

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN ECOTOURISM CONSORTIUM

DestiMED PLUS Project

Ecotourism in Mediterranean Destinations: From Monitoring
and Planning to Promotion and Policy Support

Developed by:



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List of Acronyms

CPMR	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
DMO	Destination Management Organisation	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
EC/EP	European Commission / European Parliament	OECMs	Other effective area-based conservation measures
ECTN	European Cultural Tourism Network	PA	Protected Area
EIB	European Investment Bank	PAP/RAC	Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management	REC	Regional Ecotourism Coordination Tables
INSTO	International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	SPA/RAC	Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre
LEC	Local Ecotourism Clusters	SPC/RAC	Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production
MCPAs	Marine and Coastal Protected Areas	ToRs	Terms of Reference

MEC	Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium	UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
MedPAN	Mediterranean Protected Areas Network	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
MEET	Mediterranean Experience of EcoTourism	UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
MSP	Maritime Spatial Planning	UNFCCC	United Nations Climate Change Conference
MSSD	Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development	WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
MPAs	Marine Protected Areas		

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Mediterranean basin is the world's leading destination for marine and coastal tourism, representing 33% of international tourists' arrivals in 2021 (UNWTO, 2022)¹. The Mediterranean is particularly appreciated for its cultural and natural heritage. As a biodiversity hotspot,² it hosts the highest rate of plant endemism at a global level (20 to 30% of the species),³ and gathers between 15,000 and 25,000 flora species, 60% of which are unique to the Mediterranean Region.

If tourism, understood as a very complex transversal sector, plays a crucial role in the economic development of the Mediterranean Region, it can also lead to significant pressures on environmental resources, and concentrating on small areas often results in conflict between uses and users. As a proof of this, the Mediterranean is one of the seas most affected by sea plastic pollution in the world with more than 500 tonnes of plastic dumped at sea every day.⁴ The density of marine litter may increase by 40% in the summer months due to the high numbers of tourists.⁵ Water supplies are also subject to important pressure due to tourist activities, tourists using on average one third more water per day than a local inhabitant.⁶ Hence, tourism activities add significant environmental stress on the Mediterranean Region and especially its islands, which are already highly vulnerable to climate change, as highlighted by the last [2021 International Panel on Climate Change report](#).

However, tourism can contribute positively to local development, and to nature conservation and support economic activities, and cohesion if managed in an integrated, sustainable and responsible manner. In this respect, ecotourism provides a solution to tackle the detrimental effects of mass tourism described above by capitalising on natural assets and contributing to a better awareness of the benefits of conservation. As described in the [Mediterranean Experience EcoTourism \(MEET\) manual](#), according to one of the most widely accepted definitions of this term, ecotourism is defined as: "Environmentally responsible visiting of relatively unspoilt natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present), that promotes

¹ UNWTO (2022), Global and regional tourism performance, Access: <https://www.unwto.org/global-and-regional-tourism-performance>

² IUCN, Factsheet, Mediterranean: a biodiversity hotspot under threat, Access: https://www.iucn.org/downloads/the_mediterranean_a_biodiversity_hotspot_under_threat_factsheet_en.pdf

³ State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean, 2020, Plan Bleu, access: https://planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SoED_full-report.pdf ; BirdLife International, Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot, 2017, Access: https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/mediterranean-basin-2017-ecosystem-profile-english_0.pdf

⁴ State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean, 2020, Plan Bleu

⁵ F. Galgani, D. K.A. Barnes, S. Deudero, M. C. Fossi, "Marine litter in the Mediterranean and Black Sea - Executive Summary" in Marine litter in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (2014), p.7-20.

⁶ Pérez, D.M.G.; Martín, J.M.M.; Martínez, J.M.G.; Sáez-Fernández, F.J. An Analysis of the Cost of Water Supply Linked to the Tourism Industry. An Application to the Case of the Island of Ibiza in Spain. Water 2020, 12, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w12072006>.

conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.”. It is also mentioned that “Ecotourism is widely regarded as a form of tourism that respects nature and culture, engages local people, brings significant economic benefits to local communities, and minimizes the disruptive effects associated with mass tourism. The MEET approach particularly considers ecotourism as taking place in and around areas which are protected, i.e. in any areas that can be identified as “ a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” (IUCN Definition 2008).”

Protected Areas (PAs) represent the most important instrument for nature protection in the Mediterranean and, consequently, an important asset for the development of ecotourism in the Mediterranean countries since they can act as a laboratory to test new methodologies and tools for the development of ecotourism in the region. According to the [2019 MAPAMED database](#), the number of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)⁷, has reached 1,320 in 2019. In 2021, MPAs covered 9,69% of the Mediterranean basin’s surface.⁸

The most important challenge for nature conservation and sustainable development lies in the necessity to achieve a balance between the effective protection/conservation of ecosystems, species and habitats in PAs and allowing the development of sustainable tourism activities such as ecotourism.

From a governance perspective, and setting aside other structural factors, the current conditions for ecotourism development in coastal PAs are weak, due to the lack of structured dedicated policy framework and evidence-based policy making, to establish balance between the historically conflicting interests of tourism and conservation sectors and give little opportunity for ecotourism to properly thrive.

Ecotourism in the Mediterranean PAs became a priority since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. The tourism sector has been one of the most affected by the pandemic. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), international tourism faced a decline of 60% in 2020.⁹ Countries positioned on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea have been the most affected by the crisis and have proved to be more vulnerable to the pandemic.¹⁰ If tourism is one of the hardest-hit sectors, it is also one of

⁷ As defined by IUCN, other effective area-based conservation measures’ (OECMs) is a conservation designation for areas that are achieving the effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas. This number includes national MPA declarations, marine Natura 2000 sites, the Pelagos Sanctuary, the Strait of Bonifacio Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs), Ramsar sites, World Heritage sites, the Biosphere Reserves, and Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean importance (SPAMIs).

⁸ WWF Report, 30 by 30: Scenarios to recover biodiversity and rebuild fish stocks in the Mediterranean, 2021. Access: https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_med_30x30_full_report_2021__1_.pdf

⁹ OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), Tourism Policy Responses to the coronavirus (COVID-19), 2020, Access: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=124_124984-7uf8nm95se&title=Covid-19_Tourism_Policy_Responses&_ga=2.21196275.916183796.1637830718-91161558.1614154483

¹⁰ Juan Antonio Duro, Alejandro Perez-Laborda, Judith Turrion-Prats, Melchor Fernández-Fernández, Covid-19 and tourism vulnerability, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, Volume 38, 2021, 100819.

the sectors that will take the longest to recover.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Covid-19 pandemic also led to new trends in tourism behaviour.¹² Indeed, the crisis gave rise to more nature-seeking tourism, in addition with the increase of local tourism, making PAs more attractive for tourists.¹³ This behavioural change in the tourism sector represents an opportunity to enhance the emergence of more ecotourism in PAs and to engage with a new audience. The pandemic could lead to a shift towards a more sustainable and inclusive form of tourism in the Mediterranean.

With respect to the challenges faced by the tourism sector and considering the opportunities for the development of more sustainable forms of tourism in Mediterranean PAs, the key role of coastal and maritime territorial cooperation programmes, such as the Interreg MED programme, shall be highlighted. Indeed, they allow the deployment of projects supporting the experimentation of innovative solutions that could be replicated in other territories willing to commit. The experience acquired along the different phases of the projects can then be capitalised on, at local, regional and European levels.

In this regard, [DestiMED PLUS project](#) is one of the projects developed under the [Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism Community](#) (MED STC) of the Interreg MED Programme. It has been initiated to answer the challenges faced by the Mediterranean region by fostering a balance between the conflicted interests of conservation and tourism sectors. The project also responds to a greener post-covid recovery of the tourism sector, as DestiMED PLUS intends to give way to an alternative sustainable model of tourism in the Mediterranean PAs.

DestiMED PLUS is working towards supporting the [MEET Network](#), a Network of Mediterranean Protected areas working for ecotourism development, born as a spin-off of the previous DestiMED and MEET projects. MEET Network gathers the Mediterranean natural parks with the objective to develop high-quality ecotourism experiences that benefit conservation and local communities. The MEET Network represents a unique body at the Mediterranean level for the development of ecotourism. It is mainly composed of local actors, notable Protected Areas, and founded by the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, MEDPAN Network, IUCN Mediterranean. Most of the DestiMED PLUS Protected Areas are or will become members of the MEET network in order to benefit from the promotion necessary for the launch of their new package developed within the project, following the MEET standard.

DestiMED PLUS, started in November 2019 for a duration of 3 years (official end in June 2022), builds on the success of [MEET](#)¹⁴ and [DestiMED](#) projects, and gathers 9 Mediterranean

¹¹ UNWTO (2022), Tourism grows 4% in 2021 but remains far below pre-pandemic levels, Access: <https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-grows-4-in-2021-but-remains-far-below-pre-pandemic-levels>

¹² Eichelberger, S.; Heigl, M.; Peters, M.; Pikkemaat, B. Exploring the Role of Tourists: Responsible Behavior Triggered by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Sustainability 2021, 13, 5774. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115774>; Murali R., Syiemlieh J. D., Govindan M., Tourism in the new normal post Covid-19: Is eco-tourism the solution? (2021), Access: <https://www.teriin.org/article/tourism-new-normal-post-covid-19-eco-tourism-solution>

¹³ Eichelberger, S.; Heigl, M.; Peters, M.; Pikkemaat, B. Op. Cit.

¹⁴ MEET (Mediterranean Experience of Ecotourism) project, financed by the ENPI-CBC- MED Programme in 2011-2015, continued in 2016-2019 with the DestiMED project financed by the Interreg MED Programme.

countries/regions/areas and their respective PAs (Figure 2) as well as key organisations dealing with tourism and conservation: World Wide Fund for Nature MED (WWF MED), Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), International Union for Conservation of Nature MED (IUCN MED), University of Vic (UViC), Institute for Tourism from Croatia (IT).

The project implements its activities in 9 Pilot actions: six pilot actions take place in islands, including MPAs, and the other three include PAs located in sparsely populated areas. This Interreg MED project aims to improve levels of integration between regional tourism and conservation policies in Mediterranean PAs through the creation of ecotourism packages which are to be developed using a collaborative approach, both locally and regionally. DestiMED PLUS focuses especially on enhancing cross-sectoral local and regional policies, improving integrated planning strategies, based on Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Maritime Spatial Planning (ICZM and MSP) approaches, and providing stakeholders with effective training and tools to manage, measure, and promote ecotourism. Indeed, before the end of the project, existing monitoring tools related to ecotourism products implementation will be harmonised and shared through an online monitoring platform, and another online learning platform will be produced, allowing park managers, local SMEs and public authorities to develop and manage ecotourism packages according to a common vision, and ensuring ecotourism benefits conservation in terrestrial and marine PAs.

After the end of DestiMED project, the Protected Areas that participated in it joined forces in the MEET Network, acting as Destination Management Organisation (DMO) establishing a first level of governance and collaboration for ecotourism in the Mediterranean.

In addition to this first grouping of technical actors, in the [policy brief](#) of the previous DestiMED project the partners identified the need to also strengthen the governance and legislation framework to allow ecotourism to thrive in the Mediterranean area, especially by establishing multi-level and intersectoral governance aiming to improve the collaboration between tourism and conservation policies. Based on the approach followed by the MEET Network, the DestiMED PLUS project has already established two levels of governance (Figure 1): Local Ecotourism Clusters (LECs), established in all the pilot parks involved in the different projects (Figure 2), ensuring private-public collaboration at destination level, as well as Regional Ecotourism Coordination tables (RECs), gathering conservation and tourism departments in each project-related Regional administration, with the objective to achieve stronger coherence with existing policies and planning processes, and to implement a Mediterranean Ecotourism Roadmap based on ICZM principles, and promoting ecotourism and the LECs.

The partnership is now working on the establishment of the last and highest level of governance (Figure 1): the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium (MEC). The MEC will allow Regional or, when appropriate, national authorities to advocate for integrated ecotourism policies at Mediterranean scale and exchange best practices including the MEET ecotourism model implemented in DestiMED PLUS project. Other local/regional/national/international organisations (public/private authorities or NGOs) will also be included as observers.

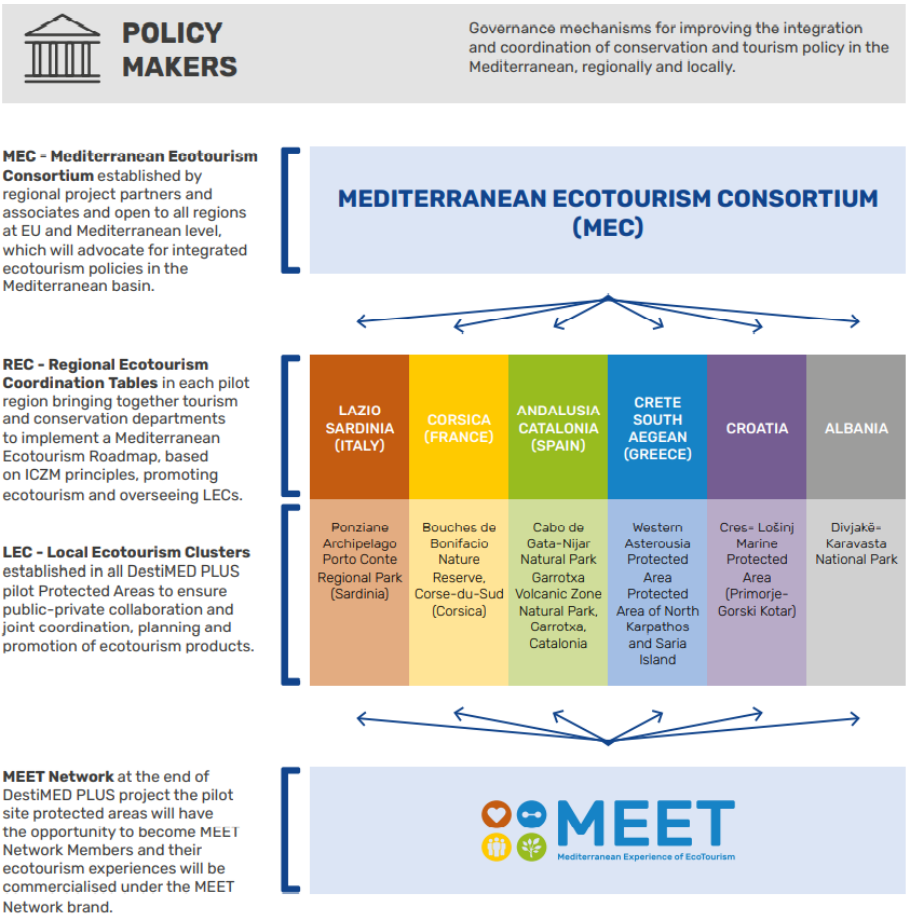


Figure 1: DestiMED PLUS Governance Mechanism structure

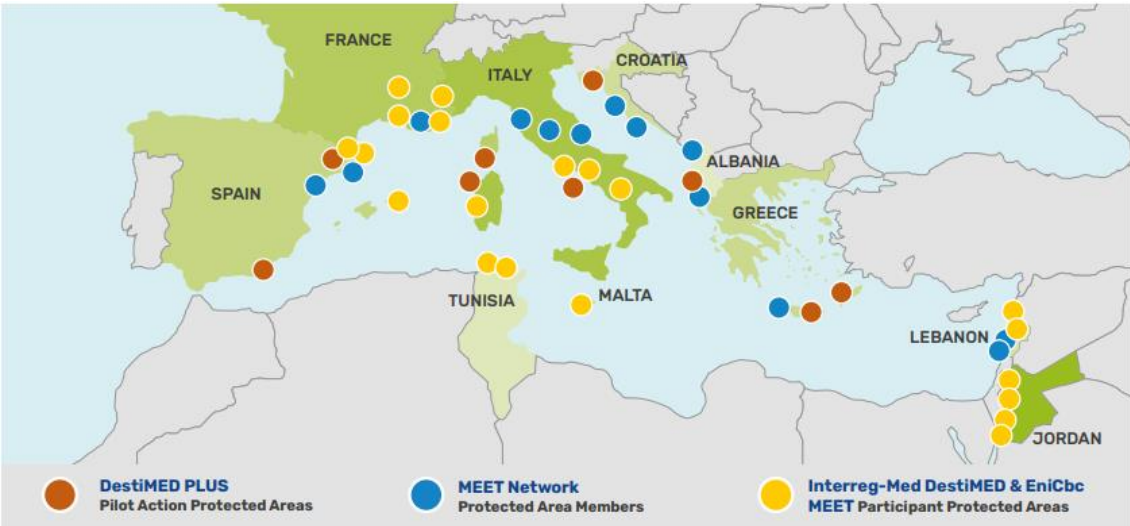


Figure 2: [Protected Areas \(Projects and MEET Network\)](#)

2. OVERVIEW AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Achieving sustainability is key for the Mediterranean basin, especially through the development of sustainable tourism activities as the sector is amongst the highest income generators in the Mediterranean Region. Although initiatives and policies that directly aim to improve the regional socioeconomic conditions in the Mediterranean, while fostering the preservation of the natural, environmental, and cultural assets of the area already exist, it seems that there is no structured consortium of Regional authorities working together for conservation and tourism policy integration at Mediterranean level.

In that sense, the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium will gather Regional Administrations Policymakers or

- a) monitoring and advocating relevant practices and policies to accelerate the tourism and conservation policy integration in the Mediterranean region.

- b) exchanging good practices and data among Mediterranean tourism and conservation stakeholders and other relevant actors.

The MEC, built under the DestiMED PLUS project, will serve, among other things, some international objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), tourism being directly covered by 4 SDGs (12: SCP; 13 Climate Action; 14: Life below water; 15 Life on Land) and interact with other SDGs. It will also benefit the goals identified in the [WINTER MED Transnational Strategy](#): achieve a joint development of sustainable year-round tourism across the Mediterranean; regional cohesion and development; ownership. It will also align with the [European Green Deal](#), the [EU Digital Strategy](#), the [2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy](#), and the EU new approach for a sustainable blue economy and follow the principles of marine and coastal activities regulatory instruments, such as Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), the Ecosystem-Based Management Approach, the [European Charter for sustainable tourism in protected areas](#), as well as [UNWTO "One Planet Vision for the Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector"](#), programme calling for a responsible recovery in the tourism sector in the perspective of a more sustainable tourism industry. Finally, it will integrate pre-existing governing strategies for sustainable development and conservation of PAs of the Mediterranean region such as the Barcelona Convention¹⁵, the [UNEP/MAP Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development](#), the UNEP/MAP Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean MPA Forum Post-2020 MPA Roadmap, the [BlueMed Initiative](#), and the [Bologna Charter](#).

The objectives and policy guidelines of the MEC must be regularly adapted to the most up-to-date policies and initiatives in terms of sustainable tourism, conservation / ecotourism, as part of the policy monitoring activities. Hence, the MEC also takes into account the

¹⁵ The Convention provides important objectives: prevent, abate, combat to the fullest possible extent, eliminate pollution of the Mediterranean Sea Area, protect and enhance the marine environment in that Area so as to contribute towards its sustainable development.

[Glasgow declaration](#)¹⁶ that has been adopted at the UNFCCC COP 26 in November 2021 and upholds the [European Parliament resolution of March 2021 on establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism, the DG GROW Tourism transition pathway co-creation](#).

2.1 Overview of current ecotourism governance

In order to understand the context in which the MEC is created and will evolve, and to better frame the objectives of the initiative as an innovative and complementary element, it is important to start with a non-exhaustive list, complementing the above, of main existing networks, organisations and initiatives related to the governance/development sustainable tourism, ecotourism and/or the tourism and conservation policy integration at international, European and Mediterranean level.

a. *Global level*

Tourism2030/DestiNET

[Tourism2030](#), formerly known as DestiNET, is an independent portal designed in 2002, which brings together the global community of people and organisations working on a more sustainable tourism shift. Indeed, Tourism2030 facilitates networking and exchange among organisations working in the tourism sector and is mainly managed by [ECOTRANS](#), an NGO working since 1993 for a more sustainable tourism.

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism

The [Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism](#), launched in 2011, is a network of tourism stakeholders of the public and private sectors, non-profits, United Nations agencies and programmes, international organisations, and academic institutions who collaborate internationally, regionally, nationally to transform tourism. The Global Partnership is jointly managed by the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) and [UNWTO](#).

The objective of the network is to transform the way tourism works worldwide by building partnerships to support the implementation of sustainable tourism practices through the adoption of effective policies, projects, knowledge sharing and experience.

The Future of Tourism Coalition

The [Future of Tourism \(FoT\)](#) was created in 2020. It is a coalition of six non-governmental organisations with the common objective to drive change in the tourism sector. As a result of Covid-19 impact on tourism, the coalition intends to build a movement of stakeholders that stand behind their mission, putting communities at the heart of recovery plans and working towards a stable future for tourism.

¹⁶ The Declaration sets-up 5 pathways for climate actions: measures (related to emissions), decarbonisation, regeneration of ecosystems, collaboration, and finance.

The Glasgow Declaration

The recent [Glasgow Declaration](#) was officially launched during the COP26 in Glasgow (UNFCCC) from October 31st to November 12nd 2021. It was developed through the collaboration of UNWTO, [UNEP](#), [Visit Scotland](#), the [Travel Foundation](#) and [Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency](#), within the framework of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme committed to accelerate sustainable consumption and production patterns. The Glasgow declaration aims to act as a catalyst for increased urgency about the need to accelerate climate action in tourism and to secure strong actions and commitment to cut tourism emissions at least in half over the next decade and reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050. Specifically, the declaration sets-up 5 pathways for climate actions:

- Measure: Measure and disclose all travel and tourism-related emissions
- Decarbonise: Set and deliver targets aligned with climate science to accelerate tourism's decarbonisation
- Regenerate: Restore and protect ecosystems, supporting nature's ability to draw down carbon, as well as safeguarding biodiversity, food security, and water supply
- Collaborate: Share evidence of risks and solutions with all stakeholders and our guests and work together to ensure our plans are as effective and co-ordinated as possible
- Finance: Ensure organisational resources and capacity are sufficient to meet objectives set out in climate plans, including the financing of training, research and implementation of effective fiscal and policy tools where appropriate to accelerate transition.

Each signatory is committed to deliver a concrete climate action plan, or updated plan, within 12 months of signing. Plans will be aligned with the proposed pathways of measurement, decarbonisation, regeneration, collaboration and financing that will accelerate tourism's ability to transform.

The Local2030 Islands Network

The [Local2030 Islands Network](#) is a coalition of islands dedicated to achieving progress related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also a platform to help islands identify and advance solutions toward the SDGs. The network provides and promotes virtual learning and sharing opportunities in a demand-driven manner including through Communities of Practice, events, and webinars to highlight best practices and to facilitate support in SDG implementation.

b. European level

Network of European Region for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism - NECSTouR

[NECSTouR](#) is a network of 40 European regional tourism authorities and around 30 associated members (universities, research institutes, representatives of tourism enterprises and sustainable tourism associations). Therefore, it brings together European regions

committed to sustainability as a crucial driver of destination competitiveness. Since 2007, it has provided an integrated approach to tourism governance and acted as an important link between regional administrations and wider European levels of government - EU Parliament, Commission and Committee of the Regions - monitoring and contributing to European tourism policy developments, while developing interregional cooperation through EU-funded projects. NECSTouR is moreover an associated partner of DestiMED PLUS project and partner in charge of the capitalisation activities within the Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community.

Natura 2000

Natura 2000 is a network of core breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species, and some rare natural habitat types which are protected in their own right. It stretches across all 27 EU countries, both on land and at sea. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, listed under both the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive.

European Cultural Tourism Network

The [European Cultural Tourism Network](#) (ECTN) is a network for cultural tourism development and promotion which was established in Brussels in 2009. The ECTN members are destinations, authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research institutes who share the mission to bring together the tourism and cultural industry professionals from different Regions of Europe and develop new and innovative approaches towards the tourism sector.

European Network for Sustainable Travel

This [Network](#) was launched as a contribution to the European Year of Rail 2021¹⁷ and it connects sustainable travel agencies engaged with the promotion of sustainable and social Tourism. It aims at promoting soft mobility as a whole, and the railway in particular, and it also responds to the growing demand of passengers from Northern Europe to be able to travel to Southern Europe without using air travel and with a preference for transport by rail.

c. Mediterranean level

Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community

The [MED Sustainable Tourism Community](#), to which DestiMED PLUS belongs, was created in November 2016 within the framework of the Interreg MED Programme, initially known as the [BleuTourMed project](#). It has been renewed in 2019 for a three-year period until June 2022 to make tourism a real driver for inclusive and sustainable growth.

It aims to reach four objectives defined in the [Athens Declaration](#):

- To contribute to address tourism pressures in the Mediterranean region

¹⁷ The year 2021 has been declared the European Year of rail with the main goal of **boosting rail** as a sustainable, innovative, interconnected and intermodal, safe and affordable mode of transport in line with the objectives set out in the European Green Deal and the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

- To enhance attractiveness and tourism offer in the Mediterranean region
- To strengthen planning and management practices towards sustainable tourism
- To build a strong community of projects and stakeholders.

The Community intends to replicate its most tangible outputs in other areas of the Mediterranean and achieve the maximum visibility and implementation.

MED Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (NSTO) of BEST MED

The Interreg MED Strategic Project [BEST MED](#) is establishing a [Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories \(NSTO\)](#) that should benefit the sustainable tourism governance of the Mediterranean Region. The main objectives of the network are to:

- Cooperate in sharing strategies and data management models related to sustainable tourism;
- Facilitate the sharing of information and tools;
- Enhance the development of joint projects and joint activities, in relation to the funding opportunities;
- Ensure the development of capacity building actions and sharing of best practices;
- Further develop the existing [info hub](#) already integrated in the BEST MED web portal which aims at collecting and systemizing in a dedicated "resource centre" key information, documents, news, events and in general knowledge related to the monitoring and data management in the field of sustainable tourism;
- Collect (re-usable) data on sustainable tourism relevant for the Mediterranean NSTO in real time and use it to elaborate new documents, studies or analysis;
- Contribute to the goals and activities of [UNWTO INSTO](#) and the EU works on data.

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and the Task Force on Culture and Sustainable Tourism of its Intermediterranean Commission (IMC)

The [CPMR](#) is a platform for technical and political cooperation between more than 150 regional authorities on priority issues and policies for peripheral maritime regions. Divided into six geographical commissions, its [CPMR's Intermediterranean Commission](#) brings together around 40 Mediterranean regions working on various issues such as: Territorial Cooperation and Macro-Regional Strategies; Transport and Integrated Maritime Policy; Water and Energy and Economic and Social Cohesion. Within the framework of this last area of work, and following the request of its members, in 2015 the IMC created a Task Force dedicated to Culture and Sustainable Tourism. This Task Force allows the Mediterranean regions to exchange good practices related to sustainable tourism and to coordinate political support for the sustainable development of the sector. The IMC therefore intends to use this Task Force to capitalise on the results of the projects in which it and its members are involved.

Plan Bleu - and other key Regional Activity Centres of the UNEP/MAP - Barcelona Convention system

[Plan Bleu](#) is one of the 6 Regional Activity Centres of the [Mediterranean Action Plan](#) (MAP) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - Barcelona Convention System, put in place by France since 1977. As one of its implementers, its programme of work is approved every two years by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. One of

its main lines of work is looking at Mediterranean tourism challenges in terms of sustainability. It is also a partner of the Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community.

It is also worth mentioning the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP/RAC) and the [SCP Regional Action Plan](#); the [Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region \(Post-2020 \) SAPBIO](#) and its activity 25 on Tourism which “foreseen the development of a framework of specific indicators for assessing the impact of marine and coastal tourism on destinations and for promoting ecotourism”, to be initiated by the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) in coordination with the Priority Actions Programme/Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) and Plan Bleu; the [Post-2020 Regional Strategy for marine and coastal protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures in the Mediterranean](#) (Post-2020 MCPA-OECM Strategy) and its Output 5.3: “The contribution of MPCAs and OECMs to sustainable development goals, the blue economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the wider society are recognized and accounted for”.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and its work on Blue Economy:

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental institution bringing together the 28 European Union Member States and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean to promote dialogue and cooperation. UfM’s mission is to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives with tangible impact on our citizens, with an emphasis on young people and women, in order to address the three strategic objectives of the region: stability, human development and integration.

Six years after the first UfM Ministerial Declaration, Ministers adopted a [new Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy on the 2nd February 2021](#), firmly committing to cooperate closely and address joint challenges in key blue economy sectors including coastal and maritime tourism. They agree to promote transformative policies and tools such as maritime clusters or maritime spatial planning and support the transition to carbon neutral and circular blue economy. New joint activities and projects will be set up on a wide range of issues, including blue skills, marine litter, marine renewable energies and nature-based tourism. Moreover, in the point 57.a and 57.e it is clearly stated that “Ministers agree to promote policy coordination, stakeholder collaboration and cooperation mechanisms to strengthen the resilience of the tourism sector in the Mediterranean; and to promote eco-tourism and niche tourism, including activities such as pesca-tourism, culinary tourism, and sport tourism, among others”.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive

The [ICZM Protocol](#) was signed in Madrid, on 21 January 2008. Integrated coastal zone management is a dynamic process for the sustainable management and use of coastal zone, taking into account at the same time the fragility of coastal ecosystems and landscapes, the diversity of activities and uses, their interactions, the maritime orientation of certain activities and uses and their impact on both the marine and land parts. With regard to the development of the tourism sector, the protocol (i) encourages sustainable coastal tourism that preserves coastal ecosystems, natural resources, cultural heritage and

landscapes; (ii) invites to promote specific forms of coastal tourism, including cultural, rural and ecotourism, while respecting the traditions of local populations; (iii) calls to regulate or, where necessary, prohibit the practice of various sporting and recreational activities, including recreational fishing and shellfish extraction¹⁸.

The [MSP Directive](#) can be considered as a tool for promoting sustainable tourism and conservation integration as it is “a practical way to create and establish a more rational organisation of the use of marine space and the interactions between its uses, to balance demands for development with the need to protect marine ecosystems, and to achieve social and economic objectives in an open and planned way” (Ehler and Douvere, 2009).

International Union for Conservation of Nature - IUCN

IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organisations and the input of more than 18,000 experts. This diversity and vast expertise makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

The Open Network for Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism (ONMEST, ONMEST 2)

[ONMEST](#) is a project launched in 2009 with the objective to create a network, including small-micro enterprises, covering the entire tourism supply chain to check they are operating along sustainability criteria. The main partners of the project were Jordanian, Egyptian, Palestinian, Israeli partners.

In order to contribute to the diversification of tourism offer, ONMEST was followed by the launch of [ONMEST 2](#) a project aiming to enhance minor tourism destinations in marginal geographical areas such as Ipsica (Italy), Kalavrita (Greece), Alcaraz (Spain), Kadisha Valley (Lebanon), Birzeit (Palestine), Umm Qais (Jordan) and Béja (Tunisia), and turn them into ‘Centers of Local Culture’ as privileged places of sustainable tourism.

Conclusion:

This short overview of existing initiatives for the governance of sustainable tourism/ecotourism and for the development of tourism and conservation policy integration at International and Euro-Mediterranean level showcases the lack of a comprehensive body gathering regional authorities to establish multi-level and intersectoral governance to improve the collaboration between tourism and conservation policies.

Indeed, most of the organisation and initiative are related to sustainable tourism development, or conservation but few of them are gathering regional authorities and when it's the case too often the link is not made between the two themes.

Therefore, the Mediterranean Ecotourism Consortium intends to fill in the gap, allowing the monitoring of sustainable practices, exchange of best practices through a participatory, bottom-up approach that will support the development of policies supportive of

¹⁸ Article 9 - 2d of the protocol: [Protocol publikacija_May09.pdf \(paprac.org\)](#)

ecotourism actions and more generally of integrated conservation and tourism actions in PAs in the Mediterranean and beyond.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEC

The main objective of the MEC is to support the policy and governance conditions so that the integrated and sustainable ecotourism model, developed in DestiMED PLUS and operated by MEET Network, will be adopted and scaled-up by each member of the MEC, and hopefully by most of, if not all, the Mediterranean Regions.

Indeed, by encouraging Mediterranean Protected Areas to become members of the MEET network, the Mediterranean regions will, among other things, enable their Park managers and tourism professionals to have access to specific trainings for the development of environmentally friendly ecotourism packages following the MEET standards, but also and more generally to tools to measure/manage the quality and impact of ecotourism products on their territory.

The MEC will also look beyond Protected Areas and stimulate the adoption of the MEET model even beyond PAs in other types of territory.

The MEC is defined as an umbrella of existing regional conservation and tourism departments, with the idea to cover any ecotourism initiative implemented in the Mediterranean and promoting the approach developed in DestiMED PLUS and by MEET Network. The MEC will thus act as a forum for policy exchange, learning and generating collaboration on ecotourism/between conservation and tourism in order to adopt/scale-up the MEET model and thus strengthen the enabling conditions for ecotourism to thrive in the Mediterranean.

To ensure the MEC will achieve its objective, two strategic axes have been identified.

1. The first strategic axis is related to the creation of a comprehensive governance of ecotourism / for the integration of tourism and conservation following the ICZM protocol, identified as a challenge in the [DestiMED Policy Brief 2019](#). Starting from the RECs (Regional Ecotourism Coordination tables), the deployment of the MEC will allow the integration of various stakeholders and initiatives related to ecotourism and conservation. The members of the MEC will prepare a Mediterranean Ecotourism Policy Roadmap reflecting, among others, the information already collected in the [Governance and Policy Baselines of Regional Partners Participating in DestiMED PLUS](#), and consisting of an Action Plan to guide the Regional Policy-related activities and coordinate the development of ecotourism / tourism and conservation policy integration in the Mediterranean basin in Protected Areas and beyond.

This axis includes the definition and development of policy support and advocacy efforts including lobbying activities that can ease the integration of conservation and tourism, through the synergies of ecosystem services/ecotourism. This will aim to contribute to the promotion of ecotourism based on the experience and knowledge of MEC members and other relevant entities, as well as to provide general support to MEC members and participants working with ecotourism or in related fields.

This axis will support the MEC to represent the interest and political agenda of tourism and conservation departments in each participating country, region and destination, and monitor Mediterranean/European Policy developments in the field of tourism/conservation/ecotourism and ensure relevant information sharing on possible consultations and funding for better ecotourism management/governance.

The core of this axis will be to always intend to prioritise the bottom-up approach: to do so, the participation of local/regional organisations that represent protected areas (Protected areas managers from MEET network for instance) will be key so as to reflect the reality from the ground.

This axis also includes the coordination/management of the MEC itself as an on-going process.

2. The second strategic axis refers to data management and monitoring and will look at how to improve the collection, analysis and use of data and indicators related to ecotourism / tourism related environmental pressures with the aim of developing data-driven decisions in favour of the sustainability of territories and local communities. This process should be inspired by the existing initiatives and policies: for instance, this work could feed and be developed in synergy with the [Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories \(NSTO\)](#) being currently set up by BEST MED project funded by Interreg MED, so triggering complementarities, and also possibly the conception of new concrete joint projects that can be connected to the core business of the MEC (e.g. ecotourism assessment methods, planning and promotion of tourism, involving new regions, establishing peer learning mechanisms etc.).

3. The third strategic axis is the launch of networking activities benefiting ecotourism / tourism and conservation policy integration. This includes collaboration with other international/macoregional institutions, networks and initiatives focusing on ecotourism and on balance between tourism and conservation with shared objectives, to enable the sharing of information and experience, providing assessment, knowledge, documentation, research and innovations in the field. This axis will allow for the exchange of best practices on ecotourism / tourism and conservation policy integration within the Mediterranean regional authorities, to enable building a Mediterranean sustainable tourism and conservation governance community.

MEC Activities

The activities carried out by the MEC will follow a participatory approach so that the problems and issues they will be addressing will directly involve the local organisations/entities concerned by the results of the MECs actions, namely the Mediterranean PAs (most of them being represented by the MEET Network). By having a participatory approach this will ensure dialogue, balanced participation of all members and empowerment.

To ensure the fulfilment of the previously mentioned strategic axes, different activities have been identified. Of course, the latter will have to be validated and updated on a regular basis by the MEC members with the advice of the supporting entities.

Proposed actions for the strategic axis on Ecotourism Governance

The first activity will be to define, in collaboration with relevant regional and national organisations, a joint Mediterranean Ecotourism Policy Roadmap pinpointing strategic policy areas to focus on and that influence the development and management of ecotourism. The idea is for the Policy Roadmap to become a comprehensive document which will be defined and implemented by key stakeholders that will identify the main opportunities for its concrete implementation, looking beyond the DestiMED PLUS project's lifetime. This Policy Roadmap will be considered as a kind of Action Plan for the MEC. This Policy Roadmap will depart from [DestiMED Policy Brief](#) - which intends to ensure the transferability of the project results and build on them at larger scale for more growth and better management of ecotourism activities in Mediterranean PAs - the [Governance and Policy Baselines of Regional Partners Participating in DestiMED PLUS](#), and the DestiMED PLUS Regional Action Plans that are going to be produced by the RECs and will be complemented by further research on other Mediterranean territories not covered by the project.

The drafting of the Policy Roadmap will be complemented by the different events organised/attended and will serve as a basis for the MEC to influence the regional, national and EU strategies, policies and regulations to include ecotourism, conservation in their agendas on tourism, and then obtain a lasting impact over time.

In its aim to share views and experiences, policy support and advocacy¹⁹ actions - including lobbying activities, targeting among others the transnational and EU level for the development and implementation of ecotourism policies, networking activities with the EC/EP to increase visibility of the MEC - will be developed to reach a more structured Mediterranean dialogue on ecotourism and to scale-up the ecotourism "MEET" model. The main purpose of these activities will be to represent the interest and political agenda of the tourism and conservation departments and facilitate their integration. They will be the most

¹⁹ Advocacy is defined as public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy

important part of the MEC when generating awareness and promoting ecotourism/conservation activities in the Mediterranean, throughout the whole tourism supply chain. Specifically, the advocacy activities will focus on getting Mediterranean tourism and conservation actors together to work on a common goal/shared values for a better integration of ecotourism practices at all decision-making levels. Training activities on “Integrating sustainable tourism in Marine and Coastal Planning, addressing Protected Areas”, to foster integration between ecotourism/sustainable tourism policies approaches and conservation in marine and coastal planning processes, will be also shared with the MEC members so to help them understand why and how the ICZM protocol and the Ecosystem based approach can be applied in their territory for the development of ecotourism.

Under this axis, and in order to best direct the policy support and advocacy activities, the MEC will also monitor Mediterranean and EU policies on ecotourism/sustainable tourism/conservation and integrated territorial development as well as EU-funded projects, initiatives and funding opportunities in relation to the latter.

The MEC will also ensure relevant information sharing on possible consultations for better ecotourism implementation.

Finally, the MEC members and supporting entities should facilitate the governance of the MEC itself by: promoting the MEC, boosting adhesions, implementation / regular monitoring and updating of the strategic axes and proposed activities.

Proposed actions for the axis on ecotourism data management and monitoring

To become successful ecotourism policy supporters, MEC members and supporting entities must identify/define harmonised mechanisms to collect, share and use specific data regarding ecotourism. The aim of this is to improve decision making processes (i.e. developing or contributing to better decision support systems).

It will be crucial indeed to foresee actions for harmonising the use of available monitoring tools - esp. those developed by DestiMED PLUS project -, allowing local, regional and national authorities to measure sustainability, while also ensuring ecotourism benefits for conservation in PAs and beyond. The different stakeholders will be invited to share data they have on ecotourism/conservation/tourism related pressures on PAs through different monitoring tools in order to develop or improve the research activities based on this data.

Also, it is essential to work on data analysis, to define priorities and goals on how to raise awareness of ecotourism and PAs and influence policies.

Links with existing initiatives, such as BEST MED's NSTO, will be encouraged to generate synergies and avoid overlapping.

Finally, the MEC will also share relevant information on possible consultations and funding related to data collection, sharing and use in general and especially in the ecotourism, sustainable tourism and conservation sector.

Proposed actions for the strategic axis on networking

Exchanging and capitalising good practices, experience and solutions on the integration of tourism and conservation policies, improving the enabling conditions and reducing barriers for ecotourism development in Mediterranean protected areas and beyond, will be essential for successful networking. The governance good practices identified will complete/be added to the Good Practices Database of the project. To achieve this, a minimum of two meetings will be organised in the framework of DestiMED PLUS to launch the series of meet-ups and events that will be organised for/by the members and involving, when needed, the Supporting Entities of the MEC (on-line or in-person - depending on the evolution of the health situation related to the COVID-19 crisis). In the framework of the DestiMED PLUS project, these meetings will be in particular useful to better define the MEC scope, review/update its objective, its strategic axes, activities, structure, members/supporting entities and governance before and after the end of the project. These meetings will also help to define a Mediterranean Ecotourism Policy Roadmap targeting the key policy areas to work on in the short/medium/long term.

Other general conferences and events will be organised to attract new members and Supporting Entities, and to facilitate the collaboration with other international/macoregional institutions and initiatives related to ecotourism development. Several regional events, involving a diverse variety of stakeholders and in collaboration with the CPMR, NECSTouR, MEET Network, IUCN, WWF, MedPAN network and other key organisations, could also be held in order to start addressing the main challenges of creating a thriving and more dynamic ecotourism governance environment.

Different promotion, dissemination and awareness raising activities on the policy integration of ecotourism / conservation and tourism integrated policies could also be implemented as for example the publication of key information through newsletters (using existing ones), activity reports, annual reports, etc. This could be supported by sharing information on ecotourism governance and providing assessments, documentation, research and innovation in this field between Members and Supporting Entities.

The Members and Supporting Entities of the MEC will be encouraged to participate in major events related to ecotourism / tourism and conservation integration and its governance/promotion in the Mediterranean and beyond. In this way members and Supporting Entities of the MEC will give visibility to the MEC and share the findings of these events with all the MEC members.

Thanks to all of the above, partnerships between the MEC and relevant Mediterranean and initiatives and networks related to ecotourism, sustainable tourism and conservation integrated governance could be created. Agreements with international actors in other areas of the world should also be foreseen.

Summary Table

STRATEGIC AXES	ACTIVITIES
1- Governance	a- Definition a Joint Mediterranean Ecotourism Policy Roadmap
	b- Organisation/Participation to key events
	c- Definition and development of policy support and advocacy efforts to ease the integration of conservation and tourism and contribute to the promotion of ecotourism
	d- Shared training on ICZM and ecosystem-based approach for ecotourism development in the MED PAS/territories
	e- Monitor European Policy development in the field of ecotourism, sustainable tourism, conservation and integrated territorial development
	f- Monitor the EU project proposals, initiatives and funding opportunities that could be useful for the achievement of the different axes and general objective of the MEC
	g- Ensure relevant information sharing on possible consultations for better ecotourism implementation
	h- Coordinate the MEC process: facilitating the promotion of the MEC, boosting adhesions, implementing / regular monitoring and updating of the proposed strategic axes and activities.
2- Data management and monitoring	a- Identify/define harmonised mechanisms to collect, share and use specific data regarding ecotourism
	b- Harmonise the use of existing monitoring tools, allowing local and regional authorities to measure sustainability, while also ensuring ecotourism will benefit conservation in PAS.
	c- Improve data driving decision making processes (i.e developing or contributing to better decision support systems).
	d- Encourage the different stakeholders to share data they have on ecotourism through different monitoring tools in order to

	develop or improve the research activities based on this data.
	e- Focus on Data Analysis to define priorities and goals on how to raise awareness of ecotourism and PAs and influence policies.
	f- Generate links with existing initiatives such as the one promoted by BEST MED - NSTO.
	g- Ensure relevant information sharing on possible consultations and funding related to data collection, sharing and use.
3- Networking	a- Exchange and capitalise good practices, experience and solutions.
	b- Continuous updating of the Good Practice Database
	c- Organise/participate in MEC meetings on a regular basis (at least 2 in the framework of the project lifetime).
	d- Organise general conferences and events/regional events to attract new members and supporting entities and thus increase the reach of the MEC/address the main challenges of creating a thriving and more dynamic ecotourism environment.
	e- Collaborate with other international/macoregional institutions and initiatives.
	f- Implement promotion, dissemination and awareness raising activities on ecotourism.
	g- Share information on ecotourism and provide assessment, documentation, research and innovations in the field.
	h- Participation in major events related to ecotourism to give visibility to the MEC and report the outcomes to the MEC members and supporting entities.
	i- Encourage the creation of partnerships between the MEC and relevant Mediterranean initiatives and networks and with internationals for know-how in other areas of the world.

4. MEMBERSHIP

The MEC stems from the Interreg DestiMED PLUS project. Hence, the membership of the MEC is naturally open to the regional tourism and conservation departments from DestiMED PLUS Partners (RECs) and Associates and will be extended by those from the whole Mediterranean. When relevant other departments (e.g. department dedicated projects) related to ecotourism / tourism / conservation will also be able to become members but under a voting process. The MEC will also count on Supporting Entities, including all the other entities working or interested in working on the promotion of ecotourism / tourism and conservation policy integration in the Mediterranean region.

The members of the MEC will be mainly made up of the tourism and conservation departments of the DestiMED PLUS project (Partners (RECs) and Associate Partners), and other Mediterranean regions, starting with the member regions of the "Culture and Sustainable Tourism Task Force" of the CPMR-IMC. It is also important to include all departments tackling these issues at local, regional and national level to comply with competences distribution on tourism, sustainability, conservation environment and protected areas. MEET Network, as a representative of PAs, will be invited to join.

Initial members (RECs mainly) will carry out the activities mentioned in previous sections to ensure the launch and sustainable and continuous growth of the MEC, even after the end of the project.

The Supporting Entities could be composed by:

- Tourism-related private sector associations: they represent the companies that offer the products and services related to ecotourism and they are the ones who will be able to exploit ecotourism as an economic activity. Including private actors in the co-creation of the ecotourism sustainable integrated model, will ensure a good balance between the sustainability, preservation and conservation of protected areas and their use as tourist attractions.
- Local/regional/national/Mediterranean levels Environmental/conservation-related Non-Governmental Organisations as the organisations with great social links, specific territorial knowledge and often acting as ambassadors for ecotourism.
- PAs and local actors including the LECs (local administrations, ITOs, DMOs), mainly represented by the MEET Network, to expand the network to local actors that are directly involved in ecotourism activities and ensure the bottom-up approach of the MEC. It will also be a good opportunity for them to be involved in the training activities, encouraging them to use the training and monitoring tools developed by DestiMED PLUS and identified by the MEC.

Members of previously existing regional and national networks related to sustainability, ecotourism and environmental protection, conservation and protected area management are also encouraged to become involved with the MEC as their participation will increase knowledge and contribute to the efficiency of the exchange of good practices.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE MEC AND OPERATION

In order to avoid starting from scratch and to enable the MEC to sustain its activities, it is intended to be part of the IMC-CPMR “Culture and Sustainable Tourism Task Force”.

Indeed, this Task Force, gathering about 40 regions and their tourism departments, will allow to extend the activities of the MEC beyond the regions of the DestiMED PLUS project.

After approval by the IMC-CPMR members of the Task Force, the MEC members could meet within the framework of the IMC-CPMR Task Force meetings. Indeed, this will be done by inviting conservation departments to take part in the discussion on sustainable maritime and coastal tourism sustainable development, especially in the Mediterranean protected areas but also beyond.

Supporting Entities could also be invited to participate in some of the MEC meetings in order to give their opinion, to bring the vision of other types of organisations and to support advocacy activities prepared by MEC members with the aim of improving the governance of ecotourism in the Mediterranean.

Some partner regions of the DestiMED PLUS project (e.g. Lazio, Andalusia, etc.), as initial members, will be invited to convene and prepare the MEC exchanges/meetings which will take place during the IMC-CPMR Task Force meetings.

Key networks such as NECSTouR will also contribute to the promotion/implementation of the MEC, including inviting its members to take part in consortium activities/meetings. NECSTouR could also eventually take the lead of some key meetings according to its policy agenda and in accordance with the MoU shared with the CPMR.

Of course, the governance structure of the MEC could evolve with new funding opportunities. In particular, governance programmes will be best suited to continue the MEC effort. Also, some programmes for the next period 2021-2027 have already been identified, such as the Interreg Euro-Med programme and its call for governance projects, the NEXT MED programme, etc.

6. MEC IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE AND ACTORS

In order to ensure the implementation of the different activities mentioned above, an indicative timetable has been created. This will of course be subject to change and can serve as a roadmap for the implementation of the governance/coordination of the MEC itself.

[MEC timetable AnySol V1.xlsx - Google Sheets](#)

Following the description of the different actors/organisations expected to contribute to the MEC either as full members or supporting entities, a first list identifying some of the contacts - namely partners (RECs), associated partners of DestiMED PLUS, IMC-CPMR members and other Mediterranean regions and external actors has been created.

[DestiMED PLUS Organisations to invite AnySol V2.xlsx - Google Sheets](#)

This list will also evolve over time, taking into account the recommendations of stakeholders/members and other key organisations.

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