

Webinar “Sustainable destination management and regenerative tourism”

24 September 2025, 15.00 – 17.00 CET

Webinar Summary





Transition pathway for EU tourism



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Intro



Target audience

National, regional and local authorities, DMOs, SMEs and larger companies, academic, research and VET institutions, NGOs and business associations, and any other tourism stakeholder interested in the topic.

Scope and objectives

This webinar explores how tourism can evolve into a regenerative force – restoring natural ecosystems, empowering communities and preserving cultural heritage. It highlights innovative approaches to sustainable destination management, nature-positive tourism, and community revitalisation; focused on regenerative power of tourism. Participants gain insights from leading experts, academic researchers and practitioners.

Agenda

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| | Welcome and Introduction |
| 15.00 – 15:10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moderator: <i>Liisa Kokkarinen</i>, Head of Sustainable Development, Visit Finland• <i>Ralf Pastleitner</i>, TUI Group and Chair of the T4T Green subgroup• <i>Ramune Genzbigelyte-Venturi</i>, Policy officer- Tourism, European Commission, DG MOVE |
| | Session 1 “Sustainable destination management and regenerative tourism” |
| 15.10 – 15:40 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Tourism in the EU: sustainability as a driver for long-term competitiveness”, <i>Isabel Yglesias Julià</i>, Member of the Employers’ Group of the European Economic and Social Committee• “Beyond Sustainability: Regenerative Pathways for Thriving Destinations”, <i>Xavier Cazorla</i>, Founder & CEO, ELEMENTS |
| | Session 2 “Regenerative power of Nature-positive tourism” |
| 15.40 – 16:15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Nature-positive tourism on the rise - emerging examples from Finland”, <i>Esko Sorakunnas</i>, Postdoctoral researcher, BIODIFUL / Biodiversity Unit, University of Turku, Finland• “Nature-Positive Tourism in Practice: Lessons from Haltia Lake Lodge”, <i>Teemu Tuomarla</i>, CEO & Co-founder, Haltia Lake Lodge |
| | Session 3 “Regenerating communities and heritage through tourism” |
| 16.15 – 16.50 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “The Role of Tourism in Restoring and Sustaining Cultural Heritage: Case Studies from Slovenia (Podčetrtek, Podsreda)”, <i>Boštjan Misja</i>, Turizem Podčetrtek, Bistrica ob Sotli and Kozje, GIZ (Public Institute for Tourism, Culture and Sport)• “Colourful Cultures Croatia: Revitalising Communities and Heritage through Tourism”, <i>Romana Tomić</i>, Senior expert associate, DEŠA Dubrovnik |
| | Concluding remarks and Next steps |
| 16.50 – 17.00 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Liisa Kokkarinen</i>, Head of Sustainable Development, Visit Finland• <i>Ralf Pastleitner</i>, TUI Group and Chair of the T4T Green subgroup |

Webinar “Sustainable destination management and regenerative tourism”

Speakers



Ralf Pastleitner
TUI Group and
Chair of the T4T Green
subgroup



Ramune Genzbigelyte-
Venturi
Policy officer-
Tourism, DG MOVE



Isabel Yglesias Julià
Member of the Employers'
Group, European Economic
and Social Committee



Xavier Cazorla
Founder & CEO
ELEMENTS



Liisa Kokkarinen
Head of Sustainable
Development
Visit Finland



Esko Sorakunnas
Postdoctoral researcher
BIODIFUL, University of
Turku



Teemu Tuomarla
CEO & Co-founder
Haltia Lake Lodge



Boštjan Misja
Turizem Podčetrtek



Romana Tomić
Senior expert
associate
DEŠA Dubrovnik

Transition pathway for EU tourism

Moderates:

Webinar in numbers



400 Registrations



198 Participants

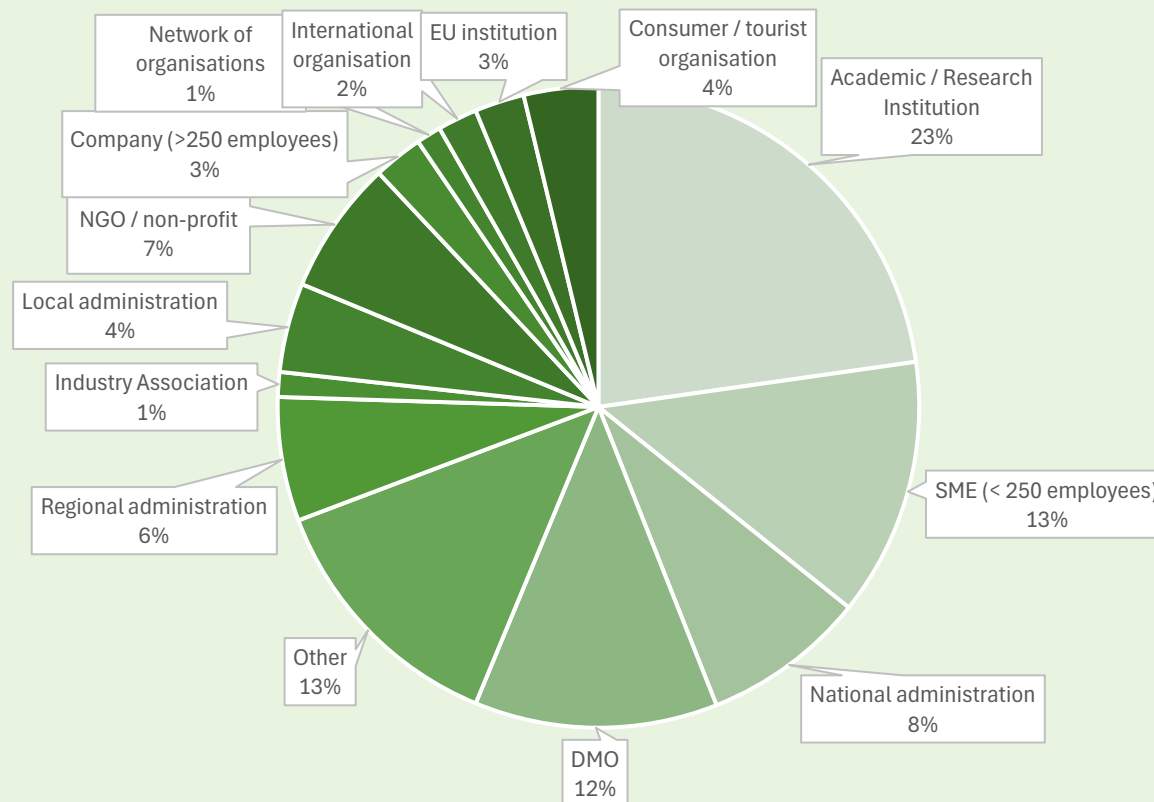


Registrations from **26 EU MS** and **22 non-EU** countries



8 Speakers

Participants' Organisations



Results of the post-webinar survey



89% of the respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with the webinar.



100% of the respondents found that the webinar provided useful information.



94% of the respondents feel that they have obtained a better understanding and knowledge of the topic after attending.

Key discussion points (1/3)

Representatives from the **European Economic and Social Committee, ELEMENTS, University of Turku, Haltia Lake Lodge, Turizem Podčetrtek, and DEŠA Dubrovnik** discussed the following:

1

Session 1: “Sustainable destination management and regenerative tourism”

- **Isabel Yglesias Julià**, member of the Employers’ Group of the European Economic and Social Committee, presented **the EESC’s opinion “Tourism in the EU: sustainability as a driver for long-term competitiveness,” emphasising that responsible, sustainable, and regenerative tourism is essential for continued economic and social benefits across Europe**. The intervention highlighted that negative impacts, such as environmental strain and social acceptance issues, stem from a lack of strategic planning rather than tourism itself and called for new measurement criteria beyond visitor numbers to assess success. A holistic, system-wide approach involving all stakeholders, increased investment in regenerative projects, and the exchange of best practices were identified as priorities. Sustainability and regeneration were positioned as vital for the sector’s resilience and competitiveness, with EU policies encouraged to promote dialogue, research, and financial support to ensure tourism remains a key driver of growth and cohesion throughout the EU.
- **Xavier Cazorla**, Founder & CEO of **ELEMENTS**, explored **regenerative pathways for thriving destinations by advocating a shift from conventional sustainability to active restoration of ecosystems and communities**. The presentation addressed the challenges of overtourism, ecological degradation, and social inequality in destinations such as Barcelona and the Canary Islands, positioning regeneration as a move from minimising harm to healing and improving places. Essential elements included long-term policy vision, community co-creation, and new metrics focused on well-being and ecosystem health. Case studies from Southern Europe, such as Cerdanya Viva, Anaga Biofest, and Rewilding Spain, demonstrated how local networks, habitat restoration, and inclusive governance can drive systemic change. Tourism was presented as a force for healing when regeneration is embedded in policy, community action, and collaboration, with a call to reimagine destinations as living systems and make local communities central to decision-making.

Key discussion points (2/3)

Representatives from the **European Economic and Social Committee, ELEMENTS, University of Turku, Haltia Lake Lodge, Turizem Podčetrtek, and DEŠA Dubrovnik** discussed the following:

2

Session 2: “Regenerative power of Nature-positive tourism”

- **Esko Sorakunnas**, Postdoctoral Researcher at the **University of Turku**, examined **the rise of nature-positive tourism in Finland, positioning biodiversity loss as a critical business risk and a driver for sector transformation**. The presentation outlined how Finnish tourism is moving beyond harm reduction to actively restore nature, guided by the UN's Kunming-Montreal Agreement and global net positive goals. Examples included the removal of invasive species, beach clean-ups, and the protection of endangered eider ducks, all achieved through collaboration among tourism companies, local communities, and visitors. Nearly 40% of Sustainable Travel Finland-certified companies now implement biodiversity-enhancing actions such as habitat restoration, staff training, and partnerships with conservation authorities. The benefits of nature-positive tourism were shown to include business resilience, ecosystem service maintenance, and personal empowerment, positioning tourism as a key contributor to both environmental recovery and sustainable economic growth in Finland.
- **Teemu Tuomarla**, CEO and Co-founder of **Haltia Lake Lodge**, presented **practical lessons in nature-positive tourism by integrating conservation into the core business of a boutique hotel in Finland's Nuuksio National Park**. Case studies included lake restoration through fish management, peatland restoration, and building insect hotels with local students, each leaving a tangible mark on local ecosystems. The “Planet Positive Conservation Holiday” product enables guests to participate directly in hands-on restoration activities, such as meadow care and invasive species removal, creating measurable benefits for biodiversity and offering visitors a meaningful, anxiety-reducing experience. The presentation demonstrated that even small businesses can drive change by embedding nature-positivity into daily operations and collaborating with both travellers and partners, showing that scalable, guest-driven conservation models can inspire broader movements towards a regenerative tourism future.

Key discussion points (3/3)

Representatives from the **European Economic and Social Committee, ELEMENTS, University of Turku, Haltia Lake Lodge, Turizem Podčetrtek, and DEŠA Dubrovnik** discussed the following:

3

Session 3: “Regenerating communities and heritage through tourism”

- **Boštjan Misja**, Public Institute for Tourism, Culture and Sport, presented **case studies from the Podčetrtek region in Slovenia**, illustrating how tourism can drive the restoration and sustainable use of cultural heritage. Focusing on Podsreda Castle, Podčetrtek Castle, and Olimje Monastery, he highlighted how targeted investments, often supported by EU and municipal funding, have transformed historic sites from neglect into vibrant attractions. Renovations included luxury apartments, wellness facilities, digital museums, and improved accessibility, while preserving authenticity and community value. These projects have revitalised local economies, fostered community engagement, and created new visitor experiences, from cultural events to religious tourism. It was emphasised that successful heritage restoration requires adapting content to each location and strong collaboration between state, municipalities, and local communities, positioning tourism as a catalyst for both preservation and regional development.
- **Romana Tomić**, Senior expert associate at **DEŠA Dubrovnik**, presented the **TUI Colourful Cultures Croatia** initiative, a two-year project in partnership with the TUI Care Foundation. The project aims to revitalise Dubrovnik’s communities by preserving intangible cultural heritage, empowering women, and promoting creative entrepreneurship. Key activities include pop-up art and craft events, over 100 workshops, and annual festivals at Lazareti, all designed to increase the visibility of local heritage and arts in tourism. The initiative also provides digital marketing and WordPress training to enhance the skills and market reach of participating women and artisans, and supports at least six female artists to exhibit and sell their products through DEŠA Pro Ltd. By engaging both locals and visitors in hands-on experiences, the project fosters knowledge transfer, boosts employability, and creates new income opportunities, positioning tourism as a force for inclusive and sustainable local development in Dubrovnik.

Conclusions

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | Embedding sustainability and regeneration at the heart of EU tourism policy ensures the sector remains a resilient, competitive, and positive force for economic and social cohesion across Europe. |  |
| 2 | Regenerative tourism turns destinations into living systems, making tourism a driver of restoration and shared prosperity. |  |
| 3 | Nature-positive tourism shows that the travel sector can play a vital role in reversing biodiversity loss and supporting sustainable development. |  |
| 4 | Integrating conservation into tourism experiences demonstrates that even small businesses can drive meaningful environmental impact. |  |
| 5 | Tourism, when supported by strong collaboration and tailored to local context, can be a powerful catalyst for restoring and sustaining cultural heritage while driving regional development and community vitality. |  |
| 6 | Empowering women and preserving intangible heritage through creative, community-driven tourism can foster inclusive local development. |  |

Thank you!

The document has been prepared for the European Commission in the context of the project “Transition Pathway Stakeholder Support Platform: Implementation for Tourism Ecosystem” (the Project) in accordance with the signed contract No EISMEA/2022/OP/0018. This report reflects the views and results of the webinar discussion between the tourism stakeholders and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission. The action recommendations, however, do not necessarily represent the position or endorsement of all stakeholder groups nor the position of individual Member States or the European Commission.