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OUTPUT 3.1
MED ECOTOURISM STRATEGY

In Harmony with People and Planet

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TO CARE MED | Output O3.1

MED ECOTOURISM STRATEGY
In Harmony with People and Planet

A strategy-oriented framework for sustainable ecotourism development across Mediterranean destinations

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About the Project

TO CARE MED — Transferring Tourism Carrying Capacity Tool TO CARE about Sustainability of MED ecotourism strategies, plans, products and services — is an Interreg Euro-MED transfer project (2025–2027). It builds on earlier Mediterranean cooperation experiences, particularly ALTERECO, ALTERECO PLUS, SHAPETOURISM, and 2BPARKS, to strengthen sustainable ecotourism governance across the Mediterranean Basin.

The project capitalises on the Tourism Carrying Capacity Limits (TCCL) methodology developed by the Venice School at Ca' Foscari University, extending it from urban and coastal tourism contexts into a broader ecotourism perspective covering protected areas, rural landscapes, islands and ecologically sensitive destinations.

Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

"By 2037, Mediterranean ecotourism destinations thrive in harmony with nature, community and culture, welcoming visitors at the pace and rhythm of life — contributing to the well-being of people, biodiversity and the planet."

What this strategy is

The Joint Mediterranean Ecotourism Strategy is the shared framework through which TO CARE MED connects measurement, interpretation and action. It is the governing logic through which evidence, principles and interventions are integrated into a coherent planning system for Mediterranean ecotourism destinations.

The strategy addresses a clear strategic issue: Mediterranean destinations hold extraordinary ecotourism value — in biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage and community life — but are increasingly exposed to pressures that, if unmanaged, undermine the very foundations of that value. The need is not to stop tourism, but to manage it better: to distribute it more intelligently across seasons and spaces, to develop it with respect for ecological and social thresholds, and to organise it so that communities remain protagonists rather than spectators of development.

Who it is for

This strategy is designed for the planners, investors, destination managers and governance bodies who make strategic decisions about ecotourism in Mediterranean territories. It speaks to municipal authorities and regional agencies, to Destination Management Organisations and Working Groups, to conservation managers and cultural heritage bodies, to ecotourism investors and hospitality operators, and to community-based organisations engaged in sustainable territorial development.

It provides them with a shared vocabulary for diagnosis; a set of strategic principles for decision-making; a practical framework for action; and a methodology for connecting strategy to place through co-designed Destination Action Plans.

Core structure

The strategy is organised in seven chapters, each addressing a distinct layer of the planning system:

- **Chapter 1** diagnoses the Mediterranean ecotourism challenge: the structural pressures, the governance gaps, and the opportunities that make a new strategic approach both necessary and timely.
- **Chapter 2** defines the shared Vision 2037 and the three strategic principles — Harmony, Rhythm and Action — that together provide the direction, the lens and the pathway for change.
- **Chapter 3** introduces "*rhythmanalysis* " as a practical planning instrument: a dynamic reading of destination life across seasons, spaces and intensities, grounded in Lefebvre's theoretical framework and applied to ecotourism governance.

- **Chapter 4** presents the seven Strategic Areas of Action, the operational architecture through which the vision is translated into coordinated intervention across interconnected planning domains.
- **Chapter 5** explains the TCCL framework: its four subsystems, its scope, its limitations and its role as the evidence base for scenario-based planning.
- **Chapter 6** develops the scenario-based planning methodology, combining TCCL subsystem evidence with rhythm analysis to generate planning insights differentiated by season, space and governance capacity.
- **Chapter 7** addresses the transition from strategy to place through Destination Action Plans co-designed with local stakeholders in the TO CARE MED pilot destinations.

Key strategic principles

Three principles anchor all planning decisions in this strategy:

- **Harmony** — the long-term dynamic balance between ecological, social, cultural and economic systems — is the normative horizon. Success is not measured in visitor volumes but in the quality of relationship between destination systems.
- **Rhythm** — the pattern of temporal, spatial and intensity variation in destination life — is the integrating analytical lens. When, where and how intensely visitor presence interacts with ecological and social systems determines outcomes more than aggregate numbers alone.
- **Action** — through seven Strategic Areas of Action, scenario-based planning and place-based co-design — is the practical pathway from vision to implementation.

Strategic Areas of Action

The seven Strategic Areas of Action provide the operational architecture of the strategy. They address, respectively: Nature and Biodiversity Protection; Mobility, Transport and Infrastructure; Regenerative Hospitality; Cultural Heritage, Mediterranean Ways of Life and Traditions; Social Balance in a Liveable Destination; Environmental Resilience and Resource Balance; and Sustainable Prosperity.

These areas are interconnected: no single SAA can deliver harmony in isolation. They must be pursued in combination, with locally adapted priorities defined through the Destination Action Plan process.

> **CORE COMMITMENT**
>
> One shared strategy. Different local pathways. A common commitment to ecotourism in harmony with people and planet.

0 About TO CARE MED

0.1 Project Identity and Mission

TO CARE MED — Transferring Tourism Carrying Capacity Tool developd during the implementation of the ALTERECO and ALTERECO PLIS projects, in order TO CARE about Sustainability of MED ecotourism strategies, plans, products and services — is a Transfer Project within the Interreg Euro-MED Programme 2021–2027, Priority 'Greener MED'. Its specific objective addresses the enhancement of protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure in Mediterranean contexts exposed to tourism pressure.

The project's scope is to transfer, adapt and deploy an established carrying-capacity methodology — the Tourism Carrying Capacity Limits (TCCL) framework — so that it can effectively support sustainable ecotourism governance in Mediterranean pilot destinations. Transfer, in this context, means not simple replication but critical adaptation to diverse territorial conditions, institutional frameworks and governance capacities and Integration with a new prospect assuming the rhythm theory as a reference.

0.2 Project Capitalisation Pathway

TO CARE MED stands on a substantial foundation of prior cooperation. Its capitalisation pathway builds explicitly on:

- ALTERECO and ALTERECO PLUS, which tested governance-centred carrying-capacity approaches in Mediterranean coastal cities as living laboratories, generating evidence on what works and what the political and institutional obstacles are.
- SHAPETOURISM, which contributed observatory-based decision-support methodologies, georeferenced indicators and advanced approaches to understanding tourism flows and impacts.
- 2BPARKS, which reframed protected areas from passive constraints into strategic territorial assets capable of supporting place-based planning, environmental education, cultural interpretation and local economic activation.
- BLUTOURSYSTEM, which strengthened integrated and data-informed perspectives on sustainable tourism in coastal and maritime contexts.

These projects collectively provide the empirical, methodological and governance knowledge base that TO CARE MED systematises and extends. The TCCL framework, the rhythm lens and the Destination Action Plan methodology of this strategy are built on — and accountable to — this accumulated learning.

0.3 Project Partners and Pilot Destinations

The project is led by the University of Ca' Foscari Venice (UNIVE) and involves partners across the Mediterranean. Pilot destinations in the project network provide the testing ground for the strategy's methodology, generating place-based evidence that feeds back into the common framework.

1 Challenges and Opportunities for Mediterranean Ecotourism

1.1 The Mediterranean as a Global Ecotourism Region

The Mediterranean Basin is one of thirty-six globally recognised biodiversity hotspots (Myers et al., 2000). It hosts approximately 25,000 vascular plant species, of which nearly half are endemic. Marine biodiversity is equally exceptional: approximately 7% of all known marine species occur in the Mediterranean, which represents less than 1% of the global ocean surface. Posidonia oceanic meadows — the dominant seagrass of Mediterranean shallow waters — are among the most ecologically important habitats on earth: primary productivity engines, nursery habitats, carbon sequestration reservoirs and coastal protection systems.

Culturally, the Mediterranean concentrates approximately 30% of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, along with an extraordinary range of living Intangible Cultural Heritage: the Mediterranean Diet (UNESCO-listed), artisan ceramic and textile traditions, festival cultures, oral poetry, traditional fishing practices and agricultural knowledge systems accumulated over millennia. This cultural richness is ecologically embedded: traditional land management practices — terraced olive groves, dry-stone walls, agro-sylvopastoral systems — have created landscapes of exceptional biodiversity value that depend on continued human stewardship for their ecological integrity.

> The Mediterranean concentrates both the highest ecotourism potential and some of the most acute tourism pressure of any region on earth. This paradox — extraordinary value and extraordinary vulnerability in the same places — defines the strategic context of this document.

1.2 The Over-Tourism Challenge

Over-tourism — the condition in which visitor demand exceeds the ecological, social and infrastructural carrying capacity of a destination — has become a defining governance challenge of Mediterranean tourism. What is new is not the phenomenon itself, but its speed, scale and geographic spread, driven by sustained demand growth, digital platform proliferation, declining real air travel costs and governance frameworks designed for a slower tourism era.

The evidence from ALTERECO (2018–2022) is instructive. Testing alternative tourism strategies in Mediterranean pilot areas, the project demonstrated that governance-centred, community-engaged approaches can reduce visitor concentration, improve local economic retention and strengthen destination quality. It also documented the political and institutional obstacles: short electoral cycles, private sector resistance, fragmented governance mandates and the absence of shared

planning frameworks capable of connecting tourism management to ecological and social sustainability.

1.3 Structural Planning Failures

Conventional tourism planning tools are structurally inadequate for governing Mediterranean ecotourism because they cannot capture the temporal, spatial and intensity dynamics that determine whether tourism remains compatible with the ecological and social systems of place.

Planning Limitation	**Consequence**	**What the Strategy Addresses**
Annual aggregate visitor statistics	Conceal acute seasonal peaks; destinations appear sustainable annually while in arrhythmia during peak months	TCCL seasonal disaggregation + Rhythm Lens temporal analysis
Sector-based planning	Misses interactions between TCCL subsystem pressure and ecological/social sensitivity	Integrated methodology combining TCCL + sectoral plan integration + rhythm analysis
Fixed threshold carrying capacity	Cannot accommodate dynamic seasonal and spatial variability	TCCL scenario framework with seasonal and spatial disaggregation
Reactive governance	Degradation is cumulative and often irreversible before response	Adaptive management with monitoring-based triggers and small-scale testing
Top-down expert-driven planning	Low stakeholder ownership; fails at implementation	DWG co-design process; community-centred planning methodology

1.4 Climate Change as a Structural Planning Context

Climate change represents a structural challenge that fundamentally alters the planning environment for Mediterranean ecotourism. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2021) projects Mediterranean warming at approximately 1.5 times the global average rate, with summer temperature increases of 2–4°C for Mediterranean coastal zones by mid-century under moderate emissions scenarios.

Direct climate risks to ecotourism assets include thermal stress on Posidonia oceanica meadows at sea surface temperatures above 28°C, increased wildfire frequency, altered precipitation patterns affecting freshwater systems, coastal erosion and sea level rise, and phenological shifts altering wildlife observation opportunities. For visitor demand, climate projections also create opportunities: heat increases at coastal destinations may drive demand towards spring and autumn,

potentially supporting the seasonal redistribution this strategy promotes — if well governed.

1.5 The Strategic Opportunity: From Pressure to Governance

The challenge of Mediterranean ecotourism is simultaneously a governance opportunity. The same destinations that are under pressure are also those with the richest ecological and cultural assets — and the strongest potential visitor motivation for quality, authenticity and responsible engagement. The scientific evidence is clear: when governance is strong, community ownership is genuine, and monitoring and adaptive management are in place, ecotourism generates positive ecological, social and economic outcomes.

The Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community (2022), in its assessment of twenty-two projects and nearly three hundred organisations across six years of Mediterranean cooperation, identified governance quality — not asset quality or investment scale — as the primary determinant of sustainability outcomes. This finding is the strategic mandate for this document.

2 Shared Vision: Mediterranean Ecotourism in Harmony

2.1 Why a Shared Vision Matters

A shared vision is the precondition for coherent transnational action. Without a common horizon, Mediterranean destinations develop ecotourism in fragmented and sometimes contradictory ways, competing rather than cooperating, replicating mistakes rather than learning from each other, and failing to leverage the collective institutional weight needed to influence EU policy and investment frameworks.

The Joint Mediterranean Ecotourism Strategy provides that shared vision. It does not prescribe a uniform model — Mediterranean destinations differ too profoundly in their ecological conditions, cultural identities, governance structures and development challenges for a single model to be appropriate. Rather, it establishes a common direction, a shared language and a common methodology through which diverse destinations can chart their own locally adapted pathways.

2.2 Vision 2037

> "By 2037, Mediterranean ecotourism destinations thrive in harmony with nature, community and culture, welcoming visitors at the pace and rhythm of life — contributing to the well-being of people, biodiversity and the planet."

This vision encodes a specific model of development. It calls for ecotourism that is ecologically grounded — respecting the biological cycles and carrying capacity limits of Mediterranean habitats. It calls for ecotourism that is socially rooted — keeping communities as active protagonists of destination life rather than passive service providers to the tourism economy. It calls for ecotourism that is culturally alive — protecting and transmitting living heritage rather than commodifying it into staged performance. And it calls for ecotourism that is economically fair — generating value that circulates within local economies rather than leaking to external capital.

Harmony, in this context, does not mean stasis or the absence of development. It means dynamic, adaptive balance — a living relationship between tourism and place that requires continuous governance attention to maintain.

2.3 Three Strategic Principles

To make the vision operational, three strategic principles guide all planning decisions. They are mutually dependent: harmony cannot be achieved without understanding rhythm, and rhythm remains analytical insight unless translated into action.

HARMONY	RHYTHM	ACTION
The Direction	The Lens	The Pathway
Dynamic **balance** between ecological, social, cultural and economic systems. Defines what success looks like.	**Dynamic reading of destination life** across seasons, spaces and intensities. Guides when, where and how to act.	Translation into **SAAs, TCCL-informed scenarios and co-designed Destination Action Plans**.

2.4 From Shared Vision to Place-Based Action

The strategy operates at two levels simultaneously. At the Mediterranean level, it provides a shared direction, a common strategic structure and a transnational learning framework. At the destination level, it supports differentiated local pathways. The Destination Action Plan is the bridge between these two levels: it translates the common framework into a realistic and locally owned implementation roadmap. This dual architecture — shared direction, differentiated pathways — is the defining governance design of the strategy. It allows the Mediterranean network to function as a coherent learning community while preserving the territorial specificity that makes place-based ecotourism meaningful.

2.5 Ecotourism as a Development Pathway, not a Market Niche

A critical conceptual commitment in this strategy is the distinction between ecotourism as a market segment and ecotourism as a development pathway. Market segment thinking leads destinations to develop ecotourism products for niche visitors while the broader tourism economy continues on a conventional growth trajectory. Development pathway thinking places ecological integrity, community ownership and regenerative value creation at the centre of destination planning — and repositions all tourism development within that logic.

This strategy adopts the development pathway meaning. Ecotourism strategy is not primarily a product marketing exercise. It is a governance and planning commitment to a particular quality of development — one that recognises the inseparability of ecological health, community well-being and long-term destination resilience.

3 Rhythm as an Interpretive and Planning Lens

3.1 Why Rhythm?

Mediterranean destinations are shaped by rhythms. These rhythms are not metaphors — they are real, observable patterns in the temporal and spatial organisation of destination life: the seasonal flowering of endemic plants, the tidal rhythms of coastal lagoons, the migration flyways of birds, the weekly market cycle, the daily flow of fishing boats at dawn, the annual olive harvest, the festival calendar of a village community. These cyclical rhythms define the ecological and cultural identity of Mediterranean places.

Ecotourism planning requires an approach capable of reading these rhythms. Aggregate annual visitor statistics conceal the temporal concentration that creates pressure. Average spatial distribution maps conceal the hotspot dynamics that generate ecological damage and community displacement. The rhythm lens provides the more adequate analytical framework: it reads destination life across time, space and intensity, revealing where compatibility exists and where conflict is building.

In this strategy, rhythm analysis is used not only as an interpretive lens, but also as an operational support for planning. It helps identify when pressures intensify, where imbalances concentrate, and which responses are most appropriate in time and space.

3.2 Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis: Origins and Core Concepts

The theoretical source for the rhythm-based approach developed in this strategy is Henri Lefebvre's Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life (Lefebvre, 1992/2004). Lefebvre's central insight — that space and time are not neutral containers but are actively produced through the interaction of multiple rhythms — provides the conceptual foundation for understanding destinations as living polyrhythmic systems rather than static tourism infrastructure.

For planning practice, the most powerful contribution of rhythmanalysis is the distinction between linear and cyclical rhythms. Modernity is characterised, Lefebvre argued, by the progressive domination of linear rhythms — timetables, booking systems, production schedules — over cyclical rhythms: seasons, harvest calendars, biological clocks, festival cycles. Ecotourism destinations are precisely the sites where this tension is most visible: the natural cyclical rhythms of Mediterranean life confront the linear rhythms of package tourism, charter flights and online booking platforms.

Rhythmanalytic Concept	Meaning	Ecotourism Planning Application

Eurhythmia	Harmonious synchronisation between coexisting rhythms; condition of health and vitality	The normative target: visitor rhythms, community rhythms and ecological cycles in mutually supportive relationship. Scenario A in the TCCL framework.
Arrhythmia	Discord and pathological misalignment; associated with crisis and breakdown	The over-tourism condition: visitor rhythms overwhelming ecological and community rhythms. Scenario D in the TCCL framework.
Polyrhythmia	Normal condition of any living place: multiple rhythms coexisting at different scales	All Mediterranean destinations exhibit polyrhythmia. The planner's role is to conduct it towards eurhythmia.
Isorhythmia	Different rhythms synchronising at the same frequency	Tourism peaks coinciding with ecological sensitive periods create destructive isorhythmia. Seasonal redistribution seeks constructive alignment.
Resonance	Rhythmic alignment between visitor and place: transformation from observation to participation	The experiential quality that distinguishes quality ecotourism: visitors engaging with destination rhythms rather than imposing travel rhythms.

3.3 The Rhythm Lens: Three Planning Dimensions

The Rhythm Lens — the practical planning instrument derived from rhythmanalysis for application in this strategy — operates across three analytical dimensions that together provide a comprehensive dynamic reading of ecotourism destination conditions.

The Temporal Dimension

How do conditions, pressures and opportunities change over time? Mediterranean seasonality is the primary temporal scale — the annual cycle of ecological, social, economic and visitor rhythms that determines the character and sustainability of ecotourism across the year. But rhythm analysis also operates at shorter temporal scales: the weekly rhythm of market days, the daily rhythm of visitor flow patterns, and the longer-term cycle of multi-year demand trends and climate variability. A destination may be in balanced harmony in spring and in deep arrhythmia in August. Planning must respond to this temporal differentiation, not average across it.

The Spatial Dimension

How are pressures and opportunities distributed across the destination territory? Rhythm analysis reveals spatial concentration patterns that aggregate data conceals: the simultaneous overcrowding of popular sites and under-use of nearby alternatives; the juxtaposition of tourist-saturated zones and community residential areas; the spatial disconnect between the ecological assets that generate ecotourism value and the tourism infrastructure that captures it. Spatial redistribution — guiding visitors from concentrated hotspots to dispersed activation zones — is one of the most powerful rhythm-informed planning interventions available.

The Intensity Dimension

With what energy, velocity and impact does visitor presence interact with the living systems of place? This dimension captures qualitative differences between visitor types and activities that quantitative counts cannot reveal. A small number of motor vehicles on a sensitive coastal track may generate more ecological damage than a much larger number of walkers. Rhythm-informed planning attends to the character and intensity of visitor rhythms, not only their scale.

SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	WINTER
Peak ecological sensitivity: nesting, migration, flowering. Activation opportunity for slow nature tourism.	All subsystems near capacity. Maximum ecological stress. Community rhythm displacement risk highest. Active redistribution required.	Post-peak ecological recovery. Cultural richness: harvest, gastronomy. Shoulder demand — diversification opportunity.	Community vitality season. Winter biodiversity: waterbirds, fungi. Restoration and DAP planning cycle.

3.4 Rhythm, Situated Knowledge and Territorial Meaning

A rhythm-based reading of ecotourism destinations gains depth when it is complemented by forms of situated and interpretive territorial knowledge. The notion of 'places of sense' (Lioce, Boscolo Quaglia, 2013) — developed through the 2BPARKS experience — demonstrates that destinations cannot be understood only through measurable material components. They are also shaped by symbolic meanings, collective memories, perceptions, atmospheres and forms of territorial attachment that influence how places are lived, valued and transformed over time.

This interpretive dimension enriches the rhythm lens: while the TCCL identifies subsystem pressures and scenarios, and rhythm analysis interprets temporal patterns and conflicts, the mapping of meaningful places reveals how landscapes are experienced and why certain territorial balances matter to local communities. In ecotourism destinations where identity, heritage, landscape perception and

environmental education are central to both conservation and visitor experience, this qualitative layer is not supplementary — it is constitutive.

Recent interdisciplinary research in embodied interaction and temporal experience (Gill; Sha Xin Wei; Chang and Sefkatli) further supports this perspective: rhythm is not only a structural condition but also a perceptual and experiential one. Temporal patterns are sensed, interpreted and responded to differently by different individuals and communities, influencing how spaces are used, how pressure is perceived and how conflicts emerge. Designing for rhythm is therefore inseparable from designing for meaningful, respectful and immersive ecotourism experience.

4 Seven Strategic Areas of Action

4.1 The Architecture of the Strategy

The strategy is implemented through seven Strategic Areas of Action (SAAs). These are not isolated themes or independent action lists. They are interconnected planning domains through which the harmony vision is progressively realised across Mediterranean ecotourism destinations. Their purpose is to provide a shared strategic structure within which local actors can define their own priorities, design their own interventions and build their own pathways towards ecotourism in harmony with people and planet.

The SAAs were developed through the combined review of TCCL baseline evidence, rhythm analysis findings, lessons from prior Mediterranean ecotourism cooperation projects and priorities identified through the TO CARE MED co-design process, including the Venice workshop (November 2025) and the Murcia workshop (April 2026). They reflect the full range of ecological, social, cultural, infrastructural and economic conditions that shape ecotourism sustainability in Mediterranean destinations.

For planners and investors, the seven SAAs also provide a practical structure for identifying priorities, sequencing interventions and aligning resources with long-term destination resilience.

INTERCONNECTION PRINCIPLE

The seven SAAs are explicitly interconnected: no single SAA can deliver harmony in isolation. Ecological protection depends on sustainable mobility and economic arrangements that reward stewardship. Regenerative hospitality depends on local food systems and environmental resilience. Cultural vitality depends on social balance. Destination Action Plans must treat the SAAs as an integrated system, not as independent silos.

4.2 The Seven SAAs at a Glance

SAA	Name	Core Focus
SAA 1	Nature & Biodiversity Protection	Active stewardship and regeneration of the ecological foundation of Mediterranean ecotourism
SAA 2	Mobility, Transport & Infrastructure	Reshaping how visitors arrive, move and distribute across destination territory

SAA 3	Regenerative Hospitality	Accommodation and hospitality as active contributors to local ecology, culture and community
SAA 4	Cultural Heritage, MED Way of Life & Traditions	Protecting, transmitting and carefully sharing the living cultural fabric of Mediterranean destinations
SAA 5	Social Balance in a Liveable Destination	Ensuring residents remain protagonists — not backdrop — of ecotourism development
SAA 6	Environmental Resilience & Resource Balance	Managing the environmental resource base that underpins long-term ecotourism viability
SAA 7	Sustainable Prosperity: Economies that Work for Residents	Building equitable, locally rooted, year-round economic vitality

4.3 Detailed SAAs

1 SAA

Nature & Biodiversity Protection

Protecting and regenerating the ecological foundation of Mediterranean ecotourism

TCCL Connection: Attractions subsystem visitor flows at protected natural sites. Peak season throughput approaching or exceeding capacity at coastal and habitat sites. Signals the need for ecological sensitivity protocols.

Rhythm Lens: Ecological systems operate to their own biological clocks — Posidonia growth season, turtle nesting, bird migration, post-breeding recovery. Visitor management must be calibrated to these rhythms. An April birdwatcher respecting seasonal access may be more compatible than an August boat tour in a Posidonia zone, even at equal numbers.

Planning Priorities:

Ecological baseline and TCCL monitoring; Seasonal access zoning (spring nesting, summer marine limits, autumn trail opening, winter waterbird programmes); Core/buffer/visitor zone spatial framework; Active habitat restoration; Wildlife guide certification network; Integration with Natura 2000 and biodiversity monitoring plans.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenarios	Planning Response
Attractions subsystem: visitor flows at protected natural sites	Peak season throughput at sensitive sites approaching or exceeding capacity; spatial concentration at coastal access points; booking system absent at key ecological sites	Integrate: ecological sensitivity calendar from protected area management plans; habitat condition indices from biodiversity monitoring; implement seasonal access zoning; introduce mandatory booking at sensitive sites

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Ecological baseline & TCCL monitoring Species and habitat condition monitoring aligned with TCCL attraction data; phenological calendar for destination-wide seasonal management; citizen science integration	**► Seasonal access zoning** Spring: close nesting sites April–July. Summer: limit daily Posidonia dive sites to TCCL-informed capacity. Autumn: open post-breeding mushroom trails. Winter: waterbird observation programme.	**► Core / buffer / visitor zone framework** Spatial zoning based on habitat sensitivity, linked to TCCL spatial pressure mapping; differentiated access protocols per zone and season
► Active habitat restoration programme Guided Posidonia monitoring dives; coastal dune restoration volunteering; rewilding trail maintenance linked to slow visitor engagement in shoulder season	**► Wildlife guide certification** Professional guide network trained in species protocols, seasonal sensitivity codes and ecological interpretation; guides as real-time ecological monitors	**► Sectoral plan integration** Connect TCCL attraction data to Natura 2000 management plans, biodiversity monitoring programmes, IUCN guidelines and regional climate adaptation strategies

2 SAA	**Mobility, Transport & Infrastructure** Reshaping how visitors arrive, move and distribute themselves — by means, speed and space
	TCCL Connection: Public Transport and Parking subsystem: network load, parking occupancy, modal split. TCCL signals parking at capacity; car dominance; transport saturation on coastal corridors. Integration required from regional transport sustainability plans.
	Rhythm Lens: A visitor arriving by a slow coastal path experiences the destination at the rhythm of place: ecology, landscape and village life at walking pace. Mobility design is ecotourism experience design — and fundamentally reshapes the spatial and temporal distribution of pressure.
	Planning Priorities: Slow mobility trail networks connecting ecotourism sites and villages; Electric and zero-emission transport options; Parking demand management with seasonal road closures; Real-time digital visitor routing; Modal shift incentives; Integration with regional mobility and climate plans.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenario	Planning Response
Public Transport & Parking subsystem: network load; parking occupancy; modal split	TCCL signal: parking at capacity at peak; car dominance; transport network saturation on main coastal corridors; low public transport use share	Integrate: regional transport sustainability plan (emissions, air quality, carbon); design slow mobility supply to redistribute spatial visitor load; set modal shift targets linked to TCCL seasonal pressure data

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Slow mobility trail network Walking and cycling routes connecting ecotourism sites, villages and landscapes; heritage path restoration linking cultural and natural rhythms of the territory across all seasons	**► Electric and zero-emission transport** Solar-electric boat services; e-bike hire calibrated to seasonal demand; electric shuttle linking peripheral parking to destination core during peak season	**► Parking demand management** Summer: peripheral park-and-ride compulsory in coastal zones; dynamic pricing to redistribute temporal demand; seasonal road closures at ecologically sensitive access points
► Real-time digital visitor routing Guidance to less-loaded sites; spatial redistribution tools during peak congestion; push notifications informing visitors of alternative destinations with available capacity	**► Modal shift incentives** Discounts on guided experiences for visitors arriving by public transport or slow mobility; ecotourism package integration with ferry and train connections	**► Sectoral plan integration** Connect TCCL transport data to regional mobility plans, EU sustainable transport frameworks, air quality monitoring and urban low-emission zone plans

3 SAA

Regenerative Hospitality

Accommodation and hospitality as active contributors to local ecology, culture and community vitality

TCCL Connection: Accommodation subsystem: occupancy rates, length of stay, seasonal and geographic distribution. TCCL signals peak July-August concentration vs. near-zero winter; geographic clustering in coastal zones; low local economic multiplier.

Rhythm Lens: Regenerative hospitality businesses are rhythm-synchronised with their territory: menus follow the seasonal food calendar, cultural programming aligns with the local festival cycle, guide programmes respond to the ecological calendar. They decelerate visitors from travel speed to the pace of place.

Planning Priorities:

Regenerative certification standard (local procurement >60%, traditional building, community benefit, seasonal resource management); Local supply chain development; Seasonal demand redistribution with spring/autumn/winter programming; Resource efficiency calibrated to natural cycles; Community benefit mechanism; MAST project alignment.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenario Signal	Planning Response
Accomodation subsystem: occupancy rates; length of stay; seasonal and geographic distribution	TCCL signal: 97% peak July-August occupancy vs. 8% winter; geographic concentration in coastal zones; limited winter opening; low local economic multiplier	Integrate: accommodation sustainability audits (water, energy, waste, local procurement share); housing market impact data; connect TCCL seasonal data to regenerative certification programme design

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Regenerative certification standard

Quality criteria: local procurement >60%; traditional building methods; seasonal resource management; community benefit contribution; ecological interpretation programme for guests

► Local supply chain development

Direct linkages between accommodation businesses and local farmers, fishers, cheesemakers, winemakers, artisans; seasonal procurement calendar aligned with local production rhythms

► Seasonal demand redistribution

Spring nature programmes; autumn harvest and gastronomic immersion; winter cultural depth experiences; incentives for businesses opening year-round

► Resource efficiency programme

Water management calibrated to aquifer recharge seasons; solar energy matching summer demand; composting linked to local agricultural cycles; seasonal resource consumption monitoring

► Community benefit mechanism

Revenue contribution to local conservation fund; community employment priority; traditional craft and food practitioners as hospitality partners and interpreters

► Sectoral plan integration

Connect TCCL hospitality data to regional agro-food strategies, environmental quality standards, housing and land use plans, and rural development programmes

4 SAA

Cultural Heritage, MED Way of Life & Traditions

Protecting, transmitting and carefully sharing the living cultural fabric of Mediterranean destinations

TCCL Connection: Attractions subsystem: visitor throughput at cultural sites and living events. Signals heritage site overcrowding in peak season; authenticity erosion at cultural festivals; commercial pressure on artisan quarters converting to souvenir retail. Integration with UNESCO management plans required.

Rhythm Lens: Culture is deeply rhythmic: the olive harvest, the carnival, the patron saint festival, the almond blossom, the fisherman's dawn departure. Ecotourism that engages visitors with authentic cultural rhythms — joining the harvest at its natural pace, learning a craft from the craftsperson — is both more meaningful and more sustainable than staged performance.

Planning Priorities:

Intangible heritage documentation (community-owned); Community cultural guide programme; Mediterranean Diet as ecotourism asset (food trails, producer visits); Cultural event visitor management with pre-booking; Heritage site stewardship with seasonal limits; Integration with UNESCO ICH registers and cultural landscape frameworks. MedDiet Go and MED-GIAHS alignment.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenario Signal	Planning Response
Attractions subsystem: visitor throughput at cultural sites and living events	TCCL signal: heritage site throughput approaching capacity in peak season; overcrowding at cultural festivals risking authenticity erosion; commercial pressure on artisan quarter converting to souvenir retail	Integrate: UNESCO heritage management plans; intangible cultural heritage register; cultural carrying capacity assessments; community cultural vitality monitoring; visitor behaviour studies at living events

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Intangible heritage documentation

Community-owned documentation of living traditions, seasonal practices, traditional ecological knowledge and artisan skills — foundation for authentic, non-commodified interpretation

► Community cultural guide programme

Certification of local residents as authentic interpreters: olive farmers, fishers, potters, winemakers, bakers, musicians as experience hosts and cultural ambassadors

► Mediterranean Diet as ecotourism asset

Local food trails; producer visits; seasonal cooking experiences; market-to-table connections grounded in territory and seasonal calendar; UNESCO Diet heritage interpretation

► Cultural event visitor management

Pre-booking for limited-capacity community events; visitor behavioural codes; resident priority access to own festivals; TCCL-informed throughput management at heritage sites

► Heritage site stewardship

Seasonal visitor limits linked to TCCL attraction data; heritage ranger networks; no-access periods for conservation; conservation funding from visitor fees directed to local management

► Sectoral plan integration

Connect TCCL attraction data to UNESCO management plans, national intangible heritage registers, cultural landscape frameworks and traditional agricultural heritage designations

5 SAA

Social Balance in a Liveable Destination

Ensuring residents remain protagonists — not backdrop — of Mediterranean ecotourism

TCCL Connection: All four TCCL subsystems generate indirect community impact: transport congestion disrupting mobility, accommodation pressure displacing housing, catering saturation replacing local services, attraction overcrowding excluding residents from public space. Integration with community quality of life monitoring essential.

♪ **Rhythm Lens:** Social balance is a rhythmic management challenge. It requires protecting the times and spaces where community life has priority: residential quiet hours, local market days, fishing community harbour access at dawn, festival eve reserved for community celebration. These are rhythmic interventions — defining temporal boundaries between visitor and resident rhythms.

Planning Priorities:

Resident quality of life monitoring (annual + peak-season pulse); Community-priority space designation; Housing and anti-displacement policy (short-term rental limits, community land trusts); Resident co-governance as DWG members with structural representation; Local service preservation; Social impact assessment integration in all DAP monitoring.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenario Signal	Planning Response
All four TCCL subsystems (indirect community impact)	Transport congestion disrupting resident mobility; Accommodation and hospitality demand displacing housing;	Integrate: community quality of life baseline surveys (annual); housing affordability monitoring; social cohesion indices; resident satisfaction with

	catering saturation replacing local services; attraction overcrowding excluding residents from public space	tourism management; displacement risk assessment from housing market analysis

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Resident quality of life monitoring Annual survey disaggregated by season tracking: public space access, acoustic environment, housing affordability, service availability, cultural vitality, governance participation satisfaction	**► Community-priority space designation** Village squares and gathering spaces: no commercial tourism 7–9am and 9–11pm; resident market days protected; fishing community harbour access designated and enforced	**► Housing and anti-displacement policy** Short-term rental registration and limitation in residential zones; affordable housing targets in tourism-pressure areas; community land trust development; anti-gentrification measures
► Resident co-governance Residents as co-designers of DAPs and DWG members; community veto rights on major tourism infrastructure; structured representation beyond governance and industry actors	**► Local service preservation** Support for locally-oriented food, health and cultural services; commercial rent regulation in village cores; "local life zones" preventing tourist monoculture in residential areas	**► Social impact assessment integration** Connect TCCL demand data to social impact assessment frameworks; community well-being indicators mandatory in all DAP monitoring systems; quarterly resident check-ins during peak season

6 SAA

Environmental Resilience & Resource Balance

Managing the environmental resource base that underpins long-term ecotourism viability

TCCL Connection: Critical gap: TCCL does NOT measure water, energy or waste management performance. Peak season demand surge on environmental resource systems is invisible in TCCL data alone. Integration essential with hydrological assessments, energy system capacity and waste infrastructure plans.

Rhythm Lens: Environmental resources have their own replenishment rhythms: aquifer recharge in autumn-winter rainfall, soil moisture accumulation, Posidonia growth at 1-5cm per year recovering over decades. Tourism consumption must be calibrated to these natural cycles. Destinations exhausting summer groundwater before September are in resource arrhythmia.

Planning Priorities:

Water demand management calibrated to aquifer recharge; Renewable energy transition aligned to summer demand peak; Circular waste systems; Coastal resilience planning with Posidonia protection zones; Climate adaptation integration updating TCCL scenarios annually with climate projections; Integration with water resource plans, EU Green Deal targets and wildfire risk plans.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenario Signal	Planning Response
All TCCL subsystems — resource consumption dimension not captured by TCCL	Critical gap: TCCL does NOT measure water, energy or waste management performance. Peak season demand surge on environmental resource systems is	Integrate: hydrological assessments (aquifer recharge data); energy system capacity from regional plans; waste management infrastructure capacity; connect TCCL seasonal peaks to environmental

	invisible in TCCL data alone.	threshold data as management triggers

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Water demand management Seasonal water consumption monitoring; aquifer recharge protection during winter recharge season; rainwater harvesting for accommodation; seasonal tariff structures; leakage reduction	**► Renewable energy transition** Solar energy for tourism infrastructure matched to summer demand peak; seasonal energy storage; smart grid integration; zero-carbon visitor transport charging infrastructure	**► Circular waste systems** Destination-wide waste reduction programme; composting linked to local agriculture; packaging-free zones in historic cores; post-peak ecological clean-up engaging visitors
► Coastal resilience planning No-anchor Posidonia protection zones; managed coastal retreat; sediment monitoring; access restriction on eroding coastal paths during autumn storm season	**► Climate adaptation integration** TCCL scenarios updated annually with climate projections; wildfire risk protocols integrated into peak season visitor management; heat stress management for summer visitors and ecosystems	**► Sectoral plan integration** Connect all TCCL data to water resource plans, energy plans, coastal zone management plans, climate adaptation strategies, wildfire risk plans and EU Green Deal targets

7 SAA

Sustainable Prosperity: Economies that Work for Residents

Building equitable, locally rooted, year-round economic vitality

TCCL Connection: Catering and Accommodation subsystems: high seasonal concentration of revenue; low local procurement; winter closure of majority of businesses; economic leakage to external suppliers. Integration with local economic baseline and supply chain analysis required.

♪ **Rhythm Lens:** Sustainable local economies have their own productive rhythms: the agricultural year, the fishing calendar, the artisan production cycle, the weekly market. Economic eurhythmia means tourism value chains synchronised with local rhythms — not external capital extracting peak-season profit and leaving communities fragile for nine months.

Planning Priorities:

Local value chain development (target: 50% local procurement by year 3, 70% by year 6); Year-round economic activation across all four seasons; Cooperative and community enterprise models; Stewardship-linked revenue mechanisms (visitor fees to conservation funds); Skills and capacity building for local guide networks, regenerative hospitality and cultural interpretation.

TCCL Connection

TCCL Subsystem	Scenario Signal	Planning Response
Catering & Accomodation subsystems (economic dimension of TCCL capacity data)	TCCL signal: high seasonal concentration of catering and hospitality revenue; low local procurement; winter closure of majority of businesses; economic leakage to external suppliers	Integrate: local economic baseline (employment, income, supply chain sourcing); seasonal business census; local multiplier analysis; connect TCCL seasonal peaks to economic diversification and year-round activation strategy

Key Planning Priorities and Rhythm-Based Action Examples

► Local value chain development

Direct linkages between tourism businesses and local farmers, fishers, artisans, cultural producers; destination-wide procurement target: 50% local by year 3, 70% by year 6

► Year-round economic activation

Spring nature tourism; autumn harvest and gastronomic tourism; winter cultural and birdwatching tourism; ecotourism calendar designed to distribute economic activity across all four seasons

► Cooperative and community enterprise

Community guide cooperatives; local ecotourism cluster development; social enterprise models for cultural interpretation; community accommodation network development

► Stewardship-linked revenue mechanisms

Visitor fee mechanisms directed to conservation and community benefit funds; ecotourism certification premiums supporting local guide employment; monitoring contracts to local guide networks

► Skills and capacity building

Local guide certification programme; regenerative hospitality management training; cultural interpreter qualification; green business skills for SME operators

► Sectoral plan integration

Connect TCCL economic data to regional development programmes, LEADER rural development funds, agro-food strategies, fisheries plans and EU ERDF investment priorities

5 TCCL Analysis: Understanding Tourism Subsystems

5.1 The Venice School and the Evolution of Carrying Capacity

The intellectual heritage of the TCCL framework traces directly to the Venice School at the University of Ca' Foscari Venice. Wagar (1964) provided the foundational application of carrying capacity to recreational settings. The Limits of Acceptable Change framework (Stankey et al., 1985) shifted the conceptual focus from a fixed visitor number to a condition-based adaptive management system — asking not 'how many visitors?' but 'what conditions are acceptable, and what management responses are triggered when indicators approach thresholds?' This remains the most influential methodological framework in the carrying-capacity tradition.

The Venice School translated and advanced this tradition in the Mediterranean context., Camatti, Giove and van der Borg (2020) applied a fuzzy linear programming methodology to Venice, generating scenario ranges rather than single threshold numbers and integrating multiple subsystems into a unified model. Camatti, Bertocchi, Caric and van der Borg (2020/2021) extended this to Dubrovnik, demonstrating the technical feasibility of dynamic carrying capacity management and the governance prerequisites for its effective implementation: integrated data systems, multi-stakeholder coordination and political commitment to active visitor management.

5.2 TCCL Architecture: Four Subsystems

The TCCL framework assesses the functional capacity and utilisation of four key tourism subsystems. For each subsystem, it defines capacity indicators, establishes baseline condition assessments, identifies threshold conditions and constructs scenario trajectories.

Subsystem	Key Capacity Indicators	Sustainability Integration Gap
Public Transport & Parking	Transport network load factor; peak parking occupancy; modal split; average visitor access time	TCCL measures functional transport capacity — NOT carbon emissions, air quality, noise or transport sustainability footprint. Integration required from transport and climate plans.
Accommodation	Bed occupancy rate by season; average length of stay; accommodation	TCCL measures utilisation — NOT water/energy consumption, landscape impact, housing market

	supply vs. peak demand; spatial distribution	effects or local procurement share. Integration required from sustainability audits and housing plans.
Catering & Restaurants	Cover turnover by season and zone; catering supply vs. visitor demand; local vs. imported food supply share	TCCL measures throughput capacity — NOT food system sustainability, waste, local sourcing or supply chain footprint. Integration required from agro-food territorial plans.
Attractions	Visitor flows by season; queue and waiting times at peak; spatial distribution of visits; visitor satisfaction	TCCL measures visitor throughput — NOT ecological carrying capacity of habitats, heritage integrity, wildlife disturbance or community social impact. Integration required from environmental and heritage management plans.

SCOPE BOUNDARY

The TCCL tool is a tourism subsystem capacity monitor, not an environmental sustainability calculator. Its strategic value lies in identifying pressure patterns and bottlenecks across four tourism subsystems. Ecological, social, cultural and resource sustainability dimensions must be integrated through connecting TCCL evidence to territory-specific sectoral plans — and this integration is the primary methodological challenge that this strategy addresses.

5.3 The Integration Challenge: Bridging TCCL and Sustainability

The central methodological challenge of this strategy is bridging the gap between what TCCL measures (tourism subsystem capacity utilisation) and what ecotourism sustainability requires (harmony with ecological, social, cultural and environmental systems). Closing this gap requires a three-layer analytical framework.

Layer 1 — TCCL Evidence

Tourism subsystem capacity data disaggregated by season and spatial zone, providing the primary evidence base about where and when pressure on tourism infrastructure is highest.

Layer 2 — Sectoral Plan Integration

Sustainability data from the territory-specific sectoral plans governing ecological, social, cultural and environmental systems: protected area management plans, biodiversity monitoring programmes, water resource management plans, climate adaptation strategies, cultural heritage management plans, social impact assessments, local economic development strategies. These plans provide the ecological sensitivity calendars, habitat condition assessments, species threshold data, cultural vitality indices and resource capacity data that transform TCCL subsystem signals into sustainability planning insights.

Layer 3 — Rhythm Analysis

The integrating interpretive framework (developed in Chapter 3) connecting TCCL temporal and spatial data to the living dynamics of destination systems. Rhythm analysis asks not only 'how much pressure?' but 'when, where and with what intensity, relative to the ecological and social sensitivity of place?'

Integration Layer	What It Addresses	Key Data Sources	SAA Connections
TCCL subsystem assessment	Functional capacity of transport, accommodation, catering and attractions	TCCL tool; visitor statistics; operator data; transport surveys	All SAAs — provides pressure baseline
Environmental sustainability integration	Ecological thresholds, habitat sensitivity, biodiversity impacts, resource limits	Protected area plans; biodiversity monitoring; water resource and climate adaptation plans	SAA 1, SAA 6
Social sustainability integration	Community quality of life, cultural continuity, social cohesion, resident well-being	Community surveys; housing market data; cultural heritage vitality monitoring	SAA 4, SAA 5
Economic sustainability integration	Local value creation, benefit distribution, seasonal economic resilience	Local economic data; supply chain analyses; seasonal business surveys	SAA 3, SAA 7
Rhythm analysis	Temporal and spatial dynamics connecting all dimensions to living rhythms of place	Seasonal ecological data; visitor flow disaggregation; community calendar	All SAAs — integrating interpretive framework

6 Scenario-Based Planning: Combining Rhythm and TCCL

6.1 Why Scenario-Based Planning?

Mediterranean ecotourism destinations operate under conditions of structural uncertainty: climate variability, market dynamics, demographic change, geopolitical instability and ecological system change create contexts in which single-point forecasts are inadequate. Scenario-based planning — the structured exploration of multiple plausible futures rather than the prediction of a single expected outcome — provides a more robust basis for strategic governance.

Within the TO CARE MED framework, TCCL scenarios serve three functions: diagnostic (mapping current conditions and identifying pressure points); prospective (exploring how conditions might evolve under different demand and governance assumptions); and decision-support (enabling stress-testing of strategies against multiple possible futures before committing to full-scale investment).

6.2 The TCCL Scenario Matrix

The TCCL scenario matrix combines two dimensions: the level of tourism demand (from low-moderate to high) and the quality of governance (from weak to strong). These two dimensions generate four scenario conditions, each with distinct planning implications.

A — BALANCED HARMONY Low-moderate demand + Strong governance Eurhythmic condition. The target state of the strategy. Visitor, community and ecological rhythms in dynamic balance. Governance focus: maintain quality, invest in monitoring and adaptive capacity.	**B — MANAGED PRESSURE** High demand + Strong governance Stressed but governed. Active redistribution required. Governance focus: real-time management, strict site limits, seasonal diversification, community protection protocols.
C — FRAGILE EQUILIBRIUM Moderate demand + Weak governance	**D — CRISIS / ARRHYTHMIA** High demand + Weak governance Over-tourism emergency. Immediate intervention required. Governance

Creeping degradation risk. Governance investment urgent. Governance focus: DWG establishment, monitoring system launch, community engagement, first DAP co-design.	focus: emergency visitor limits, community protection, damage assessment, political mandate for governance reform.

6.3 Seasonal Scenario Application

The TCCL scenario matrix is applied not once but four times — once for each primary seasonal condition. A destination may be in Scenario A (Balanced Harmony) in its Accommodation subsystem during winter and simultaneously in Scenario B or D at its coastal attractions subsystem during peak August. Planning responses must be differentiated accordingly.

Season	TCCL Typical Conditions	Rhythm Diagnosis	Priority Planning Response
Spring (Mar–May)	Moderate demand; attractions subsystem at ecological sensitivity threshold at protected sites; mobility below capacity	High ecological sensitivity: nesting, migration, flowering. Visitor-ecology arrhythmia risk at specific sites	Spring ecological protocols; restrict nesting site access; activate interpreted slow trail offer; DWG monitoring launch
Peak Summer (Jun–Aug)	All four subsystems at or near capacity simultaneously; transport and attractions most critical	Maximum arrhythmia: visitor rhythms overwhelming ecological and community rhythms. Community displacement risk highest	Strict site limits; mandatory booking; real-time redistribution; community quiet zone enforcement; emergency DWG protocols if thresholds exceeded
Autumn (Sep–Oct)	Post-peak declining demand; ecological recovery; cultural season richness	Eurhythmic opportunity: harvest, gastronomy, post-breeding wildlife. Ecological recovery	Activate autumn cultural and nature offer; monitor ecological recovery; harvest experience programme;

		from summer stress	stakeholder governance review
Winter (Nov–Feb)	Minimal visitor pressure; community vitality season; ecological restoration	Community rhythm recovery; winter ecological richness (waterbirds, fungi). Low arrhythmia risk	Community life protection; habitat maintenance and restoration; niche market development; annual DAP review and update

6.4 Sectoral Plan Integration Framework

The full value of the TCCL scenario framework is realised only when TCCL subsystem evidence is systematically integrated with the sectoral plans that provide the sustainability evidence base at destination level. The following framework structures this integration across planning domains and SAA connections.

Sectoral Plan Type	**Sustainability Dimension Provided**	**SAA Connection**	**Integration Mechanism**
Protected area management / biodiversity monitoring	Ecological sensitivity calendar; habitat condition; species thresholds; visitor impact data	SAA 1, SAA 6	Joint planning committee; shared monitoring data; seasonal protocol coordination
Regional transport sustainability plan	Modal split; emissions; air quality; transport carbon footprint	SAA 2	Data sharing agreement; modal shift targets in DAP; joint mobility infrastructure planning
Local agro-food territorial strategy	Food production calendar; supply chain local content; traditional food landscape	SAA 3, SAA 4, SAA 7	Local procurement standards; chef-producer network; seasonal menu co-design
Cultural heritage management / UNESCO ICH register	Heritage integrity; living heritage vitality; community ownership of heritage	SAA 4, SAA 5	Heritage authority participation in DWG; visitor management protocols at living cultural sites
Social impact assessment /	Community quality of life; housing affordability;	SAA 5	Annual resident survey; housing monitoring;

housing market analysis	displacement risk; social cohesion		resident representation in DWG
Water resource / climate adaptation / coastal zone plan	Water availability; aquifer recharge; coastal erosion; climate projections; wildfire risk	SAA 6	Resource management triggers linked to TCCL seasonal peaks; climate scenarios in TCCL modelling
Regional economic / rural development plan	Employment; income distribution; supply chain structure; seasonal economic patterns	SAA 7	Local multiplier monitoring; LEADER fund alignment; cooperative enterprise support

6.5 Testing at Small Scale Before Investing at Large Scale

One of the most important methodological commitments of this strategy is the principle that adaptive planning requires systematic testing at small scale before investing in full-scale implementation. In complex Mediterranean destination systems — where ecological, social, cultural and governance dimensions interact across seasonal and spatial variability — management interventions should be treated as structured experiments that generate evidence for subsequent decisions.

The ALTER ECO project demonstrated this principle in practice: testing alternative tourism strategies in six Mediterranean cities as living laboratories generated evidence about what works in different contexts before attempting replication or scaling. Rigorous test design requires: a clearly specified intervention; pre-specified success indicators; a baseline measurement before the intervention; and a committed monitoring protocol. When these four elements are in place, test evidence can be evaluated against explicit criteria and made transferable across the Mediterranean network.

> **ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLE**
>
> Testing is not a bureaucratic planning step. It is a planning culture: the commitment to learning from small-scale evidence before investing at large scale. Evidence from testing builds stakeholder confidence, reduces implementation risk and generates the specific local knowledge that makes larger-scale implementation effective.

7 Destination Action Plans: From Strategy to Place

7.1 The Purpose of the Destination Action Plan

The Destination Action Plan (DAP) is the bridge between the joint Mediterranean strategy and local implementation. It translates a shared framework into a place-based, governance-endorsed and community-owned roadmap for ecotourism development in a specific destination. The DAP is not a technical annex to the strategy. It is the primary implementation instrument through which the strategy acquires territorial meaning and governance traction.

DAPs are co-designed through the Destination Working Group (DWG) process — a structured multi-stakeholder governance methodology that activates existing territorial actors within the shared strategic framework. The DWG is not a consultation theatre. It is a governance community of practice that builds the three prerequisites for effective ecotourism governance identified by Camatti, Smith and van der Borg (2021): knowledge, governance capacity and political will.

In practical terms, the DAP is the point where shared strategy becomes actionable local governance: a tool for prioritising, coordinating, testing and financing ecotourism transitions at destination level.

7.2 Place-Based Rationale

Mediterranean ecotourism destinations differ profoundly in their ecological sensitivity, tourism intensity, settlement structure, social composition, cultural identity, infrastructure conditions, governance capacity and development opportunities. A single implementation model cannot be appropriate for all. The DAP process is designed to produce differentiated local pathways within a coherent common framework.

This place-based rationale has four dimensions. First, ecological specificity: the biodiversity, habitats and ecological rhythms of each destination determine which SAAs are most critical and what seasonal management protocols are required. Second, cultural specificity: living heritage, community identity and social practices shape what kinds of ecotourism are compatible with community well-being and what kinds are not. Third, governance specificity: existing institutional structures, political will, and governance capacity determine what is implementable in the short term and what requires longer-term capacity building. Fourth, economic specificity: the local supply chain structure, employment patterns and existing economic diversification determine the realistic pathways for sustainable prosperity.

7.3 DWG Structure and Workshop Sequence

The DWG is a multi-stakeholder governance body whose composition must reflect the full complexity of destination systems. It includes governance authorities, community representatives (resident associations, cultural organisations, traditional

producer communities, youth groups), economic actors (accommodation operators, guide networks, food producers, artisans, transport providers), civil society (environmental NGOs, heritage associations, research institutions) and visitor representatives where feasible.

The DAP co-design process follows a structured six-workshop sequence. Each workshop builds on the previous one, progressively moving from shared understanding of evidence and framework to vision setting, action design and governance validation.

Workshop	**Purpose**	**Key Outputs**
W1: TCCL + Rhythm Orientation	Build shared framework understanding across DWG members with diverse backgrounds; co-map the local seasonal calendar	Shared analytical vocabulary; local rhythm calendar; initial vulnerability map
W2: Baseline Evidence Review	Validate TCCL findings with local knowledge; integrate sustainability evidence from sectoral plans; identify gaps	Validated evidence base; integrated vulnerability assessment; sustainability integration priorities by SAA
W3: Vision & SAA Priority Setting	Co-define local vision within Vision 2037 framework; select and prioritise SAAs using evidence-grounded criteria	Local vision statement; priority SAA framework; strategic objectives for each priority SAA
W4: Action Design	Co-design specific rhythm-calibrated actions for each priority SAA; assess feasibility; map responsibilities	Action portfolio; rhythmically calibrated specifications; responsibility matrix; testing priorities
W5: Plan Validation	Broad community and governance validation of draft DAP; build legitimacy and community ownership	Endorsed DAP; governance commitments; community ownership; communication plan
W6: Testing Protocol	Design systematic pilots for novel or uncertain interventions before full-scale investment	Testing protocols; monitoring framework; learning templates; go/no-go criteria

7.4 Implementation Barriers and Strategic Responses

The transition from plan to action encounters governance barriers that even a high-quality co-design process cannot fully anticipate. Understanding and designing

mitigation strategies for these barriers is an essential element of DWG governance capacity.

Barrier	Manifestation	Strategic Response
Governance authority gap	Multiple agencies with overlapping mandates; no single authority can enforce across all domains	DWG as coordination mechanism; explicit multi-agency commitments; shared monitoring dashboard; annual joint accountability review
Private sector resistance	Operators perceive visitor management as economic threat; resist booking systems or site limits	Demonstrate economic benefits of quality over volume; higher per-visit spend, lower degradation costs; build progressive operator coalition
Short political cycles	Elected officials face re-election pressure to prioritise short-term growth over long-term sustainability	Multi-year DAP governance commitments spanning electoral cycles; community accountability mechanisms; sustainability performance in public reporting
Monitoring capacity constraints	Insufficient human or financial resources to maintain agreed monitoring systems	Design monitoring sustainable with available resources; integrate citizen science; link to transnational network monitoring support
Community fatigue	Residents disengage when implementation is slow or governance commitments are not honoured	Early visible wins from testing; transparent progress reporting; governance commitments with public accountability; community benefit fund as tangible early outcome

7.5 From Local Testing to Mediterranean Learning

The commitment to systematic testing generates evidence whose value is multiplied when shared across the Mediterranean network. A booking system test at a Greek island marine protected area generates evidence directly relevant to coastal destinations across the Mediterranean. A community quiet zone pilot in a Sicilian village generates evidence relevant to social balance challenges in hundreds of Mediterranean towns.

Systematic learning documentation — testing protocol, baseline data, monitoring results, lessons learned, adaptation decisions, scale-up outcomes — should be produced for all testing activities and made publicly available, tagged by SAA, destination type, ecological context and governance context. Cross-destination learning exchanges enable tacit knowledge that documentation alone cannot

capture. This accumulating evidence base is the long-term intellectual legacy of the strategy: a growing body of empirical knowledge about what works for Mediterranean ecotourism in harmony with people and planet.

7.6 Governance for Harmony: Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Governance is not one dimension among many in this strategy: it is the enabling condition for all other dimensions. The evidence accumulated across the Interreg MED Sustainable Tourism Community consistently identifies governance quality as the primary determinant of ecotourism sustainability outcomes in Mediterranean destinations. Ecological richness, cultural heritage depth, financial resources and visitor demand are all necessary but not sufficient. Governance — the quality of coordination, accountability, adaptive learning and community engagement — is the factor that determines whether potential is realised.

Monitoring Domain	Core Indicator	Data Source	Review Cycle
TCCL: Transport & Parking	Modal split (%); peak parking occupancy; public transport load factor	Mobility surveys; operator data; count stations	Monthly (peak); quarterly (other)
TCCL: Accommodation	Occupancy rate by month; average length of stay; spatial distribution	Accommodation register; operator survey	Monthly
TCCL: Catering	Cover turnover; local procurement share; food waste per season	Operator survey; supply chain audit	Seasonal
TCCL: Attractions	Visitor flows at key sites by season; satisfaction index	Counting systems; visitor survey; operator data	Monthly (peak); seasonal
Ecological integrity	Habitat condition index; sensitive species status; disturbance incident rate	Environmental monitoring; protected area authority	Seasonal — tied to ecological calendar
Community quality of life	Resident satisfaction; cultural vitality;	Annual resident survey; quarterly	Annual; quarterly in peak

	housing affordability; public space access	pulse in peak season	
Economic sustainability	Local procurement share; seasonal revenue distribution; permanent employment share	Economic survey; operator data; employment register	Annual; seasonal business census
Governance effectiveness	DWG active participation; monitoring data use in decisions; DAP milestone progress	Process documentation; stakeholder survey	Annual governance review

Conclusions: Towards Mediterranean Ecotourism in Harmony

"By 2037, Mediterranean ecotourism destinations thrive in harmony with nature, community and culture, welcoming visitors at the pace and rhythm of life — contributing to the well-being of people, biodiversity and the planet."

The Mediterranean Ecotourism Strategy builds on a clear and coherent scientific and planning logic. TCCL provides the evidence base about tourism subsystem capacity conditions across the four operational domains of Mediterranean ecotourism. Rhythm analysis integrates this evidence with ecological, social and cultural sustainability dimensions, asking when, where and with what intensity visitor presence interacts with the living systems of place. Vision 2037 and the seven Strategic Areas of Action provide the normative horizon and planning structure. Destination Working Groups co-design locally adapted Action Plans. Small-scale testing generates the evidence base for confident implementation at scale. And monitoring-based adaptive management ensures the strategy remains effective in the face of change and uncertainty.

TCCL integration is the primary methodological challenge — The TCCL tool is powerful for identifying subsystem capacity pressure — but its strategic value depends entirely on integration with ecological, social and cultural sustainability data from territory-specific sectoral plans.

Rhythm analysis provides the integrating lens — Rhythmanalysis reveals temporal and spatial dimensions of carrying capacity that aggregate indicators conceal, and guides planning responses calibrated to the specific conditions of place in time.

Governance capacity is the primary determinant of outcomes — Investing in Destination Working Group quality, monitoring systems and adaptive management is the highest-return investment the strategy recommends. Asset richness without governance is insufficient.

Community ownership is both ethical and practical — Destinations where residents are genuine co-designers of ecotourism development consistently achieve better ecological, social and economic outcomes.

Testing at small scale enables ambition at large scale — Systematic evidence from structured pilots builds stakeholder confidence, reduces implementation risk and generates the specific local knowledge that makes large-scale implementation effective.

The seven SAAs are the correct architecture — All seven are required. None can be omitted without undermining the conditions for harmony. They must be pursued in combination, with locally adapted priorities.

> One shared strategy. Different local pathways. A common commitment to ecotourism in harmony with people and planet.

Annex 1 — Destination Action Plan Template

This template provides a common structure for preparing the Destination Action Plan (DAP) within the TO CARE MED Joint Mediterranean Ecotourism Strategy. It is designed for concise and operational use. Destination Action Plans should not exceed 25 pages excluding annexes. They should synthesise key evidence, define priorities and organise actions — not reproduce existing plans or technical studies.

> **EDITORIAL GUIDANCE**
>
> As a general rule: remain within 25 pages maximum (excluding annexes). Focus on strategic choices and implementation. Connect with existing plans without repeating them. Reserve the largest share of the document for specific goals, actions and the implementation roadmap.

Introduction (Max. 1 page)

Briefly explain: the purpose of the DAP; its link with the TO CARE MED Joint Mediterranean Ecotourism Strategy; its territorial scope and time horizon.

SESSION 1 Destination Profile

1.1 Destination Features (Max. 3 pages)

Key territorial and environmental features; tourism profile and main pressures; socio-economic and community characteristics; relevant plans and policies already in place; key challenges and opportunities. Reference existing plans — do not summarise them.

1.2 Rhythm Lens Reading the Context (Max. 2 pages)

Summary of the rhythm-based reading of the destination: main seasonal, spatial and daily patterns; rhythm conflicts, imbalances and pressure points; main implications for planning and action.

1.3 TCCL Baseline and Reaccommodation (Max. 3 pages)

Summary of the baseline situation; main critical subsystems and pressure points; most relevant scenarios explored; strategic implications for the destination. Synthesise TCCL evidence — do not reproduce the full technical assessment.

SESSION 2 VISION AND ANTICIPATED CHANGES

2.1 VISION

Define specific VISION for Destination in Harmony

2.2 Strategic Direction for the Destination (Max. 1.5 pages)

Place-based vision aligned with Vision 2037; strategic positioning of the destination; priority Strategic Areas of Action and the rationale for selecting them.

2.3 Specific Goals, Action Matrix (Max. 10–15 pages)

Core section. Actions organised by SAA. Not all SAAs need equal attention — focus on most relevant areas. Actions should be concise and operational. Include: action title, short description, lead actor, timeframe, expected result, TCCL connection, rhythm lens, link with existing plans, possible funding source.

SESSION 3 GOVERNANCE, QUALITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

3.1 Governance and Stakeholder Roles (Max. 1.5 pages)

Role of the DWG; key stakeholders involved; responsibilities and contributions; how participation and communication will continue over time.

3.3 Risk Management (Max. 1.5 pages)

Identify risks, and estimate the likelihood of the Risk occurrence and the impact on the goals and on the vision; define strategy to mnaage the risk

3.3 Quality Approach to implementation (Max. 1 page)

How implementation will be monitored; a limited set of key indicators; how and when the DAP will be reviewed and updated to ensure quality of the outcomes and results

SESSION 4 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

4.1 Roadmap for Implementation (Max. 2 pages)

Phasing of actions in short, medium and long term; priority actions and quick wins;; sequence from testing to scaling up.

4.2 Actions Sheets: Resources and Conditions for Implementation (Max. 1 pages per Action)

Per each action , or for the priority action (in this case explain prioritization) Existing resources and capacities; main gaps; possible funding sources; enabling conditions....

SESSION 5 Perspective beyond the project

5.1 Impact Pathways (Max. 1.5 page)

5.2 Sustainability uptake and mainstream of results (Max. 1.5 page)

5.3 Short closing section (Max. 0.5 page)

Reaffirming the long-term direction, strategic priorities and role of the DAP as a local roadmap for ecotourism in harmony with people and planet.

Annexes to the DAP

No page limit. Possible annexes may include: stakeholder list; workshop reports; maps; TCCL summary tables; scenario tables; extended action fiches; monitoring dashboard; references.

Annex 2 — Glossary of Key Terms

Arrhythmia

Discord or pathological misalignment between different rhythms in a destination. The over-tourism condition as diagnosed through the rhythm lens: visitor rhythms overwhelming community and ecological rhythms simultaneously.

Carrying Capacity

The maximum level of use that a natural or social system can sustain while maintaining acceptable quality of conditions. In this strategy, understood dynamically: as a condition varying by season, spatial zone and management quality, not as a fixed number.

Destination Action Plan (DAP)

A locally owned, evidence-based and governance-endorsed planning document that translates the joint strategy into specific, place-based and monitored interventions for a particular Mediterranean ecotourism destination. Co-designed through the DWG process.

Destination Working Group (DWG)

The multi-stakeholder governance body through which the joint strategy is translated into Destination Action Plans. Includes governance authorities, community representatives, economic actors, civil society and research institutions.

Ecotourism

Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education (TIES, 1990; UN Tourism, 2002). In this strategy: a development pathway, not merely a market segment.

Eurhythmia

Harmonious synchronisation between multiple coexisting rhythms in a destination. Visitor rhythms, community social rhythms and ecological cycles in mutually supportive relationship. The normative target of Vision 2037.

Harmony

The overarching strategic vision: a dynamic condition in which ecological, social, cultural and economic systems coexist in mutually supportive relationship. Not stasis, but living, adaptive balance requiring continuous governance attention.

Polyrhythmia

The coexistence of multiple rhythms at different scales and frequencies within any living destination. The planner's role is to conduct this polyrhythmia towards eurhythmia — not to simplify or override it.

Resonance

The experience of rhythmic alignment between visitor and place: the transformation of ecotourism from observation to participation, from consumption to engagement. The experiential quality that distinguishes high-value ecotourism.

Rhythm Lens

The practical planning instrument derived from Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, developed in this strategy for application in Mediterranean ecotourism destinations. Analyses temporal, spatial and intensity dimensions of visitor-place interaction.

Rhythmanalysis

The theoretical and methodological framework developed by Henri Lefebvre (1992/2004) for understanding social and spatial life through the analysis of rhythms: their interaction, conflict and potential for harmony.

Scenario-based planning

A planning methodology exploring multiple plausible futures rather than predicting a single expected outcome. Applied in this strategy through the TCCL scenario matrix across four seasonal conditions and four governance-demand combinations.

Strategic Area of Action (SAA)

One of the seven interconnected domains of coordinated planning and management intervention through which the harmony vision is progressively realised. The seven SAAs are: (1) Nature and Biodiversity; (2) Mobility and Transport; (3) Regenerative Hospitality; (4) Cultural Heritage; (5) Social Balance; (6) Environmental Resilience; (7) Sustainable Prosperity.

TCCL (Tourism Carrying Capacity Limits)

A multi-subsystem dynamic assessment framework, developed within TO CARE MED, for evaluating the functional capacity of four tourism subsystems. A tourism capacity monitor — not an environmental sustainability calculator.

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