

Emblematic **M**editerranean **M**ountains
as **C**oastal destinations of excellence
(**EMbleMatiC**)

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Transfer Guide

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SUMMARY

The Transfer Guide is addressed to any Destination Management Organisation (DMO) or similar local public or private entities willing to implement the scheme of the EMbleMatiC project and its product, the Ecojourneys, to their territory. Consequently, this guide provides its reader with that information necessary to understand the project, its origins, the partners involved in it, the process followed and all the relevant information that can be useful for a potential new member of the EMM Network. And what is of utmost importance, the outcomes are based on on-site experience of the partners and not only from a theoretical approach.

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0. Preface

What is a Transfer Guide?

This document is addressed to any Destination Management Organisation (DMO) or similar local public or private entities willing to implement the scheme of the EMbleMatiC project and its product, the Ecojourneys, to their territory. Consequently, this guide provides its reader with that information necessary to understand the project, its origins, the partners involved in it, the process followed and all the relevant information that can be useful for a potential new member of the EMM Network. And what is of utmost importance, the results come from the on-site experience of the partners and not only from a theoretical approach.

After an introductory chapter in which we will present ourselves and what we stand for, in this Guide you will find a detailed explanation of the process of creation of the Ecojourneys, together with a final chapter referring to the lessons learnt and some recommendations and points of vigilance to be taken into account by newcomers to the Network.

How to use this Guide?

This Guide is user-oriented; meaning that it has been conceived and developed for its readers. You should be able to find the information you're looking for in a straight and easy way. Since you might be looking for practical tips in order to face possible tricky issues, when possible, we have structured the content in two kinds of information: On the one hand, information related to something that has to be overcome, being a challenge, a problem, a barrier... They are **highlighted with a light blue background** and symbolised with a traffic sign showing a lightning like this:



On the other hand, information and strategies related to how to overcome a problem/challenge is **highlighted in a pale yellow background** and is accompanied by a shiny bulb like this:



1. Who are we and what do we share with you?

1.1 The Emblematic Mediterranean Mountains(EMM) Network

The **Emblematic Mediterranean Mountains** network (hereinafter: “the Network”) was launched in 2013 under the initiative of four rural areas in France, Greece and Bulgaria working within the framework of the LEADER programme (October, 2013 – May, 2015).

They met on respective territories and worked together on **common challenges**:

- ✓ Preserving their patrimonial values from endogenous and exogenous threats.
- ✓ Sharing positive experiences and good practices.
- ✓ Increasing their international recognition.

As a result of this collaboration, the participants wrote a **charter** summarizing their **common values** and agreed on adopting the concept “**emblematic**” to characterize the experience associated to the unique and exceptional nature of their Mediterranean mountains territories.

As an attempt to define their Emblematic dimension, 6 **common criteria** were identified: picturesque landscape, legends and myths, inspirational force (identity, arts...), historical places, biodiversity of exception, and specific local services. Finally, each territory produced one fact-sheet with a local description of each of the 6 criteria.

In June 2015, the Network was invited to present the work carried out so far during the Interreg MED programme¹ open days to prepare the new period of 2014-2020. After this, the Network found new potential partners and organised a meeting in September 2015. As a result, a new partnership was established, in which common issues in relation to unbalanced tourist flows concentrations were identified.

The Network started writing a new project proposal to develop a new positioning for their tourism development policy. The proposal was submitted to the call for **modular project** in the framework of the **InterregMED** programme. The submitted application was called “Emblematic Mediterranean Mountain as Coastal Destinations of Excellence” (short: **EMbleMatic**). Happily, the project was declared eligible and run three years (2017 to 2019).

The project partnership included **9 mountain areas** spread across 5 countries (*see map below*), each mountain area being represented by one partner (*see table below*). In addition, there was one **academic partner**, the CETT-School of Tourism, Hospitality & Gastronomy (Universitat de Barcelona), as well as seven associated partners and an external expert (Eurêka 21).

¹<https://interreg-med.eu/>



<i>Name of the partner</i>	<i>Name of the mountain</i>	<i>Region (Country)</i>
SyndicatMixte du Canigó (lead partner)	Canigó	Occitanie (FR)
Himara Municipality	Çika	(AL)
Development Agency of Berguedà	Pedraforca	Catalonia (ES)
LAG Gran SassoVelino	Gran Sasso	Abruzzo (IT)
PierikiAnaptixiaki	Olympus	Central Macedonia (GR)
LAG Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara	Etna	Sicily (IT)
Consell Insular de Mallorca	Serra de Tramuntana	Balearic Islands (ES)
AKOMM-Psiloritis Development Agency	Idi (Psiloritis)	Crete (GR)
Métropole d'Aix-Marseille Provence	SainteVictoire	PACA (FR)

1.2 The EMbleMatîC project

The overall aim of EMbleMatîC was to create and test a new and radically different tourism offer based on the assets of the hinterland areas of theselected mountains that will be able to offer an alternative to both sun & beach tourism and to the (very often overcrowded) mountain summits. This alternative was agreed to be based on sustainable and responsible tourism.

The project was organised around three strategic objectives:

1. To **rebalance tourist flows** concentrations between the sea and the mountain, to extend the season and to improve economic returns for the territories.
2. To **co-build and experiment a *slow tourism* offer** located in the hinterland coastal mountainous area (by the creation of nine routes, i.e. one each mountain area, based on the singularities of each territory –see section 1.3 below).
3. To **improve the international recognition** of the Network: shared communication actions should lead the territories toward the definition of an umbrella brand based on a sustainable and responsible tourism approach.

Resulting from the internal discussion and development of the project, the original 6 **common criteria** were extended to the following 10:

1. Proud local people
2. Institutional recognition
3. Reputation
4. Legends and myths
5. Power of inspiration
6. Picturesque landscape
7. Particular ecosystem
8. Mediterranean cultural identity
9. Sustainability and anthropogenic environment
10. Historic places

Also the **values** of the Network, what moves its members, were redefined as follows:

- ✓ To apply a global **sustainable** approach
- ✓ To preserve **cultural and natural heritage** and the experience associated to it
- ✓ To be an **open mountain**, gathering value through people, both visitors and locals
- ✓ To **cooperate** to transnational and interterritorial projects

The **actions** we have carried out in the project aim at

- ✓ operating as a laboratory, using **transnational cooperation** to boost varied local development plans through capacity building activities;
- ✓ being exemplary at **site management**, with a controlled and balanced development, protecting the landscape and the quality of the experience;
- ✓ encouraging **bottom-up approach**, as well as local development carried out by local people;
- ✓ fostering a **new touristic economy** based on experience, being the human and immaterial values of place the major components of our visitors' experience.

The vision behind the project was that, once the main goals were achieved, more mountains might join the Network to share our initiative by implementing it in their own territories. In order to achieve this vision, the transferability of the project was considered of paramount importance, since this is, after all, the *raison d'être* of this Guide.

The main outcome of this project is the creation of 9 emblematic slow tourism eco-itineraries, whose final product is called "Ecojourney".

1.3 The Ecojourneys

The tool that was conceived and developed during the project's lifetime consists in **routes of experiential tourism** across selected places of each of the nine mountain areas belonging to the Network. These routes or itineraries should contribute to overcome the network's common challenges (i.e. unbalanced tourist flows between the

coastline/mountain summit and the hinterland areas; marked seasonality, absence of economic benefit of the hinterland areas from the touristic activities, as already mentioned).

To do so, the itineraries were conceived to comply with a series of **attributes** related to five topics: the basic features of the routes (e.g. length, accessibility, and difficulty degree); their associated services (e.g. offering local guiding services and showing attractions related to both tangible and non-tangible heritage); ethics & sustainability aspects (e.g. promote sustainable mobility and favouring interaction between visitors and locals); management & governance aspects (e.g. implementing monitoring tools and environmental good practices); and marketing (i.e. sharing common targets as well as promotion strategies and tools). As above stated, the final product is called **Ecojourneys**. The table below lists the nine Ecojourneys that were developed in the framework of the Project.

<i>Name of the Ecojourney</i>	<i>Responsible partner</i>
The foothills of the Canigó	Syndicat Mixte du Canigó
From Çika highlands to the beach	Himara Municipality
The seven faces of Pedraforca mountain	Development Agency of Berguedà
The Gran Sasso, a mountain of Saints and Warriors	LAG Gran Sasso Velino
"Olympios Zeus", Cultural Route	Pieriki Anaptixiaki
An ecojourney through pathways of Etna "Ginesta" and "Vineyard" flowered fields	LAG Terre dell'Etna e dell'Alcantara
The route of Comte Mal	Consell Insular de Mallorca
On the Paths of Myth	AKOMM-Psiloritis Development Agency
In the mood for Sainte-Victoire	Métropole d'Aix-Marseille Provence

2. An Ecojourney step by step. From the idea to the implementation

Herewith, we would like to share with you the process we followed in order to obtain our product: the Ecojourneys. This process spread along most of the EMbleMatiC project, since it was our main action. In order to provide you with the most valuable insights, we have divided the process in five steps, starting from the very first discussions about the design of the route and finishing with the promotion of the finished tourist product: the Ecojourneys.

STEP 1: Involvement of local stakeholders

One of the main pillars of the strategy we followed during the process is the so-called *co-creation* approach. This means that each project partner tried to involve their own local stakeholders (i.e. persons, companies, associations, public administration or other kind of actors that live/are located in the mountain area) **from the very beginning** of the process. We didn't want to provide a finished product to these stakeholders, since they are the ones who eventually have in their hands the feasibility of this product in the short, mid and long term. We have integrated our Network's experience in the three following sections, aiming at giving you practical hints when contacting, inviting and involving stakeholders in your project.

Identifying potential stakeholders

Potentially, you can contact a wide range of stakeholders operating in your territory (municipalities, districts/counties, region etc.). These stakeholders have different features and can be classified using different criteria. One basic distinction that makes sense in all cases is differentiating between private and public organisations.

Among the first, those actors that are intimately related to tourist activities might be the most often contacted ones. They include **accommodation services** (including any kind of accommodation, ranging from hotels to camp sites), **restaurants** and any other kind of food providers, as well as **local producers** dealing with products that are usually consumed by visitors, being food, crafts and similar. Providers of **active tourism** activities (e.g. sports) are relevant actors for the kind of offer that the Ecojourneys should include (see next section "Step 2").

Further stakeholders of private nature are **travel agencies** and **guiding** services. Actors providing heritage **interpretation services** are usually private, too. Further potential partners that should be born in mind when starting the process are **NGOs** and other representatives from the **civil society**, such as associations and even individuals.

As of actors of public nature, there is usually a wide range of authorities from the **public administration** (municipalities, districts/counties, provinces, regions, even at national level). Because protected areas are usually present in rural and mountain areas, **managing authorities** of these areas play a key role, too. And, of course, a key actor are

the so-called **Destination Management Organisations** (DMOs), most of them of public character, although some of them are partially private, as well as **tourism offices**. Last, **academic actors** might be also contacted and invited to participate in the process.



There are many reasons why you should actively involve stakeholders. It's easy to attract those ones that are interested in the project; most difficult is to manage with those ones that don't show any interest initially. However, involving those ones operating in the same area of your project is of utmost importance.

Contacting and involving stakeholders

First, you might contact the potential stakeholders using a wide range of **channels**, including analogical and digital tools. An announcement on your website, for instance, is a way of bringing your project to the public, without targeting anyone specifically. In most of the cases, however, your organisation doesn't start from scratch, but it's already inserted in the local stakeholder networks (with different degrees and playing different roles, depending on the legal nature of your organisation, its aims and resources). In this case, a newsletter or even a personal call or e-mail might be a more effective way of conveying information.



Usually, you invite the contacted stakeholders to participate in meetings. The more regular and frequent the meetings will be, the more likely you will be to develop a fruitful collaboration between you and the stakeholders.

Working together with stakeholders

Involving actors of different nature means dealing with **different** (and very often opposite) **worldviews** and ways of doing things. You as initiator and/or coordinator of an inclusive tourist offer might be confronted with this fact, and this means dealing with manifold challenges. As our experience has shown, adopting this approach has a valuable reward, namely the **input from the stakeholders** in order to design a more attractive product.

You might face a series of **difficulties** already by contacting and selecting potential stakeholders, particularly out of the tourism high season. Some stakeholders might be reluctant to participate, because they are afraid of being asked for money. Also, there might be difficulties of legal nature. To sum up, contacting and selecting stakeholders is a time-consuming activity.

Effectively involving partners, i.e. engaging them in the design and execution of an Ecojourney, might bring an even more colourful set of difficulties. We summarise them in the following box:



LACK OF TIME: Stakeholders have usually little time, and it's difficult to gather them together. Small businesses, for instance, cannot drop their customers in order to attend meetings. Some officials from the public administration may also have excessive workload, which makes their participation very difficult. Elected representatives, in their turn, often volunteers, receive invitations to many meetings from the various public instances. Narrow time schedules lead to individual approach as the only feasible way to involve stakeholders.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS: Any kind of project has its own terms, which usually are reduced to acronyms. In addition, there are technical terms that belong to specific jargons such as the scientific language. This kind of expressions doesn't belong to ordinary people's vocabulary; thus, hurdles appear when including external actors in a project. Overcoming such hurdles, however, might become more difficult as one could imagine. Very often, the Network partners had to plan an alternative way of thinking, acting and motivating in order to feel part of a network.

BUREAUCRACY: Contacting private stakeholders might need the agreement of public administration powers such as municipalities, as some examples from our Network showed.

SCEPTICISM: Stakeholders are usually sceptical with projects with short lifetime, since the further development of the foreseen actions beyond its end is uncertain.

NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS: Paradoxically, in some cases the large number of stakeholders can become a problem.

LACK OF REWARD: Usually, there are no monetary stimuli to participate in this kind of projects. This lack of adequate financial reward for extra activities might hinder stakeholder participation.

MISSING SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY: Usually, there's a total lack of responsibility for the success or failure of projects financed by public funds.

The following box shows some ways that might help you to overcome the above mentioned difficulties. The contents come straight from our own experience in the nine mountain areas of the Network.



ESTABLISHING FIXED APPOINTMENTS FOR MEETINGS: A good way to create trust among you and the involved stakeholders is to celebrate regular meetings. When choosing the fixed date, you might observe stakeholders' availability. For instance, restaurants and other kind of accommodation and food providers usually have a day off (e.g. Monday).

BE TRANSPARENT: In order to strengthen your network, you can distribute the outcome of a meeting among all registered partners, regardless of their actual participation in a meeting. This will allow them to keep pace with the progress of the group.

SHOWING PROGRESS: If you work in projects/networks of international character, you can draw the attention and raise the interest of your stakeholders by highlighting this issue and by sharing with them the progress of the initiative, particularly if there are few initiatives of such dimension in your area.

TAYLORED MEETINGS: Very often, individual and personalised meetings are a good way to break some barriers (i.e. prejudices, fears, distrust) that potential stakeholders might have. During these meetings, acting in a structured manner is important, as well as receptivity to incorporate stakeholders' suggestions and even involving them in the implementation of the project activities.

IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS' ATTITUDES: Generally speaking, within the group of stakeholders you can identify some of them acting in a proactive way, being optimistic and trying to take advantage of the project. Usually, those proactive stakeholders are those ones who directly benefit from the project (i.e. accommodation services, restaurants, museums, tourist guides...). On the other hand, there are stakeholders adopting a passive attitude, i.e. waiting for the results of the project. Only if it is successful, they are onboard; otherwise, they disappear if there are no immediate results.

STEP 2: Design of the itinerary

The concept "Ecojourney"

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the 9 mountains share similar characteristics, such as physical and social realities together with common issues to face regarding their economies and specially related to sustainable tourism as an opportunity for their future development. This being true, several differences could arise, as to how to develop the product(s) planned in the project. Thus, to move on with the creation of the nine ecojourneys, a need of a common baseline for all partners was detected.

The nine ecojourneys are the result of the implementation of a number of agreed attributes to the initial itineraries planned by the partners in their territories.

The attributes of an Ecojourney

After an initial proposal by the academic partner and a subsequent discussion about them (i.e. how many and which ones), the Network agreed on establishing 30 attributes to be fulfilled by all the proposed itineraries and, therefore, shape the identity of our final product: the Ecojourney.

As pointed out in the first chapter of this Transfer Guide, the attributes were distributed in five different topics: basics, associated services, ethics & sustainability, management & governance, and marketing. You can find in the table below the list of attributes (on the left) together with the suggested evidences to help proving their fulfilment (on the right).

TOPIC	#	ATTRIBUTES OF THE ITINERARY	EVIDENCE TO BE PROVIDED FOR THE ATTRIBUTE FULFILMENT
Basics	1	Located in the foothills	Map & description of the itinerary
	2	Low to medium difficulty	Map & description of the itinerary
	3	Accessible all year around (excepting extreme weather episodes)	Itinerary opening schedule
	4	Properly signposted (either with posts or digital tools)	Signposting project, pictures/video
	5	Including properly indicated panoramic viewpoints	Map of the itinerary, description of the selected spots
	6	Favouring non-saturated spots	Map & description of the itinerary explaining how the proposed itinerary avoids the most saturated spots
	7	Optimising existing infrastructure	Catalogue of existing elements
Associated Services	8	Including environmental & landscape interpretation services/facilities	Brief description of the existing/planned facilities/services
	9	Including visits on cultural heritage sites & monuments	Brief description of the planned itinerary activities
	10	Including contents related with intangible heritage	Brief description of the planned itinerary activities
	11	Offering local guidance services	List of the hired guide services including their relationship to the area in question
	12	Providing eco-friendly leisure activities (sport, health & wellness...)	List of optional activities
	13	Offering local gastronomy	List of restaurants and catering services and (if applying), corresponding certifications (e.g. slow food, Km.0, organic, fair...).
	14	Offering the possibility to meet local producers with option to buy their products in the area	List of local producers and their relationship to the itinerary.
	15	When offering picnic take-away, promote sustainable and eco-friendly services	Picnic guidelines for establishments.

Ethics & Sustainability	16	Option to reach the destination with public transport and encouraging visitors in voluntary carbon offsetting	Description of the existing public transportation possibilities and Information for visitors on how can they voluntary offset their carbon footprint.
	17	Promoting eco-friendly mobility within the eco-itinerary	Map & description of the itinerary. Those motorised itineraries should provide foreseen actions to implement eco-friendly mobility.
	18	Promoting interaction between visitors and local people	Brief description of the possible interactions (e.g. through accommodation, leisure activities....)
	19	Prioritising locally owned accommodation (e.g. through local quality agreements)	List of establishments to be included in the future travel guide.
	20	Providing visual & clear information about visitors' correct behaviour in the area	Rules for visitors (might be inspired on the provided documents).
	21	Raise awareness among stakeholders about responsible tourism best practices	Guidelines on Best Environmental Practices (BEP)
Management & Governance	22	Implementing monitoring tools to improve the sustainable performance of the destination	Plan of Action (<i>see Annex</i>)
	23	Involving local stakeholders in the design of the itinerary	Stakeholder database, incl. their role in the designing process
	24	Using indicators to monitor and manage the impact of the itinerary	List of indicators to be used (<i>see Annex</i>)
	25	Sharing experiences with other partners of the network periodically	Schedule of face-to-face meetings or other sort of periodical communications
	26	Providing interpretation material in at least local languages & English	List of materials to be produced
Marketing	27	Informing about local available services	List of services to be included in the travel guide
	28	Oriented both to local and coastal visitors as an alternative complementary activity	Marketing brief
	29	Oriented to a common target group	Marketing brief
	30	Promoting the common brand & marketing strategy	Marketing brief

Fulfilling the common attributes

Hereinafter, you can find some tips on how to deal with the fulfilment of the listed attributes, as a result of the experience accumulated during the months of work on the project by our partners.



TAKE IT EASY: Try to work the attributes one by one, starting with the ones representing less difficulty for you and moving forward to complete the rest. The fulfilment of some of them will only depend on you, while others might need the cooperation of third parties like local stakeholders or others. Be aware that the latter may require more time and effort to achieve. The involvement of local stakeholders is one of the difficulties some of the partners have encountered and at the same time a key aspect of success.

INFORMING VISITORS ABOUT LOCAL AVAILABLE SERVICES (attribute #27) has been an issue in some destinations. So, be sure to check if the applicable legislation in your territory allows doing so, otherwise just skip it.

SIGNPOSTING (attribute #4) is a tricky issue for given partners, since protected area management authorities are often strict with new signs; try to coordinate with them from the start to reach the best possible agreement.

TACKLE THE UNEXPECTED! Certain external circumstances that are beyond your control, such as the weather in certain periods of the year, may condition the development of the planned itineraries and you will have to cope with it and adapt to reality.

COOPERATION IN DATA GATHERING. You will probably also have difficulties to fill in a database in which you are asked to provide a detailed picture of the involved actors, including their degree of involvement and the certifications they have (attributes #13 & 14). Once again, teamwork with them from the very beginning of the process will ensure their commitment for the common benefit and will help in the always arduous process of collecting data.

PROMOTING INTERACTION BETWEEN VISITORS AND LOCALS (attribute #18) is an “easy to agree” attribute, although setting it down on the real praxis might become something tricky: while everyone recognises the need to facilitate interaction between visitors and locals, no specific form of interaction can really be reassured, so you should pay special attention to this issue.

RAISING AWARENESS among stakeholders about responsible tourism best practices (attribute #21). This is an important attribute to be fulfilled and it has to be done through persuasion, as you cannot force anyone, since you are not a certification authority. Try to convince, not to impose. In the Annex of this Guide (p. 30), you will find a [list of recommendations](#) thought for your local stakeholders that might help you when addressing this issue on the ground.

BE PART OF THE CHANGE! You might find difficulties when dealing with issues like environmentally friendly picnic services (attribute #15) or innovative practices like carbon offsetting (attribute #16). Probably, you will have to adopt a trailblazer attitude and encourage food and package providers to change their habits when offering picnic. The guidelines on the Annex (p. 28) provide you a [simple but clear scheme](#) that might be useful for this purpose. On the other hand, you might insist on spreading the word among tourist establishments and tour operators about how important is to encourage carbon offsetting. In the Annex (p. 29), you will find [a short explanation about](#) and [a ready-to-use insert for your](#)).

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. Implementing monitoring tools to improve the sustainable performance of the destination to ensure continuous improvement is something that can be done through a plan of action that we consider of utmost importance (attribute #22). You should never feel satisfied with your present achievements but strive constantly to make your project better in the future. You will find further hints in [Step 5](#) below (p. 25).

USE INDICATORS! To be sure that you are in the right path, the use of indicators to monitor and manage the impact of the itinerary is also necessary (attribute #24), so creating your own indicators or using already developed ones as ETIS (European Tourism Indicators System) is one of the last attributes to develop but one of the most important ones. Without measuring tools it is not possible to check the achievement of the goals we pursue with the Ecojourneys, and thus, to appraise the success of them. You will find further hints in [Step 5](#) below (p. 25).

One of the crucial aspects is the way local stakeholders react to the established attributes. During the internal discussion about the list of the attributes to be included in the terms of reference, the partners were often reluctant about certain attributes because of the negative local stakeholders' reactions. This was actually one of the main reasons why certain attributes (e.g. #18, 21, or 24 –see table above) were substantially modified, namely “softened” in terms of demand level. Many partners reported communication barriers with stakeholders.



In this respect, one main challenge is to monitor the attribute fulfilment itself. Our experience shows how arduous and time-consuming but useful this process might become.



In order to manage this task, you might appoint some external organisation, similarly as our Network did. In our case, this task has been executed by the academic partner, who wasn't linked to any specific mountain area. This allowed a fair and neutral monitoring process.

In case you cannot “externalise” this task, you will need to appoint your own staff. This Guide may then prove particularly helpful.

The compliance with the attributes was one of the main issues of the project, because it has generated problems or misunderstandings, showing the difficulties in this essential part of the project. Some difficulties were related to the evidence submission deadlines: despite their initial agreement, the partners did not respect the deadlines originally scheduled, when they proceeded with the provision of evidences. Even so you won't probably be subject to strict deadlines, we judge it useful to transmit you the idea of a laborious process.



DON'T FORGET THE EVIDENCES! Providing the required evidences is crucial in order to become an Ecojourney that can be integrated in our Network. Remember that they proof your Ecojourney reliability.

As reported above, this is everything but a straightforward procedure.

In the attributes table (see p. 12-13), you have seen examples of evidences that you may prepare to prove the fulfilment of the attributes. But do not forget that they are examples and that you may find other valid evidences for them, as far as they demonstrate the achievement of the attribute. Please bear in mind that this task will take place throughout all the process of implementation (see next step).

STEP 3: Implementation of the itinerary on the ground

So now that, thanks to the list of attributes, you know the requirements your Ecojourney must meet; now that you have gathered a group of local stakeholders to work with; now it is time to move your itinerary initial idea from the paper to the ground.

To do so, we propose you some tasks that you actually do not have to strictly follow, but that can give you some orientation in this process:



- ✓ Work on a detailed description of your territory and the services available in it.
- ✓ Then, try to identify an area with the most suitable characteristics for an Ecojourney
- ✓ Elaborate or update an inventory of all heritage contents (tangible and intangible) to valorise through the itinerary.
- ✓ Repeat the above task with all associated tourism services: leisure, accommodation, catering...
- ✓ Find out which existing infrastructure and routes could be incorporated in the new Ecojourney.
- ✓ Make sure that the paths promoted in your itinerary are accessible in terms of legal status, i.e. they belong to the public domain or you have obtained the appropriate authorisation of use from private owner. One third of our partners was forced to change their itinerary due to legal issues.
- ✓ Have in mind all the logistic requirements and the suppliers or external expertise you may need to work on them.
- ✓ Analyze the feasibility of the Ecojourney according to legal requirements and budget availability that may condition it.
- ✓ Estimate the consequent investments and make sure you can count on the necessary funding sources.
- ✓ Ask for the legal authorisations required (permissions for signposting, restrictions in protected areas, etc.) well in advance, since you might launch public procurement processes in order to execute this kind of actions.
- ✓ Set the final design of the Ecojourney and validate it with your local stakeholders.
- ✓ Start up all the physical works on the itinerary, that is, its implementation on the ground: directional signage on road and paths, set-up of welcoming areas and interpretation tools, etc.

And please remember! Develop all these tasks hand in hand with your local stakeholders in a process of co-creation that you will lead but that will be the result of everyone's work. It is only by integrating the rest of actors of your territory that your Ecojourney will gain the potential to last over time.

STEP 4: Creation of a tourism product: the Ecojourneys

The next step of the process is to turn something that has been implemented on the ground, i.e. a route or a network of routes, into something that can be promoted and sold as a tourism product. In other words: if your itinerary is not being put on the market as part of a package, you don't have an Ecojourney, but just a path that needs visitors. And you will reach these visitors using marketing strategies. In this section, you will discover some insights from our experience on creating the Ecojourneys as a tourism product.



The first issue that has to be stated is that you will probably start the creation of the product prior to the finishing of the "physical" implementation of the itinerary on the ground.



Actually, you should start making thoughts about crucial issues related with who do you want to attract, in what season etc. straight from the beginning of the process, i.e. in the design of the itinerary. Again, the role of the local stakeholders will be crucial to define the goals of the promotion strategy of your Ecojourney.



In order to start this process in a structured manner, we suggest setting down your **MARKETING OBJECTIVES**.



They might get inspired by the following ones, which were established for our Network:

- To conceive a commonly agreed, well structured and easy to execute marketing strategy.
- To project the values that you stand for as destination.
- To establish a well-defined positioning in the market.

- To create a brand and to define its promotion strategy.
- To generate a differential proposal and to be able to communicate it.



Once your objectives are set down, you will be able to establish the specific **MARKETING ACTIONS**.



Our Network actions were the following:

- Establishing a target profile
- Creating a positioning, including a storytelling and a brand
- Profiling our product (in this case, an experience)
- Fixing the product price



Defining the **TARGET PROFILE** of your potential visitors is, indeed, a complex decision that usually needs deep discussion. Once again, in order to define the target, you will need to take into consideration the characteristics of your area, the assets that you can offer as experiences, and the experience of the local stakeholders. The opinions and aspirations of your stakeholders are key in order to meet a right decision about your target.



Our Network started a discussion on this topic and it was not easy to define a common target. Of course, working with several destinations increases the complexity of this issue. In any case, you will need to address the following aspects related on the profile of your target:

- **Age:** do you want to target young people, adults, and/or elderly?
- **Socio-economic status:** do you want to target visitors with a low, medium or high income?
- **Household composition:** do you want to target singles, couples, and/or families with children?
- **Origin:** Will your visitors come from domestic precedence or from abroad? If so, from which geographic area?
- **Way of travelling:** What kind of groups might be your target? People travelling alone? Small groups? Medium or large groups? Families? School groups? Companies?

→ *Motivation*: What should attract your target to visit your area? Is your target made of nature lovers? Or rather, people keen on meeting cultural heritage? Do they want to practice sports? Are they looking for gastronomy?

→ *Mobility*: How should your target move in your area? On foot? Biking? Riding? Using public transport? Using private transport? Should transportation means have a collective or an individual nature?



The next step is to create a given **POSITIONING** for what you offer.



You might think about the assets of your area, i.e. what does make your area unique and what can your area offer that other similar areas cannot. Think about your area's singularities, which might be related to its physical and/or cultural landscape and its associated stories and traditions, including gastronomy and festivities. Think about promoting innovative ways of promoting your area's assets, notably from the sustainability approach. Endeavouring low impact on the environment might not be enough for your targeted visitors. They might eager unique experience by meeting locals and by participating in their activities. They might feel pioneers in contributing to a better local and global future when visiting your area and acting as proactive individuals instead of being mere consumers. They might be keen to share their experiences with friends and relatives. They might be feeling in a place offering them guidances and welcome, a place where they can explore the territory and make their own findings and personal discoveries in a slow path, enjoying each moment being simple and far from the spectacular.



Having defined the features of your offer and the values behind, it's time to express it by using a **BRAND**, including a logo and a motto.



Try to think about physical features that might inspire you, for instance singular landscape elements, objects or images from local traditions, etc. Try to visualise them whilst using objects as metaphors that illustrate the values you want to convey with your product. You might use things such as natural elements (light, fire, rocks, water...).



Now, it's your turn to describe your **PRODUCT** in a detailed way, highlighting those aspects that are related to your positioning and using the elements of your brand to bundle them with the product.



In this respect, it's crucial to define the experience(s) that is/are associated with this product. Your product definition will be used in those promotion materials (maps, guides, videos, leaflets...) and strategies (presentations, participation in fairs, discussions, public events...).



Based on your defined target and on the services that your area offers to the visitors, you will need to define a **PRICE** and a **QUALITY STANDARD** for your product.



This is, indeed, a tricky issue. However, you might orientate yourself by using the target profile that you have previously defined. You may adapt the price of the product to those potential visitors' needs and preferences. And, as usual, you will have to deal with the local stakeholders' preferences, too.



Last, you will need to **COMMERCIALISE** your product.



To do so, you will have to research the market and to choose ways of communicating about your product. You will have to decide whether you will create a tourist package or not, or whether you will work together with tourism offices and/or tour operators or not. You might wonder about the advantages and

disadvantages of working together with these actors. In this respect, we can contribute with one testimonial from our Network:

“In the creation of the business network, we have included a tour operator among the members. Thanks to the presence of the tour operator we are quantifying the activities to propose a tour package on the market. In our opinion, marketing a product and, therefore, a territory, creates an added value to the project that, otherwise, would remain only on paper as experimentation (yet another)”



As of the COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES, our Network has used multiple ways: leaflets, posters, promotional videos, press trips, publishing inserts in specialised journals, and participation in touristic fairs. And, of course, we undertook an up-to-date and regular activity in the usual social networks.



Having said this, a critical issue is about deciding who is supposed to undertake these actions.



In this respect, only you will be able to decide whether you have enough internal capacity (in terms of time/personal resources and know-how) to assume the planning and execution of all these task, or alternatively, you might hire external expertise for such purpose.

STEP 5: Continuous improvement and monitoring and of the Ecojourneys

As already argued, we designed the Ecojourneysso that they comply with 30 attributes that ensure a given quality standard and convey consistently the “emblematic” spirit of the project, which has been already explained in this Guide (see chapter 1). If we raise this issue again is because one aspect that is intimately related to the product sustainability (i.e. its feasibility in the long run) is the ability to monitor its development.



As you already know, we included monitoring tools in the list of attributes (see attributes #22 and 24). However, in practice it proves difficult for any organisation to implement actions that, in most of the cases, require a given budget. Our partners argued that in the absence of dedicated project funds, it might not be possible to bring what is written on the paper to reality.

From our experience, we can offer you a concrete tool that might ease this issue to you: the Plan of Action (PA) (see annex, p. 32).



A Plan of Action (PA) is conceived as an operational document to allow continuous improvement for the destination, reflecting its sustainable strategy. A PA shall be developed with public participation and be based on the responsible tourism policies and other issues related to environment, economy, society, quality, health and safety, culture and aesthetics. In the PA, the specific targets and priorities needed for the fulfilment of the commitments made must be established. The plan might be structured with the following contents:

- ✓ A prioritised list of objectives to be achieved, specifying the person(s) responsible for achieving each point.
- ✓ A general description of the measures designed to achieve these objectives and the deadlines and means for implementing the measures. The total timeline shall not exceed three years, by which time the PA must have been reviewed and updated, setting new targets for improvement.
- ✓ A definition of the follow-up process planned for these objectives, to monitor compliance and to take action if necessary.
- ✓ Development of the indicators needed to evaluate the continuous improvement of the destination in all aspects of tourism sustainability. They shall be able to prove constant compliance with the requirements of this standard.

In practice, a PA can be nothing less than a table containing the issues that have been presented so far. In the annex of this Guide, you will find a [template](#) that we have used during our project.

Likewise, the partners recognised the importance of adopting indicators to monitor the Ecojourney's territorial and societal impact through measuring the stakeholder performance.



In practice, however, monitoring activities surpassed our capacities as consortium, because they go beyond the project's objectives. This issue needs to be addressed at Network level.

For this reason, at this stage we cannot bring you any specific monitoring experience from our project. However, what we can do is offer you some hints derived from what we internally discussed around the attribute #24 ("Using indicators to monitor and manage the impact of the itinerary"):



If you're looking for widely accepted monitoring tourism indicators, and you are used to work with European institutions or have already used their outcome, your reference might be ETIS: the European Tourism Indicator System.

The ETIS indicator list is exhaustive (it contains 43 core indicators) and, therefore, it might be difficult for you to address all of them.

What we did in the project was to select those indicators appearing more accessible for our partners to deal with. As a result of our discussions, ten indicators were selected. You will find them [in the Annex of this Guide](#).

3 What we have learnt from the process and how can you take advantage of

In this last chapter, we offer a series of thoughts summarising the main strengths and weaknesses of the process of designing and implementing the Ecojourneys. The contents go beyond the very specific aspects that we have presented in chapter 2 and are clustered in three categories, according to the main topics that have most influenced the project. Additionally, it includes a series of recommendations that are intimately related with the contents of this chapter.

3.1 Don't underestimate the power of human relationships!

One of the main outcome from our experience is a series of difficulties related to the way human relationships work. For instance, an issue that is of utmost importance in this process was how stakeholders reacted to the agreed attributes. During the internal discussion about the list of the attributes to be included in the so-called terms of reference, the partners were often reluctant about certain attributes because of the negative local stakeholders' reactions. This was actually one of the main reasons why certain attributes (e.g. #18, 21, or 24 see table in chapter 2, step 2 above on page 2) were substantially modified, namely "softened" in terms of demand level. However, in practice, the involved stakeholders didn't seem to respond in a reactive way, at least according to what our partners told us during the process. For sure, there are multiple stories lying behind each relationship; stories that we as coordinators of monitoring the fulfilment of the attributes, knew only indirectly. In any case, what could be stated is that some partners adopted a rather conservative attitude when discussing certain attributes that their product had to comply with.

Another example is communication: how to convey the message from our project. There has been a lively debate about this issue during the whole project, including the transnational meetings and also other activities such as the participation in tourist fairs. We, as consortium, were confronted with the potential visitors only in the final part of the project, but we realised that we lacked the know-how (and, very often, the possibility – due to the nature of the institutions being represented in the consortium) to properly communicate and bring our product to the market. In addition to this, the partners have expressed their different opinions on how to address these issues. Sometimes, these opinions were pretty much divergent. Anyhow, when the partners were asked about this issue in a self-evaluation questionnaire, the results were overwhelmingly positive.



- Those partners with more flexibility and resilience (i.e. with some ability to adapt to new circumstances) are the most suited to large networks.
- Make sure that the partners have regular contacts with local stakeholders by e.g. agreeing in a minimum number of (documented) meetings.
- Always try to communicate in a positive manner! E.g. put the emphasis on the benefits of certain action(s)/measure(s) rather than on the trade-offs, but without trying to hide the latter.

3.2 The long and tortuous path towards sustainability

When dealing with sustainability aspects, bringing words into facts is always a tremendous challenge. Very often, the reason lays in the way our socio-economic system works. Pushing sustainability aspects is definitely a common problematic in tourism as well as in any other socioeconomic activity. This factor could be clearly identified during the process of discussion and fulfilment of the attributes.

For instance, we could state how far away the project partners are concerning themselves with the application of certifications that give standards and, therefore, can ensure a certain compliance level with aspects such as energy consumption, waste management, or using local/regional, seasonal and/or organic products. In our mountain regions, very few local actors have already acquired some kind of certification. This fact was a major problem for us, since our marketing strategy is based on sustainable and responsible tourism. However, without certifications, visitors can just trust on local actors' word, which might be a weakness of the project.

That making steps towards sustainability is often a matter of cultural change as illustrated by the debate around carbon footprint. Most of the partners weren't even familiarised with this concept. It took some time and several attempts to explain on what carbon footprint consists in. The first reactions were very illustrative: "we don't want to pay!" "we don't want new taxes!". A similar conclusion can be obtained from the debate around picnic services. Generally speaking, the partners were reluctant to bring this issue to the local restaurants because it's "too early" for them to make changes to the way they work.



→ Choose partners that...

...are as much as possible attached to the area they represent, i.e. they know the local socio-economic “ecosystems”;

...are sensitive to sustainability issues;

...dare to communicate about sustainability in an effective and persuasive way to local and regional actors.

→ If this is not possible or only partially possible, make sure that the partners get at least familiar with those basic sustainability issues by e.g. conducting workshops, courses, instructions...

3.3 Working in a network requires an extra effort

After the whole process, the main conclusion that we obtain is that working with a network with nine representatives from nine different regions across the Mediterranean basin is everything but straightforward. There are at least two reasons that illustrate this statement: 1) although the mountain areas included in the project are confronted with similar problematic, their local characteristics and contexts are different; and 2) although all partners share a common vision and very similar diagnostics about their regions' challenges and ways of overcoming their barriers, they (the partners) are also inserted into their own local and regional peculiarities and –what is more decisive- they have different legal character, which determines to a high degree what they can do and what they cannot, e.g. managing agency versus local action groups.

This issue, which –in the end- is self-evident, lies on the background of almost every issue, and it has made the process of designing and implementing a common product (the *Ecojourneys*) inherently more difficult. We have manifold examples of this:

- The project lifetime and its time schedule have been influenced (and sometimes jeopardised) by the partners' particularities: elections, the own institution's house rules, different speeds in launching tenders for public procurements...
- Marketing issues are one key aspect to obtain a shared tourist product. However, the mountain areas' different characteristics have made this issue difficult. The best example is the definition of target groups. This issue was intensively discussed among the “territorial” partners and the academic one. Eventually, we didn't manage to define a specific tourist target profile, so we agreed on a spectrum of targets being defined according to different criteria: age, household composition, main interest/motivation, way of travelling (e.g. individually, couples, groups), preferred mobility means, region of precedence and budget.

If you work outside of an (international) network, you might not underestimate this issue, since the local actors that you might work with also constitute a network!



- The larger the partnership is, the more difficult is to reach agreement in critical issues.
- It is important to discuss those critical issues (e.g. what kind of visitors am I interested in?) as earlier in the project's lifetime as possible.
- Each partner has to be able to estimate how much room they have for taking action in terms of legality and political landscape.

Annex

Some suggestions for the picnic guidelines

1. The guidelines don't need to be an exhaustive document; rather, try to **keep them simple** and **short**. A **checklist format** may help providers to incorporate them.
2. Basically, the guidelines may include **2 main issues**:
 - a. Food quality aspects
 - b. Environmental aspects



Food quality aspects may be related to:



Origin: local and/or regional food is also fresher than the one from overseas; it fosters local/regional agrosystems; it reduces the carbon footprint... and simply tastes better.



Seasonality: intimately related to point 1, your picnic package might better offer products from the same season, rather than others coming from far away. In other words: if possible, try to avoid fresh summer vegetables in March! You might find some alternatives from the region.



Certifications: organic, fair, Km 0, slow... all these certifications provide a higher quality standard to your products.



Environmental aspects may include:



Avoiding the use of (too many) **packages**, particularly disposable ones



Providing users proper **information** on waste disposal

Definition of carbon offsetting

What is carbon offsetting?

Reaching our touristic destinations from other parts of Europe/world would be not possible without air travel. The problem is, that this is one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases and, therefore, contributes to the anthropogenic climate change **in a decisive manner**. Fortunately, there exist carbon offsetting initiatives allowing visitors to **compensate their generated carbon footprint ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS (i.e. it has nothing to do with fares, fines or taxes!!)**. These initiatives offer a web tool with a calculator so that everyone can calculate the price of their own carbon offsets. By purchasing the emitted CO₂, one mitigates their own greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, but also for non-renewable electricity use, and other sources. The purchased offsets are usually dedicated to on- or off-site forest management projects, but also to conservation of biodiversity in collaboration with local managers.

Do you need more details?

[EN] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_offset






[FR] <http://www.info-compensation-carbone.com/vous-etes/particulier/>

[ES] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compensaciones_de_carbono

[IT] <https://www.reteclima.it/compensazione-co2>

Insert about carbon offsetting

Travelling responsibly in times of climate change? Yes, you can! Just offset your CO₂ emissions...

-  Reaching our mountain areas from other parts of Europe or the world would be not possible without air travel. However, aviation is one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases and, therefore, contributes to the anthropogenic climate change **in a decisive manner**.
-  Fortunately, you can **offset the generated carbon footprint on a voluntary basis** by using one of the existing carbon offsetting initiatives. These initiatives usually offer a web tool with a calculator so that everyone can calculate the price of their own carbon offsets. By purchasing the emitted CO₂, you can mitigate your own greenhouse gas emissions from transportation (e.g. your flight), but also from using non-renewable energy sources during your stay.
-  The purchased offsets are usually dedicated to **on- or off-site forest management projects, but also to conservation of biodiversity** in collaboration with local managers. You can contribute to these projects with small amounts. For instance, the offsets from a flight from Berlin to Thessaloniki (round trip) cost less than 20 Euro, and from Stockholm to Catania, about 30 Euro.
-  You can offset your emissions wherever you like. We suggest using “**Atmosfair**”, being one of the most well-known and reliable platform. Just have a look at www.atmosfair.de!
-  Thank you for making responsible and sustainable travel possible!

List of recommendations about best environmental practices for stakeholders

As local stakeholders involved in our Emblematic Eco-Journey project, you should be aware of the importance of:

1. MANAGING WATER CONSUMPTION: in the Mediterranean area, water is a scarce resource, we should avoid wasting it, so any measure to save or to collect and reuse it will be convenient and advisable.
2. MANAGING ELECTRIC CONSUMPTION: the generation of energy has an impact on the environment, any progressive reduction of consumption should be our goal.
3. MANAGING WASTE: probably we have all heard about the three R's (re-use, recovery and recycling), avoiding waste generation should be a must for us.
4. CONSUMING LOCAL PRODUCTS: doing it in our business means helping local economy, promoting traditional gastronomy and avoiding transport of products and its negative environmental consequences.
5. USING CLEAN ENERGIES: whenever possible by using hydropower, wind or solar energy, will reduce the impact of our activity and show our commitment to care for the planet.
6. OBTAINING AN ECOLABEL: there are many national or international certifications that companies can obtain to ensure a good environmental performance.
7. AVOIDING THE USE OF HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES OR PRODUCTS: they can endanger people and the environment and generate hazardous waste, so this must be in our "to-do" list.
8. SHOWING OR DELIVERING INFORMATION about our ecojourney to the public and to visitors: it is a good way to communicate our engagement and to raise awareness among them with our example.
9. JUST TAKE ACTION! Click on [this document](#) and discover guidance and practical examples on how you can improve your environmental performance.

Selection of 10 monitoring indicators from ETIS

Criteria	Indicator reference#	ETIS core indicators
A.1 Sustainable tourism public policy	A.1.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises/establishments in the destination using a voluntary certification/labelling for environmental /quality/sustainability and/or Corporate Social Responsibility
A.2 Customer satisfaction	A.2.1	Percentage of tourists and same-day visitors that are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination
B.1 Tourism flow (volume and value) at destination	B.1.4	Daily spending per overnight tourist
B.2 Tourism enterprise(s) performance	B.2.1	Average length of stay of tourists (nights)
C.5 Protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, local identity and assets	C.5.2	Percentage of the destination's events that are focused on traditional/local culture and heritage
D.1 Reducing transport impact	D.1.2	Percentage of tourists and same-day visitors using local/soft mobility/public transport services to get around the destination
D.3 Solid waste management	D.3.1	Waste production per tourist night compared to general population waste production per person (kg)
D.5 Water management	D.5.1	Water consumption per tourist night compared to general population water consumption per resident night
D.6 Energy use	D.6.1	Energy consumption per tourist night compared to general population energy consumption per resident night
D.7 Landscape and biodiversity protection	D.7.1	Percentage of local enterprises in the tourism sector actively supporting protection, conservation and management of local biodiversity and landscapes

If you're interested in the whole list, you'll find it in the [2016 ETIS Toolkit](#), which also contains practical information on how to implement the ETIS indicators (available languages: EN, FR, IT, ES).

Template for a Plan of Action

OBJECTIVE	PRIORITY	RESPONSIBLE	COST	ACTION	FOLLOW UP/DEADLINE	INDICATOR	ACHIEVEMENT Y/N
Have at least one eco-friendly means of transport in 2020	Low	Local administration	Local administration budget	Contact local administration to show its necessity and the benefits for the project and the community	Meetings with the responsible administration/December 2020	Number of eco-friendly transport units	
Obtain carbon offsets from visitors	middle	Project Partners	100 €	Raise awareness among stakeholders	Collect data from stakeholders / October 2020	Number of visitors who have used any carbon offsetting tool	
		Stakeholders		Communicate carbon offsetting tools to visitors	Collect data from visitors / October 2020		
Increase the number of restaurants with any kind of food certification	High	Project Partners	Partner budget	Stimulate and assess stakeholders about obtaining a certification	Follow actively the certification process / December 2021	Number of new certifications obtained	
		Restaurants	Certification cost	Applying and obtaining a certification	Meet the scheduled certification requirements and deadlines / December 2021		