



“Eco-tourism Innovations for Rural Development”

TRANSNATIONAL REPORT 2

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Project Overview

The Eco-tourism Innovations for Rural Development project, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, promotes sustainable tourism practices in rural regions across Italy, Cyprus, Denmark, and Romania. By focusing on minimizing environmental impacts, enhancing the capacity of local tourism operators, and raising awareness among tourists and local communities, the project contributes to responsible tourism. The project will end in December 2024.

In Report 1, the following topics were explored:

- The project's background and objectives
- Partner organizations
- An overview of Activities 1, 2, and 3.

In the present report, *Activities 4 and 5 will be examined*, along with an analysis of the overall impact, the challenges faced, and the future of the project.

Activities Overview

The project is organized into five main activities:

1. **A1 - Project Management (October 2023 - December 2024):** Coordination and monitoring of all project phases, ensuring timely deliverables and quality outputs.
2. **A2 - Research and Handbook Development (January 2024 – March 2024):** Compilation of best practices for sustainable tourism in rural areas, emphasizing eco-friendly practices, cultural preservation, and stakeholder collaboration.
3. **A3 - Pilot Implementation (April 2024 - June 2024):** Testing and refining training modules and materials in real-world scenarios.
4. **A4 - Online Training Sessions (May 2024 - October 2024):**
 - The main objective was to educate stakeholders on sustainable rural tourism as an economic driver. Each partner delivered five online training sessions, targeting tourism operators, community members, and local authorities.
 - Topics included eco-friendly product development, methods for promoting sustainable tourism, networking with authorities, and preserving cultural and natural heritage.
 - Key achievements:
 - Over 255 online presences (including repeat attendees).
 - Targeted 50 representatives from rural tourism organizations.
 - *Knowledge assessment results showed over 80% of participants significantly improved their understanding of sustainable practices.*
 - *Satisfaction surveys reported that over 90% of participants experienced positive behavioural changes and felt confident applying their new knowledge.*
5. **A5 - Final Conference and Dissemination (October 24-26, 2024):**
 - Held in Valdobbadiene, Italy, this event showcased project outcomes and facilitated discussions on sustainable rural tourism.



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- *Participants exceeded expectations, with 40 attendees from institutions, authorities, and the private sector.*
- In addition to the conference, the Activity 5 program included a series of cultural and recreational activities involving European partners, local entrepreneurs, and tourism operators. These activities featured: guided tours of the Conegliano and Valdobbiadene hills, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with stops at agritourisms and wineries adopting sustainable practices; the Cartizze Slow Experience, an immersive walk through the hills accompanied by an environmental guide, featuring local wine tastings; and participation in the Festa dei Marroni di Combai, a traditional event celebrating local culture and flavours, with tastings of typical dishes and experiential workshops.

Results and Impact

The project has delivered substantial outcomes that align closely with its objectives and emphasize long-term sustainability.

1. **Handbook on Sustainable Tourism:** The handbook, a comprehensive guide on sustainable practices tailored for rural tourism operators, has been distributed to over 100 stakeholders. It includes detailed strategies for reducing environmental impact, promoting local traditions, and fostering collaboration among key players in the tourism sector. The document also highlights case studies that showcase the successful implementation of sustainable tourism practices.
2. **Training:** Through a combination of pilot sessions and online training, a total of 65 rural tourism operators were trained. These sessions provided participants with actionable knowledge and skills, such as developing eco-friendly products, forming strategic networks, and utilizing innovative promotional methods. The training program also emphasized how to engage with local authorities and community members to ensure sustainable tourism benefits the entire region.
3. **Increased Knowledge:** The knowledge assessment questionnaires revealed that over 80% of participants significantly improved their understanding of sustainable practices. This marked improvement underscores the effectiveness of the training content and methodology.
4. **Overall Satisfaction:** Over 90% of the participants reported a positive change in their attitude and behaviour towards sustainable tourism and sustainable practices. Respondents praised the interactive and practical approach of the training. Notably, the clarity of teaching materials and the expertise of instructors were universally rated as excellent.
5. **Environmental and Economic Benefits:** Preliminary data indicate that businesses participating in the project have successfully reduced their environmental footprint while simultaneously benefiting from an increased demand for eco-friendly tourism options. These results demonstrate the economic viability of sustainability-focused strategies.
6. **Establishment of Sustainable Tourism Networks:** The project facilitated the creation of new networks that connect tourism operators with local producers, cultural organizations, and environmental advocates. These partnerships span all participating regions and are designed to support ongoing collaboration, ensuring that the project's impact continues to grow.



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Challenges and Lessons Learned

The implementation of the project was not without obstacles, but these challenges offered invaluable lessons for future initiatives.

1. **Cultural and Regional Differences:** The diversity among the participating regions presented both challenges and opportunities. Each region had unique characteristics, which required tailored training materials and methodologies. For instance, regions with less developed tourism infrastructure needed examples and strategies that directly addressed their specific limitations. Flexibility in adapting the content to local contexts proved critical in maintaining the relevance and impact of the activities.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging local stakeholders was initially challenging in some areas, especially where scepticism toward sustainability practices prevailed. However, by demonstrating the economic advantages of adopting eco-friendly tourism strategies, such as cost savings and increased marketability, resistance was effectively addressed. This approach not only encouraged broader participation but also fostered stronger partnerships between local businesses and authorities.
3. **Transnational Collaboration:** Coordinating activities across four countries posed logistical complexities, including language barriers, and differing administrative frameworks. Regular communication through online meetings, coupled with a structured project management plan, helped to overcome these challenges. A collaborative approach, the use of digital tools and the proactive role of project leaders were instrumental in ensuring smooth implementation.

Future Prospects and Sustainability

The conclusion of the Eco-Tourism Innovations for Rural Development project in December 2024 marks the beginning of its long-term impact. Several initiatives are already underway to ensure the sustainability of its achievements.

1. **Final Conference Impact:** The final conference in Valdobbadiene served as a key platform to disseminate the project's outcomes and engage a wide range of stakeholders, from regional authorities to tourism operators. Discussions held during the event highlighted actionable strategies for continuing sustainable tourism development. The conference also strengthened networks among participants, setting the stage for future collaborations and joint initiatives.
2. **New Erasmus+ Proposal:** Building on the successes of this project, three of the four partners have already submitted a proposal for a new Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership project. This new initiative aims to expand the reach of the training programs and handbook to new regions while deepening collaborations with rural tourism operators.
3. **Sustainable Tourism Networks:** The networks established during the project are set to continue as key support systems for local tourism operators. These networks will facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices among stakeholders. They also provide a framework for regional authorities and private enterprises to



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collaborate on innovative initiatives, ensuring that sustainable tourism practices are not only maintained but also evolve over time.



Valdobbiadene, 25 October 2024

In conclusion, the *Eco-tourism Innovations for Rural Development* project has laid a strong foundation for sustainable rural tourism in Europe. Its legacy will continue through ongoing training, collaboration, and new partnerships.



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