ECO HOL

Policy recommendations report

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION & ARCHITECTURE

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Summary

Introduction

This policy recommendation report is the result of consultations, discussions and research carried out by the European consortium of the ECOHOL project, co-funded by the European Union.

Following a work plan developed by the work package coordinator and questionnaires validated by the consortium, consultation groups were created.

Representing a wide range of stakeholders (sustainable tourism entrepreneurs, young students in the tourism sector, policy makers, young people with fewer opportunities, representatives of tourism networks, etc.), more than 80 participants from four different European countries (France, Belgium, Spain and Cyprus) contributed to the development of this document.
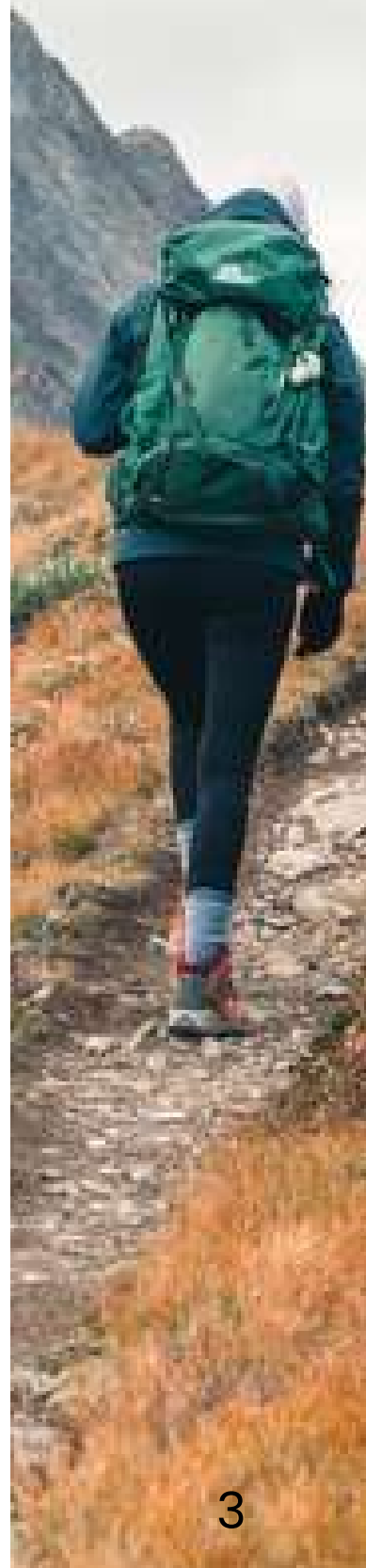
01

Overall diagnosis of tourism

*Challenges, findings and opportunities*

Findings

Tourism, a major economic driver, is currently facing structural tensions that affect both major European destinations and local, urban and rural areas.
Brussels, Barcelona, Cyprus and certain Mediterranean areas are experiencing overtourism, which is putting pressure on ecosystems, infrastructure and social cohesion.

This pressure also leads to environmental degradation (pollution, overcrowding of natural sites) and cultural erosion, with a loss of local identity, decline in traditional crafts and amplifying effects of social media. The economic consequences are equally visible: dependence on tourism, unregulated short-term rentals, inequalities in access to housing and tourism resources.
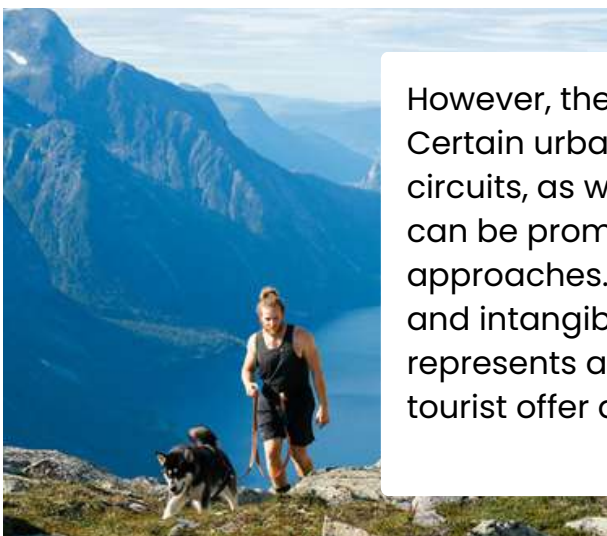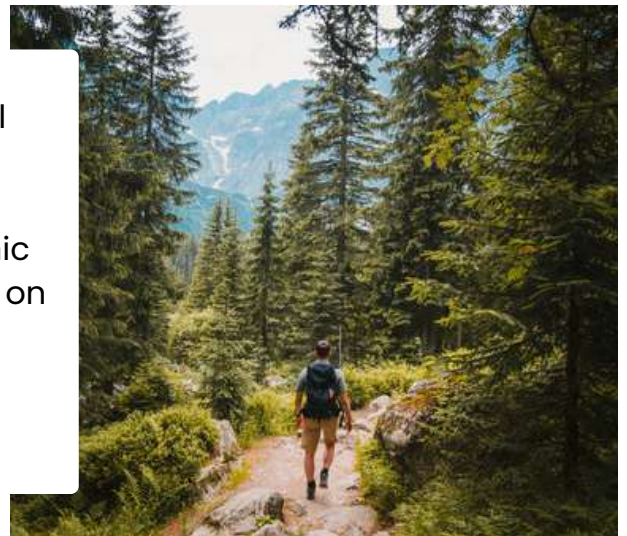
However, these challenges reveal concrete opportunities. Certain urban neighbourhoods outside the traditional tourist circuits, as well as rural areas and under-exploited villages, can be promoted through ecotourism and experiential approaches. Natural and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, often overlooked or poorly promoted, represents a largely untapped potential for enriching the tourist offer and enhancing the attractiveness of the region.

The Common Plain
redefining territory

Objective

Make La Plaine Commune a coherent and attractive destination by promoting its heritage, cultural, natural and human resources. The challenge: move beyond the image of a 'transit area' to create a truly urban and sustainable destination that is inclusive and creates local value.

Methodology

The approach is structured around three areas:

1. Creating destinations:
connecting heritage sites, cultural facilities, sustainable tourism stakeholders and natural spaces to create a coherent network and an extended visitor experience.

2. Developing hospitality:
establishing a collective culture of hospitality within the region, involving residents, shopkeepers, restaurateurs and community stakeholders.

3. Supporting the transition to sustainable tourism:
promoting accessible, experiential urban and rural ecotourism based on local priorities, while promoting a renewed narrative of the region.

A third-party facilitator (neutral actor) plays a key role in fostering cooperation between the various stakeholders and ensuring the consistency of actions.

Stakeholders involved

- Local authorities: Plaine Commune, town halls, tourist office.
- Public stakeholders: cultural establishments, integration organisations, urban planning departments.
- Private stakeholders: local businesses, accommodation providers, restaurants, artisans.
- Associations and residents: stakeholders in participatory tourism and the social and solidarity economy.
- Third-party facilitator: independent organisation providing mediation and support for collective projects.

Results

Emergence of a strong regional identity based on cooperation and heritage promotion.

- Creation of synergies between cultural, economic and social actors.
- Development of a coherent tourism ecosystem focused on hospitality, sustainability and inclusion.
- Increased visibility of the region and better distribution of economic benefits.

Transferability

The La Plaine Commune model can be replicated in other urban or peri-urban areas facing similar challenges in terms of development and cohesion. Keys to success:
Have shared governance and allow plenty of time for coordination.

- Use a third-party facilitator to promote cooperation.
- Build a unifying regional narrative that includes residents and economic stakeholders.

Analysis

According to feedback from Ecohol programme partners:

- Local and national frameworks are often insufficient to address the global challenges of sustainable urban and rural tourism. Institutions too often work in silos, without coordination.

- Young people and local communities are rarely involved in tourism planning.

- Digital tools and social networks, which have a significant influence on tourist behaviour, remain under-exploited in promoting sustainability.

- Attention is still too often focused on major attractions, to the detriment of local initiatives. Yet the latter demonstrate strong potential for social integration, civic engagement and cultural promotion, in both urban and rural areas.

- Often, regional development is geared towards tourism without taking into account the daily reality of residents, which can generate tensions and limit local support.

Proposals

Develop a coordinated European vision for sustainable tourism, integrating ecology, social inclusion and innovation, and break down silos at the level of communities and structures.

- Put residents back at the heart of tourism projects: infrastructure and services should not be designed solely for visitors or solely for residents, but for both. This approach avoids the exclusion of either group and promotes coherent and participatory development in line with local priorities. It also encourages co-construction with residents: citizen workshops, surveys to determine what constitutes heritage for them, participation in projects and gradual adjustment of policies based on feedback and expressed needs. This approach creates a more inclusive form of tourism that is better accepted by the population and sustainable over time.

- Create local and digital observatories to monitor tourist flows and environmental and socio-economic impacts, in order to understand, learn and act on the real issues facing the area.

- Promote cultural, urban, rural and intangible heritage as a lever for attractiveness and differentiation.

- Develop integrated tourist routes, connecting towns, countryside and natural areas, to extend the visitor experience and balance visitor numbers.

- Tell new stories about the area, which go beyond current representations and highlight unexpected opportunities, in order to enhance the attractiveness and engagement of both visitors and residents.

Example
Istanbul
participatory municipal design

Objective

Create a space for direct collaboration between residents and designers to co-design concrete solutions to the needs of the area. The challenge: to put citizens back at the heart of urban transformation, encourage collective creativity and strengthen social ties through participatory design.

Methodology
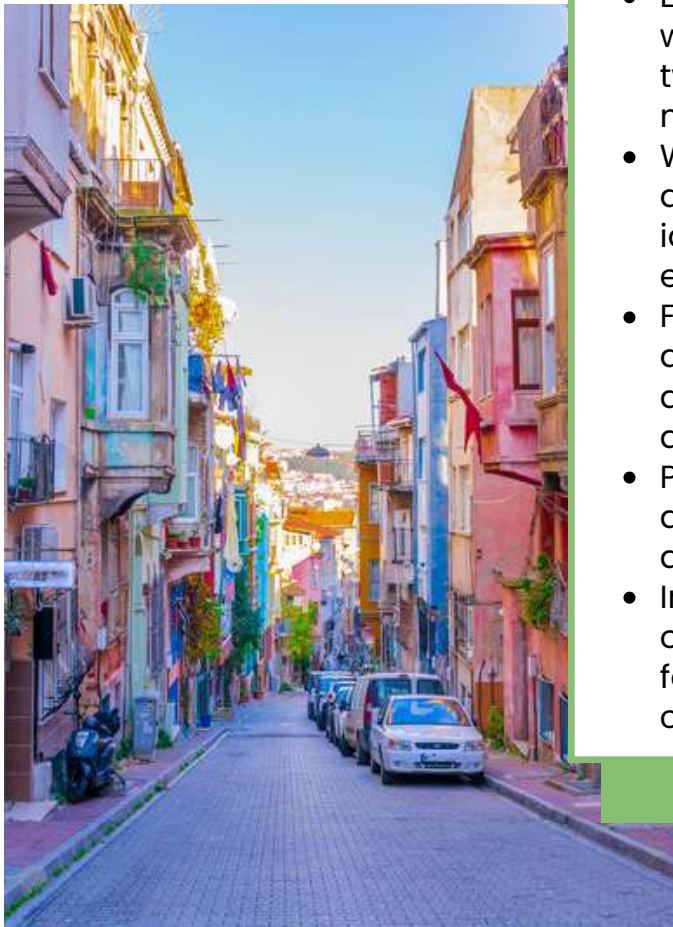
- Establishment of a municipal design workshop run by a team of around twenty designers integrated into the municipality.
- Welcoming residents who come to discuss their everyday problems or their ideas for improving their living environment.
- Formation of mixed teams of residents and designers working together to design functional, aesthetic solutions adapted to the local context.
- Promotion of a culture of participatory design based on training, co-creation and experimentation.
- Integration of an initial training module on the history and principles of design for each newcomer to the association or collective.

Stakeholders involved

Istanbul Municipality: initiator of the project and guarantor of the institutional framework.

- Professional designers: supervise, train and co-create with residents.
- Residents and local associations: contribute their knowledge of the area and specific needs.
- Partner organisations: schools, universities and cultural actors involved in disseminating knowledge and practices of collaborative design.

Results

- Creation of tailor-made local solutions that directly respond to the needs expressed by residents.
- Strengthening of a sense of belonging and pride within communities.
- Development of a culture of citizen-led design that integrates innovation, inclusion and sustainability.
- Improvement of quality of life in the neighbourhoods concerned and dissemination of the participatory approach to other areas of the city.

Transferability

The Istanbul model is highly replicable in other urban or rural areas seeking to strengthen citizen participation and local innovation.

Key success factors:

An institutional framework open to co-construction and experimentation

- The presence of a third-party facilitator (team of designers or mediators) to support the process.
- The inclusion of training and collective appropriation of participatory design methods.
- An approach that can be transposed to other areas: tourism, heritage, mobility, environment, etc.

02

Mobility and transport

A strategic lever for sustainable and inclusive tourism
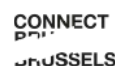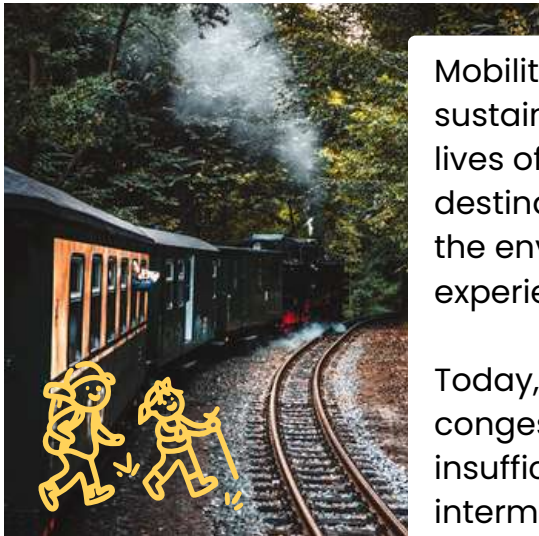
Mobility is a strategic issue for rethinking tourism in a sustainable, inclusive way that is consistent with the daily lives of local residents. Whether in urban or rural destinations, the way visitors travel has a direct impact on the environment, local quality of life, safety, and the tourist experience.

Today, tourist mobility faces several challenges: road congestion during peak season, car dependency, insufficient soft infrastructure (cycling, walking), lack of intermodality, and fragmented information. These issues generate environmental impacts, but also social tensions and stress for residents.

Facts

- To understand the challenges of tourist mobility, it is essential to start from concrete observations, both at European and local level.

- Dependence on transport modes: Accessibility, prices, and service levels strongly influence the choice between plane, train, and car. Cars remain the most popular mode of transport for European travelers, despite their environmental impact.
- High concentration of cars in high season: road saturation, increased pollution, stress, accidents and sometimes a feeling of rejection or flight from local residents.
- Last-mile problem: getting tourists from the airport or train station to their place of stay sustainably remains a challenge, often poorly integrated into local policies.
- Traveling sustainably remains difficult: lack of charging stations, inconsistencies in bicycle policies, insufficient safety for bicycles, difficulty transporting one's bicycle on trains, lack of reliable information on intermodality.
- Innovation is often technocentric: few practical solutions adapted to the real needs of residents and visitors.
- Lack of coordination: tourist routes and soft mobility infrastructure (cycling, walking) are rarely thought of together, making tourist mobility fragmented and unsustainable.
- Transition from muscle bike to electric bike: allows for going from 40 km rides to 100-120 km, requiring larger scale data and infrastructure.
- There are several obstacles:
- Sociological: residents' perception of their legitimacy to use certain spaces and services;
- Techniques: access to reliable data for planning routes, intermodal mobility (e.g.: bicycle + train)
- Policies: lack of coordination or incentives at national or European level.
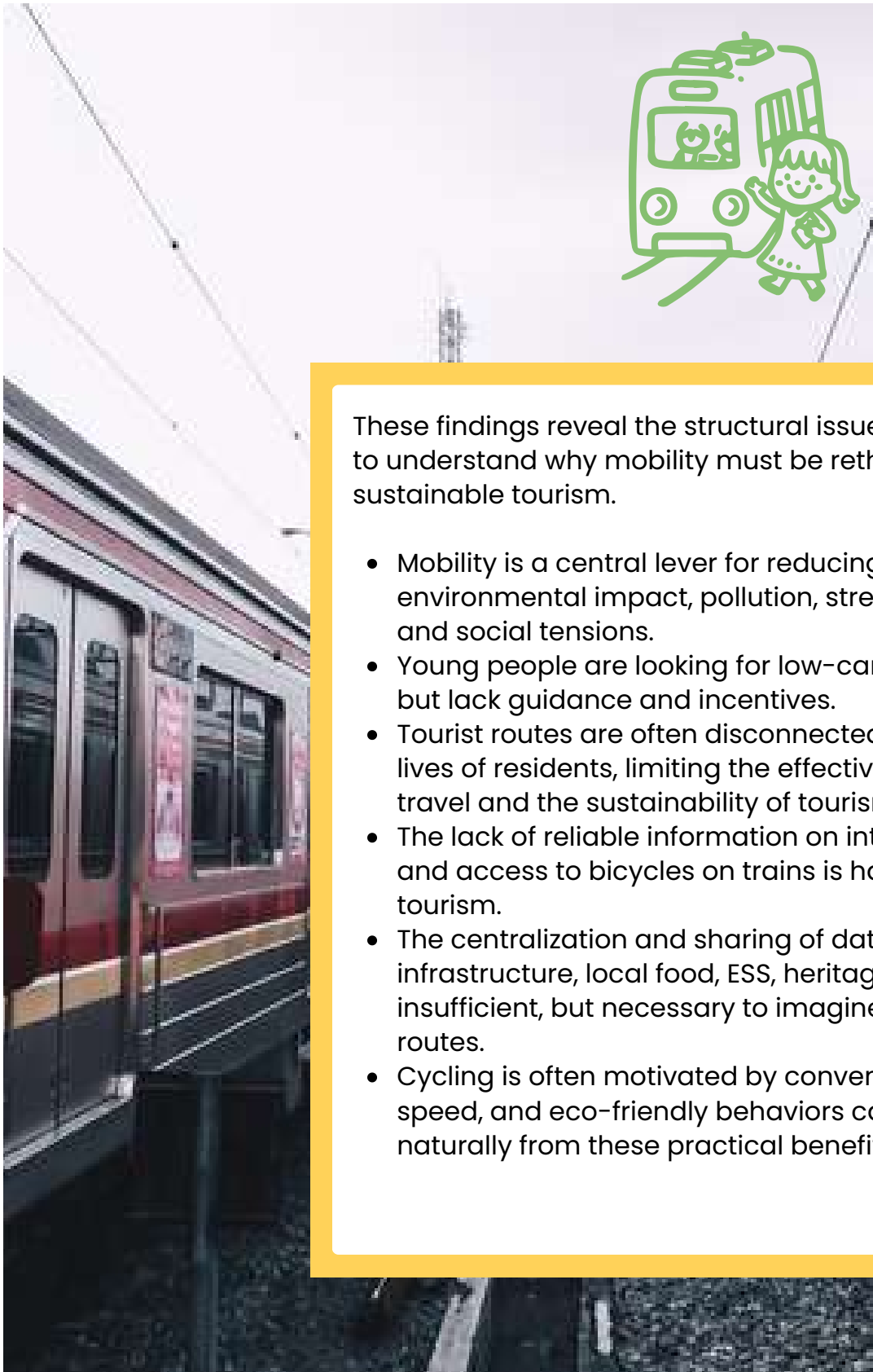
These findings reveal the structural issues and allow us to understand why mobility must be rethought for sustainable tourism.

- Mobility is a central lever for reducing environmental impact, pollution, stress, accidents and social tensions.
- Young people are looking for low-carbon options, but lack guidance and incentives.
- Tourist routes are often disconnected from the daily lives of residents, limiting the effectiveness of soft travel and the sustainability of tourism.
- The lack of reliable information on intermodality and access to bicycles on trains is hampering slow tourism.
- The centralization and sharing of data (routes, infrastructure, local food, ESS, heritage) are insufficient, but necessary to imagine suitable routes.
- Cycling is often motivated by convenience and speed, and eco-friendly behaviors can flow naturally from these practical benefits.

Opportunities

Despite the constraints, concrete opportunities exist to develop more sustainable, immersive and inclusive tourism.

Create integrated and multimodal routes, linking towns, countryside and tourist sites, giving priority to soft modes.
Developing bicycle tourism as a structuring lever for experiential and decentralized tourism.
Centralize and share data to enrich the tourist offer and facilitate the planning of multimodal routes.
Co-construct solutions with residents, through citizen workshops or educational programs, to identify real needs and design appropriate pathways.
Promote the off-season and encourage low-carbon travel through bonuses, discounts or digital campaigns.
Integrate soft mobility into local tourist routes, for sustainable and immersive tourism.

Concrete proposals

To act, it is necessary to implement coordinated, accessible measures adapted to local realities.

- Harmonize transport and sustainable mobility policies on a European scale (bicycle, trains, multimodal).
- Invest in cycling infrastructure, multimodal hubs and integrated planning applications.
- Encouraging intermodality: facilitating the transport of bicycles on trains, labeling and harmonization of information for slow tourism
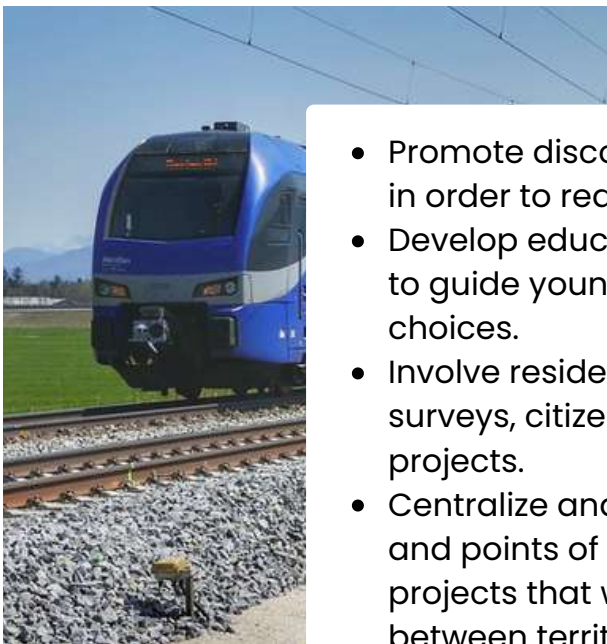
- Promote discounts or benefits for passengers using the train, in order to reduce dependence on cars or planes.
- Develop education and awareness on sustainable mobility, to guide young people and tourists in making responsible choices.
- Involve residents in the co-construction of routes, through surveys, citizen workshops and monitoring of tourism projects.
- Centralize and share data to make routes, bike docks, shops and points of interest visible, but also to reuse them in projects that we don't necessarily imagine, such as synergy between territories for the possibility of creating routes across several territories, mapping small paths and places of passage in the forest or in the city which enriches the tourist offer and facilitates bicycle tourism.

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Sustainable Mobility

Objective

Transforming tourist mobility into a sustainable and attractive lever, by reducing environmental impact, facilitating access to territories and promoting soft and multimodal travel

Method

- Deployment of functional and modular solutions adapted to local needs:
- Teritorio and Cycloclamp: practical equipment for cycling and soft mobility.
- La Bulle Verte: modular eco-tourist resorts for electric vehicles.
- Loopi: digital platform for creating, managing and distributing multimodal tourist circuits.
- Incentive hotels: benefits for visitors arriving by train or soft transport.
- Development of participatory planning and mapping tools:
- Contribution of residents and professionals to enrich the tourist offer.
- Applications and interactive maps to view cycling, GR and hiking routes.
- Implementation of labels and standards (e.g. "Accueil Vélo") to structure the quality and visibility of the offer.
- Long-term anticipation via university chairs and research projects on cycle planning and sustainable infrastructure.

Actors involved

- Local authorities: urban planning, infrastructure, subsidies.
- Businesses and start-ups: technological solutions and mobility services.
- Hoteliers and tourism providers: adoption of incentives for visitors using soft mobility.
- Residents and local associations: participation in mapping and co-design of circuits
- Universities and research centers: studies, foresight and infrastructure innovations.
- Labels and specialized media: promotion, communication and referencing of the offer.

Results

- Development of sustainable and inclusive tourist mobility, reducing the carbon footprint.
- Easy accessibility to tourist sites for all types of visitors and modes of transport.
- Strengthening the visibility and quality of services for cycle tourism and soft mobility.
- Involvement of local communities in the co-design of the tourist offer.
- Innovation and long-term planning through infrastructure research and anticipation.

Transferability

Model applicable in any tourist area, urban or rural, wishing to promote soft and sustainable mobility.
- Conditions for success
- Close collaboration between communities, businesses, residents and researchers. Economic incentives and labels to structure and promote the offer.
- Integration of digital and participatory tools to enrich and disseminate the courses.
- Approach adaptable to various contexts: cycle tourism, hiking, public transport, urban ecotourism

03

Local development

value experience and encounter

Local development is a key lever for reinventing tourism and creating rich, authentic, and meaningful experiences. Drawing on local resources allows us to highlight encounters with local residents, the discovery of local expertise, and the cultural richness of the region, while promoting places often overlooked by traditional tourist routes.

By exploring these less-frequented "shutters," tourism goes beyond simply visiting monuments or emblematic sites to become an immersion in the daily life, identity, and history of a territory. This approach encourages local discovery, learning, and intergenerational transmission, while contributing to the economic robustness of the territory: it attracts both local visitors and tourists from further afield, and diversifies economic flows.

Tourism thus becomes a tool serving the living elements of the territory, linking heritage, experiences and local initiatives in a sustainable, participatory and regenerative approach, focused on the quality of the experience rather than the quantity of visitors.

Facts

- Relying on local development helps to reveal social, cultural and economic dimensions often neglected by traditional tourism.
- Appropriation of space by young people: most live and evolve in less than 5% of the space available around them, limiting their territorial and cultural interactions.
- Risk of spatial isolation: in certain extreme cases, this compartmentalization leads to a feeling of confinement and distrust of the outside world.
- Combating rural depopulation: local development helps revitalize the countryside by promoting its heritage, know-how and initiatives, offering a sustainable alternative to the tourist dependence of large cities.
- Social integration and inclusion: walks and projects led by residents or young people in integration promote local employment and the development of neighborhoods.
- Identity and territorial singularity: each territory is based on a cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, which forges its identity and its capacity to attract visitors in search of meaning.

Local development in tourism is not limited to attracting visitors: it is part of a holistic dynamic, which connects residents, communities and the heritage of the territory to generate sustainable social, economic and cultural benefits.

- This approach considers the territory as a living ecosystem, where each stakeholder contributes to the animation, preservation and enhancement of its local resources. It highlights the need to think about long-term sustainability, balance financing models and strengthen economic resilience in the face of crises, while promoting social cohesion and professional integration.
- In this context, several observations emerge:
- The involvement of residents and local communities in tourism and cultural initiatives generates sustainable, intergenerational and deep-rooted social, economic and cultural value.
- These local dynamics contribute to the preservation of living heritage and strengthen the cohesion of neighborhoods and rural areas.
- Funding remains a major challenge: it is essential to find a balance between public subsidies, self-financing and private partnerships to ensure the sustainability of initiatives.
- Local development is not limited to tourist attractiveness: it plays a structuring role in professional integration, social cohesion and the economic robustness of the territory.
- It also helps to reduce economic dependence on external sources, an issue particularly highlighted by the Covid crisis, which has weakened territories dependent on international tourism.

Opportunities and proposals

Local development paves the way for more balanced and robust tourism, capable of combining attractiveness, sustainability and inclusion.

Opportunities

- Strengthening the economic robustness of territories: by relying on local resources, we limit vulnerability to external crises and stabilize economic activity.
- Diversify sources of income: encourage cooperative models and short supply chains that ensure local redistribution of profits.
- Reinventing the uses of heritage: activating historic or cultural sites through artist residencies, participatory workshops, or educational experiences.
- Create authentic experiences: focus on encounters, know-how and local stories to enrich the tourist offer.
- Involve young people as actors, guides, mediators or creators of experiences, thus promoting their integration and territorial anchoring.

Concrete proposals

- Breaking down barriers between public policies: articulating culture, tourism, heritage, integration and the social economy within a single vision of territorial development.
- Support project leaders: train in cooperation, shared governance and the search for hybrid financing.
- Support the construction of sustainable economic models, combining turnover, subsidies and alternative approaches:
- circular economy (reuse of local resources),
- economy of functionality and cooperation,
- regenerative economy,
- social and solidarity economy.
- *These approaches strengthen the financial autonomy of projects and their territorial anchoring.*
- Promote local experiments: third places, rehabilitated brownfield sites, local circuits or participatory urban agriculture.
- Encourage pooling of resources between cultural, associative and economic actors to stabilize projects and amplify their effects.
- Promote education in cooperation and citizen participation, an essential condition for building sustainable and vibrant territories.

Example 1

Cultural wastelands and living heritage

Objective

Rehabilitate brownfield sites or heritage buildings to create experimental cultural and tourist spaces, strengthening social ties and promoting living heritage.

Method

- Renovate and develop heritage sites to host artistic residencies, participatory workshops and cultural tours.
- Organize fun events and activities combining classical and contemporary heritage.
- Integrate peripheral heritage to broaden the scope of the tourist experience.

Actors involved

- Local authorities and heritage services.
- Cultural and artistic associations.
- Residents and young people, co-builders of the routes.
- Tourism entrepreneurs and service providers for mediation and communication

Results

- Heritage brought to life and accessible to all.
- Creation of spaces for meeting and experimentation.
- Development of authentic and immersive tourist experiences.
- Strengthening social ties and local identity.

Transferability

Applicable to any territory with unused buildings or wasteland.
- Requires coordination between public, cultural and citizen actors.
- Adaptable model for arts, sports, industrial or architectural heritage.

Example 2

Urban agriculture and social inclusion

Objective

Use urban agriculture to create discovery and meeting paths, strengthen social ties and encourage the inclusion of residents in the development of the territory.
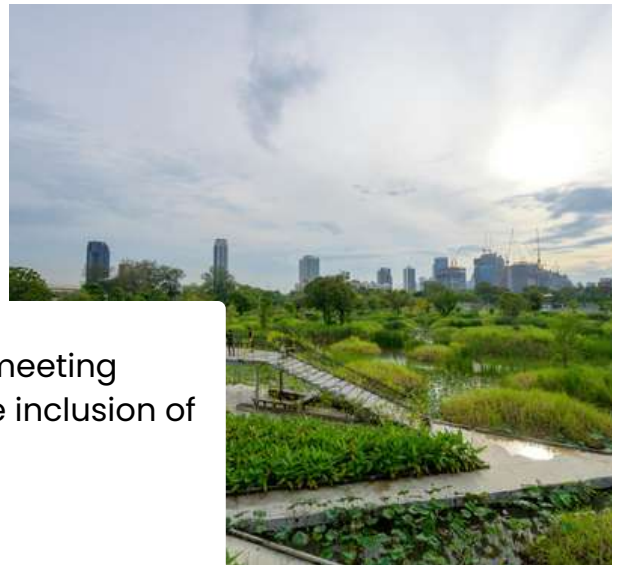
Method

- Develop participatory urban gardens integrated into tourist or educational routes.
- Organize workshops and collective events (planting, harvesting, cooking, environmental awareness).
- Set up educational and cultural mediation activities for residents and visitors.

Actors involved

 Local authorities and environmental/urban planning services.
- Associations and citizen collectives.
- Urban farmers and teachers.
- Visitors and tourists participating in activities.

Results

- Creation of inclusive and participatory collective spaces.
- Strengthening the link between neighborhoods and residents.
- Appropriation of public space and awareness of environmental and food issues.
- Development of a local social and solidarity economy.

Transferability

Applicable in any urban or peri-urban context with available land.
- Promotes co-construction and citizen involvement.
- Compatible with educational, ecological and participatory tourism.

04

Alternative tourism

Alternative initiatives transform tourism into a rich, authentic, and sustainable experience. Rather than focusing solely on iconic sites or large visitor flows, these approaches draw on the region's human, cultural, and heritage resources to create immersive and participatory experiences.

By involving local residents, promoting know-how and little-known places, and integrating young people and local communities, these initiatives encourage encounters, learning, and intergenerational transmission. They also contribute to the economic and social robustness of territories by limiting dependence on external flows and diversifying local income.
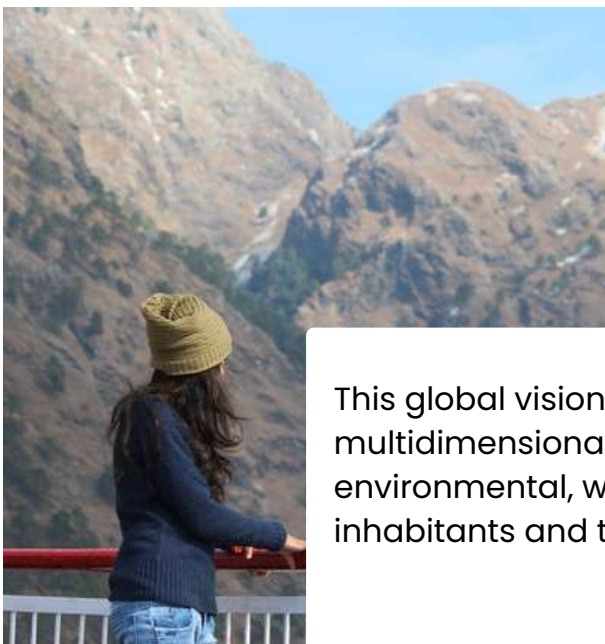
This global vision makes it possible to understand tourism as a multidimensional lever: social, cultural, economic and environmental, while strengthening the sense of belonging of the inhabitants and territorial cohesion.

Facts

- Alternative tourism is based on the idea that experience and encounters are at the heart of discovering a territory. These initiatives offer residents and visitors immersive experiences that stimulate dialogue, strengthen social ties, and showcase the uniqueness of the territory.

Concrete points

- Seeking alternative experiences: Tourists today are looking for something other than traditional sites (e.g., Place de la Bourse in Bordeaux). Even a small percentage interested in local experiences can ensure economic viability.
- Discovery of neighborhoods off the tourist map: These areas allow participants to play an active role in the discovery, guided by locals who bring their knowledge and personal perspective.
- Cultural and audiovisual influence: Audiovisual creations directly influence tourism (e.g., filming locations). The balance between cultural promotion and territorial protection is essential.
- Preservation and transmission of know-how: Example of the Argot ship, a former silver production site, which promotes technical heritage via a museum, workshops and university collaborations.
- Urban walks and the role of residents: In Bordeaux, 90% of participants are from the metropolitan area. Resident leaders change the perception of neighborhoods and promote word of mouth.
- Professional integration and youth engagement: Participants in the walks benefit from socio-professional training and find employment or training in 60% of cases.
- Participation and territorial innovation: Young people create and test new walks, experiment with heritage and public spaces, contributing to local revitalization.
- Diversity of uses and specialization of neighborhoods: Certain areas are highly specialized (offices, heritage, businesses), which requires adapted mobility and accessibility solutions.
- Heritage appropriation: Traditional heritage can be rigid; participatory and fun experiences allow residents and visitors to become actors in its promotion.

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Alternative tourism reveals that the involvement of residents and local communities is an essential lever for creating sustainable social, cultural and economic value.

These dynamics produce multiple impacts:
- Social, cultural and economic value: The involvement of residents generates intergenerational, rooted and lasting value, which crosses neighborhoods and rural areas.
- Preservation of living heritage: Local initiatives contribute to the conservation and transmission of know-how and heritage, while promoting learning and direct experience for residents and visitors.
- Local cohesion and dialogue: Participatory projects strengthen social ties and the sense of belonging, by creating positive interactions between residents, young people and visitors.
- Financial challenges: Finding a balance between public subsidies, self-financing and private partnerships remains crucial to ensure the sustainability of projects.
- Economic robustness and territorial resilience: Local development helps reduce economic dependence on foreign visitors, an issue highlighted by the Covid crisis, while diversifying income and opportunities for residents.

Opportunities

Local initiatives and alternative tourism offer numerous opportunities to strengthen the social, cultural and economic impact of territories, while creating enriching and sustainable experiences.

Concrete points:

Promote immersive experiences: Encourage journeys off the beaten track to reveal little-known neighborhoods and places, and create authentic interactions with locals.

- Strengthen cultural and heritage influence: Integrate places of expertise, historic sites or audiovisual spaces into participatory and attractive tourist routes.
- Developing the integration and participation of young people: Training local facilitators, young mediators and scouts to design and lead tourist experiences.
- Promoting local economic robustness: Diversifying sources of income, limiting dependence on international tourism and supporting local economic players through mixed models (self-financing, subsidies, partnerships).
- Encourage territorial innovation: Experiment with participatory, sporting, cultural or artistic projects, and mobilize residents to test new forms of tourism and strengthen social cohesion.

Propositions

It is essential to create a framework that facilitates local engagement, cooperation, co-construction, and the sustainability of initiatives. These proposals must strengthen experience, encounters, and learning in the region, while supporting the local economy, professional integration, and social ties. To be effective, they require appropriate political support: flexible, bottom-up mechanisms that leave room for citizen and community initiatives, rather than cumbersome and complex territorial, national, or European policies.

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Concrete points

- Strengthen co-construction with residents: Citizen workshops, participatory surveys and local mediation to design tourist routes and experiences that meet the real needs of the community.
- Create sustainable economic models: Combine self-financing, subsidies and private partnerships to ensure the sustainability of projects, drawing inspiration from the circular, functional, social and solidarity economy.
- Diversify tourist experiences: Integrate heritage, sport, culture and local initiatives to create immersive and authentic journeys, outside of traditional circuits.
- Promoting apprenticeships and professional integration: Training young people and residents to lead tourist experiences, while strengthening their employability and their territorial commitment.
- Facilitate mobility and access: Adapt infrastructure and routes so that visitors and residents can easily and sustainably discover all areas of the territory.
- Strengthen dialogue and social cohesion: Promote projects that bring residents and visitors together, encourage intergenerational exchanges and improve the sense of belonging to the territory.
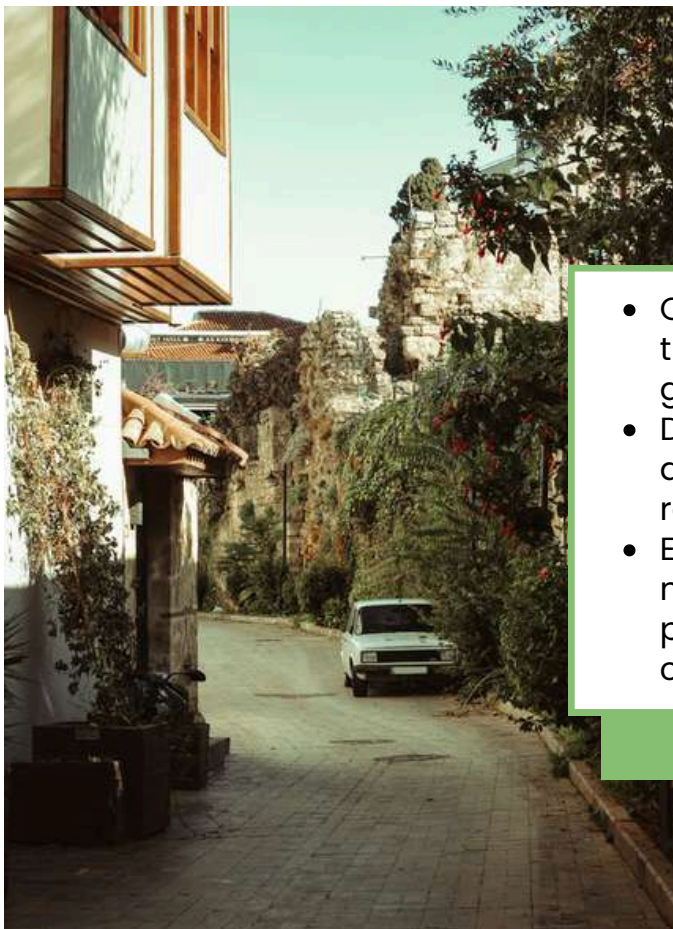
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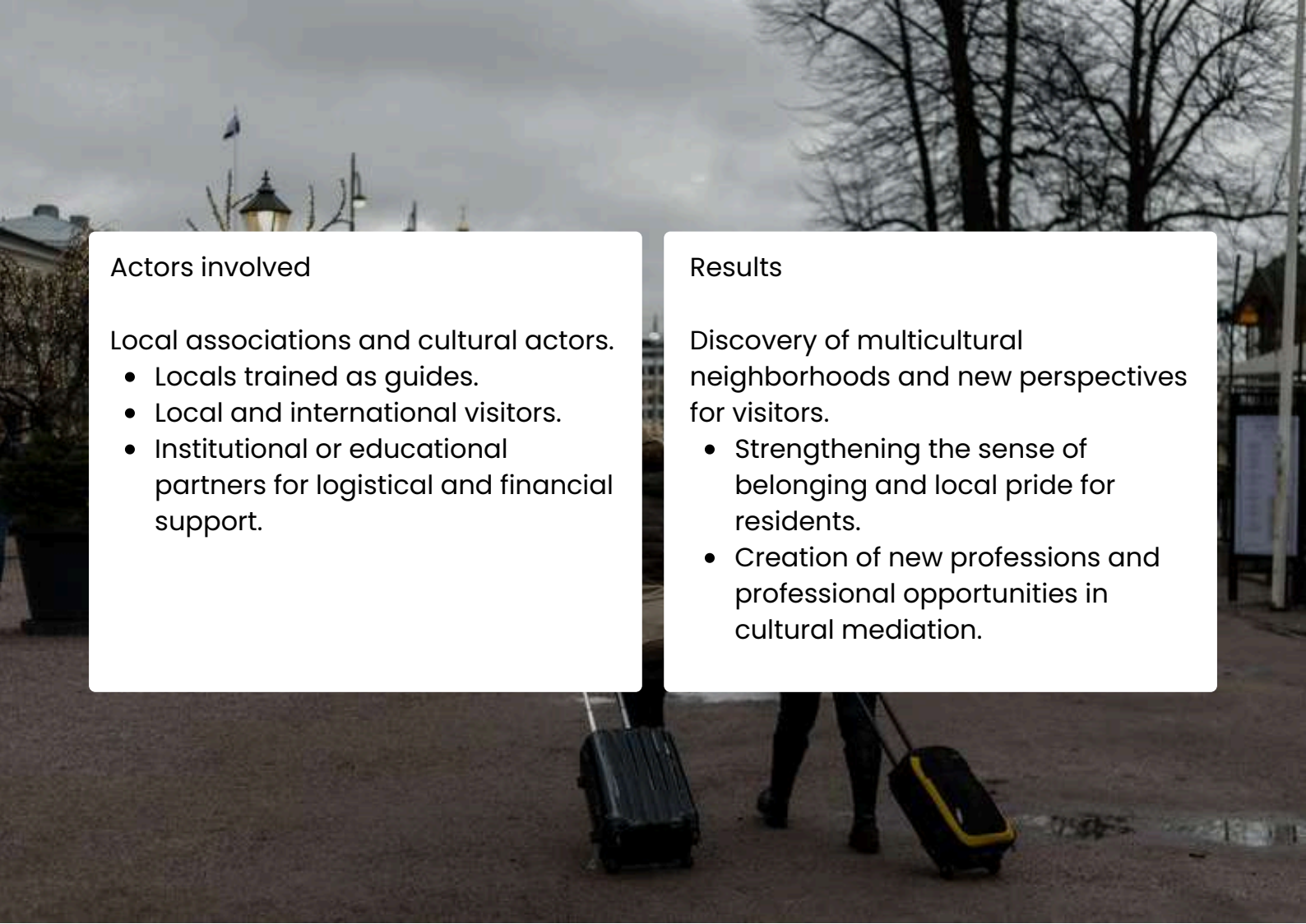# *(Paris et international)*

Objective

Train residents to become guides in their neighborhood and promote local history, culture and memory.

Method

- Organize training for residents so that they become cultural mediators and guides.
- Develop thematic tours, focusing on daily life, cultures and local stories rather than on classic monuments.
- Encourage participants to tell their neighborhood stories through their own perspectives and those of the community.

Actors involved

Local associations and cultural actors.
- Locals trained as guides.
- Local and international visitors.
- Institutional or educational partners for logistical and financial support.

Results

Discovery of multicultural neighborhoods and new perspectives for visitors.
- Strengthening the sense of belonging and local pride for residents.
- Creation of new professions and professional opportunities in cultural mediation.

Transferability

Model applicable in any urban district with cultural and social wealth to promote.
- Requires training and support for residents to ensure the quality of the courses.
- Can be adapted to other cities or international contexts.

Example
The Urban Alternative in Bordeaux

Objective

Promote neighborhoods outside the traditional tourist circuits and offer professional opportunities to young people and residents in integration.
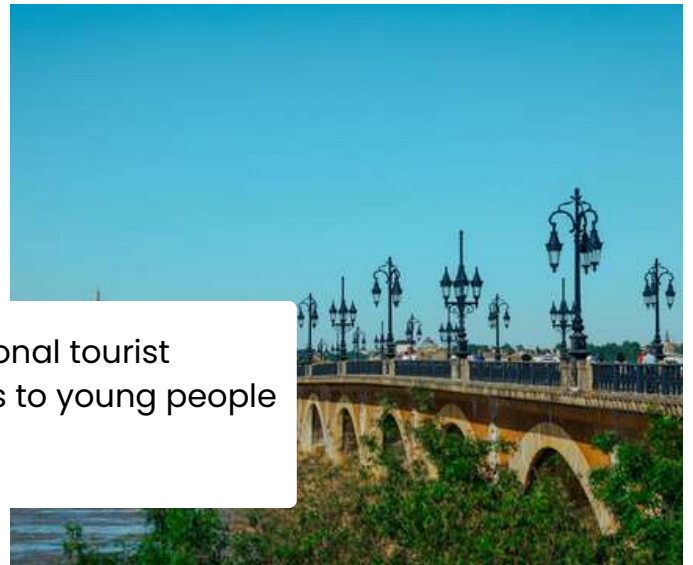
Method

- Organize guided walks by residents or young people in integration.
- Integrate thematic tours on local culture, heritage and neighborhood life.
- Develop practical skills in mediation, facilitation and event management.

Actors involved

Local associations and professional integration structures.
- Young people and local residents.
- Local authorities for support and promotion.

Results

- More than 60% of participants find employment or continue training after their participation.
- Strengthening the social bond between residents and visitors.
- Promotion of neglected neighborhoods and increased local pride.

Transferability

Adaptable to other cities or urban neighborhoods with motivated local populations.
- Can be combined with professional integration programs and cultural initiatives.

Exceptional Convoy
(Bordeaux)

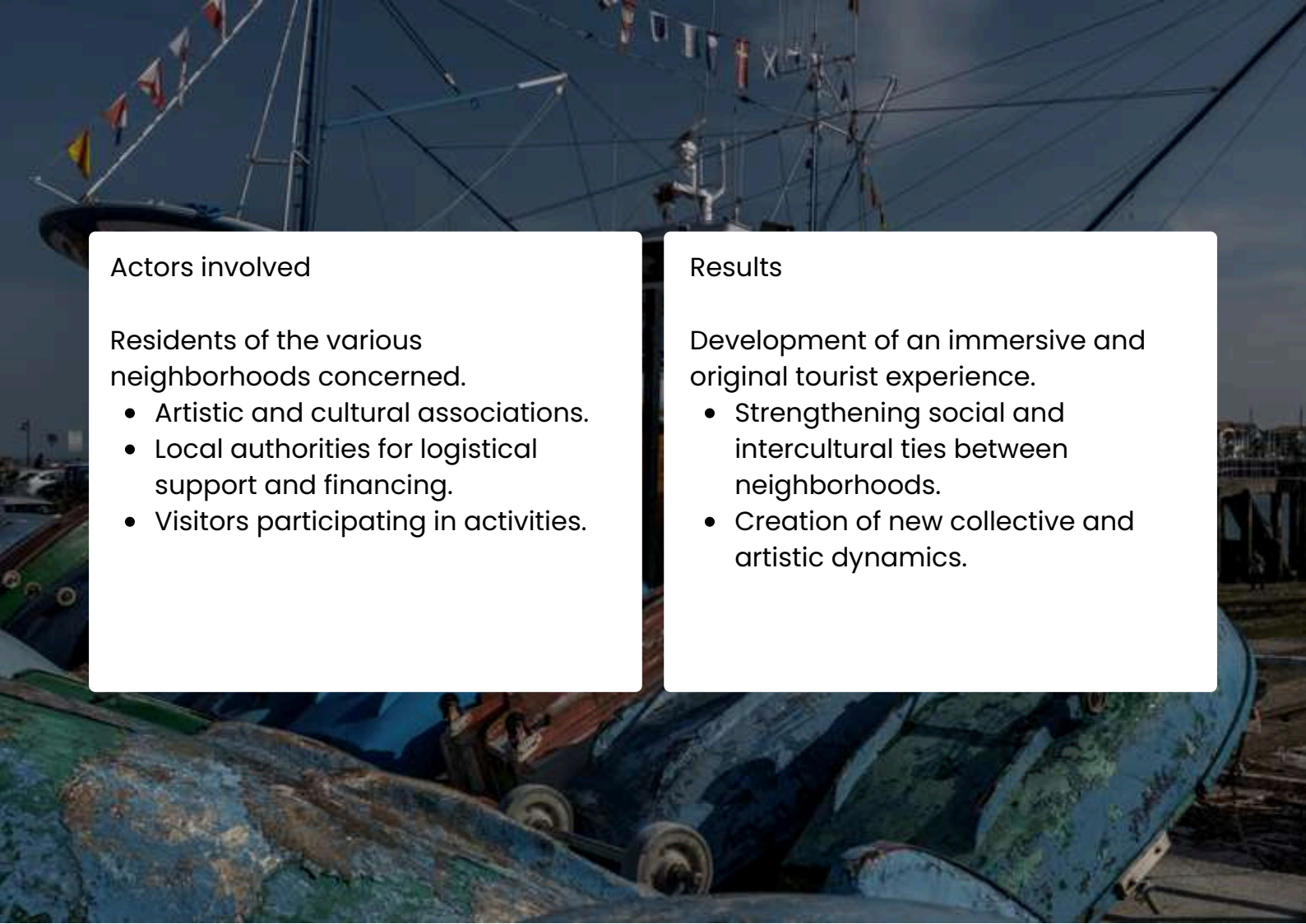### *Objective*

Promote cultural co-construction and social links between several urban districts through tourism and art.

Method

- Create a collaborative program where residents define activities and visitor reception.
- Establish artistic residencies and mediation workshops to stimulate creativity and cultural exchange.
- Encourage immersive and collective discovery of the territory.

Actors involved

Residents of the various neighborhoods concerned.
- Artistic and cultural associations.
- Local authorities for logistical support and financing.
- Visitors participating in activities.

Results

Development of an immersive and original tourist experience.
- Strengthening social and intercultural ties between neighborhoods.
- Creation of new collective and artistic dynamics.
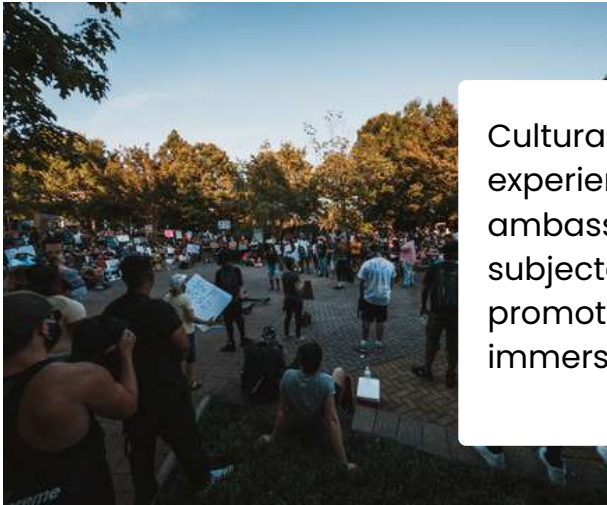
Transferability

Applicable in any urban context where multiple communities can collaborate.
- Requires a third-party facilitator to coordinate actors and support co-construction.
- Adaptable model for other types of participatory cultural or tourist events.

05

Cultural dialogue and participatory tourism

Cultural dialogue transforms tourism into a shared experience where locals become the primary ambassadors of their territory. Rather than being subjected to tourism, they become active participants, promoting their history and expertise, and creating immersive and authentic experiences for visitors.

This approach is based on co-construction, the participation of local communities, and practical innovation. It connects agreed attractiveness and resident engagement, while fostering cooperation between different sectors and stakeholders. Initiatives based on cultural dialogue strengthen residents' sense of belonging, stimulate social ties and intercultural learning, and open up sustainable economic opportunities focused on cooperation rather than immediate profit.

Additional benefits

Cultural dialogue stimulates creativity, promotes diverse modes of expression, and offers new ways of viewing, sharing, and experiencing one's territory and roots. Through a variety of cultural activities, it transforms our view of the world and how we inhabit it. It also brings joy by breaking with the formats and logic of traditional tourism, which tends to turn visitors into passive consumers. On the contrary, cultural dialogue invites everyone to experience the territory deeply, to become an active participant in the experience, to interact with local residents, and to connect authentically with local history, know-how, and cultures.

Facts

Participatory tourism based on cultural dialogue shows that the direct involvement of local residents, sometimes even children, transforms the way in which territories are perceived and valued. This approach creates an experience where encounter, sharing, and co-creation are at the heart of the tourist experience.

Concrete points

- Residents as ambassadors: Local communities produce their own tourism representations and decide what they want to share with visitors.
- Children's tourism and co-construction: Example of a bicycle travel agency for children, developed with a participatory workshop and the direct involvement of children and residents.
- Local and practical innovation: Initiatives prioritize creativity and sustainability (e.g., upcycled bicycles, panniers made from truck tarps) rather than technology or profit.
- Balancing sustainability and attractiveness: Some companies still offer long-haul travel, while others, more local and sustainable, are experimenting with resilient and creative models.
- Behavioral shifts: E.g. Germany: the creation of university chairs on cycle planning makes it possible to anticipate the transformation of urban behaviors in the long term.
- Creativity and diversity: The projects encourage multiple forms of cultural and artistic expression, allowing people to discover and share the region in a variety of ways.

Analysis

Cultural dialogue demonstrates that tourism can be a lever for social, intercultural, and creative cohesion. Involving locals as mediators and creators of experiences enables direct, authentic, and rewarding contact for local communities.

- Social and intercultural cohesion: The projects promote exchanges between residents and visitors, creating a lasting bond and strengthening local cultural identity.
- Empowerment and autonomy of residents: Tourism becomes a source of joy and learning for residents, who retain control of their territory and its story.
- Innovation and local resilience: Initiatives encourage sustainable and creative practices, adapted to the local context, rather than copying standardized models.
- Multi-stakeholder cooperation: The success of these projects relies on the sharing of knowledge and resources between residents, associations, local businesses and institutions.
- Educational impact: Involving children and young people in creating tourism experiences promotes the development of skills, awareness of heritage and sustainability.
- Stimulating creativity and diversity: Multiple cultural activities allow us to rediscover the territory, express our roots and change the way we perceive and inhabit the world.
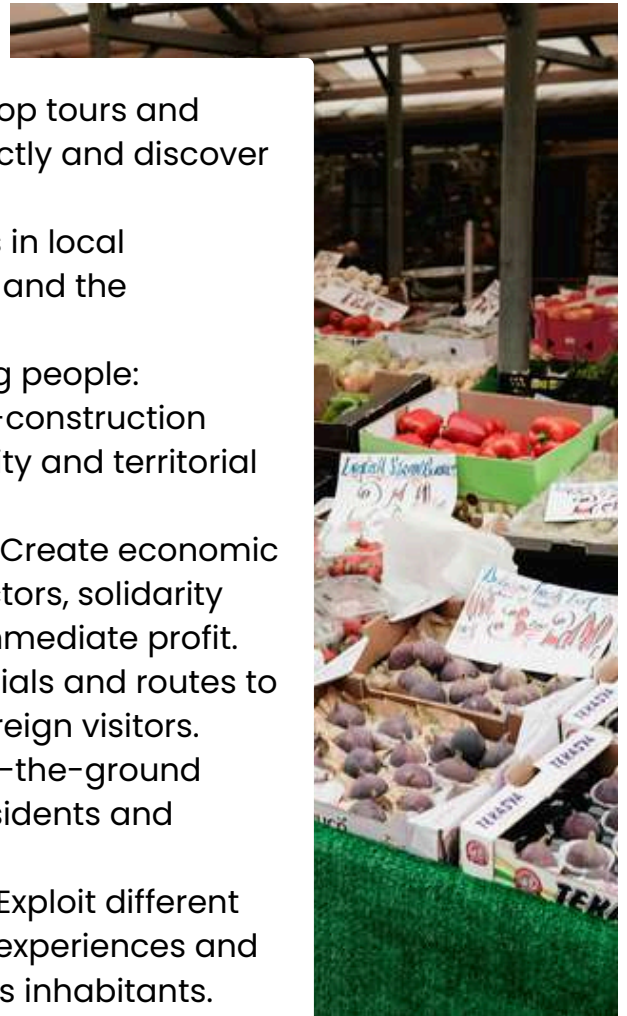
Opportunities

Cultural dialogue offers numerous opportunities to transform tourism into a lever for sustainable, inclusive, and participatory development. These experiences strengthen local identity, stimulate innovation, and promote cooperative economic practices.
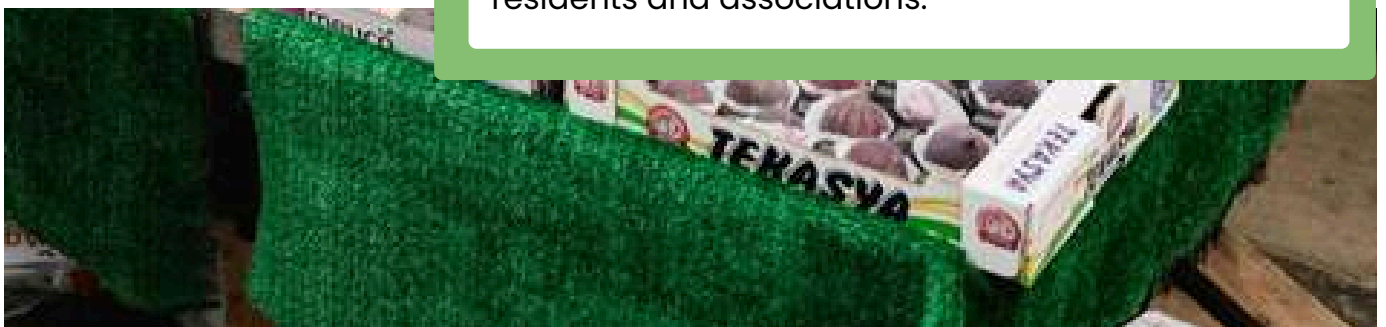
Concrete points:

- Intercultural and participatory tours: Develop tours and events allowing visitors to meet locals directly and discover the area in an immersive way.
- Cultural mediation training: Train residents in local storytelling, the transmission of know-how and the promotion of community initiatives.
- Educational tourism for children and young people: Integrating children into discovery and co-construction projects to stimulate creativity, responsibility and territorial commitment.
- Cooperation and economic sustainability: Create economic models based on cooperation between actors, solidarity initiatives and sustainability rather than immediate profit.
- International accessibility: Translate materials and routes to facilitate understanding and access for foreign visitors.
- Practical innovation: Encourage simple, on-the-ground solutions that provide direct benefits to residents and visitors.
- Cultural diversity and creative expression: Exploit different modes of cultural activities to offer varied experiences and enrich the perception of the territory and its inhabitants.

Opportunities

To maximize the impact of cultural dialogue, it is necessary to support local initiatives and create a flexible, bottom-up political and institutional framework that facilitates the engagement of residents and associations.

Concrete points:

- Encourage local co-construction: Participatory workshops, citizen surveys and workshops and cultural mediation to co-create tourist routes adapted to local needs and stories.
- Support sustainable and creative initiatives: Promote experimental projects, upcycling, soft mobility and educational experiences.
- Train and support local mediators: Develop training for residents and young people so that they become cultural leaders and guides in their area.
- Create cooperative economic models: Combine self-financing, subsidies and partnerships to ensure the sustainability of projects, with an emphasis on sustainability, solidarity and local regeneration.
- Facilitate mobility and access: Adapt infrastructure to enable residents and visitors to fully participate in tourist experiences.
- Promote intercultural and intergenerational dialogue: Organize events and tours that bring together residents, children and visitors, and promote the cultural identity of the area.
- Strengthen creativity and diversity of experiences: Encourage different forms of artistic and cultural expression to change our view of the territory and enrich the way we experience the world.

06

New Urban trades

New urban professions are emerging at the intersection of tourism, cultural mediation, and local engagement. They are transforming the way residents and young people interact with their communities, offering them professional opportunities and promoting their knowledge and expertise. These professions contribute to the revitalization of cities, social cohesion, and cultural attractiveness, while addressing the challenges of integration, inclusion, and civic participation.

Beyond mediation and tourist support, these professions represent a unique opportunity to preserve the region's typical know-how and to transmit a living intangible heritage. They allow local traditions to perpetuate, promote the unique skills of each neighborhood or territory, and constitute an essential link with the roots and identity of communities.
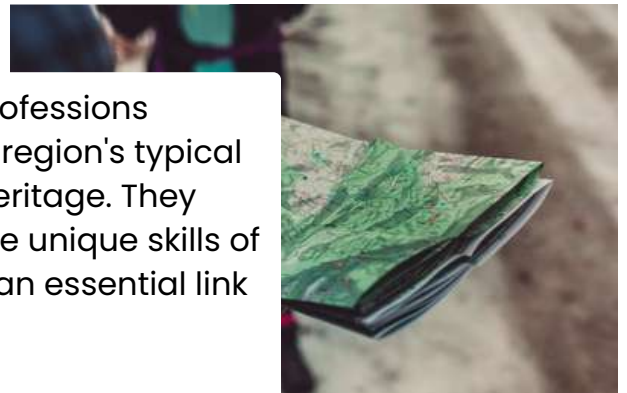

They also play a key role in revitalizing often-negative city neighborhoods, helping to change attitudes and breathe new life into these spaces. These professions make knowledge accessible to as many people as possible, stimulate the collective and individual imagination, and transform negative perceptions into opportunities to reclaim and explore one's environment.

By integrating these professions into structured and sustainable career paths, cities can support meaningful employment, strengthen dialogue, encourage surprise and discovery between residents and visitors, stimulate local creativity and innovation, and contribute to the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and practices. These initiatives also offer immersive tourist experiences, where the main actor is not only the visitor, but also the resident who becomes a mediator, ambassador and living guardian of their territory, while actively participating in the construction of a positive collective imagination and the enhancement of its environment.

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Facts

These new urban professions are based on concrete experiences where the resident becomes a mediator and actor in tourism:

- Ecotourism mediators and culinary guides: they lead tours, workshops and participatory visits, combining local knowledge and professional integration.
- Scouts and residents trained: In Bordeaux, residents become urban walking tour leaders, guiding tourists and locals through off-the-beaten-path neighborhoods. Training and local engagement: These professions combine apprenticeships, cultural outreach, and civic engagement, contributing to social cohesion.
- Inspiring examples:
- Friche de Mai in Marseille: in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Europe, this cultural wasteland now offers a multitude of artistic, cultural and social activities to residents and visitors alike, transforming the image of the neighborhood and creating a place for intergenerational exchanges.
- Les Beaux Mets restaurant in a prison in Marseille: this project allows inmates to learn a trade in catering, offering them new opportunities for reintegration upon their release and creating a strong social bond with the community.
- Darwin projects (Bordeaux), Greeters initiatives (tours guided by residents) and participatory tours combining heritage, sport and culture.
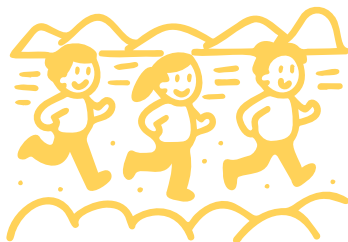
Analysis

These professions respond to a triple social, economic and cultural challenge:

- Integration and inclusion: they offer concrete professional opportunities to young people, residents and prisoners, who are sometimes far removed from traditional employment.
- Revitalization and attractiveness: by transforming poorly perceived neighborhoods (like Friche de Mai), they bring urban spaces back to life, encourage curiosity and stimulate the collective imagination.
- Transmission and preservation of know-how: they enable the promotion of unique skills, traditions and intangible heritage, ensuring intergenerational continuity.
- Citizen participation and mediation: residents become ambassadors for their territory, strengthening dialogue and cooperation between communities and visitors.
- Challenges: These professions require structured support, with training courses, stable funding and institutional recognition.

Opportunities

The emergence of these professions opens up new perspectives for urban areas:

- Development of sustainable jobs: professionalize the roles of mediators, scouts, guides and facilitators to create certified and stable paths.
- Promoting living heritage: integrating local know-how, traditions and social initiatives into tourist and cultural experiences.
- Revitalizing neighborhoods: bringing back life to poorly perceived spaces, creating surprise and stimulating the collective imagination (Friche de Mai, Les Beaux Mets restaurant).
- Creativity and innovation: allowing residents to test and offer new cultural and tourist activities.
- Dialogue and social cohesion: strengthening inclusion and the sense of belonging through the active engagement of residents and young people.

To maximize the impact of these new urban professions, several concrete actions can be considered:

- Recognition and training: create certified courses for urban mediators, scouts and guides, integrating sustainable tourism, cultural mediation and civic engagement.
- Institutional support and funding: developing partnerships between associations, communities and businesses to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of these professions.
- Promoting intangible and social heritage: integrating know-how, local traditions and cultural practices into tourist experiences, with an active role for residents and social initiatives such as Les Beaux Mets.
- Revitalizing neighborhoods: using these professions to transform poorly perceived areas (e.g. Friche de Mai), create surprise, discovery and stimulate the collective imagination.
- Professional and intergenerational integration: supporting young people, residents and prisoners in learning and transmission paths, combining culture, tourism and social commitment.
- Participatory innovation: encouraging residents to propose, experiment with and adapt new cultural and tourist activities, by promoting constant dialogue with visitors.

07

Regulation and certification
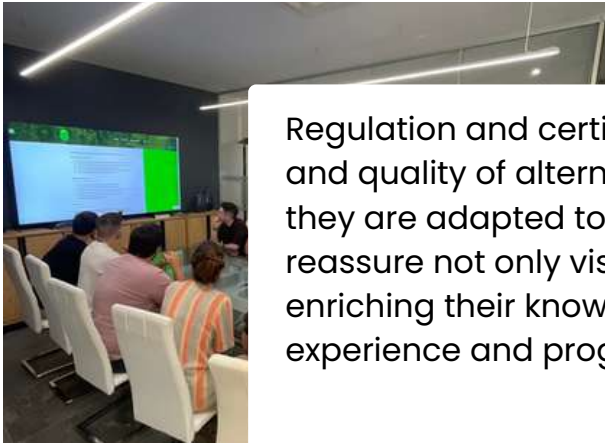
Regulation and certification play a key role in the credibility, safety, and quality of alternative and inclusive tourism initiatives, provided they are adapted to the reality on the ground. Certification should reassure not only visitors, but also the organizations themselves, enriching their knowledge and practices to offer a memorable experience and progress towards responsible tourism.

Today, the abundance of certifications can sometimes lose meaning for citizens. It is essential to promote certification as a true sign of recognition, comparable to Michelin stars: it attests to quality, but also constitutes a source of continuous evolution for the organization. As for regulations, they must remain simple, understandable, and consistent with the local context, avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens. These tools make it possible to structure pathways, promote the professionalism of local stakeholders, and guarantee the safety and quality of experiences. In the absence of uniform standards, innovative initiatives often remain isolated and difficult to replicate, which can limit their dissemination. This is not a problem when the objective is to preserve the originality, relevance, and identity of a territory.
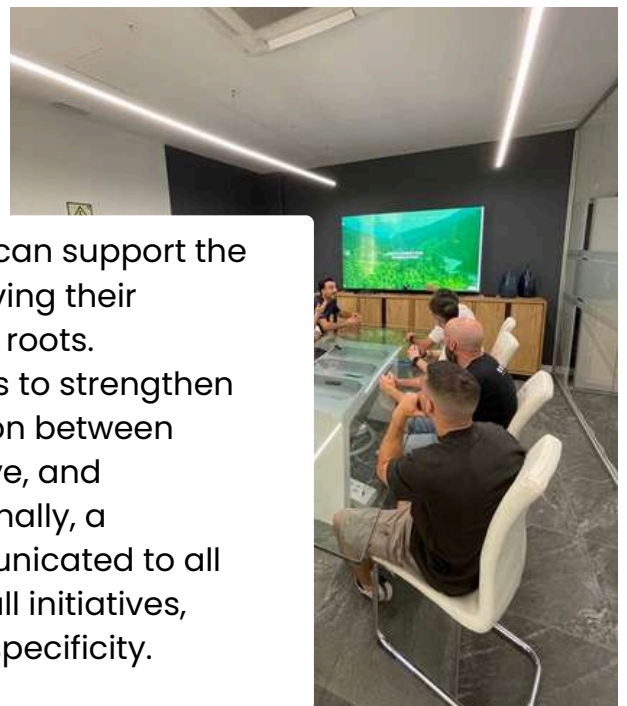
A flexible, harmonized, and realistic framework can support the development of alternative routes while preserving their authenticity, participatory dimension, and local roots. Certification and regulation then become levers to strengthen participants' confidence, encourage cooperation between stakeholders, and promote sustainable, inclusive, and responsible tourism, rather than a constraint. Finally, a common, clear, recognized certification communicated to all stakeholders can serve as a sign of quality for all initiatives, while respecting their originality and territorial specificity.

Facts

- The association is a certified EPI training organization, guaranteeing certain standards of quality and professionalism.
- Alternative tourist walks and routes meet safety and quality standards, but there are no uniform standards for all initiatives.
- Current certifications are numerous and sometimes confusing to the public, which can reduce their perceived value.
- Some inexpensive certifications allow you to tick boxes without a real audit, which can impact the transparency and credibility of the process.

Analysis

- Certification ensures the credibility, safety and quality of the courses, while strengthening the professionalism of local stakeholders.
- The lack of common standards limits the reproducibility and dissemination of innovative initiatives.
- Appropriate, clear and understandable regulations, as well as recognized certification, can become levers for: o strengthening the confidence of participants, o encouraging cooperation between stakeholders, o structuring courses and promoting local know-how.
- Excessive standardization is not desirable: it is essential to preserve the originality and relevance of initiatives linked to the territory.

Opportunities

- Create a harmonized and flexible framework allowing alternative initiatives to develop while respecting their local identity.
- Make certification a valuable and recognized sign of quality, comparable to Michelin stars in gastronomy, which becomes a tool for continuous development for organizations.
- Harmonize good security, mediation and quality practices to facilitate cooperation and the exchange of experience between stakeholders.
- Encourage the dissemination and visibility of innovative initiatives through credible and clear labels or certifications for the public

- Establish specific certification for alternative and inclusive tourist routes, recognized at local, national or European level.
- Harmonize standards of quality, security and cultural mediation, while leaving room for originality and territorial creativity.
- Communicate clearly about certifications so that they are understood and valued by all participants, visitors and partners.
- Encourage cooperation between associations, communities and private actors to support certified courses and promote the dissemination of good practices.
- Use certification as a support and progression tool, not as an administrative constraint.

08

Cross-cutting and integrated approach
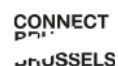
- The most innovative tourism and cultural initiatives cannot be limited to a single sector or actor. They combine tourism, integration, culture, heritage, and mobility, and require an integrated approach to maximize their social, economic, and environmental impact. This perspective constitutes an invitation to foster intercultural and sectoral cooperation and the sharing of skills, while placing citizens at the heart of decision-making and action.

- These projects require a long maturation period and coordination between multiple stakeholders: residents, associations, communities and businesses. They also require a real political will to trust citizens, to move away from the traditional top-down model and, on the contrary, to move towards the co-construction of collective solutions, for example through citizen participation workshops to identify and test actions adapted to local problems.

- The sustainable development of these initiatives is often hampered by the short-termism of public policies, one-off funding, and a lack of cross-cutting vision. An integrated approach allows for better coordination of social, cultural, and economic dimensions, the creation of shared value, strengthening territorial cohesion, and the development of performance indicators toward criteria that take into account quality of life, social and environmental aspects, as well as the economy.

Conclusion: For these projects to reach their full potential, it is essential to unite all stakeholders around meaningful initiatives, where everyone finds their place, can contribute and share responsibility for the results. This collective approach not only ensures the sustainability of the projects, but also strengthens the sense of belonging and the positive impact on the territory.

Concrete facts

- Initiatives combining tourism, integration, culture, heritage and mobility remain rare and complex to implement, due to numerous silos between the private, associative and public sectors.
- Projects often suffer from a short-term vision, with a lack of continuity in funding, which limits their lasting impact.
- Citizens and local communities are at the heart of the design and implementation of routes and activities, but encounter numerous political, administrative and organizational obstacles.
- The short-termism of public policies and the fragmentation of funding hinder the development and sustainability of projects, making it difficult to consolidate partnerships and mature initiatives.

- Innovative tourism and cultural projects require an integrated and cross-functional approach, coordinating tourism, integration, culture, heritage and mobility to maximize their social, economic and environmental impact.
- Citizen participation and co-construction are essential levers: they strengthen the support of local communities, stimulate innovation and enable us to better respond to the needs of the territory.
- A political will to build trust and support is essential to remove administrative and financial obstacles and guarantee the sustainability of initiatives.
- The evolution of performance indicators to include quality of life, social and environmental impact, at the same level as economic ones, makes it possible to measure the real effectiveness of projects beyond just financial results.
- Synergies between actors, as in the example of Marseille Hospitalité, show that multi-actor coordination promotes creativity, visibility and the effectiveness of actions, while consolidating the social and cultural fabric of the territory.

Concrete proposals

- Encourage integrated multi-stakeholder projects, involving residents, associations, businesses and communities, to articulate the different dimensions of the territory and create shared value.
- Guarantee multi-year funding to enable initiatives to mature and partnerships to consolidate.
- Develop citizen participation workshops, offering residents an active role in the co-design and testing of solutions adapted to the needs of the territory.
- Revise performance indicators to integrate social, environmental impact and quality of life at the same level as economic ones.
- Bringing together all stakeholders around meaningful projects, where everyone can find their place, contribute and share responsibility for the results, like the Marseille Hospitalité initiative.

Summary and action sheets

Towards alternative, inclusive and regenerative tourism
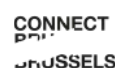
Tourism can become a powerful lever for social cohesion, cultural and economic revitalization, preservation of local know-how and heritage, and improvement of quality of life and public health. The initiatives analyzed demonstrate that tourism that places people, the territory, and collective well-being at the heart of the experience generates lasting social, cultural, and economic benefits.

However, these projects are still too few in number and require strong political support at all levels— local, national, and European—to develop and sustain them. European strategies, such as the Green Deal, Agenda 2030, and the European Tourism Agenda, provide an ideal framework, but it is essential that these programs are accessible and adapted to the realities of small local stakeholders, associations, and businesses, so as not to hinder relevant and meaningful initiatives.

1. Support integrated and multi-stakeholder projects

Level of action: Local and national

Objective: Promote initiatives combining tourism, culture, social integration and sustainable mobility, aligned with the Green Deal and the European Tourism Agenda.

Method: Encourage co-construction between communities, associations, businesses and residents; finance over the long term.

Actors: Communities, associations, businesses, residents, State.

Expected results: Maximization of social, cultural and economic impact; strengthening of social and territorial ties.

Transferability: Applicable to any city or territory seeking to create inclusive and sustainable tourism.

2. Put young people at the center of tourism planning

Level of action: Local and national

Objective: To make young people, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, stakeholders in sustainability and tourism planning, while offering them professional career opportunities.

Method: Training programs, participatory workshops, mentoring, non-formal education, internships and professional integration courses in sustainable tourism.

Actors: Young people, educational establishments, associations, communities, tourism businesses.

Expected results: Social innovation, inclusion, renewal of tourism practices, better knowledge of urban dynamics and equity.

Transferability: Applicable to all cities and rural areas with youth initiatives.

EU Link: Contributes to SDGs 4, 8 and 10 of the 2030 Agenda.

3. Develop sustainable and regenerative tourism

Action level: EU and national

Objective: Define and respect the reception capacity of the sites for protect the environment and cultural heritage.

Method: Evaluation of tourist reception capacity, taking into account taking into account critical thresholds and territorial resilience.

Actors: Governments, municipalities, tourism operators, local communities.

Expected results: Reduction of pressures on sites, better experience for visitors and residents, preservation of resources.

Transferability: Applicable to busy destinations.

EU Link: Aligns practices with the Green Deal and European Tourism Agenda.

4. Encourage soft and low-carbon mobility

Level of action: Local and national

Objective: Reduce the carbon footprint of tourism and promote access to sustainable travel for all, including disadvantaged populations.
Method: Development of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, eco-stations, multimodal circuits integrating the last mile; affordable pricing; incentives for train, bicycle and public transport; integration into daily life.
Actors: Communities, businesses, associations, transport operators, residents.
Expected results: Sustainable and inclusive travel, attractiveness reinforced, contribution to climate objectives.
Transferability: Model adaptable to urban and rural areas.
EU Link: Supports the Green Deal objectives for sustainable mobility and bas carbone.

5. Strengthen the involvement of residents and local communities

Action level: Local

Objective: To make residents tourism mediators, to promote their know-how and heritage, and generate local economic, social and cultural benefits.
Method: Participatory workshops, guided tours by residents, artistic residencies, collaborative projects.
Stakeholders: Residents, associations, communities, tourism operators.
Expected results: Collective appropriation, intercultural dialogue and intergenerational, inclusion, strengthening of the economic and cultural fabric.
Transferability: Applicable to all territories.
EU Link: Contributes to SDG 11 of the 2030 Agenda on cities and sustainable communities.

6. Integrate technology as a lever for innovation

Action level: EU and national

Objective: Diversify the tourist offer, reduce pressure on sites physical and make the tools financially accessible and easy to use.
Method: Digital applications, participatory mapping, immersive experiences (augmented/virtual reality), simplified training.
Actors: Communities, start-ups, tourism operators, institutions European.
Expected results: Better distribution of visitors, enrichment experience, accessibility of information and services.
Transferability: Urban and rural.
EU Link: Encourages innovation and inclusion in European Tourism Agenda.

7. Promote and protect local culture and businesses

Level of action: Local and national

Objective: Preserve cultural identity, support the local economy and promote sustainable economic models (circular, social and solidarity economy).

Method: Strengthen links between visitors and producers/artisans local; support trade and cultural initiatives; promote cooperation between stakeholders.

Stakeholders: Communities, associations, local businesses, residents.

Expected results: Cultural preservation, value creation economic and social, sustainable tourist attraction.

Transferability: Wherever cultural identity and heritage are tourist levers.

EU Link: Contributes to the 2030 Agenda and the Green Deal for tourism responsible and sustainable.
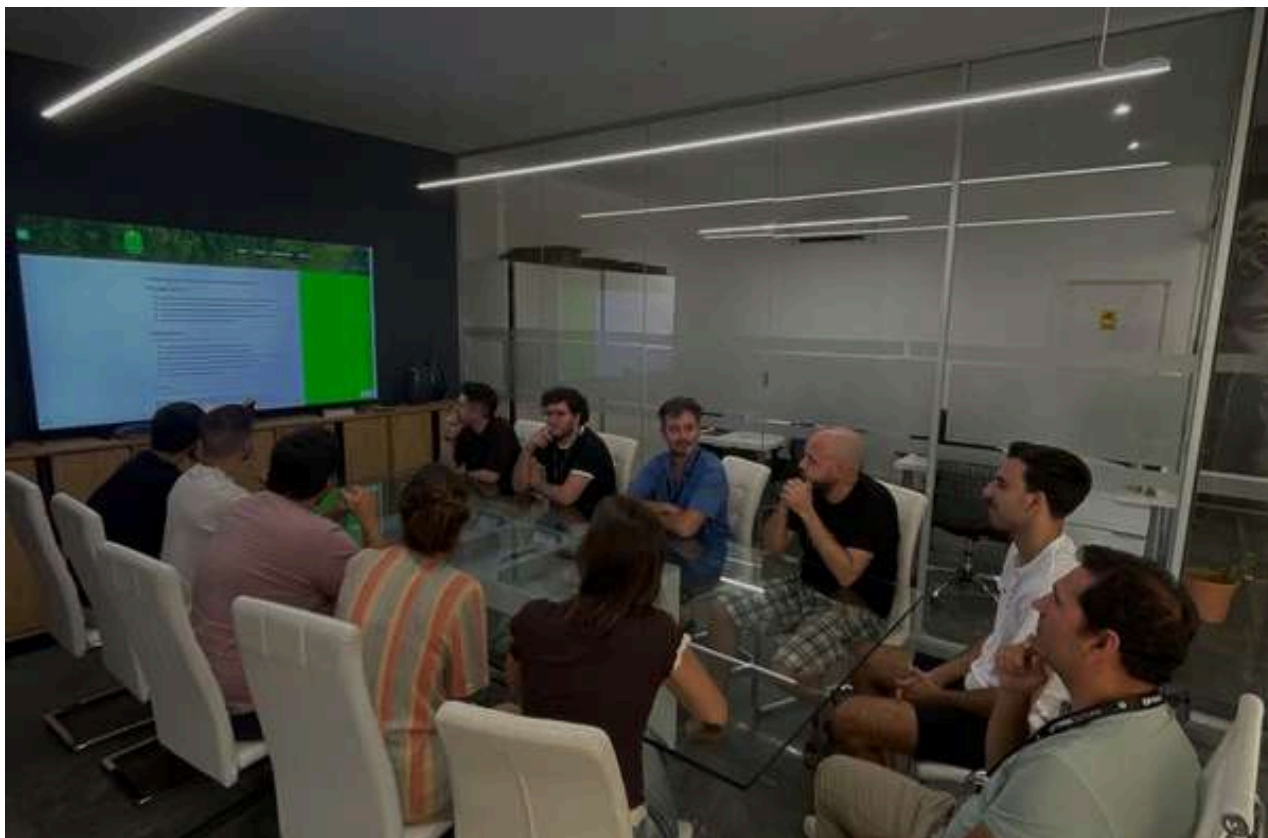
8. Develop integrated performance indicators

Action level: National and EU

Objective: Measure the social, environmental, cultural and health impact at the same level as the economic one.
Method: Integration of quality criteria into project evaluation of life, inclusion, public health and territorial cohesion.
Actors: Ministries, communities, tourism agencies, institutions European.
Expected results: Informed management, real impact measured, promotion of holistic and regenerative tourism.
Transferability: All projects and destinations.
EU Link: Aligns practices with the Green Deal, Agenda 2030 and l'European Tourism Agenda.

Conclusion

This advocacy demonstrates that alternative, inclusive, and regenerative tourism is not only possible, but necessary. It can strengthen social cohesion, boost the local economy, preserve cultural and natural heritage, and improve quality of life and public health. The initiatives analyzed show that placing people, the territory, and collective well-being at the heart of the experience produces lasting and concrete benefits.
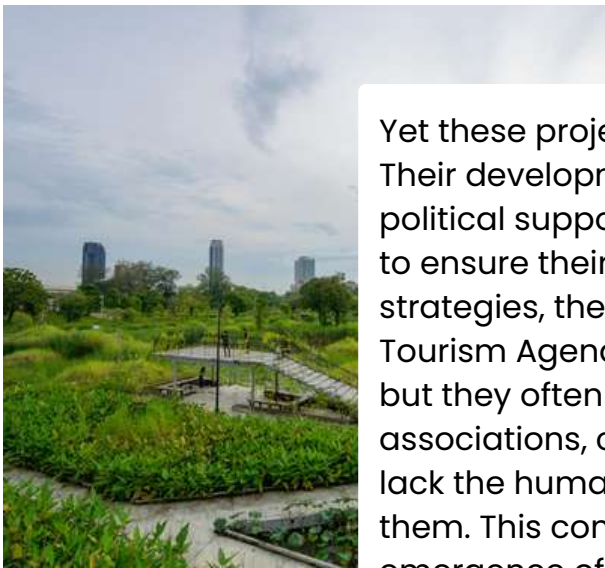
Yet these projects remain too few in number and fragile. Their development requires strong and appropriate political support at all local, national, and European levels to ensure their sustainability and replicability. European strategies, the Green Deal, Agenda 2030, and the European Tourism Agenda provide an essential strategic framework, but they often remain complex and burdensome for small associations, communities, and local businesses, which lack the human and financial resources to comply with them. This complexity hinders territorial dynamics and the emergence of relevant, innovative, and meaningful initiatives.

It is time to rethink public and European policies so that they truly put themselves in the shoes of local stakeholders, by simplifying access criteria, supporting long-term projects, and promoting initiatives that bring territories to life, stimulate the collective imagination, and build inclusive, resilient, and sustainable communities. The time has come to transform this ambition into concrete action: supporting young people, residents, local cultural and economic stakeholders, investing in soft and sustainable mobility, integrating digital innovation, and measuring impact holistically. By doing so, Europe can become a global model of regenerative tourism, where every territory and every stakeholder has its place, and where tourism becomes a force for positive transformation for society, the economy, and the environment.

Sources

- Xperiential, the podcast that propels the transition of tourism
- New Breath, the podcast for businesses on the path to regeneration
- Lumiǎ, the regenerative map
- Marseille Hospitalités, the fresco of hospitality
- Essentiem, an endowment fund that works on social cohesion, discovery of others, awareness and preservation of the environment, as well as balanced and equitable development of territories
- Grassroots EcoHealthTourism Programme, Erasmus+ — a program that enables young people to develop and adapt their projects, initiatives and businesses in ways that holistically support the health of people, animals and the planet
- University of the Earth, Reconciling Humanity with itself and with the living
- GenAct, an association that unites and develops the skills of all those who wish to become game changers!
- Practical School of Nature and Knowledge is an association under the sponsorship of Jean-Marie Pelt and Edgar Morin, to promote 5 strong ideas:
- Health and preventive approaches
- Social and interpersonal relationships
- Education and transmission
- Land, agriculture and representations
- Governance
- Olivier Hamant, Robustness, the antidote to performance

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