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Sustainable and Technological Approach to Rethink Tourism ?

In alignment with the Erasmus+ Programme priorities, particularly those focused on vocational education and training (VET), the S.T.A.R.T. project (Sustainable and Technological Approach to Rethink Tourism) aims to support the personal and professional development of tourism workers in partner countries. The project seeks to guide and inspire these workers towards rethinking their business models in a circular key, exploiting new digital technologies.



The main expected project results include:

Upgraded digital and green skills of tourism operators in the targeted S.T.A.R.T. areas, primarily SMEs and start-ups in the tourism sector.

Increased awareness and understanding among the involved regional ecosystems about the competitive advantage of sustainable and technological approaches in tourism through the S.T.A.R.T. model.

Increased capacity of the S.T.A.R.T. partners to implement and transfer a transnational green and digital upskilling action to support sustainable tourism growth.

Policy Recommendations

1

Tourism is a major economic activity in the European Union, it represents nearly 10% of the EU GDP and accounts for around 23 million jobs in the Union, with wide-ranging impact on economic growth, employment, and social development. The whole tourism ecosystem comprises businesses that work in several sectors, including food and beverage services, on-line information and services providers (tourist offices, digital platforms, travel technology providers), travel agents and tour operators, accommodation suppliers, destination managing organizations, attractions and passenger transport (for example, airlines and airports, trains, and cruises).

2

The tourism sector is undergoing a twin transition, driven by the need for digital transformation and sustainability. Changing consumer behavior, growing environmental concerns, and evolving market demands are pushing businesses to embrace both digitalization and sustainable practices to remain competitive. However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of Europe's tourism industry, face significant challenges in adapting to these shifts. Many SMEs lack the resources, infrastructure, and technical expertise necessary to keep up with the rapid pace of digital transformation and meet sustainability standards. Supporting these businesses is crucial, as their success is essential for the overall resilience and sustainability of the tourism sector. Without targeted support, SMEs risk falling behind, making it imperative for governments and institutions to provide the necessary tools and resources to help them thrive in this evolving landscape.

3

In 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation to stimulate learning for the green transition, including providing learning opportunities in formal, non-formal and informal settings. In the same year, the European Commission launched the policy action of developing a European sustainability competence framework, as part of the European Green Deal initiative. The GreenComp competence framework consists of four interrelated areas, categorizing different sustainability competences, forming a total number of 12. The creation of GreenComp Framework was a big step towards the shift in mindset and behavior of European society.



Promote the twin transition of tourism SMEs through the S.T.A.R.T. training tools

To ensure that learning for environmental sustainability is a systemic feature of policy and practice in the EU, the whole educational system needs to adapt and reinforce this possibility, and Adult Education in general plays an important role in this process.

The transformative learning potential of adult education can be promoted through the inclusion of new, more innovative pedagogies that are relevant to support the development of sustainability competences, developed in further detail in the “S.T.A.R.T. Green Tech Toolkit”.

For what concerns the S.T.A.R.T. project objective of fostering the “Twin transition” of EU tourism sector, this can be achieved:

- 1** By promoting tourism operators' awareness of the social importance of digital innovation combined with sustainability, as well as the benefits that the “twin transition” can guarantee to tourism companies;
- 2** By promoting tourism operators' awareness about examples, best practices and existing tools and procedures which may allow or support the “twin transition” of their companies;
- 3** By providing tourism operators' with financial resources in the form of subsidies or grants, or alternatively to raise their awareness about existing funding lines, with the aim of reimbursing – even partly – the costs related with introducing innovative procedures or tools in their daily work practices to foster the “twin transition” of their companies.



The S.T.A.R.T. education programme and the GREEN TECH TOOLKIT are precisely aimed at sensitize tourism operators about the importance of “Twin transition” by highlighting the benefits, for their company and for the society as a whole, that can result from such transformation. Additionally, the S.T.A.R.T. training outputs includes a set of tools that may support the “twin transition” of tourism companies, as well as guidance and examples on their possible uses. Finally, a presentation of European programs, initiatives and funding lines promoting the sustainability and digitalization of the European tourism sector is included among the S.T.A.R.T. outputs.

To trigger a more thorough and consistent impact in the exploitation of the outputs resulting from the S.T.A.R.T. Project, we advocate for local, regional and national authorities in EU countries to promote their use by tourism companies’ operators and staff even after the end of project lifetime.