



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Future-Ready Tourism: The Transition Pathway in Practice

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
12 June 2024, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Future-Ready Tourism: The Transition Pathway in Practice

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organised the EU Clusters Talk “Future-Ready Tourism: The Transition Pathway in Practice” on 12 June, 8:30 – 9:45 CET, to take stock of the implementation of the transition pathway in the sector, discuss action lines for tourism stakeholders, and talk about the role of clusters for the transition.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Zivile Kropaite

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Implementation of the Transition Pathway for Tourism
Miguel Vaz Alexandre, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission
3. Insights on the Tourism ecosystem from the ECCP Trend Universe
Alexander Ettinger, Associate Partner, in-manas
4. Panel debate
Benoît Robert, Director, Cluster Montagne
Gordon Sillence, Executive Director, Ecotrans
Klaus Ehrlich, General Secretary, RURALTOUR – European Federation of Rural Tourism
Luís Campos, EU Affairs Manager, Turismo de Portugal
5. Funding opportunities

Key messages

- Clusters facilitate partnerships between public and private entities, share best practices, and help implement the EU's tourism transition pathway.
- Sustainable tourism practices require collaboration, networking, and partnerships among stakeholders. Overregulation, climate change, and over-tourism are significant challenges that sustainable tourism practices can address.
- Effective communication between the EU Commission and smaller tourism businesses is essential. There's a need for improved representation and communication channels to ensure that all businesses, especially micro and nano enterprises, have a voice in legislative processes and policymaking.
- Digital innovation is pivotal for tourism sector advancement. Partnerships like Visit Portugal's collaboration with major tech companies exemplify this.
- Improving labour conditions and adapting to climate impacts are crucial to prevent over-tourism and social challenges in popular destinations.
- Climate change adaptation is urgent for the tourism sector. Regional examples highlight shifts in tourist behaviour, such as southern Europeans seeking cooler climates in northern Europe during peak seasons.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Zivile Kropaite, the following news items were presented:

1. Save the date for [Clusters meet Regions in Graz](#), Austria, on 18-19 June 2024.
2. Save the date for further [Clusters meet Regions](#) events taking place in 2024.
3. Register for [EU-Taiwan Matchmaking](#), Berlin, on 10-12 June 2024.
4. Register for [EU-South Med Matchmaking](#), Frankfurt, on 11-13 June 2024.
5. Register for [EU-Canada Matchmaking](#), Montreal, on 10-12 September 2024.
6. Access to [Trend Universe](#) open to all users from the EU.
7. Information about [Cluster Solution Library](#).

2. Implementation of the Transition Pathway for Tourism

Miguel Vaz Alexandre, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission

Miguel Vaz Alexandre gave an update on the progress of the Transition Pathway for Tourism, introduced two years ago through a collaborative process involving extensive consultations and surveys. The pathways focus on **five main areas: governance, skills, digitalisation, green transition, and resilience**, encompassing 27 themes and 78 proposed actions. These actions aim to guide stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem towards a sustainable future, encouraging voluntary commitments.

He explained that the aim of this plan is not only to guide stakeholders through this transition but also to inspire others and gather evidence of what is happening on the ground. Some of the short-term commitments are the regulation of short-term rentals, the passenger mobility package, the travel directive, the waste framework, the packaging and packaging waste directive for single-use plastics, and policy initiatives to support measures such as Smart Tourism Capitals, Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism, the EU Tourism Dashboard, the Common European Data Space for Tourism, and the EU Declaration on Cycling, among others. Also, eleven Member States have submitted strategies aligning with the transition pathway.

In terms of stakeholder participation and commitments, **over 500 commitments have been registered from various stakeholders, primarily SMEs**. These commitments range from small individual actions to participation in large strategies and plans with Member States. The Commission, along with stakeholders, has been key in this co-creation process. Collaboratively, the Tourism Expert Group, called T4T, has been created, which is divided into three subgroups: green transition, digital skills, and resilience. These subgroups facilitate the pledges implementation and act as a bridge between the Commission and the stakeholder community.

Then, Miguel Vaz Alexandre presented the first stocktaking report. It highlights a need for more awareness raising on the pathway, specific efforts on skills and digitalisation, as well as the emergence of new trends, for instance, that climate change and energy efficiency are top concerns for stakeholders. Moreover, some Member States are worried about over-tourism. Therefore, these new topics need to be assessed and included in the transition pathway. Furthermore, The T4T expert group will conduct webinars, meet, brainstorm, and try to find solutions.



To make the transition pathways accessible to all, a stakeholder support platform is being planned. A beta version of this support platform will be launched in July and the full version in September or early October. It designed to be a one-stop shop where stakeholders can find a wide range of information and resources on tourism. On the one hand, there will be an information section containing news and updates, providing tourism and service data, and offering information on transition pathways, new legislation and strategies from the European Union and national, local or regional agencies. There will also be a **support and funding section** providing information on funding opportunities for tourism at the national and EU levels, a space where stakeholders can submit their commitments and share best practices, and sections including training courses, learning resources, and events. A discussion forum will be established where stakeholders can join to discuss various topics related to tourism, along with tools like a **commitments map** and an **events calendar**. The central idea is to provide an **easy-to-use and accessible tool** that allows stakeholders in the tourism sector to quickly find the information and resources they need to make informed decisions and improve their practices.

Responding to the question about the **main challenges facing the tourism sector**, Miguel Vaz Alexandre highlighted two significant issues: firstly, labour shortages and the need for better skills; secondly, climate change adaptation, given the increase in the frequency of climate-related events affecting tourism.

3. Insights on the Tourism ecosystem from the ECCP Trend Universe

Alexander Ettinger, Associate Partner, in-manas

Alexander Ettinger provided a detailed overview of the Trend Universe, highlighting its structure and key functionalities. He explained that the platform allows exploration of both **megatrends and macro trends impacting the future of tourism in Europe**. Users can access benchmarks and evaluations conducted by members of the trend universe, providing deep insights into how these trends are evolving and affecting the sector.

Regarding tourism, he emphasized two major megatrends: **artificial intelligence and energy sustainability and climate change**. He showed how to access info on how AI is being used to address labour shortages in tourism, e.g. through interactive avatars. Additionally, he highlighted the development of sustainable infrastructures, such as charging arcs for electric cars at tourist destinations, to meet growing demand. The platform enables users to customize their experience by selecting specific areas of interest, such as accommodation, amusement parks, and gastronomy, and receive updates on innovations and relevant micro trends.

4. Panel debate

The panellists discussed the importance of sustainable tourism practices, digital solutions, and clustering to address these challenges, emphasising the importance of collaboration, networking, and partnerships to ensure the sector's recovery and long-term success.



The speakers agreed that **overregulation, climate change, and over-tourism** are major challenges in the tourism sector. To address this set of problems, clusters must implement the transition pathway designed by the Commission. Benoît Robert explained the cluster's role in maintaining work. Giving the example of his cluster, he mentioned how partnerships between public and private entities in France and abroad aim to reinforce competitiveness and sustainability in tourism destinations, which makes networking an essential point. Also sharing good practices and promoting clusters outside of the community helps in the implementation of the tourism transition pathway.

During the discussion, one of the topics brought up was the difficulties faced by the tourism industry in promoting sustainability, particularly for small and micro businesses. Klaus Ehrlich emphasised that, from his point of view, there is a lack of direct communication and understanding of the realities of the tourism sector. He pointed out that communication between the Commission and the sector often occurs through the European trade organizations, which primarily represent the larger members of the sector due to their better organization. According to him, the main issue in the tourism sector across all countries is that **over 95% of businesses are micro and nano enterprises and they are not organised**. He proposed a solution to have a more institutionalised body of communication that allows businesses of all sizes to speak out and influence legislative proposals, policymaking and guidelines. On this point, Luís Campos agreed with Klaus Ehrlich. He pointed out the need to have an intermediary that can translate and market the things between Brussels and the tourism stakeholders. As a way to overcome these difficulties in communication, Gordon Sillence emphasised the usefulness of the Enterprise Europe Network. He suggested using this network to reach out to those small businesses. Gordon Sillence gave the example of Travel Green Germany, a platform used for making selections of hotels, which have already been certified in the supply chain. He also emphasized the role of his platform, Platform 2030, as a potential intermediary for sustainable tourism initiatives and advocated for revitalizing the Enterprise Europe Network to enhance regional initiatives and support clusters that could facilitate sustainability certifications for SMEs.

Another topic of discussion was the **challenges in sustainability and innovation**. The participants discussed the difficulty of implementing sustainability goals and fostering innovation in the tourism sector to more complex issues such as funding procedures, regulatory barriers, and the need for digital literacy. Luís Campos pointed out that many times, clusters do not know how to access funding at the EU level or don't know what programmes exist, and how can they apply. On the issue of sustainability, Gordon Sillence stated that it is not about creating new structures but about increasing the regional cooperation. He gave the Algarve as an example of good practice. In this area, they have managed to link the food sector with the tourism sector, and this can be seen great examples of people going to restaurants and having organic food and that is promoted as a whole to the world.

The importance of **digital innovation in tourism** was underscored, with examples such as the partnership between Visit Portugal and major tech companies to promote digital literacy and innovation hubs. Luís Campos explained how through a public-private partnership between Visit Portugal and the major banking, insurance, highways, telecom, Nick telecoms, and even Google and Microsoft, they created a digital innovation hub linked with tourism.



The panel discussed the challenges of **labour shortages and social sustainability in tourism**. They proposed solutions such as improving labour conditions and adapting to changing climate impacts to prevent over-tourism and social rejection in popular destinations. Benoît Robert emphasized the need for simplicity; his cluster has created a jobs data platform for this purpose. Klaus Ehrlich highlighted the problem of having fewer young people in the European labour market compared to a decade ago.

The speakers agreed that the main problem that everybody must face is adaptation to the **effects of climate change**. Klaus Ehrlich describes the shift from tourists traditionally seeking out southern European countries in July and August now look towards northern European countries. Additionally, Luís Campos underlines the social sustainability dimension, where there is a great challenge, not only in labour but also in tourism. There must be better labour conditions because otherwise, the scenario in which we find ourselves is social rejection in some areas of Europe that has never been seen before.

The panel concluded with a call for enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, leveraging clusters and digital tools to implement practical solutions for sustainable tourism. They also stressed the importance of bridging the gap between policy goals and operational realities on the ground to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

5. Funding opportunities

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [I3 Instrument: Capacity Building Strand 2b](#): deadline 14 November 2024
2. [I3 Instrument: Strand 1 and 2a](#): deadline 5 December 2024
3. [Expanding Academia-Enterprise Collaborations](#); deadline 19 September 2024
4. [Enterprise Europe Network](#); deadline 19 September 2024
5. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)