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Tourism for Tomorrow
Data-Driven Destination Hub

April 2026

THE 40 DESTINATIONS ONE-YEAR JOURNEY:

*How D3HUB is piloting the European
Competence Centre to support
Destinations in Data Management*





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Executive Summary

This publication is produced in the context of the European co-funded project D3HUB – Data-Driven-Destinations Hub, gathering eight European partners committed to designing, testing, and paving the way for the future European Competence Centre to support Destinations in Data Management, requested by the European Commission.

The three sections describe the journey of the 40 destinations that have been piloting this concept by validating assumptions, co-designing the services that the future centre should offer and building a community of practitioners committed to integrating the culture of systematic measurement for sustainability development purposes.

Indeed, European destinations are facing growing complexity as they strive to balance economic benefits from tourism with environmental sustainability, residents' well-being, and rapidly evolving digital landscapes. In this context, data has become a critical asset for informed and resilient destination management, yet many organisations still struggle to access and apply it effectively.

Through a structured methodology combining expert knowledge, peer learning, practical tools, and tailored mentoring, D3HUB participating destinations developed concrete, data-driven action plans addressing key challenges such as visitor flow management, community balance, climate adaptation, and sustainable growth in emerging areas. The pilot demonstrates that building data capabilities, fostering collaboration, and applying shared sustainability indicators can significantly strengthen decision-making processes for sustainable destination development. As the initiative evolves into a long-term support structure, it paves the way for smarter, greener, and more resilient tourism across Europe.



Context

Across Europe, destination management and marketing organisations are navigating a period of profound change. Tourism remains a vital driver of economic activity, employment, and regional identity, yet the conditions under which destination authorities operate are becoming more complex every year. Local authorities and destination managers must reconcile the expectations of residents and visitors, respond to environmental pressures, adapt to climate change, and make use of digital technologies that are transforming how tourism is planned, monitored, and managed.

In this evolving context, the ability to make informed, evidence-based decisions is no longer optional. Data has become a key resource for destinations that want to remain competitive, sustainable, and resilient. However, many organisations still face difficulties in accessing relevant data, interpreting it, or translating it into concrete actions. Recognising this gap, on behalf of the European Commission, the EU co-funded project D3HUB – Data-Driven-Destinations Hub - launched a pilot initiative to support destinations in strengthening their data capabilities by creating a European Competence Centre to Support Destinations in Data Management.

This initiative aims to provide practical support to destination management organisations (DMOs) across Europe, helping them move from fragmented information to structured, data-driven decision-making. By combining technical expertise, training, peer exchange, and testing digital tools, the D3HUB project aims to build a long-term knowledge hub to support the green and digital transition of European tourism.

This publication aims to present the journey of the 40 European destinations, which have been piloting the services of the future Competence Centre guided by D3HUB partners.



D3HUB pilot phase closure with 40 Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)



1. 40 Destinations, one goal: Learning by doing

1.1 How a call for pilots turned into a dynamic community of practice

In February 2025, 40 destinations were selected to participate in the pilot phase of the D3HUB - European Competence Centre to Support Destinations in Data Management. These destinations represent a wide range of territorial contexts, including national tourism boards, regional authorities, and municipal destination organisations. This diversity was a deliberate choice: the challenges faced by European destinations vary greatly depending on their size, geography, governance structure, and tourism intensity, and the future Competence Centre must be able to respond to all of them.

The pilot phase ran from February 2025 to February 2026 and served as a testing ground for the services that the future Competence Centre will provide, with the aim of addressing destinations' needs in a coordinated and comprehensive way. Since the pilot kicked off, the participating destinations have been working closely with the D3HUB project partners and some selected experts, to assess what types of support are most useful, which training formats are most effective, and how data tools can be applied in real operational contexts. The pilot experience has mainly consisted of: A range of thematic webinars, practical exercises to test methodologies and tools, including the development of a dashboard gathering the pilots' data focusing on sustainable and policy-oriented indicators, facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges, and the completion of destination action plans, structuring learning into specific actions to resolve a selected destination challenge. A notable highlight of this pilot phase was the significant demand from destinations eager to participate, as demonstrated by the submission of over 80 applications. Indeed, the objective was, not only to create a support structure for the 40 pilot destinations, but also to develop a model that can later be scaled up and made available to destinations across Europe.

The final list of selected destinations can be found at this [link](#) and in the figure below:

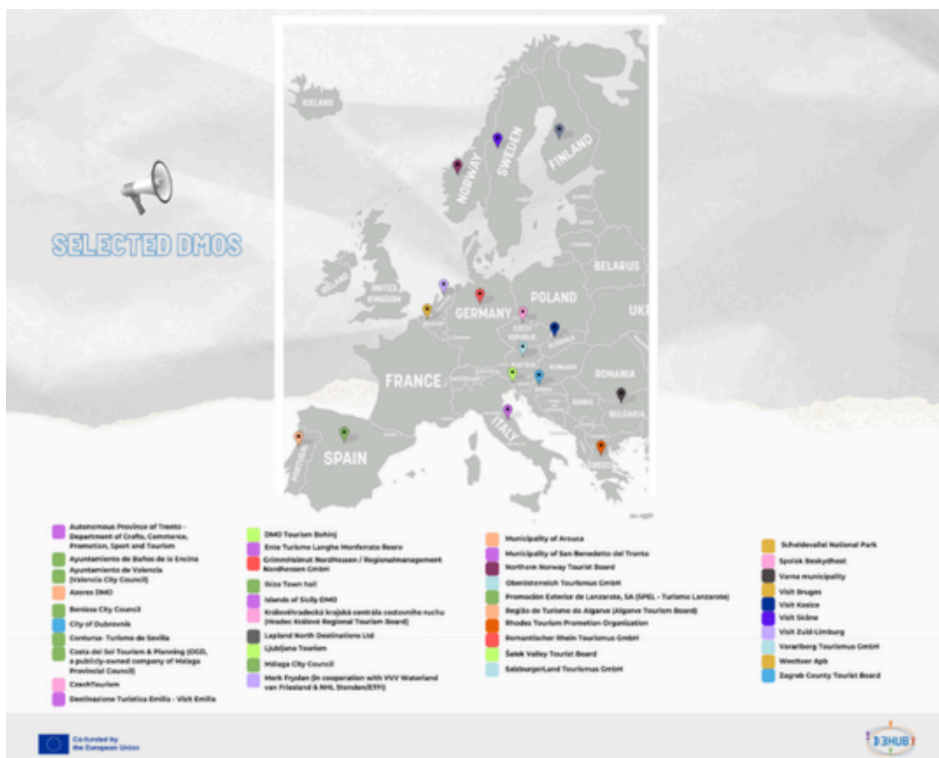


Figure 1: Map distribution of the 40 selected DMOs participating in the D3HUB pilot phase.



1.2 Measuring while responding to destination management challenges

Common challenges throughout the European territorial diversity

Before launching the pilot, the D3HUB project partners conducted an extensive consultation process with tourism authorities, destination organisations, and other stakeholders involved in destination management and directly in the tourism value chain, across Europe. Through workshops, surveys, and expert discussions carried out by the project team, several priority challenges were identified as common to a critical mass of destinations.

These challenges became the thematic focus of the pilot phase, namely the 4 operational clusters grouping the 40 destinations according to their chosen priorities:

- **Redistributing tourism flows in space and time**, to reduce pressure on overcrowded areas and make better use of existing capacity.
- **Managing the balance between residents, visitors, and stakeholders**, ensuring that tourism development benefits local communities while maintaining visitor satisfaction.
- **Climate change mitigation and adaptation**, including reducing tourism's environmental footprint and preparing destinations for changing conditions.
- **Supporting emerging destinations**, helping less well-known regions attract sustainable, high-quality tourism, and avoiding the imbalances that can be observed in some over-visited areas.

This cluster system allowed participants to work in smaller groups where similar concerns could be targeted in detail, while still benefiting from the experience of other destinations. Indeed, each of these clusters deployed a targeted knowledge programme validated by the participating destinations, who conveyed that, although each cluster was operating in parallel, the challenges addressed were interconnected. For example, climate adaptation requires a strategy for redistributing visitor flows, while improving the relationship between residents and visitors depends on better data about tourism impacts.

Therefore, the D3HUB partners adopted a flexible approach and offered the following solutions to the pilot DMOs to maximise the learning value of the overall experience:

1. The possibility to join several clusters' programmes as "observers" while belonging to one single cluster. This allowed destinations to explore several topics at the same time.
2. Three cross-cluster webinars were organized to present outcomes and learning, while offering specific lectures that were of common interest for the 40 destinations, where selected experts participated in the exchanges.
3. The D3HUB partners cluster leaders remained in regular dialogue, exchanging information on specific destination needs that could be addressed in other clusters, finding solutions, and identifying solutions that were incorporated into the cluster dynamics.

Destination participants could therefore benefit from specific advice, a practical knowledge sharing environment and benchmarking opportunities inspiring solutions to both common and specific challenges occurring in their territory, while progressively incorporating the "data-driven" approach of the project into their work environment.



A structured methodology combining learning, practice, and collaboration

The D3HUB pilot was built around a common methodology designed to maximise learning and ensure that the results are directly applicable to each destination's reality. Rather than offering only theoretical training, the programme combined expert input, peer exchange, and practical exercises.

The methodology includes several complementary elements:

Expert insights and knowledge sharing

Participants attended webinars and workshops led by the D3HUB team and external experts. These sessions presented the latest research, European policy developments, and real-world case studies from destinations that have already implemented innovative solutions. Open discussions and question-and-answer sessions allowed participants to explore how these approaches could apply to their own context.

Peer learning and exchange of experience

One of the strengths of the pilot has been the opportunity for destinations to learn from each other. Participants have been sharing their current challenges, ongoing initiatives, and lessons learned, creating a collaborative environment where practical knowledge circulates freely. This peer-to-peer exchange has proven particularly valuable for DMOs facing similar constraints but operating in different regions.

Hands-on exercises and practical tools

The programme introduced concrete frameworks and digital tools that can be used directly by destinations and some of them have been embedded into the destinations' action plans with the support of the D3HUB partners cluster leaders. This allowed destinations to apply these tools to their own situations, testing how data can support decision-making, monitoring, and the design of policy measures. In this regard, a D3HUB dashboard has been developed in partnership with the destinations, which have been contributing by sending a range of metrics with the aim of calculating the previously defined "D3HUB indicators" to empower destinations to measure tourism sustainability (economic, social and environmental perspectives) for more effective decision-making, aligning the cluster specific challenges with the necessary data that destinations can collect to inform their strategies. The dashboard's ultimate goal is to allow destinations to compare each other, yet a range of challenges remain regarding the granularity and comparability of the data owned by destinations, while data sources' availability varies between destinations and countries. AI and other digital solutions are being tested and the support of qualified experts has been secured to keep guiding destinations in this journey.

Cross-cluster collaboration

As described, destination management-related challenges rarely occur in isolation. On the contrary, they are part of a cross-sectoral and living ecosystem due to the horizontal nature of tourism. This requires a holistic management approach, a strong connection between policies such as mobility, housing, culture, environment, among others, a flexible governance mechanism including a wide diversity of public-private players, where sound data integrated into the whole process is indispensable. The above-mentioned cross-cluster sessions encouraged a broader perspective and helped destinations understand how solutions developed in one context may be relevant in another.



From data to action: Developing destination-specific action plans

From June 2025, over the summer, and back in the fall, the cluster leaders met their fellow DMOs bilaterally through targeted mentoring sessions, with the aim of supporting the elaboration of destinations' action plans, all following the same model and each adapted to the specificities of the destination. These one-to-one sessions allowed for deeper discussion of local challenges and helped identify the most appropriate metrics, tools, and actions to be implemented by each destination.

Today, these Action Plans serve as structured roadmaps, translating the knowledge gained during the pilot into practical strategies:

- A summary of the key insights from webinars, workshops, and peer exchanges.
- An analysis of the solutions most relevant to the destination's specific context.
- A set of clear objectives and actions aligned with local priorities.
- Indicators that can be used to monitor progress over time.

As a result, each D3HUB pilot destination has not only gained new knowledge but also produced a concrete, evidence-based plan that can guide future decision-making.

Building a common approach to measuring sustainability

Another important component of the pilot has been the development of a shared methodology for monitoring tourism sustainability. Reliable indicators are essential for understanding the real impacts of tourism and for evaluating whether policies are achieving their intended results.

The D3HUB project has been testing a common set of indicators, previously selected and inspired by existing sustainable tourism measurement frameworks and methodologies, including the framework developed under the UN Tourism's Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism initiative. These indicators cover environmental, social, and economic dimensions and are adapted to the four thematic clusters of the D3HUB pilot, connected to possible decisions that the participant destinations could take as a result of the measurement exercise.

For example, destinations working on visitor flows may focus on indicators related to seasonality and spatial distribution, while those addressing climate change may monitor emissions, energy use, or environmental pressures. By using a common methodology, destinations can more easily compare results and contribute to a broader European understanding of tourism sustainability.



2. Finding common solutions to shared measurement challenges

2.1 Insights from the destinations' journey

Voices from the field

The experience of front-runner destinations offers a clear illustration of their expectations on the pilot phase. Participants highlighted the value of collaborative learning offered by the project: "It allows us to collaborate with other DMOs, share best practices, innovate together, and learn from each other". Others pointed to the potential of D3HUB as an enabling platform: "D3HUB can offer the opportunity to gain access to inclusive tools that simplify complex data and make it easier for us and our stakeholders to stay informed and make better decisions". The quality of the programme's content and delivery was equally appreciated: "The start of the project has been excellent; the workshops I attended were insightful and there have been interesting presentations and best practices".

Pilot phase evaluation

The pilot phase evaluation of D3HUB engaged approximately half of the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) involved in the project. Participation was well balanced across thematic clusters and administrative levels, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives and contexts were reflected. Overall, destinations expressed satisfaction with the pilot phase, highlighting both the value of the services provided and opportunities for further improvement.

Strengths of the pilot phase

The destinations highlighted four main strengths of the pilot phase:

- Knowledge, tools and learning, as the participants gained practical insights and methodologies that can be directly applied within their organizations, particularly to support data-driven decision-making. Among the service formats offered, webinars emerged as the most appreciated.
- Expert guidance and facilitation played an important enabling role throughout the pilot. The support and availability of cluster leaders, along with contributions from external specialists and the project coordinator, were particularly valued.
- Strategic action planning was another key outcome. Participants appreciated the support in translating ongoing discussions into more structured, actionable plans with clearer priorities and a stronger orientation toward implementation.
- Peer exchange and networking, as the pilot fostered a collaborative environment that enabled mutual learning, exchange of experiences and the development of long-term, cross-border connections among DMOs and regions.

Feedback from the DMOs

While most participants rated the learning opportunities provided as relevant, the capacity to implement the knowledge gained independently revealed a moderate confidence gap between learning and autonomous application. This suggests the presence of barriers that go beyond knowledge transfer.

Overall, while most destinations reported a positive experience, constructive feedback has been gathered and is being used to inform the development of the Competence Center.

Hence, the D3HUB pilot phase provided a valuable and well-received framework for supporting destinations, successfully fostering collaboration, learning and strategic orientation among participating DMOs. The feedback highlights both the relevance of the services delivered and the strong engagement of the participants, while also pointing to targeted areas where further refinement could enhance impact.



2.2 The D3HUB Academy

The destinations' demand was clearly set: the learning journey was made to be pursued with all participants together, benchmarking the Action Plans and upgrading knowledge on topics directly connected to them. This learning journey continues as destinations prepare the implementation of their respective action plans, for which they count on the D3HUB partners' support.

These plans focus on shaping more balanced destinations by managing visitor flows through smart transport regulation, sustainable mobility solutions, and data-driven monitoring aligned with carrying capacity. They also promote lesser-known areas using targeted insights, while introducing destination cards for both residents and visitors to enhance engagement and benefits for all. At the same time, data-driven systems help protect ecosystems and improve experiences, supported by efforts to measure and better understand carbon footprints, enabling effective decarbonisation and adaptation strategies. By encouraging responsible visitor behaviour through climate-friendly offers and repositioning destinations to attract year-round tourism, these plans aim to reduce peak pressure and create more resilient, attractive destinations.

This is how the D3HUB Academy was born as the pilot programme was coming to its end, moving the clusters' experience to a next level for destinations to manage in a holistic way thanks to their action plans. The D3HUB Academy programme has been set as follows:

- 21st of October 2025, Tourism Taxation
- 27th of October 2025, Data & Dashboards for Smart Destinations
- 2nd of December 2025, Making maps: Two simple and free tools to generate data-based maps
- 10th February 2026, Dashboards: the dos and don'ts
- 26th of March 2026, Visitor satisfaction and sentiment via Google Reviews

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting interface. The main content is a presentation slide with the following text:

- COMMITTED TO SUSTAINABILITY** (with Sustainable Balearic Islands logo)
- OBJECTIVE: A MORE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MODEL**
- Process of sustainable **TRANSFORMATION** in the tourism sector
- **PACT FOR SUSTAINABILITY**: Roadmap towards a more sustainable model
- **INVESTMENT IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**: Over **1.12 billion euros of public funds**, allocated to the private sector and the public administrations (Sustainable Tourism Tax, EU Next Generation funds,...)
- www.sustainableislands.travel

On the right side, there is a vertical stack of five video thumbnails showing participants in the meeting.

Tourism taxation session



Data standarization



Standardization for Meaningful Metrics



Once harmonized, the data can be visualized easily.

Main steps:

Connect the dashboard to the clean dataset.

Define filters and analytical dimensions (destination, year, market, etc.).

Use clear visual formats (maps, trends, comparisons).

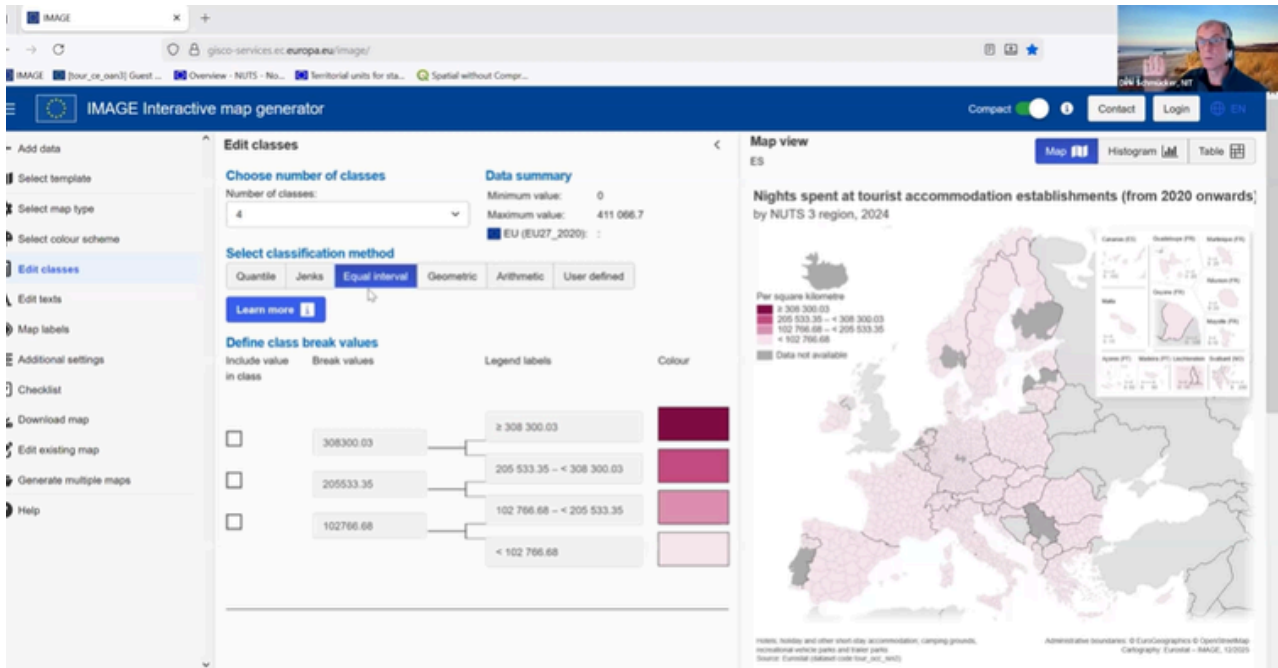
Example:

Metric = *Average spend per visitor* = Total spending / Number of visitors.

If one destination reports spending in USD and others in EUR, the indicator becomes meaningless.

Hence, **standardization is the foundation of correctness.**

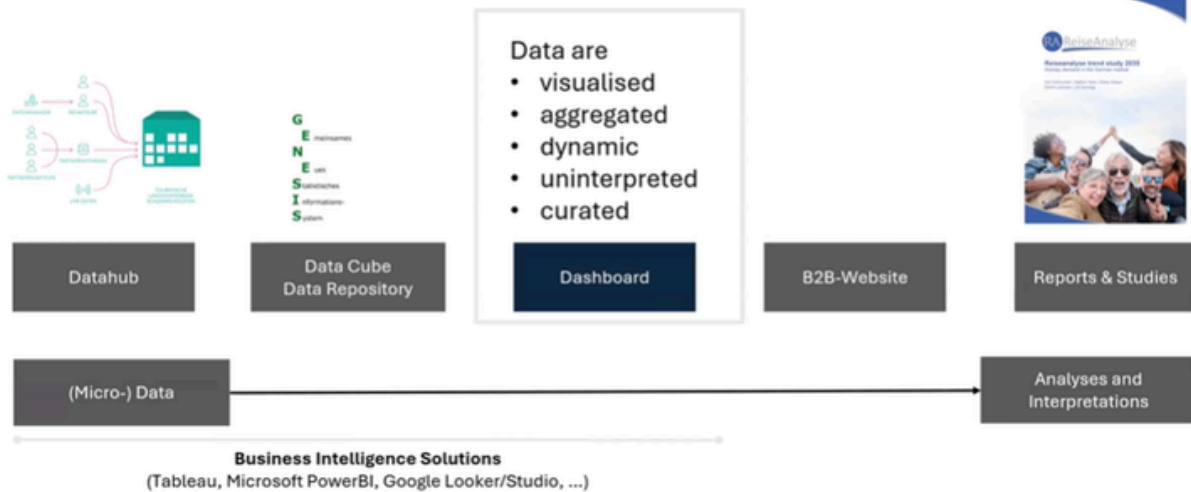
Data & dashboard session



Making maps session



Destination Market Views



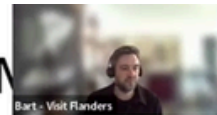
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Dashboard dos and don'ts session



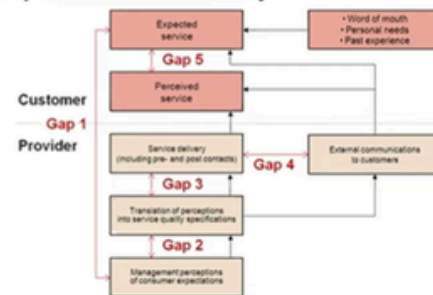
Importance of visitor surveys for DM



- Importance of visitor surveys can be framed around three core pillars:

1. Validating the value proposition:
How are visitors actually experiencing the provided services?

Gap Model of Service Quality



Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry (1990)



4

Visitor satisfaction session



3. Trends and next steps

Taking stock together

The pilot concluded with a face-to-face meeting in January 2026, at the occasion of the European Tourism Day, where participants shared their experiences, discussed the Action Plans, and explore how the Competence Centre can continue supporting them during the final stage of the D3HUB project, with the support of the European Commission representatives.

During the meeting, participant destinations could benefit from expert lectures and knowledge exchange. The morning session started with an introduction to the EU Tourism Strategy, provided by Misa Labarile of the European Commission. Afterwards, four invited speakers delivered sessions addressing pressing challenges and innovative research methodologies. Astrid Dickinger (MODUL University) explored behavioral nudging strategies for sustainable tourism transitions, fitting the cluster topic of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Joao Martins (UNINOVA Lisbon) introduced AI-based visitor flow management in cultural tourism destinations and discussed critical data infrastructure needs and gaps. Fitting the cluster topic of resident-visitor balance, Tina Šegota (University of Maribor) presented her research on residents' involvement in tourism development, with a particular focus on engaging vulnerable resident groups. Finally, Ko Koens (Inholland University) shared practical insights on regenerative tourism approaches, as well as a critical overview of the implementation potential.

As a second part of the meeting, destinations had the opportunity to benchmark their action plans and discuss their experiences with data-driven destination management during a speed-dating session that allowed one-on-one interaction while maximizing exposure with a multitude of peer destinations. Discussion topics included sharing moments of inspiration or insights from the D3HUB pilot phase, experiences with apps to nudge tourists away from hotspots, data sources considered most critical for decision-making, (dis)advantages of user-generated content and social media, data tools that are considered to offer the fastest return on investment, etc.

To finalize the meeting, a formal evaluation and reflection was conducted by the D3HUB partners on what worked well during the pilot implementation phase and what needs to be improved (see paragraph 2.1). The results of this evaluation are guiding the next steps in developing the European Competence Centre's sustainability plan, with the aim of creating a permanent structure that can support destinations in the long term.

A step towards smarter, greener, and more resilient European destinations

The D3HUB has been demonstrating the value of combining technical expertise, collaborative learning, and practical application. For the 40 destinations involved, this programme represents the beginning of a journey towards more informed and sustainable tourism management, which will require continuous support and coordination.

For destination marketing and management organisations across Europe, the initiative highlights an important message: the destinations' resilience will increasingly depend on the ability to use data effectively to forecast and respond to the demand patterns, communities' interests, climate change impacts and geo-political related challenges. This means empowering the DMOs and their territories' value chains with shared methodologies, the capacity to produce reliable information and the creation of destinations' knowledge networks where sustainability targets and systematic measurement are at the core of destinations' operations.



By helping destinations develop these capabilities, the D3HUB project aims to ensure that tourism growth goes hand in hand with sustainability, resilience, and the well-being of local communities. As the project progresses and reaches its end, the lessons learned will help shape a support system that other destinations across Europe will soon be able to join, such is the goal of the future European Competence Centre.

The D3HUB partnership remains committed to supporting the DMOs as they pursue their data-driven journey towards sustainable destination management, while the European Competence Centre to Support Destinations in Data Management is being built and, hopefully, will find its place in the upcoming European Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

More insights on the D3HUB data collection activity, which culminates in the elaboration of the D3HUB dashboard, will be presented in the next publication, which is expected to be published in June 2026.



Conclusions

The D3HUB pilot experience has confirmed that the transition towards data-driven destination management is not only necessary but achievable when supported by the right combination of tools, knowledge, and collaboration.

By bringing together 40 diverse destinations, the initiative has demonstrated the value of shared learning, practical experimentation, and tailored support in addressing complex and interconnected tourism challenges.

D3HUB destinations highlighted both the value of the knowledge and support provided through the pilot exercise, as well as the collaborative learning and benchmarking opportunities, though they call for closer support in the data-gathering process and dashboard development as a lesson learned by the partnership to incorporate into the Competence Centre business plan. In addition, the resulting Action Plans show that destinations are ready to integrate data into their governance models, improve sustainability performance, and better align tourism development with the needs of residents, visitors, and the environment.

At the same time, the pilot highlights that this transition requires continuity: sustained capacity-building, access to reliable data, and strong cooperation across sectors and territories will be essential.

The future European Competence Centre has the potential to play a key role in this process, acting as a long-term hub for knowledge, innovation, and support.

Ultimately, the D3HUB experience underlines a clear message for European tourism: resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability will increasingly depend on the ability of destinations to turn data into action and to work collectively towards a more balanced and responsible tourism model.



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