



**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
IMPLEMENTATION:
FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT**

**EUROPEAN
TRAVEL
COMMISSION**

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
IMPLEMENTATION**

**A FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT TO
SUPPORT NATIONAL APPROACHES**

A report produced for the European Travel Commission
by Green Case Consulting, Good Place & the Travel Foundation

Brussels, February 2021

ETC Market Intelligence Report

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EUROPEAN TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY SCHEMES

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Rue du Marché aux Herbes, 61,
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Website: www.etc-corporate.org

Email: info@visiteurope.com

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FOREWORD

The traditional model of tourism, that is, the way the sector has developed in Europe over the past 50 years, is at a tipping point. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, economic and employment benefits had given way to an increased understanding of the costs that accompany tourism growth, to the extent that in some heavily visited areas, local communities were actively discouraging tourists and the impact on the environment was being felt.

The global health crisis, which began in early 2020 left worldwide tourism in a state of shock. The recovery process will bring change, the exact shape and scale of which is yet unknown. It is undoubtedly a difficult process and has highlighted the insufficient resilience inherent in some of the most common models of European tourism and the fragility and dependence from other sectors. Destinations with heavy dependence on a limited number of source markets and product types, together with a reliance on high volume/low value mass tourism, will surely have additional challenges for the future.

While the industry is still reeling from the COVID-19 crisis, the need for collective action to address other global forces - some directly linked to the emergence of the novel coronavirus itself - have become impossible to ignore. When it comes to tourism management, it is imperative to integrate sustainability into national strategies and ensure that this goes beyond tokenism, to make a real and tangible difference at all levels.

ETC members are committed to developing more sustainable forms of tourism and they understand the potential for sustainability schemes to enhance Europe's reputation, attractiveness, and visitor experiences. What is needed, to build back better following the pandemic, are practical tools, guidance to support the implementation and the internal and external recognition of Tourism as "a force for good", a pivotal element for recovery in every country. ETC will play an active role in supporting its members in this task, and this new handbook will be an important part of the solution. To this end, the organisation trusts this handbook will provide practical insights and guidance for the implementation and development of a sustainable tourism scheme in Europe.

Luís Araújo

President, European Travel Commission
(ETC)

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In addition, ETC owes special thanks the five NTO representatives who provided knowledge and feedback during the development of this handbook: Shane Dineen (**Fáilte Ireland**), Imbi Lepik-Martinson, (**Visit Estonia**), Teresa Ferreira, (**Turismo de Portugal**), Maša Klemenčič, (**Slovenian Tourist Board**), and Eva Thybo, (**VisitDenmark**). Their willing cooperation was key for the development of the handbook.

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ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is for European National Tourism Organisations (NTOs), to support efforts to develop national approaches that advance sustainable tourism. It is intended as a practical document to aid implementation, for all European nations regardless of where they are on their sustainability journey. It is intended to support both those NTOs considering a national certification scheme, and those who are not, to advance national efforts to improve sustainability outcomes.

Sections 1 and 2 make the case for a national sustainable tourism approach. Section 1 introduces sustainable tourism and the urgent need for change. Section 2 looks at the benefits and implications of national coordination.

The handbook then offers a **framework or model** for sustainable tourism implementation at a national level. In recognition that there is no 'one size fits all' approach, this incorporates the flexibility to enable it to be applied to a wide range of destinations and regulatory settings.

Finally, **Section 4** outlines a number of barriers and risks to adopting a national approach, with suggestions on how to overcome or mitigate these.

Throughout, the handbook links to a **toolkit of practical resources** to assist NTOs with implementation.

BACKGROUND

Identifying the need for action on sustainability, in 2019 the ETC undertook a report into *European Sustainability Schemes and their role in promoting sustainability and competitiveness in European Tourism*¹. As a first step, this report aimed to provide a better understanding of the potential of sustainability labels/certifications as a vehicle to increase a destination's attractiveness and effectively connect with the right target audiences and influence travellers' destination choices. This research identified that:

- European NTOs all have some awareness of sustainability schemes. **Though few were capitalising on the opportunities presented.**
- There is a large number of sustainability schemes relevant to destinations across Europe but a **lack of knowledge and awareness amongst NTOs about how best to use these**, as well a **lack of clear roles and responsibilities** when it comes to sustainable tourism, hampered engagement.
- Two thirds of NTO respondents see **sustainability as important and relevant to the promotion of their destination**. Of the remaining third that do not (five participating destinations in total), in only one is this due to a lack of government interest in sustainability. All others are either addressing sustainability, without the intention to promote it, or are aware that they have a lot of work to do before being able to include it in the promotional mix.
- There is considerable collective benefit to the **sharing of knowledge, learning and experience on sustainability**. Not only will improved sustainability of tourism enhance

¹ <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/european-sustainability-schemes/>

Europe's reputation and attractiveness as a destination, but it will lead to improved visitor experiences across the board and a better quality of life for European residents, many of whom are impacted by tourism.

Having identified the opportunities and challenges, the next step was to develop a comprehensive handbook on sustainable tourism implementation, to fill the knowledge gap and address the lack of confidence NTOs may feel.

This handbook is intended as a framework and toolkit to help NTOs develop their own models and sustainability strategies relevant to their own national context and unique set of circumstances.

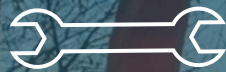
THE SLOVENIAN MODEL

Slovenia has taken a lead in integrating sustainability into all levels of its tourism offering and is able to utilise this as an effective differentiator in its branding and promotion. As a pioneer in this successful approach, the Slovenian model is heavily referenced in this handbook.

Whether a country is at the start of its sustainability journey, or has a plan it is already implementing, this handbook can act as a guide along the journey to a more sustainable tourism industry.



CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



1. INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

This section provides an overview of sustainability and sustainable tourism, outlining the key forces at play and emphasising the need to act sooner rather than later. With simple definitions and explanations, this section also aims to 'demystify' sustainable tourism and instil NTOs with the confidence to implement the changes necessary.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

Sustainability is a complicated word that does not easily translate in every language. It is easy to feel that it is some mysterious area of specialist knowledge that is best left to experts. This is not the case however. **The basic principle of sustainability is balance**, and this can be integrated by everyone into everyday actions and job roles.

Those working in tourism at a national level will, almost certainly, be integrating elements of sustainability into their work already, and often without realising it, for example when promoting authentic cultural experiences or encouraging tourists to explore those less-visited areas.

The basic concepts of sustainability are introduced in this section, however [Tool 1](#) within the toolkit explores sustainability concepts in more depth and, depending on where users are in their sustainability journey, will provide the basis for confidently explaining the subject to others or act as a useful recap.

The basic premise behind sustainability is that people are able to improve their life in ways that protect and enhance natural resources for future generations. Sustainability provides guiding principles for how people can act in the present whereby **environmental, social and economic impacts** are planned for and managed to minimise costs and optimise benefits.

Sustainable development presents a longer-term vision, and there is now international consensus that this is the only way that development should take place. The UN '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'² sets out 17 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**³ which provide a global framework to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and address climate change. Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly to all of the goals, however 3 goals specifically refer to tourism's potential to contribute to:

- inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
- sustainable consumption and production (SCP); and
- the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.

Sustainable tourism embodies the same principles of sustainability and it is important to understand that **all forms of tourism have the responsibility and potential to become more sustainable** and that it does not refer to 'niche' tourism (for example, nature tourism or eco-tourism).

² https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>



SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS AND CRITERIA

Over the years several measures, or indicators, to enable destinations to assess their sustainability performance have been developed. The best-known set of sustainable tourism indicators for destinations are those used as part of the **European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)**. Launched in 2013, ETIS is a voluntary management tool for use by those managing tourism in destinations and its stakeholders. Its monitoring results are based on self-assessment, observations, data collection and analysis by the destinations themselves. It does not set minimum standards to be achieved and does not involve any kind of certification. In identifying a core set of indicators it does, however, provide destinations with the basic information they need to monitor sustainability and manage tourism activity in a more informed way. ETIS contains 27 core indicators and 40 optional indicators covering destination management, social and cultural impact, economic value and environmental impact.

The **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria** are also important to be aware of. Now on their second iteration (GSTC-D v2) these are developed and managed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Rather than acting purely as measures, the criteria serve as basic guidelines for destinations wishing to become more sustainable. There are two sets of criteria: Destination Criteria for public policymakers and destination managers, and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators. These outline the guiding principles and minimum requirements that any tourism businesses and destinations should aim to reach and includes performance indicators designed to provide guidance in measuring compliance with the Criteria. Application of the criteria can help a destination to contribute towards the Sustainable Development Goals, to which they are aligned.

As part of the organisation's benchmarking projects in 2020, ETC have selected 12 Sustainable Tourism Indicators (STIs) to facilitate the exchange of information between ETC member countries and to allow for easy monitoring over time and comparisons between countries, cities, coastal areas and rural regions. The 12 indicators were selected for relevance, data availability and a high level of comparability with the aim of facilitating consultation, benchmarking and the exchange of good practices. These indicators cover social, economic and environmental dimensions and will help to highlight where there may be risks to sustainability.

THE BENEFITS AND BURDENS OF TOURISM

There is no doubt that tourism can provide many benefits. It is a driver of economic growth and, in Europe, it has boosted investment in both natural and cultural sites and been transformative in the development of places ranging from coastal areas to remote mountain villages. In many areas tourism places great value on natural and cultural assets which leads to environmental protection and the celebration of traditions. Tourism can foster cultural understanding and contribute to health and wellbeing, it is an industry centred around pleasure, it is dynamic, exciting and very often a lot of fun.

Unfortunately, there is a downside. The loss of natural spaces and impacts on biodiversity through both tourism development and tourist activities are well recognised and often visible. Environmental impacts have largely been understood as trade-offs for the jobs and prosperity brought by tourism.

Often the economic benefits are not widely spread throughout destinations with limited linkages between local supply chains and the large tourism businesses. Other changes, such

as the loss of cultural identity where tourist destinations begin to homogenise and lose their own sense of place, and the depopulation of rural villages as young people move to coastal resorts for employment, have taken longer to be recognised, but can be addressed and the lessons learnt by others.

For the past fifty years, as mass tourism has grown and flourished in Europe, the tourism industry has been able to operate at a national level, without being too affected by these issues that primarily impact at a local level.

However, the assumption that tourism brings more benefits than costs is, largely, still just an assumption.

Unfortunately, the mechanisms do not yet exist within national governments to fully quantify the costs of tourism to destinations. In a 2019 report, published by the Travel Foundation with EplerWood International and Cornell University⁴, these costs are described as the ‘Invisible Burden’ of tourism. The report identified that some of the world’s top destinations have growing debt per tourist even as their tourism economies soar. This is because the true costs of servicing tourist demands are not measured and tourism tax revenues are often not accrued locally, where the costs must be covered to finance additional infrastructure and protect natural and cultural resources. The result is that in many cases, tourism is not able to protect its assets for future generations.

‘The rapid growth of tourism in the 21st century is leading to damage in destinations across the world that is largely unreported and frequently not perceived by tourists, putting destinations at risk without effective response’.
Destinations at Risk: The Invisible Burden of Tourism, 2019

THE URGENT NEED FOR CHANGE

There are now several forces combining which, if left unchecked, will not only impact on the success of the tourism industry but threaten human survival. In short, we are exhausting nature’s budget. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a sudden, immediate destabilising force that has highlighted the vulnerability of tourism and whilst the effects of climate change and biodiversity collapse may seem further away, these have the potential to be many times more destructive and require our immediate attention. These forces are introduced briefly below, however [Tool 1](#) explores these in more depth.

Overconsumption of resources: ‘Earth Overshoot Day’⁵ marks the date when humanity has exhausted nature’s budget for the year, meaning that humans are utilising natural resources far beyond the capacity of ecosystems to replenish them. The date of Earth Overshoot Day, calculated by Global Footprint Network has moved up two months over the past 20 years, reaching 29 July in 2019, the earliest date ever.

⁴ Epler Wood, M, Milstein, M, Ahamed-Broadhurst, K., 2019. Destinations at Risk: The Invisible Burden of Tourism. The Travel Foundation.

⁵ https://www.footprintnetwork.org/content/uploads/2019/05/WWF_GFN_EU_Overshoot_Day_report.pdf



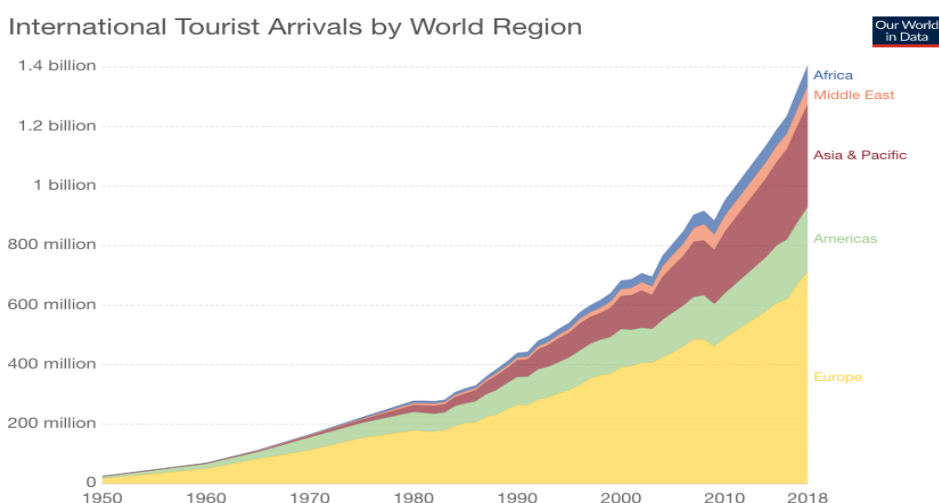
Climate Change: From snowless ski resorts to refugee boats on beaches, unstable weather patterns and sea level rises, the effects of climate change are already being felt and tourism is being forced into working around them. To ensure our planet remains habitable it is vital that we adapt to climate change and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the tourism industry to support the goal of keeping the planet within a 1.5-degree temperature increase.

The collapse in biodiversity: The crisis resulting from the increasing loss of biodiversity is the other principal phenomena threatening human survival. Ecosystems form the very foundations of economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. This collapse therefore poses as much of a danger to life on Earth as climate change according to a report by Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)⁶. The EU Biodiversity Strategy⁷ as a core part of the European Green Deal⁸ proposes a new wave of essential and long overdue targets on topics such as protected areas, restoration of nature, organic farming and the reduction of agricultural chemicals.

The European Green Deal is the response to climate change by the EU and is an ambitious package of measures ranging from cutting greenhouse gas emissions, to investing in research and innovation, to preserving Europe’s natural environment

THE RAPID GROWTH IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM ARRIVALS

The potentially devastating global phenomena detailed above have coincided with a huge rise in tourist numbers in recent decades. Pre-COVID-19, international tourism arrivals had reached 1.4 billion by 2019 (up from just 664 million in 2000). The graph below clearly illustrates the extent of the growth of arrivals in Europe - highlighting the need for the continent to take the lead in encouraging sustainability in the tourism sector.



Source: UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (2019)

⁶ <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/strategy/index_en.htm

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

The impacts of this rapid growth have been many and varied:

- Exacerbation of core environmental issues of climate change, through air pollution from aviation, vehicle traffic and CO₂ emissions from the building and operation of hotels and tourist attractions.
- Biodiversity loss, through intentional habitat destruction resulting from the expansion of tourism related infrastructure and as an unintended consequence of unsustainable resource extraction (e.g. depriving rivers and streams of water due to extraction for hotel swimming pools and power showers).
- Overtourism which, pre-COVID-19, had become a huge problem in destinations across Europe, with some, such as Amsterdam and Venice, seeking new ways to manage tourist numbers effectively.



Image Credit: Creative Commons

The worldwide pandemic brought this growth to a sudden and dramatic halt in 2020⁹, causing a myriad of social and economic problems. In some places, natural and public spaces have struggled to cope with the sudden upsurge in domestic tourists wanting to enjoy spending time outdoors. More typically, the lockdown has caused a rapid collapse in the visitor economy. This toolkit was put together in early 2021 and, at the time of writing, it is impossible to gauge how soon the recovery of international tourism arrivals will occur, and what it will look like. However, it seems inevitable that many destinations will be put under pressure from excessive tourist volumes in the future.

“We are the first generation to be able to end poverty, and the last generation that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Future generations will judge us harshly if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities.”

Ban Ki-moon (UN Secretary General 2007-2016)

THE OPPORTUNITY

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Europe and the rest of the world saw the impact of decades of unfettered tourism growth and irresponsible practices on destinations that were struggling to cope. Though hugely traumatic, the shock of the COVID-19 crisis has given the world pause for thought and shown that many interventions previously thought unrealistic, are clearly achievable - and in some instances welcome. There is increasing recognition that humanity is not best served by a return to business as usual and the UNWTO Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism¹⁰ call for a ‘Responsible Recovery’ of the tourism sector.

⁹ Worldwide International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) decreased by 74% in 2020 over 2019 (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Vol 19, Issue 1, January 2021 (UNWTO))

¹⁰ <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-05/UNWTO-Global-Guidelines-to-Restart-Tourism.pdf>

This is, therefore, an opportunity not only to help tourism industries to recover, but to emerge stronger, more sustainable and resilient, and to truly 'Build Back Better'. To realise this vision a 'sustainability lens' must be applied in developing and implementing tourism recovery plans.

Sustainability and competitiveness go hand-in-hand. After all, without the social, environmental and economic aspects being considered, a destination is liable to risk losing what made it attractive to tourists in the first place and, as a result, will eventually go into decline.

At the national level, countries will need to redefine the quality of their tourism offer. Consumer trends are rapidly evolving with an accelerated demand for nature and wellbeing experiences and a heightened awareness of the need for sustainable approaches. For example, the ETC Handbook on COVID-19 Recovery Strategies¹¹ highlights the increased awareness amongst consumers of livelihoods and prioritisation of spend with small local businesses (SMEs). This doesn't mean that there will necessarily be a large shift away from traditional tourism products but sustainability credentials are more likely to be factored into the purchasing decisions made by travellers and tourism businesses

'Sustainability has reached a tipping point. As consumers increasingly embrace social causes, they seek products and brands that align with their values. Nearly 6 out of 10 consumers surveyed are willing to change their shopping habits to reduce environmental impact. Nearly 8 out of 10 respondents indicate sustainability is important for them. 57% of consumers are willing to change their purchasing habits to help reduce negative environmental impact'.

IBM Institute for Business Value global consumer report 2020

These consumer trends provide further opportunity to create better quality products that are inherently more beneficial for residents, local businesses and whole communities. The competitive advantage of integrating sustainability elements into product differentiation is increasingly well recognised in the tourism private sector and has already moved from the niche to the mainstream. This opportunity has yet to be capitalised on extensively by destinations, though The Azores, and New Zealand are two examples of countries that promote the unspoilt quality of their environment as a differentiator.

"Sustainable tourism is likely to offer better quality products by being more experiential and emotionally engaging. Today's travellers expect more from their holiday than just relaxing".

Luigi Cabrini, President, Global Sustainable Tourism Council

A sustainable approach to tourism development presents a great opportunity; not only can destinations improve environmental quality and conserve natural resources, they can also

¹¹ <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/handbook-on-covid-19-recovery-strategies-for-national-tourism-organisations/>

increase the benefit of tourism to local people and protect culture and heritage - all the while delivering a product that is increasingly in demand. A win all round!

Given the urgency to act on climate change and other pressing global problems, keeping ahead of likely future legislation is another clear advantage presented by taking action on sustainability sooner, rather than later. Additionally, several studies such as the 'Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience' by the Global Adaptation Commission¹² have highlighted that taking simple preservation actions against the decline in biodiversity could produce significant financial net benefits.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR RECOVERY

The opportunity is to create a new national vision that goes beyond growth to value quality of life and respects the natural systems needed for survival. With greater public - private cooperation, triple bottom line accounting, that incorporates the true cost of tourism, investment directed towards green infrastructure and strengthened local supply chains, models of tourism development can be steered to maximise benefits, while minimising negative impacts.

In recognition of the urgent need to act on the current global challenges faced, together with acknowledgement that current systems of tourism measurement do not facilitate this, six global tourism NGOs came together in 2020 to form the Future of Tourism Coalition¹³ with a shared mission to place destination needs at the centre of tourism's new future. Together the coalition agreed 13 guiding principles to place sustainability at the centre of destination recovery:



Future of Tourism Coalition's 13 Guiding Principles

¹² <https://gca.org/global-commission-on-adaptation/adapt-our-world>

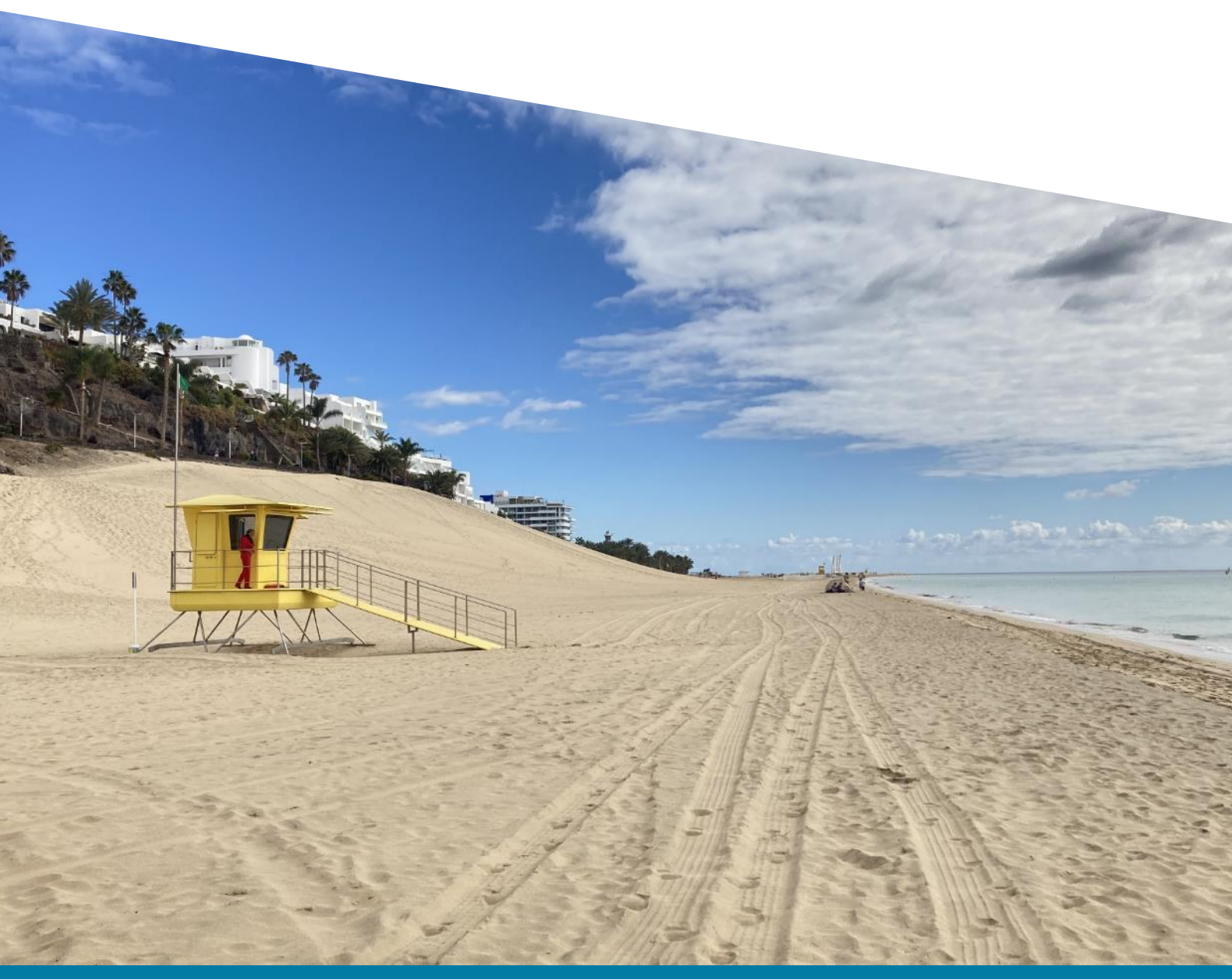
¹³ <https://www.futureoftourism.org/guiding-principles>

SUMMARY

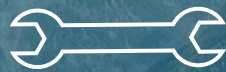
This section has provided an overview of the basics of sustainability. Which is all that is really needed to get started. It should also have highlighted the benefits and opportunities inherent in developing a more environmentally, socially and economically balanced approach to the tourism industry.

Additionally, this introduction highlighted some of the key global forces impacting on both tourism and future human survival. In emphasising the scale of the impending climate and biodiversity crisis, it is not intended to alarm, but to underpin the urgency and the importance of integrating sustainability into national tourism strategies.

See also: [Tool 1](#) to support this section plus the following tools: [2a\) Background Information](#) & [2b\) Additional Resources Weblinks](#)



CHAPTER 2



TAKING A NATIONAL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY





2. TAKING A NATIONAL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY

There is no doubt that tourism development brings many benefits, but as seen in the previous section, exhausting nature's budget, climate change, biodiversity loss and the invisible burden of tourism are all calling for an urgent change. These burning issues have to be addressed in a strategic way and with a common goal. Making personal and organisational pledges to sustainable development are important steps towards a more sustainable development of the entire country and contribute to the global efforts to safeguard the natural, social and cultural resources for future generations.

To implement sustainable tourism policy, an institutional framework is required which supports the efforts of the competent authorities. This section of the handbook guides NTOs through processes, activities and important considerations that will help them to create and implement a national sustainability model that responds to their unique national context and circumstances. It covers:

- National approaches to planning, developing and implementing sustainable tourism.
- Key partners and their roles.
- Benefits of a national sustainability approach.
- Framework and different models for implementation of sustainability.
- Sustainability certification schemes.

IMPORTANCE OF A NATIONAL APPROACH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The ETC report *European Sustainability Schemes and their role in promoting sustainability and competitiveness in European Tourism*¹⁴ presents a few examples of destinations implementing destination-based sustainability schemes to drive sustainable tourism in their country. Most destinations are still working out what they want to achieve in the area of sustainability, therefore a more systematic approach is needed. When moving from inclusion to implementation of sustainability, the emphasis is on integrating sustainability into the national tourism strategy and engaging the tourism sector with schemes during the implementation process.

As highlighted in the ETC handbook on *COVID-19 Recovery Strategies for National Tourism Organisations*¹⁴, NTOs now have a crucial role to play in guiding their sector in preparing for recovery. One of the key recommendations focuses on the goal for Europe's NTOs to lead in developing a new sustainable tourism ecosystem to make Europe the most sustainable destination in the world. NTOs could grab a unique opportunity to assume a refreshed role in guiding the tourism sector towards more sustainable tourism.

Key findings from these two ETC documents demonstrate the need and importance of a systematic approach towards sustainable tourism development at a national level in Europe. In countries where NTOs are in charge of planning, developing and promoting tourism, and where they have the legal and executional framework to improve conditions for tourism development, it makes sense to assign them key roles and responsibilities in this area. Where

¹⁴ <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/handbook-on-covid-19-recovery-strategies-for-national-tourism-organisations/>

tourism development is guided by another public institution, NTOs might play a supportive role in the whole process.

National approach¹⁵ in this document is understood as a holistic, overall approach towards implementation of sustainability in tourism on the national level.

A national sustainability model is defined as the unique solution to implementing sustainability that is relevant to your national context and circumstances. It plays the essential role in the process of implementing sustainable development endeavours because it has a strong impact on a wide range of tourism stakeholders: destinations, protected areas, tourism businesses and local communities. A positive shift to sustainable development that permeates every activity of tourism can be reached with a national system, which connects and accelerates endeavours, and provides stakeholders with the necessary support in this process.

A national sustainability model which includes a **certification scheme** can be used as a practical, efficient and simple tool to speed up the introduction of sustainable business models in tourism at the level of destinations and businesses and strive for continuous improvement, as schemes are normally progress-oriented.

PLACING SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS UNDER AN UMBRELLA STRATEGY

As stated in the ETC report on European Sustainability Schemes¹, the lack of understanding of sustainable tourism is holding many NTOs back from integrating it into their strategic plans and promotional activities in any meaningful way. Therefore, it is important for NTOs to deepen their knowledge in this area. Once the concept of sustainable tourism is better understood, sustainability should be embedded within an umbrella tourism strategy or a similar strategic document which NTOs set up with key partners to define the long-term vision and key objectives.

Development and ownership of the national sustainability model should be in the hands of a national tourism authority responsible for tourism development (NTO, Ministry or other organisation). In this way it is guaranteed that sustainable development and related activities will support the vision, and will build trust among tourism stakeholders, which is essential to achieve long-term commitment and participation in the programme.

For ETC, the goal is for Europe's NTOs to lead in developing a new sustainable tourism ecosystem, to make Europe a destination known worldwide for its sustainable, resilient and competitive destination models.

BENEFITS OF A NATIONAL APPROACH

At the very beginning, when everyone must embark on the same journey, it is useful to have a look at the **benefits of a national approach towards sustainability**, both for NTOs and for partners.

¹⁵ In this document we talk about approach on the national level. However, in some countries, especially in larger ones, a similar approach could be developed on a lower (e.g. regional) level. In this case, a regional authority should read this document from their point of view and execute activities which are planned in the document on the national level, on their regional level.

BENEFITS OF A NATIONAL APPROACH

BENEFITS FOR NTOs

- Coordinated development on a national level where everybody is implementing the same standards and following the same approach.
- Easy management - all sustainability efforts under one roof.
- Structured approach towards tourism stakeholders (changing their habits and achieving a shift in mindset).
- Encouraging destinations and industry to become models of sustainable development, improve their sustainable activities and promote them.
- Initiating movement and boosting cooperation and healthy competition among destinations and businesses.
- Identifying weakest points on the level of the entire country and developing solutions to address these issues.
- If based on global criteria, the scheme is internationally recognised and comparable, but adapted to the national character.
- Improved cooperation with stakeholders.
- Constant monitoring, progress and improvement.
- Tool for positioning and promotion (under umbrella marketing strategy).

BENEFITS FOR DESTINATION AND BUSINESS MANAGERS

- Access to efficient tools that help address sustainable tourism development in a strategic manner.
- Common understanding of sustainability and deepened knowledge.
- Access to clear and structured guidance.
- Identification of key issues and challenges.
- Benchmarking.
- Constant progress and improvement.
- Part of the national story, with access to national promotional channels.
- Repositioning on the market.
- Attracting more tourists who recognise sustainability efforts and achievements.

DIVISION OF ROLES

As stated in the ETC Handbook on Covid-19 Recovery Strategies for NTOs, the current uncertain times have changed the way NTOs are perceived. **The tourism sector is nowadays relying more on NTOs for data, insights and guidance.** NTOs must build expertise in new areas to become more proactive in tackling destination management challenges across the country. Also, they should build research capability to monitor and measure new KPIs based on sustainable criteria.

When approaching sustainable tourism development on a national level, it is extremely important to have a project holder which ideally will be the responsibility of the NTO, and also to assure involvement of experts from the sustainable tourism field. These experts can be either internal or external. The table below describes potential scenarios, roles and responsibilities of partners.

	PUBLIC PROJECT HOLDER	EXPERT IN SUSTAINABILITY
IDEALLY	National Tourism Organisation	External expert/group of experts (any legal form of organisation; NGO, consulting firm, professional agency)
OPTIONALLY	Other governmental department, public agency, public company	Internal person/group of experts within public project holder (NTO or other)
ROLE	Project management	Delivering expertise
RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management and implementation • Networking and cooperation with strategic partners • Project financing • Public communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert work on sustainability • Technical support at all stages

Should an NTO decide to build a national certification scheme using an existing sustainability certificate and establish exclusive cooperation with the certification body, this will mean that a third partner is involved. Its role is focused on the standard and assessment procedure.

Depending on the organisational structure, human and financial capacity, the division of roles will be unique in each country. No matter how the roles are divided, it is strongly recommended that a person is nominated to coordinate the national efforts in sustainable tourism development.

The development of sustainable tourism can be more successful and faster if a committed person is appointed as a National Sustainability Coordinator. This person should be appointed on the side of the public project holder, ideally as a full-time employee with full authority to perform activities within the project. The coordinator should be properly qualified and preferably involved in the project from the beginning.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION

An important part of a national approach towards planning, developing and implementing sustainability in tourism can be **certification**. Not all NTOs will opt for this scenario, but in any case, it is useful to understand some basic terms and technical concepts regarding the topic. This will make it easier to decide how to approach the development of a national sustainability scheme later in the process.

The ETC report on European Sustainability Schemes¹ states that “Sustainability schemes cover a wide range of initiatives that seek to recognise, reward and/or facilitate actions taken to improve sustainability in the tourism sector”. For the purpose of this handbook, emphasis will be given to the recommendations in that report, stating that “it is easier to adapt or adopt an existing scheme than create a whole new one.” Since many schemes are underpinned by

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria¹⁶ the focus in this chapter is on the so-called GSTC recognised standards and accredited certification bodies.

To fully understand sustainable tourism certification, some basic terms need to be clarified:

- **Sustainable Tourism Criteria** are the minimum, not the maximum, which businesses, governments, and destinations should achieve to approach social, environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability.
- **Sustainable Tourism Standard** is a set of criteria and indicators certifying bodies use when assessing sustainability of destinations or tourism businesses. Standard can be used as a **tool** with guidelines which indicate what needs to be done to become more sustainable.
- **Certification Body** is an organisation which owns the standard and has a certifying process in place to certify destinations and tourism businesses as sustainable.

There are two sets of GSTC criteria:

1. **Destination criteria** (GSTC-D) for public policymakers and destination managers
2. **Industry criteria** (GSTC-I) for hotels and tour operators.

It is important to understand that GSTC does not directly certify any products or services. Certification is done by Certification Bodies. Each certification body develops its own standard and its own process of certification. Those certification bodies who want to display a certain level of alignment of their standard with the GSTC criteria opt for either accreditation by the GSTC (higher level) or recognition by the GSTC (lower level).

GSTC accredits certification bodies and **recognises** sustainability standards. [Refer to Tool 3](#) for examples of GSTC accredited CBs and GSTC recognised standards¹⁷.



To sum up, there are many international standards which are recognised by the GSTC and are available for use by tourism stakeholders. These standards were verified and reflect sustainable tourism principles in every aspect. Since it is believed to be easier to adapt or adopt an existing standard or a scheme than to create a whole new one, the use of GSTC recognised standards is recommended. However, if an NTO decides to create its own standard, it is recommended that the GSTC criteria are used and its standard is built upon them. Eventually one might decide to even have the criteria recognised by the GSTC.

¹⁶ The GSTC is an independent and neutral organisation, legally registered in the USA as a non-profit organisation, that represents a diverse and global membership, including UN agencies, NGO's, national and provincial governments, leading travel companies, hotels, tour operators, individuals and communities – all striving to achieve best practices in sustainable tourism. The GSTC is mandated to establish and manage global sustainable standards, known as the GSTC Criteria.

¹⁷ Complete list is available at <https://www.gstccouncil.org/gstc-criteria/gstc-recognized-standards-for-tour-operators/> and at <https://www.gstccouncil.org/gstc-criteria/gstc-recognized-standards-for-hotels/>.

CHAPTER 3



INTRODUCTION TO THE FRAMEWORK



3. INTRODUCTION TO THE FRAMEWORK

The sustainability framework that follows is built as a system of four modules which form a 7-step approach towards sustainable tourism development on a national level. Each of the 7 steps is broken down into activities that act as a practical instruction, a “how to” towards more sustainable tourism. This framework is the ultimate roadmap for NTOs on how to tackle every step on the sustainable journey. It is a tried and tested process that will guide the reader through challenges of sustainable tourism development.



The framework provides two different possibilities on how to proceed with sustainable development – one might decide to develop a **Certification Scheme** and use Module 2a for this purpose or one might opt for a **Targeted Development** within Module 2b. Options 2a and 2b are not exclusive, both may be relevant for an NTO and they can be easily combined.

Throughout, the framework links to a **toolkit of resources** to assist NTOs with implementation. Based on sustainable development and management principles, it draws on the latest research and best practice tools and case studies, including the award-winning Slovenia Green scheme. With an intensely practical focus, the toolkit provides useful templates, checklists, roles and responsibility outlines, lists of key organisations and other resources to inspire and guide tourism managers through a tried and tested process to bring national sustainable tourism strategies to life.

WHERE TO START

Each module is an independent and complete unit. One does not have to follow a linear process from step 1 to step 7. As each NTO finds itself at a different stage of sustainable development, the process can begin at whichever step or module and not all steps or modules have to be implemented. However, for those NTOs at the beginning of their sustainable journey it is recommended to follow all 7 steps for best results. See our tips below and find the best position to start.

BEGINNERS

(Getting to know sustainability but do not exactly know how and where to start)

- Start arming yourself with knowledge
- Begin with Module 1, Step 1 and gradually continue on
- Follow all steps 1-7 for best results

ADVANCED USERS

(Already familiar with sustainable principles, but do not know how to implement them)

- Find and use what is most convenient for you in Module 1
- If struggling to find the best solution, focus on Module 2
- Upgrade the system with Modules 3 and 4

EXPERT USERS

(Already have own scheme or system, but looking for upgrades and improvements)

- Glance through all modules and check for possible improvements of your system

FINANCIAL EVALUATION

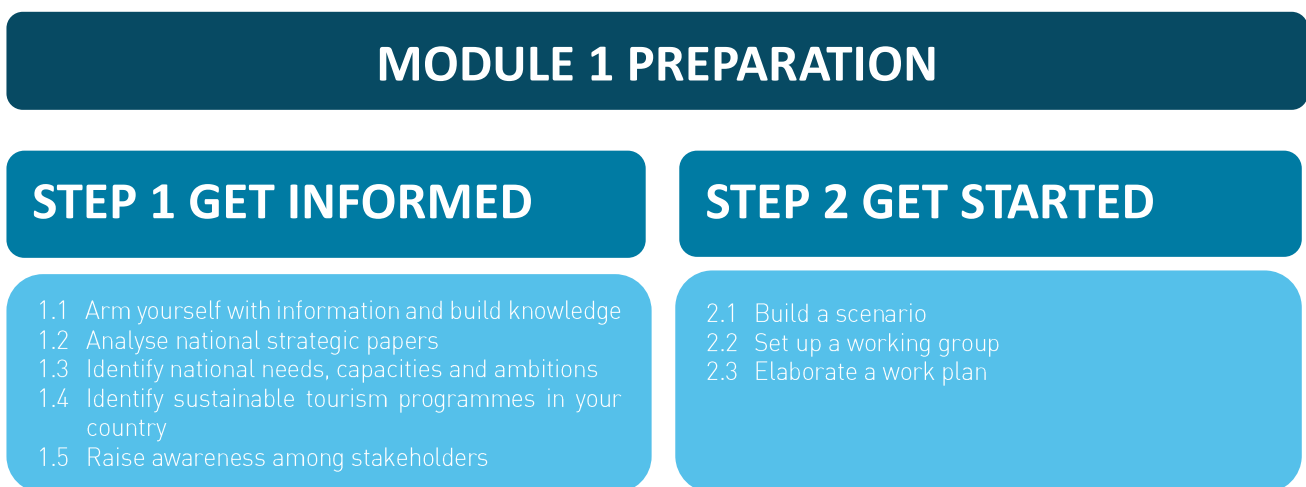
It is difficult to financially evaluate each activity and step, since this will depend on the specific country situation, available human resources, existing knowledge and established mechanisms, organisational structure and general level of costs in the country. Therefore activities are estimated in a number of days it will take an NTO to complete. These numbers are estimates which, again, depend on the experience of NTOs in this area, availability of information, dedication, etc.



MODULE 1 – PREPARATION

When you embark on your sustainability journey and decide to set up a national sustainability model, it is very important that you know your basics - what is sustainable tourism and its concepts, what is the level of sustainable tourism development in your country, what needs should you address, what targets should you set, which are the most important stakeholders you need to involve, and of course what do you want to achieve? Once you know this, you can proceed to Module 2 which will help you elaborate your national sustainability model, and Module 3 in which you will set up a supportive environment.

See Module 1 broken down into steps and activities in the picture below:



STEP 1: GET INFORMED

In the beginning you should collect as much information as possible about sustainable tourism and its trends, and most relevant strategic papers and programmes which guide sustainable development in your country. To start a movement, you should involve stakeholders in your sustainability story by raising awareness amongst them, showing them best practices and trying to understand their needs.

ACTION 1.1	Arm yourself with information and build knowledge
Guidance	Getting informed is something so basic that sometimes it is tempting to move quickly through this stage or start directly with action. It is crucial to get a bigger picture on the topic as broad as sustainability in tourism.
	Carefully read available research and handbooks about sustainability in tourism: Section 1 of this handbook including Tools 1, 2a, 2b and 3 , ETC Report on European Sustainability Schemes, ETC Handbook on Covid-19 recovery strategies for National Tourism Organisations, Tourism for SDG’s platform from UNWTO, and others.
	Should you be interested in certification, get more knowledge about GSTC standards . Find out more about the way they operate, their auditing processes, costs and promotion.



	Do not just focus on sustainable tourism; get acquainted with crucial international papers and strategies , such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare short handouts on what you have read, so the key content will always be at hand to show or explain to others (you can adapt tool 1). • Get acquainted with popular trends. There is a lot of interesting material available on-line which you can study – choose reputable organisations and research companies as your sources.
Partners	NTO, DMOs, tourism industry
Resource requirements	12 days – desktop work

ACTION 1.2 Analyse national strategic papers	
Guidance	There are plenty of strategic documents from different fields in your country. Many of these areas are closely linked to tourism, either directly or indirectly.
	Analyse documents which are relevant for tourism and see which of these documents cover sustainability issues, so that the tourism development you are guiding will be aligned with other national plans.
	Check your umbrella law on tourism, look for country development strategies, plans on development of circular economy, transport and soft mobility, waste, energy, gastronomy, climate change, etc. Getting informed about all of this will serve you as an inspiration or just as a source of information.
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use search tools to quickly find the most relevant contents within each document. • Make sure that you read the latest strategies and not expired documents. Find out when key strategies are due to be renewed.
Partners	Ministries, public agencies, local and regional authorities.
Resource requirements	8 days – desktop work

ACTION 1.3 Identify national needs, capacities and ambitions	
Guidance	Needs of tourism and wider destination stakeholders are unique and diverse. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to identify and understand them so that it will be easier to address them later in the process.
	Involve all relevant stakeholders, from national ministries and agencies to DMOs, tourism businesses, NGOs, local communities and others involved in tourism and wider placemaking. Refer to Tool 4 for help with identifying tourism stakeholders
	Develop a structured approach to capture the situation and needs of your stakeholders. You can opt for an online survey or a focus group. Outputs of the research will reveal the current situation, the main challenges and desires, and help you draw conclusions. Refer to Tool 5 for guidance on Researching National Needs



	National needs might be focused on destinations wanting to operate more sustainably, or tourism businesses wanting only more promotion, or just a general need to improve interdepartmental cooperation.
Tips	Check also existing data and studies (e.g. research from tourism and non-tourism sector, national tourism strategies, government development plans).
Partners	NTO, tourism stakeholders, universities, research institutions.
Resource requirements	1 to 3 workshops with stakeholders 4 days - on-line survey and analysis 10 days - desktop work

ACTION 1.4 Identify sustainable tourism programmes in your country	
Guidance	Investigate what sustainable tourism programmes, projects, initiatives and similar actions are already presented in your country, either on national, regional or local level.
	Check if any tourism certificates, national contact points and trained auditors are already available. Check among destinations, businesses, protected areas and other stakeholders.
	Besides certificates from the GSTC recognised standards list, look for EDEN ¹⁸ projects and other labels (e.g. EU Ecolabel ¹⁹), labels from different product associations (e.g. campsites, farm stays, outdoor activities), scan for Alpine Convention ²⁰ or Alpine Pearls ²¹ , Blue Flag beaches ²² , European Green Capital titles ²³ .
	Also search for other indirect programmes of sustainable tourism development (e.g. co-financing initiatives, corporate funds, start-ups).
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If information on sustainable programmes is not easy to find, conduct a survey among tourism stakeholders or ask your working group members (see activity 2.2). • Do not forget to check which projects funded by the EU (or other international organisations) are currently applied in your country and are related to sustainable tourism.
Partners	Representatives of global and national incentives in your country, product associations, DMOs, relevant NGOs.
Resource requirements	10 – 20 interviews with identified project leaders (10 days) 8 days - desktop work

¹⁸ European Destinations of Excellence: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/eden_en

¹⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/>

²⁰ <https://www.alpconv.org/en/>

²¹ <https://www.alpine-pearls.com/en/>

²² <https://www.blueflag.global/>

²³ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/>

ACTION 1.5		Raise awareness amongst stakeholders
Guidance	Field support is crucial at the beginning of a sustainable development journey. So, raising awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism development amongst tourism stakeholders, local communities and public decision makers is essential. The more they hear about sustainable development, sustainable tourism etc., the more they are likely to support your endeavours.	
	National and international good practices in sustainable tourism are a very useful source for getting ideas and insights. You could look to the 100 Top Green Destinations. ²⁴ Try to identify good practices that suit your country's characteristics and can inspire you. More insights can be obtained through personal contact so consider a study visit and best practice exchanges. Involve both your employees and other tourism stakeholders.	
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some good practices can be found in the ETC report on European Sustainability Schemes²⁵. • To raise awareness, create quality content that will engage your target audience. • Demystify sustainability by showing them interesting infographics, presentations, videos, etc. 	
Partners	NTO, DMOs, best practice cases.	
Resource requirements	10 days - desktop work Study visit	

STEP 2: GET STARTED

Now that you have learnt more about sustainable tourism and its concepts, sustainability certificates, plans within your country, programmes which are running, and needs of your tourism stakeholders, you can get started by deciding what you want to achieve. For this purpose, you should build a scenario, elaborate a work plan and set up a working group.

ACTION 2.1		Build a scenario
Guidance	It is now time to ask yourselves what you want to achieve by introducing sustainable tourism development in your country, and set some targets against this. Refer to Tool 6 for further guidance on this activity	
	Will you bring all sustainable initiatives under one umbrella brand, or will you rather upgrade some existing programmes and add some new approaches? Or will you develop a very targeted system to address identified key challenges?	
	Does the number and quality of existing programmes, initiatives and certificates in your country represent the needed critical mass to operate with, or not? Are you up for a national certification scheme?	
	Are your national needs so different and unique that the only way to address them is to create your own scheme or standard, or will you use something that already exists?	

²⁴ <https://greendestinations.org/sustainabletop100/>

²⁵ <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/european-sustainability-schemes/>



	There are many options you will consider and as a result you will very likely start with several scenarios. For each of them, define pros and cons both for your organisation and the participants in the programme. Consider how much human and financial resources your chosen scenario will require before you make a final decision.
Tips	Organise consultations with your working group (activity 2.2) and together select one of the scenarios. You need their endorsement to assure their support and assistance in the next stages.
Partners	NTO, working group members.
Resource requirements	2 to 4 consultation workshops with working group 20 days – desktop work

ACTION 2.2 Set up a working group	
Guidance	<p>You cannot do all of this alone. You should seek cooperation with other stakeholders who you can consult, cross check ideas with, ask for advice and in the end implement the project with.</p> <p>Your working group should be mixed and well balanced. Consider the following profiles and roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project manager (presumably this will be your organisation) • Sustainability experts • Experts in destination management, innovation, marketing • Representatives of public bodies, directly and indirectly involved in tourism, • Representatives of destinations, businesses, institutes, associations, universities, • Local communities and NGOs.
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think out of the box. Try not to think “who should not be left out” but rather “who can contribute the most”. In this sense, try to balance the political, business, academic and civil society sectors. • Nominate a responsible person for implementation of the model at your organisation, the so-called Green Coordinator, and have them manage the project.
Partners	NTO, working group members.
Resource requirements	3 days – desktop work

ACTION 2.3 Elaborate a work plan	
Guidance	<p>Now that you know what you want to achieve, you need to elaborate a work plan and define how you will achieve it. In the work plan you should define work phases and activities, appoint responsible persons and organisations, define finances and above all – define a feasible time frame.</p> <p>Consider the specifics of your country, your NTO, your processes, your staff and your budget.</p> <p>Consider also potential challenges that await you during implementation of the work plan and address them.</p> <p>To assist you in this process, we have broken down two most likely scenarios into steps</p>

	and activities: a) We want to develop a national certification scheme - go to MODULE 2a b) we want a targeted development of sustainable tourism on a national level - go to MODULE 2b.
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities in this handbook will help you elaborate your work plan.• In Module 3 you will find tips on how to develop a supportive environment.
Partners	NTO, working group.
Resource requirements	10 days – desktop work



MODULE 2 – DEVELOPING THE SOLUTION

Module 2 is about formulating a concrete solution. As mentioned earlier, each NTO will opt for a different scenario and will elaborate their own work plan with their unique targets. However, when thinking about a national sustainability approach in a progressive manner, action must be taken to respond to the conclusions reached in Module 1. There are two very likely alternatives which are described in Module 2a and Module 2b respectively.

Module 2a is for those NTOs that want to develop a certification scheme. It is built upon Slovenia Green, a tried-and-tested systematic approach towards certification and implementation of sustainability on a national level. It involves the use of GSTC recognised standards and other standards, a partnership with a certification body and local experts, and some additional national characteristics.

Module 2b explains a system of targeted sustainable development, where already existing sustainability efforts are brought together and upgraded with a more structured and strategic approach, and measurement of sustainability is introduced via implementation of sustainable tourism indicators.

In activity 2.3 above, you started elaborating a work plan. The following activities within Modules 2a and 2b will help you shape this work plan. Since this is a modular approach, you do not have to stick to 2a or 2b exclusively; you can combine steps and activities in any way you want, as long as you find it useful.

MODULE 2A - CERTIFICATION SCHEME

As the ETC report on European Sustainability Schemes finds, only one destination involved in the study, Slovenia, has so far taken a systematic approach to the implementation of sustainability schemes. Therefore, this module is based upon the experience of **Slovenia Green** but has been developed in such a way that it can be adapted for use by any NTO.

CASE STUDY: THE GREEN SCHEME OF SLOVENIAN TOURISM

The Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism (GSST) is a Slovenian **tool for sustainable tourism development at a national level** and a **certification programme** that carries out the following tasks under the SLOVENIA GREEN umbrella brand:

- It brings together all efforts directed towards the sustainable development of tourism in Slovenia;
- it offers tools for destinations and service providers that enable them to evaluate and improve their sustainability endeavours; and
- it promotes these green endeavours through the SLOVENIA GREEN brand.

As a **development** project, GSST bridges a gap between facts (Slovenia is green since 65% of land is covered by forest, 36% of land is protected by Natura 2000, it has a high quality of drinking water, etc.) and the country's green promotion (green colour in the heart of I FEEL sLOVEnia brand).

GREEN PHILOSOPHY

by SLOVENIAN TOURIST BOARD



The scheme's key strategic objective is to introduce sustainable models to Slovenian tourism, to both the tourism industry and destinations. All the objectives of the strategic guidelines are in line with sustainable development and demonstrate concern for the economic, social, cultural and natural environment.

MANAGEMENT OF THE SLOVENIA GREEN SCHEME

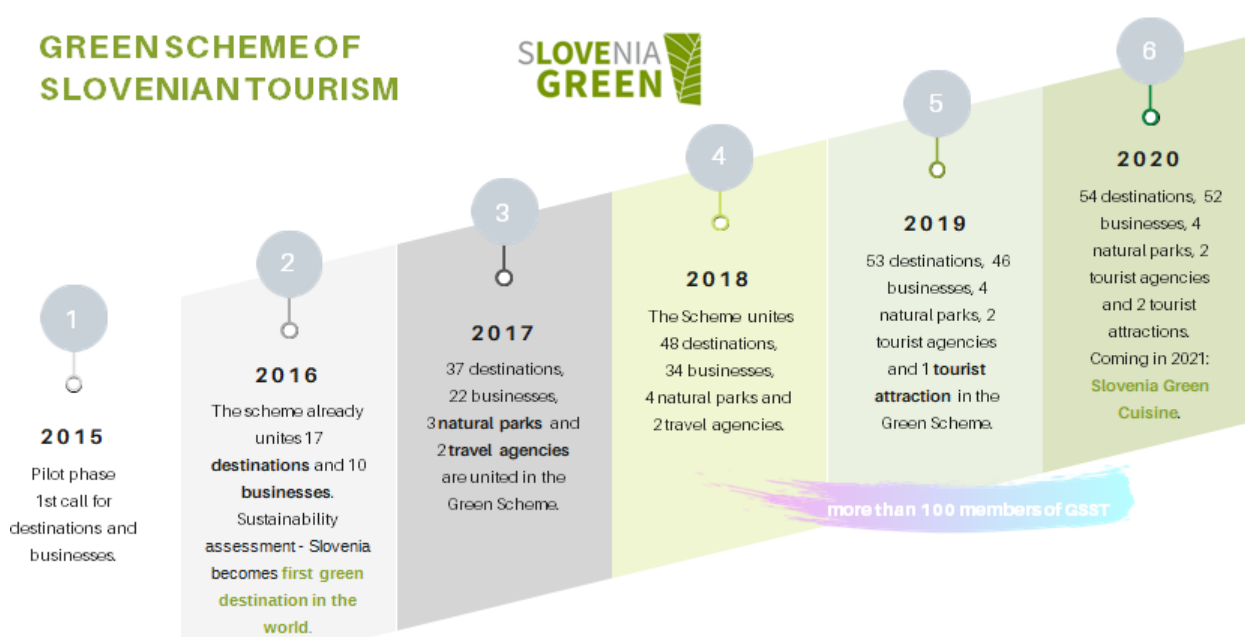
- GSST is managed by a NTO (Slovenian Tourist Board) which assumes the role of a public project holder. The NTO owns, actively manages and develops the scheme, offers educational support and establishes promotion.
- An expert in sustainability is involved (an NGO called GoodPlace). It co-develops and runs the scheme with the NTO and is a regional representative of the international certification body, Green Destinations which owns the Green Destinations standard.
- A tripartite agreement was signed between Slovenian Tourist Board, GoodPlace and Green Destinations.

DETERMINING THE BEST SOLUTION

During the development of the solution, more scenarios were considered, including the scenario where Slovenia develops its own standard for sustainable tourism. Based on the analysis and consultations with the working group (see Module 1), it was decided that, considering there are so many international certificates already in place and available for instant use, and that the development of a new standard requires a lot of human and financial resources, existing standards would be used. Additionally, the initial idea of endorsing only GSTC recognised certificates for all categories was changed to also allow non GSTC recognised certificates based on findings in the preparation phase (Module 1). Through an in-depth analysis, discussions with stakeholders, and consultations with the working group, a final decision on which certificates to use and endorse was made. This list is revised on an annual basis by the NTO and an expert partner.

Slovenia Green is today a certification scheme for destinations, protected areas, beaches, accommodations, travel agents and tour operators, attractions and (coming in 2021) restaurants. It started out in 2014 with a pilot phase for destinations and in 2015 it was launched as a scheme for destinations, accommodations and travel agents and tour operators. New categories are added annually, reflecting the needs of the sector, trends and the situation with Slovenian tourism in general. For example: since Slovenia was named European region of Gastronomy 2021 by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism, GSST is introducing a new category for restaurants in that same year and upgrading the Green Destinations standard with a dedicated module for gastronomy which will be only applied in Slovenia and offered to Slovenian destinations.

The picture below shows the progress since 2015.



DESTINATIONS

As already mentioned, all destinations in the GSST currently use the same standard, the Green Destinations standard. An elaborate supportive environment was set up for destination - from 5 workshops which green coordinators are obliged to attend, to constant on-line support and plenty of other supporting documents, such as handbooks, templates, and guidelines. The expert partner in sustainability, GoodPlace, is very closely involved in the whole process for destinations.

BUSINESSES, NATURAL ATTRACTIONS AND PROTECTED AREAS

For businesses, the system is set up differently. The scheme endorses several certificates which tourism businesses can choose, depending on their type and their needs. These are called primary certificates. The list of primary certificates includes:

- Bio hotels
- EU Ecolabel
- EMAS
- Ecocamping

- Green Key
- Green Globe
- LEAF
- Travelife
- World of Glamping Green.

Blue Flag certificate is used for beaches, and EUROPARC and MAB for protected areas. The supportive environment created for some of these categories includes the co-financing of certification costs by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. However, specific support such as workshops and handbooks have not been established for each of these certifications.



AWARDS

After successful certification, Slovenia Green certificate is awarded. For each category, there is a different certificate as follows and illustrated above.

Destinations

- Slovenia Green Destination (bronze, silver, gold, platinum)

This is the only progressive Slovenia Green certificate, awarded at four levels. Audit of destinations takes place every 3 years and the goal is to ultimately reach the platinum level.

Other Categories

- Slovenia Green Accommodation
- Slovenia Green Travel Agency
- Slovenia Green Attraction
- Slovenia Green Park
- Slovenia Green Beach
- Slovenia Green Cuisine (coming in 2021)

Other categories base the validity of the Slovenia Green certificate on their primary certificate. For instance, if a hotel is certified by Travelife for two years, the hotel will be awarded Slovenia Green for this same period of time. Once the Travelife certificate expires, Slovenia Green expires as well, unless Travelife is renewed. Evidence about primary certificates and their renewal must be submitted to the NTO on a regular basis.

PROMOTION

Although GSST is primarily a development scheme, at the end of the process everybody who successfully undergoes certification expects additional promotion. That is why the NTO has an annual marketing plan in place for Slovenia Green. It is used to promote individual certified stakeholders, as well as for placing Slovenia on the international market as a leading sustainable destination. There is also an annual award ceremony for all recipients of Slovenia Green certificates in the previous year.

[Refer to Tool 7 for more detail on the case study.](#)



MODULE 2a CERTIFICATION SCHEME

STEP 3a SET IT UP

- 3.1a Set up a scheme
- 3.2a Develop national awards

STEP 4a TEST & LAUNCH IT

- 4.1a Implement pilot phase
- 4.2a Launch the scheme

STEP 3A: SET IT UP

You opted for a national certification scheme which now needs to be set up. During this process you need to consider management, certification and promotion aspects. See some issues you need to address below. Be inspired by the Slovenia Green example but of course decide according to your wishes, needs, capabilities and specifics.

ACTION 3.1a

Set up a scheme

Guidance

You decided to build a national certification scheme for sustainability in tourism. You need to consider the following aspects:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management: Who will manage and own the scheme? What other partners will cooperate with you? Are there enough human resources at your disposal to manage the scheme? • Certification: Which types of tourism stakeholders will you certify? Which certificates will you use? Are these accessible in your country? Are auditors trained? What is the price, what are the benefits? Will you develop your own certificate? Will you sign an agreement with a certification body and use their certificate exclusively? • Costs: How much will managing the scheme cost? What will be the costs for applicants? Will you charge membership in the certification scheme? • Benefits and promotion: What will you offer to certified stakeholders? As an NTO, will you promote them on a dedicated webpage? Will you develop a new brand, name, corporate identity for the scheme? How will this scheme contribute to you being recognised as a sustainable country? <p>Once you have an answer to all the above, consult the final proposal with your working group and get their approval.</p>
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For more about the role division and certification, refer back to those sections in chapter 2. • Return to your work plan (Action 2.3) and elaborate it with the help of the above cues. • Even though we emphasised that adopting existing standards is easier than developing your own, you might still decide differently. In this case, please note that as part of this process you will have to set up a reporting platform, develop an assessment system, and train auditors.
Partners	Certification bodies as such Travelife, Earth Check, Green Destinations.
Resource requirements	<p>Management: 5 days - building an organisation structure; later you will need one person who will manage the scheme on a daily basis (approximately 100 days per year, depending on number of participants and categories you will introduce).</p> <p>Certification: 10 days - building a certification system and partnerships with certification bodies.</p> <p>Costs: 3 days - setting registration fees for each certificate and your own registration and administration fees.</p> <p>Benefits and promotion: 3 days - working out the solution.</p> <p>(Cost of certification will be based on terms and conditions of different certification bodies. Should you develop your own certificate, the number of workdays is considerably higher.)</p>

ACTION 3.2a Develop National Awards	
Guidance	<p>As you have opted for a national certification scheme, you should consider giving out national awards to all certified stakeholders. Awards should have a name and a corporate identity.</p> <p>You need to work out which stakeholders are entitled to your award, when and how they will receive it, how long it will be valid, etc. When developing awards, consider the following aspects:</p>

	<p>Technical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the award for all levels • Criteria for every level • Validity of the award • Renewal procedure
	<p>Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of the award (plaque, trophy, medal...) • Other visual aspects and design elements • Costs
	<p>Awarding process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who awards prizes, to whom, how often, on what occasion?
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about more levels of your certificate (e.g. bronze, silver, gold, platinum). It will keep your destinations and businesses even more motivated at act as a developmental tool. • Consider the minimum threshold for your award to avoid uncommitted applications.
Partners	NTO, external expert in visuals and design.
Resource requirements	5 days - setting up the award process. Additional costs of design and visual elements.

STEP 4A: TEST & LAUNCH IT

Once you have your scheme and all supportive documents ready, you should first test it and then officially launch it.

ACTION 4.1a		Implement Pilot Phase
Guidance	Before an official launch of your certification programme, take some time to test it to see whether the process runs smoothly and to assess usefulness of your supporting materials and supportive environment.	
	For the pilot call, prepare all necessary official documentation, including the public call for participants, application forms, protocols for applications with deadlines, and prices.	
	Limit the number of participants in the pilot to avoid too many applications.	
	Even though this is just a pilot call, award the participants in the end and promote their achievements country-wide.	
	Use what you learn in the pilot to improve the scheme and launch a better version.	
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down every small detail, dilemma and challenge you face during the pilot phase so it will be easier to address them within the launching phase. • Try to attract leading destinations and businesses in sustainability into your pilot. This will bring you more attention and is a higher guarantee of success. • Work with electronic documents as much as possible as they are easier to adapt. 	
Partners	NTO, applicants, sustainability experts.	
Resource requirements	5 days – developing all documents for the public call 5 days - evaluation and improvements Costs of external experts involved in the process (training, auditing).	

ACTION 4.2a

Launch the scheme

Guidance	<p>At this point, everything is in place and your scheme is ready for official launch. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Official public call for participants Refer to Tool 8 for guidance• Ready-to-use supporting documents• Established supportive environment• Well established channels for distribution of information <p>As far as the award ceremony is concerned, this can be a real promotional drive for your sustainable efforts. Module 4 will guide you on which promotional activities you should undertake.</p>
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support the launch with a promotional event for media and/or and information day for potential applicants.• Get professional tourism associations on board to help you promote your programme to their members (e.g. hotel association, association of restaurants and caterers).• See Module 3 for development of a supportive environment.
Partners	NTO, ministries, public bodies, private associations, media.
Resource requirements	5 days - finalisation of documents and official launch.



MODULE 2B - TARGETED DEVELOPMENT

You might decide that a national certification scheme is not right for you and your stakeholders at this time, but you would still like to develop a national sustainability programme to address your national needs and make progress. In this module we guide your development of such a national model. If you have not opted for 2a, you should at least read it through to get a sense of what it is about; it will help you in developing your own solution.

If you have already implemented the certification scheme in Module 2a, and by doing so, detected the weakest points of sustainable tourism development in your country, use what you learnt in Module 2a and upgrade the scheme with mechanisms introduced in Module 2b. Looking again at GSST for illustration, it is primarily a scheme through which sustainable tourism is strengthened, developed and promoted as a concept, and certificates are used as tools which help destinations and businesses implement sustainable practices. To make the most of it, a lot of effort is put into using certificates to detect **the strongest and weakest points** especially in destinations since they all use the same tool – the Green Destinations standard. Benchmarking of their results enables NTOs to identify areas where most improvement is still needed and act upon these findings by introducing new tools, such as a tool for the measurement of carbon footprint or a tool for the elimination of single-use-plastics, and by strengthening cooperation between public institutions which are responsible for a particular area of development, for example the Ministry of Transport for soft mobility, Ministry of Agriculture for local food supply chains, etc.

MODULE 2b TARGETED DEVELOPMENT

STEP 3b SET IT UP

3.1b Set up national goals and targets
3.2b Define activities
3.3b Recognise achievements

STEP 4b BRIDGE ACROSS SECTORS

4.1b Cross sector cooperation

STEP 3B: SET IT UP

First think about what you want to achieve and how you will achieve this on a national level. Set up goals and targets, define activities and partners. Put a lot of emphasis on measurement and promotion of your achievements.

ACTION 3.1b

Set up national goals and targets

Guidance

You have learnt about your national situation in the area of sustainable tourism development in Module 1 where you also decided what it is you want to achieve by setting up a national scheme of sustainable tourism development. Now it is time to set some specific goals and targets.

	<p>Select the areas of sustainability you will focus on, e.g. soft mobility, local supply chains, cooperation with the local community, biodiversity, sustainable hotels, etc. Since you already know which national programmes exist in these areas, bring them all together under one roof, optimise and improve them.</p> <p>If there are no existing activities in your country yet, introduce new tools. You might opt for already developed ones (e.g. an international tool for reduction of single-use plastics, international standard for eco hotels, etc.) or you might want to develop your own.</p> <p>Set realistic targets which you can measure, and Key Performance Indicators. Remember: If it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed.</p>
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align your goals with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). • Get involved with ETC when monitoring Sustainable Tourism Indicators.
Partners	NTO with partners.
Resource requirements	15 days.

ACTION 3.2b		Define activities
Guidance	<p>For each of the goals and targets you set, you need to elaborate activities. What exactly will be done to achieve these targets? Who is in charge of each activity? What programmes will be implemented and on what level? How much will this cost? What is the desired timeframe?</p> <p>Also consider the cross-sector cooperation that will be required. (More on this in Action 4.1b)</p>	
	<p>Seek answers to all these questions before you return to your work plan from Activity 2.3 and finalise it. Refer to Tool 9 for types of activities</p>	
	<p>At this stage involve not only your working group but a wider audience. Since you are developing a national plan and setting national targets, you must assure that your programme is feasible.</p>	
	<p>Organise consultations with different groups of stakeholders you will be targeting with your programme, check their willingness to participate and see if you have their support in reaching the KPIs. Even if you are the one running the programme and offering guidance, it will be they who will have to act. Without their support, you will not be able to succeed.</p>	
Tips	Return to your work plan in Activity 2.3 and use this Module to finalise it.	
Partners	Relevant partners for the identified sustainability challenges you aim to address.	
Resource requirements	8 days per identified challenge including consultations with key partners.	



ACTION 3.3b		Recognise achievements
Guidance	Even though you decided you did not want to set up a national certification scheme, you might still opt for some sort of reward system.	
	Think about ways that you can recognise their efforts and achievements. You might decide for an official award ceremony or only collect best practices you detect during implementation of your model and share stories of these "sustainability champions" with other stakeholders for inspiration. For more on this go to Activity 3.2a in Module 2a	
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You could look to the indicators and KPIs that you have set to help with developing criteria for awards. If you start off by using a set of sustainable tourism indicators, in time you could upgrade them into an award and certification system. By drawing from an internationally recognised set of indicators, you may be able to align with an existing certification system should you wish to. 	
Partners	NTO, external expert in visuals and design.	
Resource requirements	5 days - setting up the recognition process. Additional costs of design and visual elements.	

STEP 4B: BRIDGE ACROSS SECTORS

If you want to encourage sustainable development on a national level, you need to bridge across different sectors. Although as an NTO you are responsible for sustainable tourism development, you need to reach out because of the cross-sector nature of tourism.

ACTION 4.1b		Cross sector cooperation
Guidance	Contrary to the certification scheme approach in Module 2a, this module will require cooperation among more stakeholders.	
	Sustainability in tourism is a very broad subject which is related to environment, nature, transport, local communities, training and education, economy, gastronomy, management of natural resources, biodiversity, culture, the built environment, etc. Your goals are likely to overlap with other policy areas and sectors.	
	Similarly, you will want to be involved in national strategies that affect tourism, such as action to develop a circular economy, for example. Seek cooperation across all relevant sectors, act as a mediator and promotor of sustainability, and push the sustainable agenda across your public and private sectors	
Tips	Follow the European and international agendas. For example, European Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy, UNWTO's Tourism in the 2030 (refer back to Tools 1, 2a, 2b and 3).	
Partners	Relevant partners for the topic/subject you will address.	
Resource requirements	Constant involvement with relevant sectors (up to 50 days per year).	



MODULE 3 –SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Now that you have decided what kind of a national sustainability scheme you will develop (in line with Module 2a or 2b, or combined), think about the supportive environment that needs to be set up. You will find some hints below. Of course, the content of the materials you will be providing depends on your final solution, therefore do not think about Modules 2 and 3 as linear, since they are very interconnected.

MODULE 3 SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

STEP 5 BUILD IT UP

- 5.1 Develop supporting materials
- 5.2 Build a supportive environment

STEP 5: BUILD IT UP

In this step you will build a supportive environment in which your participants will be guided and assisted, and develop supporting materials for them to use.

ACTION 5.1		Develop supporting materials
Guidance	<p>A good toolkit is like your extended arm, when it comes to implementation of sustainability on the ground. It does not matter what you are trying to achieve and which solution you select, with quality materials such as handbooks, guidelines, templates, declarations, pledges, ready to use PR material, etc. you can easily equip partners for independent work.</p> <p>Supporting materials should guide the participants through every phase in planning, developing and implementing sustainability.</p>	
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials should be user-friendly, concise, and available in electronic format. • Make sure that users know about the toolkit and where to find it. Refer to Tool 10 for tips on Capacity Building 	
Partners	<p>NTO, external sustainability expert, other experts. Refer to Tool 11 for guidance on recruiting external support</p>	
Resource requirements	<p>20 days.</p>	



ACTION 5.2		Build a supportive environment
Guidance	<p>While materials from the previous activity will be used by participants themselves, a supportive environment involves coaches, mentors, trainers and other types of support you should consider offering.</p>	

	<p>The more you invest in a high-quality and complex supportive environment, the more you and your participants will collectively be able to achieve.</p> <p>Consider establishing support mechanisms such as workshops, training, constant online or live support, coaching, financial incentives, promotional incentives, etc.</p> <p>Refer to Tool 12 for guidance on workshops</p>
Tips	<p>If you involve your stakeholders in a sustainability programme which is not the easiest to complete (e.g. certification), they might give up unless they have additional support or incentive.</p>
Partners	<p>NTO, sustainability expert</p>
Resource requirements	<p>5 days.</p>



MODULE 4 - CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND PROMOTION

You have now successfully set up and launched a national sustainability model. There are still two very important steps ahead of you - one is to ensure constant review, evaluation and improvement of your model, while the other one is promotion.



STEP 6: EVALUATE AND IMPROVE

You need to make sure that your national sustainability model is constantly up-to-date and relevant. It might soon happen that you start running in circles and start missing opportunities for sustainable development in new areas. That is why you should ensure constant evaluation of your approach and strive for improvements and upgrades.

ACTION 6.1 Ensure continuous review, feedback and follow-up	
Guidance	Since sustainability is a live ecosystem which is constantly revealing new challenges, and since tourism and the world in general are changing so quickly, you need to ensure a regular review of your model to stay in touch with the trends and needs. Refer to Tool 13 for guidance on monitoring and evaluation
	Conduct regular surveys among your participants to see if your model is headed in the right direction, revise your work plan, documents, processes.
	If necessary, redefine your goals and targets, and introduce new activities. At the same time do not forget to evaluate reasons for your successes and failures; such analysis will help you improve the way you manage the national sustainability scheme.
	If you are running a scheme in which the same standard is used by more destinations or businesses, review and benchmark their results. Use your findings to plan your next steps. Address the weakest points revealed and develop new tools to support them.
Tips	Ask destinations and businesses to regularly report back to you on their achievements, and also on the difficulties they are encountering. This will help you introduce new solutions.
Partners	NTO, stakeholders (private and public).
Resource requirements	10 days per year. At least 1 consultation workshop with working group and partners.



ACTION 6.2 Plan for long-term development and upgrade	
Guidance	<p>Reflect on your successes and decide where you want to go next. What do you want to achieve in the long-term? Where do you want to bring sustainability in the next 5 years?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep upgrading the scheme, keep adding new projects and new activities, new groups of stakeholders, keep addressing new topics. For Europe to become known worldwide for its sustainable, resilient and competitive destination models, European NTOs must collectively keep pushing themselves. • If you have not developed a certification scheme, you might now consider it as a long-term upgrade of your activities. • Together with stakeholders who are interested in your programme, consider forming an association which is dedicated to sustainable tourism development. Organise joint trainings, study tours, develop new solutions, exchange experiences and opinions, develop sustainable products and design joint marketing activities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look around at what other NTOs are doing, study new trends, read relevant publications from ETC, UNWTO and others - anything you need to get inspired and set new targets. • Regularly revise your work plan from Activity 2.3. Let it reflect your new goals.
Tips	
Partners	NTO, relevant stakeholders.
Resource requirements	5 days per year.

STEP 7: PROMOTE

You have finally reached the last step which is promotion. Be proud of what you have achieved and what participants in your programme have achieved. Have a plan in place and be careful to communicate sustainability through stories to bring the concept closer to your readers and followers.

ACTION 7.1 Develop marketing and communications plan	
Guidance	<p>Your sustainability endeavours must be properly and loudly communicated and promoted, otherwise they will remain invisible or lost in a multitude of other messages which are sent out daily. Develop a marketing and communication plan and define how your national sustainability scheme will be promoted.</p>
	<p>Think about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of your achievements on your national tourism webpage • Incorporation of your achievements in catalogues, other printed marketing materials and umbrella advertising through agreed channels • Regular posting in newsletters and especially social media • Promotion of your achievements on B2B and B2C events, workshops, markets • Public relations (press releases, editorials, press conferences, study tours) <p>Refer to Tool 14 for guidance on marketing sustainability</p>
	<p>Develop the plan in close cooperation with your wider team, especially with your marketing and PR department. Define your national sustainable/green character and align it with the umbrella story of your tourism vision.</p>



	Note that different target audiences need different approaches. Differentiate between internal public (partners on destinations and within your organisation) and external public (professional public, businesses, domestic/foreign media and visitors).
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The biggest challenge will be to transform "hard content", such as standards, criteria, sustainability programmes, into interesting messages which are easy to read and understand. • Make sure that even though you are trying to communicate sustainability through stories, you keep the messages accurate. • Try using a sustainable tourism editorial calendar for easier planning
Partners	NTO, especially marketing and PR departments
Resource requirements	10 days - development of a plan which should include activities and budget. Execution of the plan.

ACTION 7.2 Celebrate sustainability	
Guidance	It has already been mentioned that you should award and promote the most successful participants in your programme or certification scheme. For this purpose, you should consider organising a ceremony at which you not only award the certificates but also promote and celebrate sustainability.
	Think about selecting a day in the year and host this event on the same day every year. Make it a big event with media and influencers. Enrich it with a small conference on sustainability with discussions and presentations and use it as an opportunity to collect feedback from your stakeholders, to detect their needs, and integrate this into your future work plan. With such an event you will be spreading your message, raising awareness and strengthening your sustainability network.
	Have your partner destinations host the event.
Tips	Add an element of social responsibility and organise an activity which will bring all participants together for a good deed in the host destination.
Partners	NTO, external experts in event management.
Resource requirements	15 days - preparation of an event. 1 day – event. External costs of the event (venue, speakers, activities, catering, visuals, etc).

CHAPTER 4



**RISKS AND
CHALLENGES**





4. RISKS AND CHALLENGES

There are various risks and challenges awaiting you on your journey. In the table below you will find the most common risks and tips on how to address them.

RISK	ADDRESSING THE RISK
Sustainability model consumes too many human resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employ additional people• Divide work among more employees• Integrate sustainability into relevant job roles• Assign some tasks to external experts
Sustainability model consumes too many financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look for alternative sources of finance• Cooperate with other public ministries, agencies and institutions and see whether there is any budget which could be used to support the model• Sign agreements with certification bodies and negotiate prices• Revise your model and your timeline to make it more feasible
Interest from stakeholders is weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check the needs of key groups regularly• Develop more incentives• Strengthen the supportive environment• Promote the scheme and its benefits more extensively• Demonstrate the added value
Lacking support from other departments within the NTO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen communication with other departments• Strengthen knowledge about sustainability within the NTO• Help the marketing department understand your efforts and achievements and communicate them accordingly
NTOs might feel alone on this journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up a broader working group• Get stronger political support• Bring together more actors• Bridge across more sectors• Build a stronger business case
Sustainability standards are found too demanding to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote their added value: standard as a tool for sustainable development• Offer more supportive materials and activities• Introduce more certificates so that everyone can opt for the one which suits them best
Tourists do not recognise our efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve your marketing plan• Strengthen visual communication on the ground• Develop tangible sustainable experiences

ANNEX



**LIST OF TOOLS
SUPPORTING THIS HANDBOOK**



ANNEX: LIST OF TOOLS SUPPORTING THIS HANDBOOK

TOOL		DESCRIPTION
1. Knowledge Booster 1: The Sustainability Basics	PowerPoint Slides	Presentation illustrating the main sustainable tourism concepts and global agendas
2a. Background Information	Guidance	Glossary of terms, key organisations and milestones
2b. Additional Resources Weblinks	Guidance	Links organised by sustainable tourism themes
3. GSTC Certification Bodies and standards	Guidance	Explanation and examples
4. Tourism stakeholders	Infographic	Tourism stakeholders by category
5. Researching national needs	Guidance	Guiding principles to support with process
6. Building a scenario	Guidance	Factors and options to consider when building scenarios of potential models
7. Slovenia Case Study	Case Study	Infographic illustrating Slovenia national model
8. Public Call	Infographic	Tips for launching a public call for participation
9. Types of activities for targeted development	Guidance	Guidance for determining activities that will support achievement of goals
10. Capacity Building	Guidance	Guiding principles for building capacity of tourism stakeholders
11. Recruiting External Support	Infographic	Tips for recruiting external / specialist support
12. Workshop programme	Infographic	Illustration of workshop programme for implementation of national certification scheme
13. Monitoring & evaluation	Guidance	Guiding principles for monitoring and evaluation of sustainable tourism programmes
14. Knowledge Booster 2: Marketing Sustainability	PowerPoint slides	Principles for sustainable tourism marketing and promotion with researched examples

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EUROPEAN TRAVEL COMMISSION

Rue du Marché aux Herbes 61 – 1000 Brussels – Belgium
Tel +32 2 548 90 00 – Fax +32 2 514 18 43 info@visiteurope.com – etc-corporate.org