



RECIRCLE MED

Interreg  
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# Transfer Guide





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## **RECIRCLE MED Transfer Guide**

### Responsible Partner:

University of Thessaly (UTH)

### Partners Involved:

Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry, The Energy and Water Agency, Municipality of Cefalu, National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, Municipality of Ohrid, Municipality of Bar, Living Prospects

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### Design:

Living Prospects





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# RECIRCLE MED IN A NUTSHELL

## OUR MISSION



Promote  
sustainable  
tourism models in  
the Mediterranean



Enhance and  
transfer the existing  
and generated  
knowledge



Re-think and re-  
position the  
tourism sector.

## WHAT WE ACHIEVE



### PHASE 1. DESIGN

Providing destinations  
with a ready-to-use  
Blueprint to assess  
their performance,  
identify priorities and  
plan their transition  
towards blue and  
circular tourism



### PHASE 2. TRANSFER

Co-creating Blue  
Action Plans for  
Circular Tourism and  
building local  
capacities to turn the  
Blueprint into concrete  
actions and  
investments



### PHASE 3. OFFSET

Supporting the uptake  
and replication of the  
RECIRCLE MED  
approach through  
knowledge exchange,  
policy integration and  
cross-border  
cooperation

## RECEIVING DESTINATIONS



Cefalù  
Municipality  
(Italy)



Ohrid  
Municipality  
(North Macedonia)



Bar  
Municipality  
(Montenegro)



Pomorie  
Municipality  
(Bulgaria)



# Introduction

*Tourism in the Mediterranean region is at a turning point. While it remains a key driver of economic development, it also creates increasing pressure on natural resources, local communities and cultural heritage. Responding to these challenges requires a transition towards more sustainable tourism models, where growth goes hand in hand with environmental protection and social well-being.*

*RECIRCLE MED supports this transition by helping Mediterranean destinations move towards blue and circular tourism. By integrating the principles of the circular and blue economy, the project offers a practical and integrated approach to tourism development.*

*Building on previous initiatives such as **INCIRCLE** (Support INsular and low-density areas in the transition towards a more CIRCULAR tourism Economy) and **REBOOT MED** (Recovering, Experiencing and Boosting ecoTourism in the WestMed area), **RECIRCLE MED** provides an evidence-based pathway that supports destinations in becoming more sustainable, resilient and inclusive.*

# Transforming Tourism Together: The RECIRCLE MED Approach

## Why Blue and Circular Tourism?

Tourism demand in the Mediterranean is changing. Visitors increasingly look for **sustainable, authentic and experience-based destinations**, where environmental responsibility and local identity matter.

This shift challenges traditional tourism models and creates a need for destinations to adapt. At the same time, ongoing pressures related to seasonality, resource use and environmental impact highlight the importance of more sustainable approaches.

Transitioning towards **blue and circular tourism** offers a practical way to align new market demands with long-term sustainability.

## What is circular tourism?

Circular tourism applies the principles of the **circular economy** to the tourism sector.

It focuses on:

- reducing resource consumption
- minimizing waste
- reusing and recycling materials
- promoting local production and consumption

In practice, this means:

- improving water and energy efficiency
- reducing single-use products
- supporting local supply chains
- extending the lifecycle of resources



The goal is to move away from a **linear “take–use–dispose” model** towards a more **efficient and regenerative system**.

## What is blue tourism?

Blue tourism is based on the principles of the **blue economy**, with a focus on the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources.

It aims to:

- protect marine ecosystems and biodiversity
- promote sustainable coastal and maritime activities
- reduce pollution and environmental impact
- ensure long-term use of natural resources



For Mediterranean destinations, this is particularly important due to the strong connection between tourism and coastal and marine environments.

## Why combine them?

While circular and blue tourism are often addressed separately, combining them allows for a more **holistic and effective approach**.

Integrating these two dimensions enables destinations to:

- address environmental challenges across both land and sea
- improve resource efficiency throughout the tourism system
- align tourism development with long-term sustainability goals

This integrated approach supports the development of tourism models that are **more resilient, balanced and future-oriented**.

# Blue & Circular Tourism



# What does this mean for the destination?

Adopting a blue and circular tourism model offers tangible benefits:

## ✓ **Better resource management**

More efficient use of water, energy and materials helps reduce environmental pressure and operational costs.

## ✓ **Stronger local economy**

Supporting local value chains and innovation contributes to more resilient and diversified economic development.

## ✓ **Enhanced attractiveness**

Sustainable and authentic tourism experiences strengthen destination image and respond to evolving visitor expectations.

## ✓ **Improved quality of life**

Reduced environmental impacts and more balanced tourism flows benefit local communities.

## ✓ **Stronger governance and collaboration**

Engaging stakeholders across sectors supports coordinated and effective decision-making.

A strategic opportunity for destinations to adopt a **practical and forward-looking approach** that shifts focus **from managing impacts to creating positive value** for the environment, the economy and society.



# What is this Transfer Guide about

This Transfer Guide aims to support public authorities and key stakeholders in **applying the RECIRCLE MED approach within their own territories.**

Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, the Guide presents a **structured yet flexible framework**, enabling each destination to adapt the approach to its specific context, governance system and priorities.

This Guide provides a **practical and adaptable framework** to support destinations in transitioning toward **blue and circular tourism** by:

- Gaining a clear understanding of **sustainable tourism principles** and how they apply locally
- Identifying opportunities to **improve environmental, social and economic performance**
- Facilitating **stakeholder collaboration and engagement**
- Guiding the design of **context-specific and evidence-based action plans** that reflect local priorities

This approach is based on **active stakeholder engagement throughout all stages**, from planning to implementation and evaluation, ensuring ownership and long-term impact.

## Who is it for

This Guide is addressed to:

- Public authorities (Local/regional/public authorities, sectoral agencies, infrastructures operators)
- Private sector and business support organisations (Tourism enterprises, SMEs)
- NGOs, Education and Research organisations, Institutions, Agencies and local communities

### Particularly relevant for destinations that:



- ★ are connected to coastal or aquatic environments



- ★ aim to balance tourism growth with environmental protection

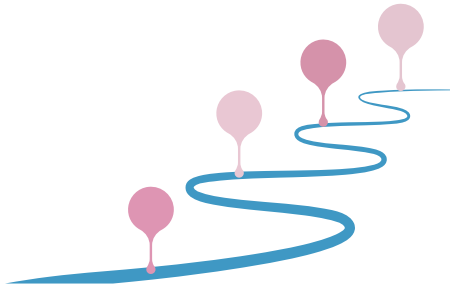
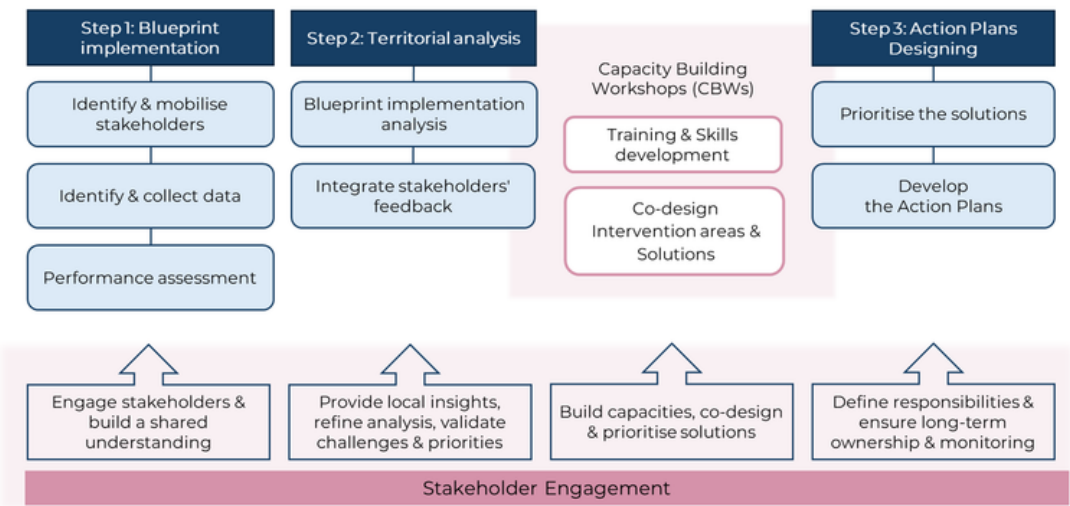


- ★ face challenges related to resource management or seasonality



- ★ are willing to transition to more sustainable models

# What is the process



# Starting with the Blueprint

## What is the RECIRCLE MED Blueprint

At the core of this approach is the Blueprint, a practical tool designed to support destinations in transitioning towards circular and blue tourism.

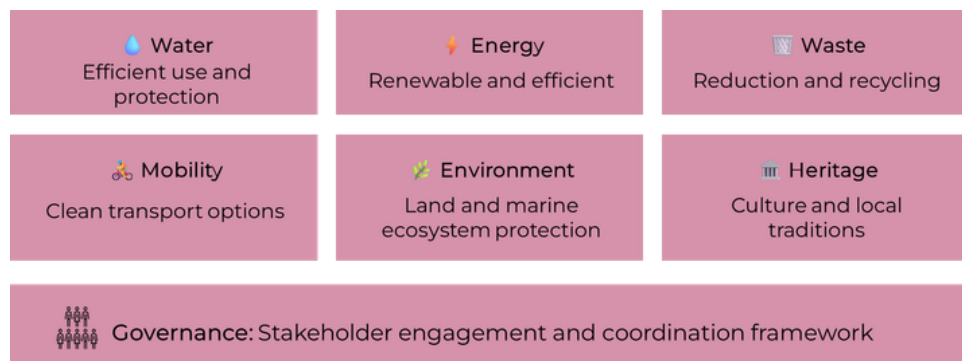
The Blueprint foresees **data collection and initial assessment**, enabling stakeholders to:

- **Assess** existing tourism practices and policies
- Identify **strengths, weaknesses and opportunities**
- Measure **performance** using a structured **scoring system**
- Ensure a structured and evidence-based foundation for designing **targeted and realistic Action Plans**

This structured framework ensures that actions are **measurable, transparent and aligned with sustainability objectives**, while supporting continuous improvement over time.

## Blueprint Pillars and Principles

The Blueprint organizes actions around **7 pillars...**



## ...and 6 principles:

1. **Reduce** – Design out waste, minimize resource use
2. **Regenerate** – Keep resources in circulation, restore ecosystems
3. **Rethink** – Involve stakeholders, adopt holistic approaches
4. **Innovate** – Create forward-looking, creative solutions
5. **Revalue** – Maximize long-term value of resources
6. **Reinvest** – Ensure economic benefits stay in local communities



## Where is it tested

The RECIRCLE MED approach has been implemented in four diverse Mediterranean destinations, including coastal and lakeside territories, ensuring that the methodology presented in this Guide is **practical, tested and transferable**.

In these areas, local stakeholders have:

- applied the Blueprint
- analysed local conditions
- co-designed **tailor-made Blue Action Plans for Circular Tourism**

The RECIRCLE MED Blueprint provides a **practical pathway for destinations** to start their transition toward **blue and circular tourism**.

By following this process, destinations can **adapt the Blueprint to their local context**, ensuring relevance, feasibility and ownership.

# STEP 1: Blueprint Implementation

**Goal:** Identify stakeholders, introduce the Blueprint and gather baseline data.

## Key activities:

### Identify and mobilize stakeholders:

Local authorities, tourism enterprises, NGOs, communities and research organizations to ensure early participation and commitment  
oIntroduce the Blueprint and its 7 pillars and 6 principles:

- *Explain blue and circular tourism concepts*
- *Collect stakeholders' input on local practices, priorities and challenges*  
*Ensure shared understanding of the destination's current situation*

### Collect data:

Gather environmental, economic, social and governance information. Include visitor numbers, resource use, infrastructure capacity and legislation.

### Initial assessment:

- *Evaluate current tourism practices according to the pillars and principles*
- *Identify existing measures, gaps and areas that need improvement*
- *Generate baseline scores and a preliminary overview of circular and blue tourism performance*

This step lays the foundation for a shared understanding of the destination's current situation.



## Role of stakeholders in STEP 1

- Provide knowledge of the local context, resource use and tourism activities
- Align understanding of current strengths and weaknesses
- Establish ownership and commitment from the start
- Ensure that the Blueprint is applied in a way that reflects local realities

### Summary of STEP 1



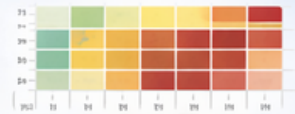
**1** Engage stakeholders and build a shared understanding



**2** Collect and structure key information about current practices.



**3** Assess initial performance according to the Blueprint's pillars and principles.



**Stakeholders** are central to ensuring realistic, locally grounded action planning.

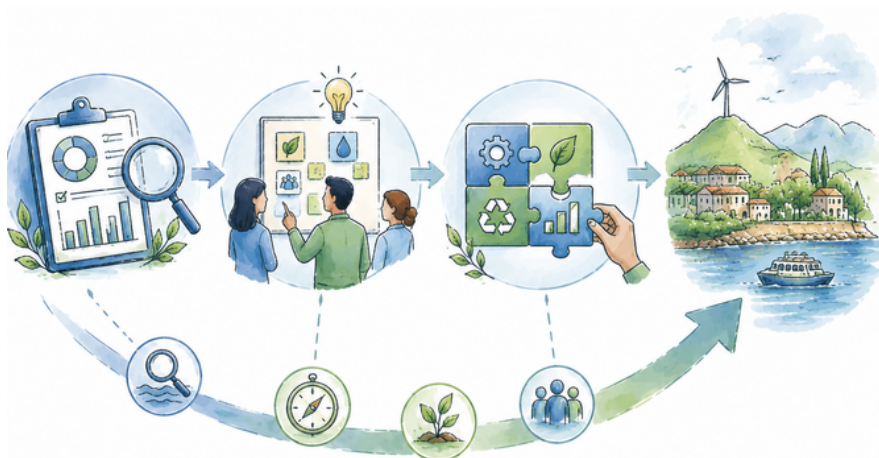
# After the Blueprint: what we do with the results

## From assessment to action

Once the Blueprint has been applied, the focus shifts from understanding the current situation to **deciding what to do next**.

Destinations use the results to **identify priorities, explore solutions and take informed decisions**, turning insights into practical actions adapted to local needs.

This process leads to the development of **Blue Action Plans for Circular Tourism**, providing a clear path from analysis to implementation.



## STEP 2: Territorial Analysis

**Goal:** Build a clear understanding of the local context and identify key priorities.

The territorial analysis builds on the results of the Blueprint and provides a clear picture of the destination's current situation.

It includes:

- Analysis of tourism characteristics
- Review of resource use
- Overview of governance structures and policies
- Identification of key challenges and opportunities

A **SWOT analysis** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is used to identify:

- Strengths: areas where high scores and concrete measures already exist (e.g. strong water management plan, active heritage integration)
- Weaknesses: low-score areas or missing pillars (e.g. no mobility measures, weak governance tools)
- Opportunities and threats: external factors (EU and national policies, blue-economy funding, climate risks, market trends) and their interaction with implementing the Blueprint

This step establishes a **shared evidence-based understanding**, forming the foundation for action.



## Role of stakeholders in STEP 2

Stakeholders:

- Refine and validate the territorial analysis
- Provide local knowledge and practical insights
- Validate key challenges and priorities

Their involvement ensures that the analysis is **accurate, relevant and widely supported**.

## Capacity Building Workshops (CBWs)

Capacity Building Workshops (CBWs) support the transition from territorial analysis to action planning.

They bring together local stakeholders to better understand the results, share perspectives and work jointly on shaping the next steps. Rather than being just training sessions, CBWs create a **space for learning, dialogue and practical decision-making**.

Building on the findings of the territorial analysis, these workshops are tailored to each destination. They help stakeholders **connect data and insights with real local challenges and opportunities**, ensuring that the transition towards blue and circular tourism is both well-informed and locally grounded.

# A dual role: training and co-design

## 1. Training and skills development

CBWs support stakeholders in developing the **knowledge and skills** needed to engage effectively in the transition towards blue and circular tourism.

Through a series of training sessions, they:

- Strengthen understanding of blue and circular economy principles in tourism
- Provide practical tools, methodologies and best practice examples
- Combine theoretical input with hands-on exercises and real case discussions
- Focus on key topics such as resource efficiency, waste reduction and sustainable coastal and marine tourism practices

These activities enhance stakeholders' capacity to:

- contribute to planning processes
- develop and implement sustainable tourism strategies

collaborate across sectors

## 2. Co-design of solutions

At the same time, CBWs serve as a space for **co-design**, where stakeholders actively shape the content of the Blue Action Plans, including:

### Defining areas of intervention by

- Using the results of the Blueprint and territorial analysis
- Building a shared understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Translating findings into clear thematic priorities

### Developing solutions by

- Exploring a wide range of options
- Proposing and discussing possible measures
- Aligning solutions with local needs, capacities and opportunities

This shared diagnosis ensures that all stakeholders work from the same evidence-based perspective. It strengthens ownership of the process, improves the feasibility of the proposed actions and helps ensure that solutions are realistic and aligned with local needs.

## STEP 3: Design of Blue Action Plans

### From analysis to priorities

Following the territorial analysis, destinations identify where the Blueprint highlights the most **critical gaps**, such as:

- low-scoring pillars and principles
- missing types of measures
- key weaknesses identified through the SWOT analysis

A **priority heatmap** is used to visualise these gaps and highlight areas requiring targeted action. This ensures that decision-making is evidence-based and focused on the most relevant issues.

### Identification and prioritisation of solutions

For each priority area, a **list of potential measures** is developed, drawing on:

- the Blueprint catalogue of measures (e.g. legislative tools, financial instruments, data and monitoring systems, research and innovation)
- existing local initiatives that can be scaled up or replicated
- proposals emerging from stakeholder discussions in CBWs

At this stage, the objective is to ensure that **all relevant options are considered**.





To move from a broad list to a focused set of actions, common prioritisation criteria are applied, including:

### **Impact on circular and blue objectives**

Contribution to improving key Blueprint scores and reducing environmental and social pressures

### **Feasibility**

Availability of technical and institutional capacity, time and resources

### **Cost and funding potential**

Estimated investment needs and access to funding sources (local, national, EU, private)

### **Stakeholder support**

Level of acceptance and ownership among public authorities, businesses and communities

### **Replicability**

Potential to be scaled or transferred to other areas

This step ensures a **balanced selection of measures**, addressing the most important gaps while combining different types of interventions, including long-term structural actions.

## Development of the Blue Action Plans

Once priorities are defined, selected measures are translated into a **Blue Action Plan for Circular Tourism**.

The Action Plan builds on:

- the results of the territorial analysis and SWOT
- the validated priorities
- the input and contributions from stakeholders

Each action is structured in a clear and consistent format, including:

- Pillar and principle addressed
- Specific objective or target
- Responsible stakeholders
- Resources required
- Timeline for implementation
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

This structured approach ensures that actions are clearly defined, measurable, feasible and linked to responsibilities and resources.



## Role of stakeholders in STEP 3

Stakeholders:

- contribute to identifying and refining solutions
- support the prioritisation process
- help define objectives and responsibilities
- provide feedback to ensure feasibility and relevance

Their participation ensures that the Action Plans are **realistic, context-specific and supported by those responsible for implementation**, while also strengthening long-term collaboration.

### Summary of STEP 2 and STEP 3



**1** Territorial Analysis:  
Understanding  
the local context.



**2** Capacity Building  
Workshops:  
Training and Co-design



**3** Action Plan Design:  
Defining priorities,  
measures and  
implementation.



Destinations move from assessment to implementation, supported by strong stakeholder engagement and a shared vision for blue and circular tourism.

## Highlights from the transfer during the project

The transfer process provided valuable insights into how destinations can successfully apply the RECIRCLE MED approach in practice. Beyond the technical aspects of the Blueprint, the experience highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement, collaboration, communication and continuous improvement.

This section summarizes key lessons learned, practical recommendations for future users of the Blueprint and common challenges that destinations may face during implementation.

## Tips for potential receivers

### Keep the approach simple and relatable



The Blueprint should be presented in a clear and accessible way to maintain attention and encourage participation. Avoid overly technical language and connect the approach to everyday realities that stakeholders already recognize.

This can include:

- tourism challenges such as pollution, transport or overcrowding
- local natural features and protected areas
- cultural heritage, traditions and local identity

Relating the Blueprint to local realities helps stakeholders better understand its relevance and strengthens their sense of ownership and responsibility towards the territory.

## Build on local identity and shared value

Emphasizing the unique identity of the destination helps create pride and reinforce the value of protecting local resources, landscapes and heritage.

Stakeholders are more likely to engage when they see how blue and circular tourism can:

- support the local economy
- improve quality of life
- preserve the identity of the destination
- strengthen long-term resilience



## Encourage active participation

Stakeholder engagement works best when participation is interactive and collaborative.

Useful approaches include:

- open discussions during workshops
- participatory exercises and co-design activities
- digital interactive tools such as Mentimeter, Slido or Kahoot!

These methods help maintain interest, encourage dialogue and ensure that different perspectives are included in the process.

# Challenges to expect and how to overcome them

## Limited available data

One of the main challenges during the transfer process was the availability and quality of data.

In some cases:

- data was difficult to access
- information was not collected consistently
- tourism-related information was fragmented across different organizations
- some data was not publicly available

This can affect the accuracy and completeness of the Blueprint assessment.

Destinations can improve the process by:

- promoting data sharing among local authorities and tourism stakeholders
- encouraging tourism businesses and local actors to contribute information
- strengthening collaboration between public authorities and the tourism sector
- using shared templates and common data collection methods

## Low stakeholder engagement

Another challenge was ensuring consistent participation from all relevant stakeholders. Some actors may be reluctant to participate, provide feedback or allocate time to the process.

Engagement can be strengthened by:

- reinforcing the connection between local identity and sustainability
- clearly explaining the benefits of participation for the community and local economy
- showing how stakeholder input directly influences the results and Action Plans
- creating open and inclusive spaces for discussion and collaboration



# Continuous improvement and monitoring

The Blueprint is not only an assessment tool — it can also support continuous improvement over time.

## Improvement

Destinations can strengthen implementation by:

- improving stakeholder engagement throughout the process
- enhancing collaboration through regular meetings and clearer responsibilities
- strengthening partnerships between public authorities, businesses and communities
- improving data collection and sharing practices
- creating shared platforms or standardized templates for information management

The Blueprint can also become more action-oriented by:

- translating assessment results into clear and achievable actions
- prioritizing measures based on impact and feasibility
- developing simple roadmaps with short-, medium- and long-term actions
- sharing success stories to inspire participation and replication

## Monitoring

Regular monitoring helps destinations track progress and adapt actions when needed. Key elements include:

- Defining clear KPIs
- Regular reporting and transparent communication through annual or biannual reporting, visual progress summaries and dashboards
- Establishing feedback loops by collecting feedback after workshops and activities through surveys, polls, open feedback sessions and continuous communication channels
- Benchmarking to compare results over time, across destinations and across similar tourism contexts
- Using digital tools for tracking and visualisation
- Strengthening accountability and ownership by assigning clear roles and responsibilities to support implementation and long-term commitment

The transfer experience demonstrated that successful implementation of the Blueprint depends not only on technical tools, but also on collaboration, communication and stakeholder ownership.

Destinations that combine strong participation, reliable data and continuous monitoring are better positioned to develop effective and long-lasting blue and circular tourism strategies.

# Beyond RECIRCLE MED: Building bridges in action

The RECIRCLE MED approach is designed to support and connect with other initiatives, acting as a bridge towards more sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean.

Building on the previous steps — from Blueprint implementation to territorial analysis and Action Plan development — the Blueprint can be applied in synergy with other projects, tools and methodologies. It provides a structured, evidence-based framework that helps strengthen existing approaches and enhance their impact.

This section illustrates how the RECIRCLE MED Blueprint can complement and support other initiatives by fostering synergies with indicative projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission. It demonstrates how the Blueprint can reinforce their implementation, improve coherence across actions and contribute to the transition towards a more sustainable blue and circular tourism model.

## How can other initiatives benefit from the Blueprint?

The RECIRCLE MED Blueprint can complement other initiatives by:

- Structuring **decision-making** through a clear step-by-step process
- Providing **metrics** to assess sustainability
- Supporting **stakeholder engagement and co-design**
- Strengthening the **link between analysis and action**
- Ensuring **consistency** across environmental, socio-economic and governance dimensions

# Indicative initiatives of the Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Mission

## MED-Routes – Enhancing MED sustainable cultural tourism through the creation of eco-itineraries inside European Cultural Routes

The project promotes sustainable cultural tourism through the development of eco-itineraries based on a “slow tourism” approach. It focuses on local heritage, community engagement and low-impact tourism models.

### How the Blueprint could contribute

#### Adding a structured assessment framework

Supporting the evaluation of sustainability performance across eco-itineraries



#### Integrating blue and circular dimensions

Linking cultural routes with coastal destinations and practices for resource efficiency



#### Reinforcing system-wide consistency

Using the Blueprint pillars to ensure that key dimensions (resources, mobility, governance, heritage and where relevant marine/coastal interactions) are systematically addressed

#### Facilitating comparability and recognition

Contributing to the development of common standards and certification approaches (e.g. Green Labels)

## Supporting coordinated stakeholder engagement

Strengthening collaboration across territories and actors involved in the routes



## Regenera4MED – Towards a Mediterranean model of Regenerative Tourism as Climate Change adaptation and risk prevention

The project focuses on regenerative tourism, aiming to restore ecosystems, strengthen communities and create resilient tourism systems.

## How the Blueprint could contribute

### Enhancing measurement and monitoring

Integrating circular and blue economy metrics (e.g. water use, resource efficiency, ecosystem pressures)



### Reinforcing governance mechanisms

Supporting stakeholder coordination across sectors and land–sea interactions



### Strengthening resource management practices

Applying circular principles while ensuring alignment with the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources

## Bridging circular and regenerative approaches

Ensuring that restoration efforts are supported by efficient and sustainable resource use systems



## Supporting structured action planning

Providing frameworks to translate priorities into coordinated and place-based actions

# A shared pathway for the Mediterranean

These examples demonstrate how the RECIRCLE MED Blueprint can act as a **bridge between initiatives**, helping to:

- connect different approaches and methodologies
- align tools and frameworks across initiatives
- support replication across territories
- strengthen policy relevance and long-term impact

By working in synergy, projects can move beyond isolated actions and contribute to a **more coordinated transition towards blue and circular tourism in the Mediterranean**.



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