SEI Tallinn) and the Estonian National Committee of ICOM co-developed the green museum certification system. The Estonian Association for Environmental Management manages the application, auditing and issues certificates based on this system. All Estonian museums aligning with the certification criteria can apply for the certification. Requirements are set for all aspects of the museum's work, including the management of the museum building and collections, oversight of environmental activities, engagement of employees and interest groups, museum education, and addressing social responsibility issues. ICOM Estonia and SEI Tallinn have held trainings for museums applying for the Green Museum certification.	As of January 2025, there are 10 certified museums, including some of the most known museums in Estonia.	<a href="https://ekja.ee/et/roheline-museum/">https://ekja.ee/et/roheline-museum/</a> <a href="https://www.icomeesti.ee/eng/green-museum">https://www.icomeesti.ee/eng/green-museum</a>	Estonian Association for Environmental Management
33	Austria Center Vienna – Green Conference & Cultural Venue	Vienna	Austria	ACV Sustainability Team	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications; Technology & Digital Tools	Austrian Ecolabel for Green Meetings & Events (UZ 62); Green Conference Centre	The Austria Center Vienna (ACV), a leading venue for international conferences and exhibitions, was one of the first in Europe to be certified under the Austrian Ecolabel for Green Meetings & Events (UZ 62) and the Green Conference Centre label. It has hosted major scientific and cultural events such as the SETAC Europe Conference (in Vienna and Seville), integrating comprehensive sustainability protocols. Key practices include promoting train travel and low-emission mobility, offering local/organic catering options (vegan/vegetarian), implementing digital signage and reusable materials, and systematic waste minimization. The ACV offers SMEs integrated in the supply chain (e.g. catering, AV, logistics) the opportunity to align with certified sustainability standards, acting as a catalyst for broader certification uptake.	A flagship example of destination-level infrastructure leveraging events to accelerate SME sustainability practices and reporting.	<a href="#">Austria Center Vienna – Sustainability</a>	
34	Congress Centrum Alpbach – Green Meeting & Cultural Hub	Alpbach	Austria	Congress Centrum Alpbach Team	Public-Private Partnerships; Facilitating Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Alignment	Austrian Ecolabel UZ 62 & UZ 200; Green Globe; klimaaktiv	Located in a mountain town with strong sustainability values, the Congress Centrum Alpbach is certified under multiple green standards, including Austrian Ecolabels UZ 62 and UZ 200, Green Globe, and klimaaktiv for low-carbon buildings. Since 2010, it has been a recognized venue for eco-certified conferences and cultural events. Its sustainable architecture includes energy-efficient heating/cooling systems and natural lighting, while event operations include reusable infrastructure, regional catering, and digital ticketing. The centre regularly collaborates with local SMEs—caterers, hospitality providers, and technicians—who align their services with the centre's sustainability strategy, thus contributing to a circular and climate-conscious tourism economy.	Demonstrates how smaller municipalities and cultural venues can lead in holistic green certification strategies and SME integration.	<a href="#">Congress Centrum Alpbach</a>	
Tour and activity operators										
35	ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR	West Mediterranean (Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Tunish, Morocco)	Italy / WestMed	X23 The Innovation Bakery	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Technology & Digital Tools; Destination-Level Strategies	In development – aligned with EU sustainability and maritime tourism policies	The ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR project, co-funded by the EMFAF (European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund), seeks to promote responsible and sustainable cruising practices in the WestMed region. Targeted at Millennials and Gen Z, the project develops eco-conscious itineraries and supports nature-based tourism. It actively engages SMEs and local operators across coastal destinations, offering training on low-impact practices and promoting certification pathways. The project fosters cross-border cooperation among cruise operators, local guides, and marine tourism SMEs to meet EU environmental standards and integrate sustainability metrics in their offers.	A novel approach combining digital tourism, sustainability training, and demand-driven product design for the next generation of travellers.	<a href="#">ECO-CRUIISING FU TOUR</a>	
36	Green & Fair Experiences – TUI Group	Multiple EU destinations	Germany / Spain / Portugal / Greece	Clara Gómez (Responsible Business Manager, TUI Amusement)	Corporate Sustainability & SME Engagement	Engagement Travelife / Green Key	TUI Group's "Green & Fair Experiences" programme certifies tours and activities meeting sustainability criteria aligned with GSTC standards. The initiative engages local SMEs through training and supplier partnerships, improving access to sustainable supply chains. Over 70 % of offered experiences are certified.	Demonstrates how global operators can accelerate SME sustainability certification and create fair local value chains.	<a href="https://www.tuigroup.com/en-en/responsibility/">https://www.tuigroup.com/en-en/responsibility/</a>	TUI Group / TUI Amusement

37	<b>Colombian Journeys – Sello de Paz (Peace Seal)</b>	Multiple regions (e.g. Antioquia, Córdoba)	Colombia	Local community-based operator	Public-Private Partnerships; Social Responsibility & Community Empowerment; SME Sustainability Certification Pathways	National Peace Seal (“Sello de Paz”) – Colombia	In 2023, Colombian Journeys, a community-based SME tour operator, received Colombia’s “Sello de Paz” (Peace Seal) for promoting peacebuilding through tourism. Their model integrates social sustainability with local heritage, offering culturally immersive itineraries in post-conflict areas. The Peace Seal encourages responsible practices, socio-economic inclusion, and environmental awareness. While not an environmental certification per se, it serves as a credible national sustainability benchmark for SMEs. This approach is particularly relevant for destinations seeking to combine social impact with eco-responsibility.	Although region-specific, the model could be adapted by EU destinations aiming to recognize social and environmental excellence at SME level.	<a href="#">Colombian Journeys</a>	
38	<b>SUSTOUR – COSME Programme for Tour Operators</b>	Multiple (Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Finland, Croatia)	EU (COSME Countries)	ECEAT / Travelife / National partners	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Alignment with EU Green Claims; Digital Tools	Travelife for Tour Operators & Travel Agents; EMAS; ISO standards	The SUSTOUR project, co-funded by the EU’s COSME Programme, empowers SME tour operators and travel agents to implement sustainability standards and obtain internationally recognised certifications such as Travelife, EMAS, and ISO standards. The project supports over 600 companies through e-learning platforms, benchmarking tools, and capacity-building workshops tailored to SME needs. As intermediaries, tour operators shape supply chains and can drive market demand for certified accommodation, transport, and activities. The project enhances business competitiveness while aligning with EU Green Claims Directive and sustainable tourism strategies.	Strong example of how sector-wide support can mainstream certification uptake, improve SME resilience, and reduce tourism’s environmental footprint.	<a href="#">SUSTOUR Project</a>	
<b>Transport providers (tourism-focused)</b>										
39	<b>MOVELETUR (Interreg Spain-Portugal)</b>	NW Spain & North Portugal (e.g., Bragança, Sanabria, Montesinho)	Spain & Portugal	Fundación Patrimonio Natural de Castilla y León / Instituto de Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration; Public-Private Partnerships; Technology & Digital Tools	Supports ISO 14001, ISO 50001, EU Ecolabel (indirectly through partnerships)	MOVELETUR, co-funded by Interreg POCTEP, developed a sustainable mobility network for tourism in natural parks across northwestern Spain and northern Portugal. The project established 18 low-emission itineraries equipped with e-vehicles (cars, bikes, scooters) and 16 solar-powered charging stations. It linked mobility providers to local SMEs in hospitality, guiding, and gastronomy, incentivizing the adoption of electric and low-emission transport certifications. The initiative enabled tourist SMEs to access new markets while aligning their operations with regional sustainability objectives.	MOVELETUR helped position rural tourism SMEs as key players in the green mobility transition while reinforcing eco-tourism through public infrastructure investment.	<a href="https://moveletur.es">https://moveletur.es</a>	
40	<b>Fahrrad2Go program</b>	Stuttgart Region	Germany	VRS – Verkehrs- und Tarifverbund Stuttgart	Sustainable mobility for tourism and leisure	Regional verification (no formal certification but aligned with Baden-Württemberg’s Sustainable Mobility Strategy)	Fahrrad2Go is a programme launched in 2013 to enable bicycle transport on buses and suburban transport in Stuttgart. It introduced both interior and external modifications (removing seats, multifunctional areas, rear vertical bike racks designed by Hochschule Esslingen students, and trailers with capacity up to 15 bikes). Seasonal and leisure-oriented routes support cycling tourism. Unified fare system allows free bike transport on weekends and evenings.	Strong alignment with sustainable tourism, improving last-mile connectivity and eco-tourism in peri-urban areas. Innovative, adaptable bus retrofitting model. Investment per bus €25–30k. Supports modal shift from cars to public transport + cycling.	<a href="#">Stuttgart Region Official Site / VVS – Stuttgart Transport / OVR Bus Fahrrad2Go</a>	Germany / EU
41	<b>Alpine Pearls</b>	Alpine network (e.g., Werfenweng, Cogne, Bohinj, Bad Reichenhall)	Austria, Italy, France, Germany, Slovenia, Switzerland	Alpine Pearls Secretariat	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Public-Private Partnerships; Regulatory Compliance	Green Key, EU Ecolabel, ISO 14001, Mobility Management Plans	Alpine Pearls is a cross-border network of alpine municipalities promoting “soft mobility” and sustainable tourism. Member destinations commit to eco-standards that require local transport operators (e.g., electric taxis, shuttles, rental services) and accommodation providers to reduce emissions and facilitate certification uptake. SMEs benefit from joint marketing, capacity building, and technical support to meet criteria under schemes like Green Key, EU Ecolabel, and national ecolabels. Visitors can access resorts via low-impact transport, supporting wider adoption of certified services across the mobility and hospitality value chain.	The initiative serves as a public-private cooperation model, enabling municipalities and SMEs to co-deliver on EU mobility and environmental goals.	<a href="https://www.alpine-pearls.com">https://www.alpine-pearls.com</a>	
<b>Coastal and nature-based services</b>										
42	<b>European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in Protected Areas</b>	Estonia	Estonia	Nele Söber	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Other	EUROPARC Federation has developed the program, where ECST part 1 is implemented by Protected Areas (in Estonia: Matsalu, Soomaa, Lahemaa tourism regions). The ECST Part 2 is a process led directly by the Protected Area authority (in Estonia: Estonian Environmental Board), through a methodology developed at the national/supranational level by EUROPARC Sections and approved by the EUROPARC Federation. Park authorities are therefore responsible to invite Partners, review applications, evaluate the Partners’ performance and award the Business Partners Certificate. Renewal in every 3 years. Estonian Environmental Board is providing applicants assistance in fulfilling the application and implementing the action plan.	By the end of Feb 2025, 28 business have been awarded	<a href="https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/become-a-sustainable-partner/">https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/become-a-sustainable-partner/</a> , <a href="https://kaitsealad.ee/en/node/1873">https://kaitsealad.ee/en/node/1873</a>	Estonian Environmental Board
43	<b>Costa Rica – Reforest the Tropics Program</b>	Costa Rica (various eco- lodges and hotels)	Costa Rica	Reforest the Tropics NGO / participating hotels	Public-Private Partnerships; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Supports carbon offset certification; aligned with ISO 14064	This innovative program allows hotels and other tourism SMEs to sponsor long-term forest plantations that actively sequester carbon. Since 2010, participating tourism businesses have helped offset over 50,000 tons of CO <sub>2</sub> . The program integrates local farmers, conservation NGOs, and tourism operators, creating a carbon credit mechanism that aligns hospitality operations with climate goals.	Acts as a bridge between eco-certification and climate finance, incentivizing SMEs to adopt voluntary offset strategies and future certification.	<a href="https://www.reforestthetropics.org">https://www.reforestthetropics.org</a>	

44	NaTour4CChange (Interreg Euro-MED)	Mediterranean coastal destinations (e.g., Portugal, Spain, Italy, France)	Multiple Mediterranean regions	NaTour4CChange Consortium	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration; Regulatory Compliance; Technology & Digital Tools	Prepares sites for Blue Flag, EU Ecolabel, and other certification schemes aligned with GSTC	This project strengthens climate resilience in coastal tourism by engaging SMEs—such as ferry operators, local guides, event venues, and artisans—in the co-development of climate adaptation plans. NaTour4CChange integrates nature-based solutions, participatory governance, and economic modelling to preserve ecosystem services. It prepares tourism SMEs and destination managers for future sustainability certifications by introducing environmental monitoring, data collection tools, and eco-training pathways.	Offers a replicable governance model and digital tools to help SMEs and DMOs align with eco-labels and Green Claims regulations.	<a href="https://na-tour4cchange.interreg-euro-med.eu">https://na-tour4cchange.interreg-euro-med.eu</a>	
45	Blue Flag Beach Certifications	Marina Alta, Málaga, Lagos, Malta, Gozo, Greece, Ireland, Romania, Poland	EU and Associated Countries	National Coastal Authorities / FEE / Local DMOs	Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Compliance	Blue Flag for beaches, marinas, and boats	Blue Flag is one of the most recognized international certifications for beach and marina quality, promoting clean water, safety, environmental education, and sustainable management. The 2024–2025 cycle highlights expansion across the EU, with Greece reaching over 600 sites, and new awards in Spain (Marina Alta, Málaga), Portugal (Lagos), Ireland, Malta, Romania, and Poland. The certification encourages local SMEs—such as restaurants, mobility operators, and activity providers—to improve environmental practices and align with sustainability standards.	Blue Flag destinations increasingly serve as gateways for SME sustainability certification, with ripple effects into the broader service ecosystem (e.g., Green Key hotels, EU Ecolabel attractions).	<a href="https://www.blueflag.global">https://www.blueflag.global</a>	
46	Eifel National Park Visitor Centres	Eifel National Park (North Rhine-Westphalia)	Germany	Nationalparkverwaltung Eifel	Public-Private Partnerships; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs	Green Key, EU Ecolabel (aspirational), national ecolabels	Eifel National Park's visitor centres represent a model of integrated eco-tourism infrastructure, co-developed by regional authorities and operated by SMEs under sustainability guidelines. These centres include eco-certified cafés, interpretive exhibits, and souvenir shops, all focused on low-impact visitor experiences. Staff are trained in sustainable tourism practices, and many services are eligible for Green Key or EU Ecolabel certification. The centres also serve as education hubs, increasing visitor awareness and encouraging SMEs in the region to adopt similar standards.	Combines environmental education with real-time implementation of sustainability practices, helping local SMEs meet certification thresholds.	<a href="https://www.nationalpark-eifel.de">https://www.nationalpark-eifel.de</a>	
<b>Retail and services linked to tourism</b>										
47	Saaremaa EHTNE	Visit Saaremaa	Estonia	Janet Väärtnõu	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration	Local / Regional Certification Scheme	Since 2012, entrepreneurs from Saaremaa and Muhumaa started using a label with the text “Saaremaa EHTNE” on their products. This regional label confirms that the product or service has been created in the pure natural environment of Saaremaa and Muhumaa, with the knowledge and work of the local people		<a href="https://ehtne.ee/">https://ehtne.ee/</a>	Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication
48	Hiiumaa Roheline märgis	Visit Hiiumaa	Estonia	Janet Väärtnõu	Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration	Local / Regional Certification Scheme	Hiiumaa Green Label, a symbol of responsible environmental practices and local pride of a separated island, where sea transport or local handling capacity must be taken into account for each raw material, product and waste. 146 businesses and products have adopted a sustainable green approach to their production. Awarded to products and services produced on the island or using local resources, the label highlights sustainability, local resources, and traditional skills. This initiative, inspired by the Ecoland project in 1995, empowers eco-conscious consumers to make informed choices while promoting sustainable tourism and resilient consumption.		1) <a href="https://www.greendestinations.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Top-100-2024-GPS-Hiiumaa-Island-Hiiumaa-Green-Label-Promoting-Sustainable-Quality.pdf">Hiiumaa roheline märgi lugu – Hiiumaa Roheline Märk</a> 2) <a href="https://www.greendestinations.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Top-100-2024-GPS-Hiiumaa-Island-Hiiumaa-Green-Label-Promoting-Sustainable-Quality.pdf">https://www.greendestinations.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Top-100-2024-GPS-Hiiumaa-Island-Hiiumaa-Green-Label - Promoting Sustainable-Quality.pdf</a>	Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication
49	Greener Põlvamaa	South Estonia Tourism Cluster	Estonia		Destination-Level Strategies for SME Certification Integration	Local / Regional Certification Scheme	Beaver mark - a sign of ancestral values The greener Põlvamaa beaver mark is proof of Põlvamaa origin and Põlvamaa values. It shows our green attitude and promises to be economical, clean, recyclable and caring in our operations. Our actions and products are driven by the desire to preserve our land and value the beautiful environment that was given to us by nature and our ancestors. It is a value label that confirms that you can enjoy our products and services with a greener conscience. The owner of the beaver badge is SA Põlvamaa Arenduskeskus, which coordinates the issuing of badges and the network of badge bearers.		<a href="https://rohelisem.polvamaa.ee/et">https://rohelisem.polvamaa.ee/et</a>	
50	ACCIONA Program for SME Decarbonization – UN Certification Pathway	National scope (Spain)	Spain	ACCIONA Sustainability Department	Public-Private Partnerships; Facilitating Sustainability Certifications for SMEs; Regulatory Compliance; Technology & Digital Tools	United Nations SME Climate Hub certification	ACCIONA has launched a national-level initiative aimed at helping SMEs within its supply chain to achieve climate certification under the UN SME Climate Hub framework. Through a tailored support model, the program enables subcontractors to commit to net-zero targets by 2050, based on science-based emissions reductions. More than 50 SMEs have been certified to date, with access to digital tools for GHG inventories, capacity-building workshops, and one-on-one guidance to develop climate transition plans. This program embeds sustainability across procurement processes, while boosting market resilience and international competitiveness for SMEs.	Sets a precedent for large corporations driving certification uptake among SMEs at scale, aligning tourism-related suppliers with global climate goals. Supports compliance with EU Green Claims and ESG investment standards.	<a href="https://smeclimatehub.org">https://smeclimatehub.org</a>   <a href="https://www.accionacom.com">https://www.accionacom.com</a>	

Source: Own elaboration, Sustainable Tourism Partnership – Action 2.

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