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ASSESSORIA JURIDICA BALEAR SL	AE – ASJUBA (ES)	NETWORK OF EUROPEAN REGIONS FOR COMPETITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASBL	BEN – NECSTOUR (BE)
EMPRESA PÚBLICA PARA LA GESTIÓN DEL TURISMO Y DEL DEPORTE DE ANDALUCÍA SA	BEN – TURAND (ES)	MINISTERIO DEL TURISMO	BEN – MITUR (IT)
INSTITUT FÜR TOURISMUS- UND BADERFORSCHUNG IN NORDEUROPA GMBH	BEN – NIT (DE)	ARCTUR RACUNALNISKI INZENIRING DOO	BEN – ARCTUR (SI)
TOERISME VLAANDEREN	BEN – FLAND (BE)		

Contact: projects@anysolution.eu

Website: <https://www.d3hub-competencecentre.eu/>

D4.2 Support Scheme Testing Report

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Contributors	NECSTOUR, FLAND, TURAND	Reviewers	ANYSOLUTION, ARCTUR, NIT

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Document Information

List of Contributors

Name	Partner
Costanza Alesse	NECSTouR
Daniel Iglesias Gonsalvez	NECSTouR
Urska Starc Peceny	Arctur
Bart Neuts	FLAND
Ana Moniche	TURAND
Vanessa Schwanz	TURAND
Dolores Ordóñez	ANYSOL
Juan Ortells	ANYSOL
Tayrne Butler	ANYSOL

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List of Acronyms

Abbreviation / acronym	Description
AB	Advisory Board
AE	Affiliated entity
AP	Associated Partner
BEN	Beneficiary
BSO	Business Support Organisation
CA	Consortium Agreement
CC	European Competence Centre
CFS	Certificate on the Financial Statements
COO	Coordinator
DCM	Dissemination & Communication Manager (DCM)
DMOs	Destination Management Organisation
DoA	Description of Action
Dx.y	Deliverable number y, belonging to WP number x
EC	European Commission
GA	Grant Agreement
PPPA	Pilot Projects & Preparatory Actions
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NTO	National Tourism Office
PC	Project Coordinator
PCT	Project Coordination Team
PM	Person-month
PMB	Project Management Board
QA	Quality Assurance
QM	Quality Manager
RASCI	Responsible/Accountable/Supportive/Consulted/Informed
RP	Reporting Period
SC	Strategic Coordinator
TL	Task Leader
TM	Technical Manager
WP	Work Package
WPL	Work Package Leader



Executive Summary

This deliverable reports on the testing of the D3HUB support scheme during the project's pilot phase, implemented between February 2025 and February 2026 with the participation of 40 European tourism destinations. The pilot was designed to validate how the future European Competence Centre can support destinations in strengthening data-driven management, sustainability monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making.

The testing process was organised around four thematic clusters addressing common destination challenges: the spatial and temporal redistribution of tourism flows; the balance between residents and visitors; climate change mitigation and adaptation; and the development of emerging destinations seeking to attract more sustainable and higher-value tourism. Within these clusters, destinations participated in expert-led webinars, practical exercises, peer-learning activities, bilateral support sessions and cross-cluster exchanges. These activities were complemented by work on sustainability indicators, data collection, dashboards, and destination-specific action plans.

The pilot translated the theoretical support scheme established in previous project activities into a practical programme tested in real destination contexts. It examined the suitability of different support formats, the contribution of internal and external experts, the capacity of destinations to apply shared methodologies and tools, and the extent to which the support could be adapted to different levels of data maturity, institutional capacity, governance structures, and territorial realities.

The results show that destinations place particular value on support that combines structured thematic learning with opportunities to exchange experiences and receive tailored guidance. The development of action plans played a central role in connecting the learning process with operational priorities, helping destinations define concrete objectives, required data, stakeholders, resources, implementation steps, and monitoring approaches. The pilot also highlighted the importance of maintaining flexibility within the support scheme, as destinations facing similar challenges often differ considerably in terms of available information, technical expertise, organisational mandates, and capacity to implement solutions.

At the same time, the testing phase identified persistent barriers to data-driven destination management. These include fragmented or inaccessible data, insufficient geographical and temporal granularity, limited interoperability between information systems, uncertainty regarding data ownership and privacy, dependence on external providers, and limited human and financial resources within destination organisations. The experience also confirmed that the availability of data alone does not ensure its effective use: destinations require support to interpret information, connect indicators with strategic objectives, communicate findings to stakeholders, and transform evidence into feasible interventions.

The report consolidates the activities implemented, the solutions and methodologies explored, the resources and expertise mobilised, the action plans developed, and the main lessons emerging from the pilot. These findings provide the basis for refining the future European Competence Centre service portfolio. In particular, they support the integration of modular capacity-building programmes, peer-learning communities, specialised mentoring, data governance assistance, sustainability measurement tools, benchmarking services, and continued implementation support.

The pilot demonstrates that a European-level support structure can provide significant added value by connecting destinations with relevant expertise, practical tools, comparable experiences, and a community of peers. The lessons captured in this deliverable will therefore contribute to shaping a Competence Centre that is scalable, adaptable, and capable of supporting European destinations throughout the full journey from identifying a challenge and collecting data to designing, implementing, and monitoring concrete actions.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide a structured overview of how the D3HUB support scheme was put into practice and tested during the pilot phase. Building on the theoretical service model defined in [Deliverable D2.2: Support Scheme Report](#) and the recruitment process documented in [Deliverable D4.1: Destinations' recruitment process report](#), this report focuses on what occurred once the selected destinations entered the programme: how support activities were organised, how destinations engaged with them, and how the proposed service formats performed in real operational contexts.

The report covers the implementation of the pilot across the four thematic clusters. Also, it documents the roles played by consortium partners, external experts, participating destinations, and other relevant stakeholders, together with the resources and knowledge mobilised throughout the process. Beyond describing the activities delivered, the report examines how effectively the support scheme responded to the diverse needs, capacities, and maturity levels of the participating destinations. Particular attention is given to the applicability of the proposed methodologies and tools, the capacity of destinations to translate learning into feasible actions, and the barriers encountered when working with tourism data, indicators, governance arrangements, and stakeholder involvement.

The scope therefore extends from the operational delivery of the pilot to the assessment of its main results and limitations. It captures the solutions explored by destinations, the action plans produced, the good practices and benchmarking opportunities identified, and the lessons that should inform the design of the European Competence Centre. The report focuses on evaluating how the support scheme functioned in practice and on identifying the adjustments required to support its future scaling and integration into the European Competence Centre service portfolio.

1.2 Structure of the document

Following this introductory section, the report is organised into five main sections that reflect the different stages of the support scheme testing process:

Section 2 – Support scheme testing methodology explains the methodological framework applied during the pilot phase. It introduces the support scheme, the composition of the pilot community, the involvement of consortium partners and external experts, and the overall testing timeline and working arrangements.

Section 3 – Implementation of the testing phase describes how the programme was delivered in practice. It presents the capacity-building and peer-learning activities implemented within the four thematic clusters, the cross-cluster sessions, the tailored support provided to individual destinations, and the work undertaken to test sustainability indicators, data collection processes, and related tools.

Section 4 – Results and outcomes brings together the main tangible outputs generated during the pilot. It covers the destination action plans, the solutions and approaches explored, and the benchmarking opportunities and good practices identified.

Section 5 – Lessons learned and integration into the European Competence Centre analyses the main findings arising from the testing process. It examines the strengths and limitations of the support model, the challenges encountered by destinations and project partners, and the adjustments needed to improve the relevance, accessibility, and scalability of future services.

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Finally, Section 6 – Conclusions summarises the overall contribution of the pilot phase to the validation of the D3HUB support scheme and outlines its implications for the future operationalisation of the European Competence Centre.

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2 Support scheme testing methodology

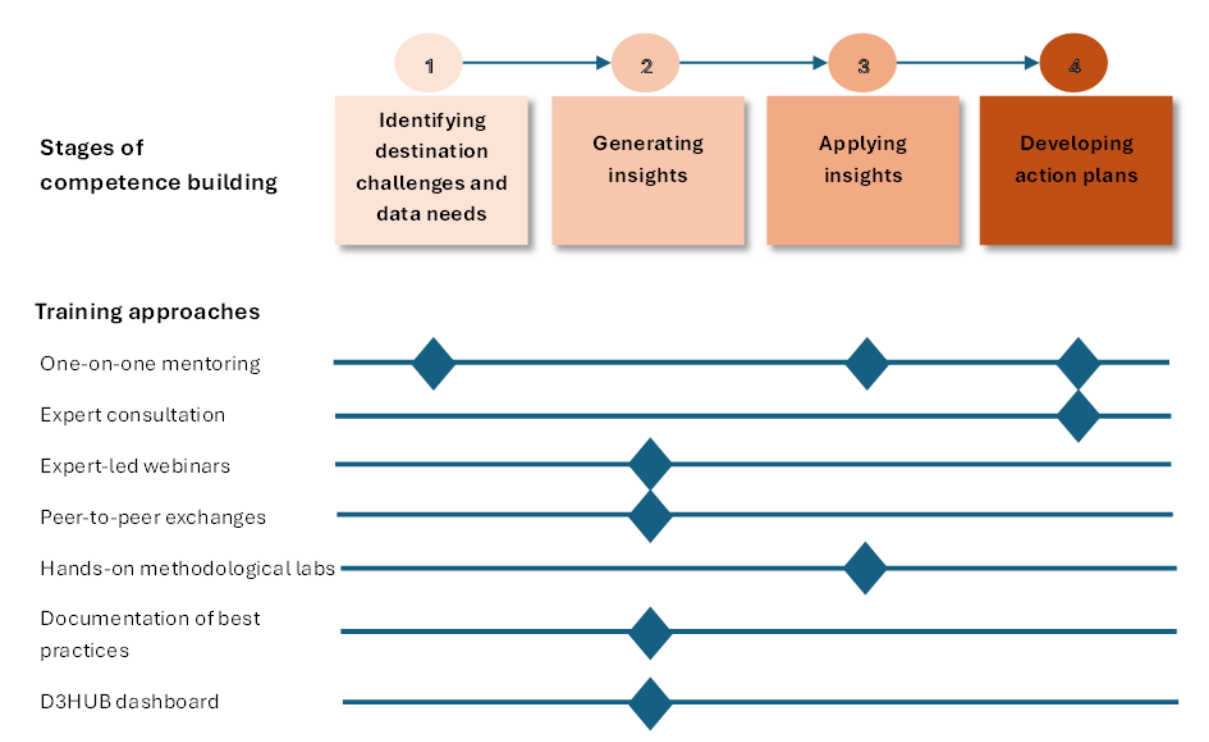
2.1 Overview of the support scheme

The European Competence Centre support scheme was delivered as [D2.2: Competence Centre Support Scheme Report](#) of the D3HUB project, with the explicit goal of establishing the portfolio of services to be provided and tested with the pilot destinations. The support scheme was structured along three aspects:

1. Stages of competence building: assisting destinations through a full journey from identifying destination challenges and data needs to applying insights and developing action plans;
2. Training approaches: providing a combined approach of expert-led webinars, one-on-one mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, and digital tools;
3. Training topics: organising destinations around relevant contemporary themes in data-driven destination management, as well as identifying interesting cross-cutting areas relevant to all destinations.

Figure 1 outlines the training approaches used during the different stages of competence building, highlighting a hybrid combination of personal one-on-one mentoring by internal and external experts, peer-to-peer best practice exchanges, webinar/lecture formats, hands-on data exercises, and digital support systems.

Figure 1 Training approaches used during pilot phase



Thematically, the trainings were anchored around four clusters that were identified through initial surveying and analysis of existing challenges, namely: (i) managing the balance between residents and visitors, (ii) redistributing tourism flows in space and time, (iii) climate change mitigation and adaptation, and (iv) supporting emerging destinations to attract quality and sustainable tourism.

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2.2 Testing framework and timeline

The pilot implementation followed a structured timeline consisting of preparation, implementation, validation, and feedback phases, spanning from February 2025 to the end of 2026, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Testing Framework and Timeline



The preparatory phase began with internal project meetings in February, followed by dedicated engagement sessions with participating DMOs in March to introduce the pilot activities, discuss expectations, and prepare destinations for data collection and participation. In April, cluster-level coordination activities were organised, including an intra-cluster meeting and a first cross-cluster workshop held on 30 April 2025. These activities helped align participating destinations around the pilot objectives, methodology, and implementation approach.

The core implementation period ran from May to October 2025 and focused on workshops with the pilot destinations, data collection, dashboard population, indicator calculation, benchmarking activities, and monitoring functionalities testing. During this phase, destinations contributed data related to the sustainability indicators and engaged with the dashboard environment. They explored opportunities for benchmarking and peer comparison to develop their own action plans. The implementation period provided valuable practical insights into data availability, reporting capacities, indicator calculation, and the operational use of dashboards for sustainability monitoring through peer learning and expert support. Thanks to the activities in the implementation phase, the pilot destinations were better equipped to draft and develop their action plan.

To facilitate exchange and mutual learning among participants, a second cross-cluster workshop was organised in November 2025, including a dedicated session held on 7 November. The workshop provided a platform for destinations to share experiences, discuss challenges encountered during implementation, especially in developing their action plans, and exchange preliminary lessons learned across the different pilot clusters.

The final stage of the pilot took place between December 2025 and January 2026. It focused on collecting feedback and insights from participating destinations, experts, and project partners, as well as finalising the action plans developed throughout the pilot process. This insight-gathering phase supported the assessment of pilot results, the identification of areas for improvement, and the

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formulation of recommendations for the future development of the European Competence Centre services. The pilot phase concluded with a final event held on 28 January 2026, during which the main outcomes, findings, and lessons learned from the testing activities were presented and discussed with stakeholders. Following the official conclusion of the pilot phase, a limited number of destinations that required additional support to complete their action plans continued to receive targeted guidance and resources to facilitate the finalisation and consolidation of their action plans.

2.3 Selection of pilot destinations and participants

According to the D3HUB methodology, the pilot phase aimed to validate the future European Competence Centre services with a representative sample of European DMOs operating at different maturity levels and facing varied tourism management challenges. The detailed recruitment methodology, selection criteria, application process, and pilot structure are fully described in Deliverable [D4.1 Destinations Recruitment Process Report](#).

An open call for pilots published by the consortium invited tourism destinations and DMOs across Europe to participate in the peer-learning and testing programme. Applications were evaluated through a structured selection process combining quantitative quota criteria and qualitative assessment. This process ensured representation of different governance, territorial, and operational conditions, as well as the diversity of the European tourism ecosystem. The consortium aimed to ensure balanced representation across:

- **European geographical areas:** The selection sought representation from Northern, Western, Southern, and Eastern/Central Europe, while also preventing overrepresentation from a single Member State through quotas.
- **Governance levels:** The process additionally ensured participation from different governance levels, including municipal, regional, and national DMOs.
- **Destination typologies:** Since sustainability and tourism management challenges differ significantly between destinations, the pilot included a mix of urban, rural, coastal/island, mountain, nature-based, and mixed destinations.
- **Levels of data proficiency:** The consortium also intentionally selected destinations with varying levels of data maturity and digital readiness.

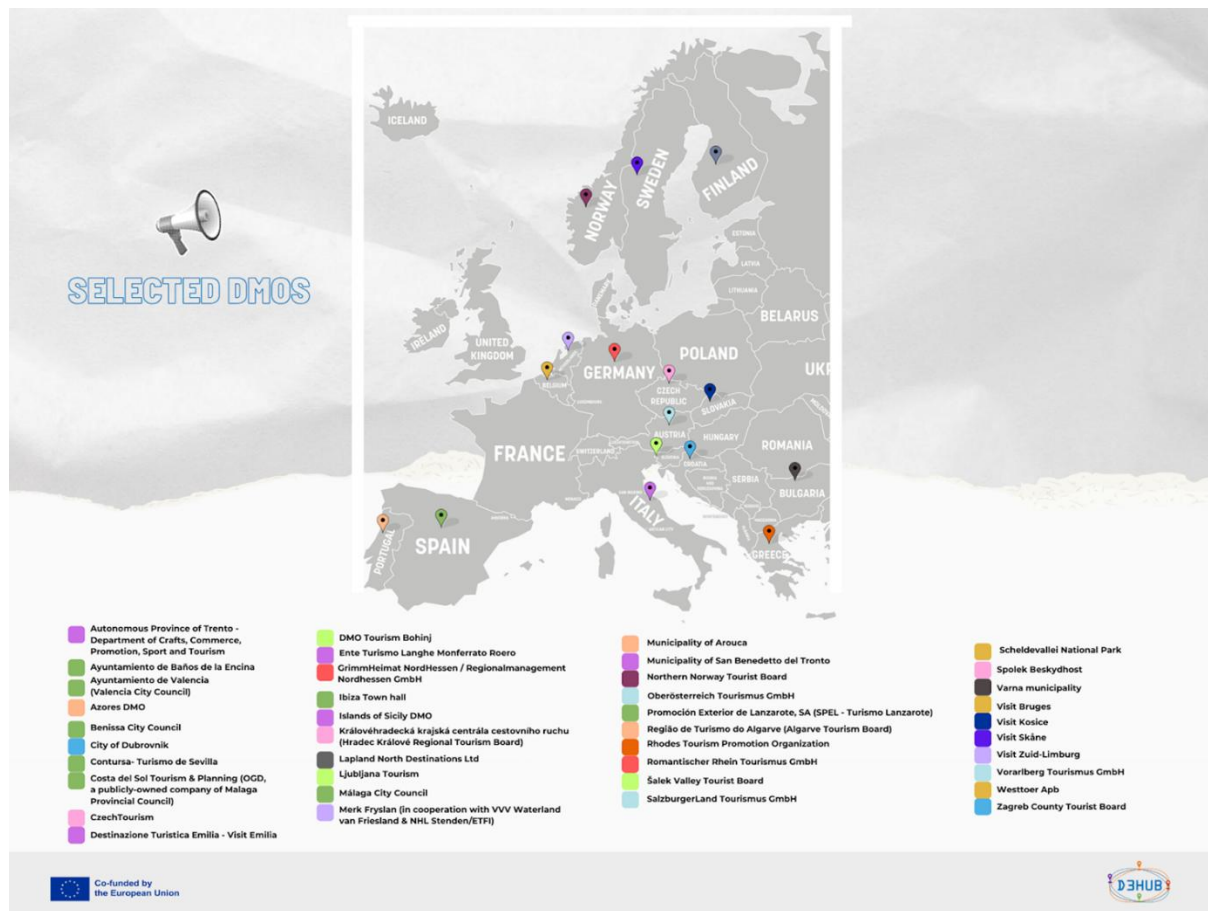
This diversity was considered essential to properly test the adaptability and scalability of the European Competence Centre services across different tourism realities. Advanced data capabilities were not a prerequisite for participation. Instead, the process prioritised destinations demonstrating a commitment to learning, willingness to share experiences and challenges, openness to peer-learning, and motivation to improve data-driven management capacities.

Following the open call and internal evaluation process of the application forms, including a signed letter of intent, 40 destinations were selected to participate in the pilot phase. These 40 destinations are mapped in Figure 3. The selected destinations were subsequently assigned to one of the four thematic clusters.

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Figure 3 Selected D3HUB pilot destinations/DMOs



After cluster allocation, the consortium conducted bilateral intake interviews with each participating destination. These interviews aimed to understand better specificities such as local characteristics and governance structures, existing data availability, organisational capacities, current tourism challenges, and expectations regarding the pilot programme. The interviews also played a key role in tailoring the pilot activities and work programmes in each cluster to the concrete needs of destinations.

In addition to full participants, the pilot introduced an “observer” modality, allowing destinations to follow activities in additional thematic clusters beyond their assigned one. This approach acknowledged the interconnected nature of tourism challenges and encouraged cross-cluster learning and knowledge exchange.

2.4 Role of experts

In the second half of the one-year testing phase, external experts were integrated into the clusters to bring additional perspectives to the work carried out within each cluster and to provide participants with complementary expertise tailored to implementing their individual action plans. Most participants welcomed this additional support, although levels of engagement varied across destinations. For the cluster leaders, the involvement of external experts represented a valuable contribution, strengthening the assessment and evaluation of the capacity-building process throughout the pilot phase.

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The CVs of several candidates were assessed against an agreed set of requirements. The evaluation was conducted using six predefined technical criteria, with each expert scored out of a maximum of 12 points (where a score of 2 represented full fulfilment of a criterion). The criteria included:

- **Experience in data and tourism:** Minimum of seven years of professional experience in the field.
- **Work with DMOs:** Proven track record of collaboration with destination management organisations.
- **Sustainable tourism:** Experience in supporting environmental and social sustainability initiatives.
- **Advisory and coaching:** Ability to provide strategic guidance and support the implementation of actions.
- **Data platforms and indicators:** Technical expertise in data tools, indicators, and monitoring systems.
- **EU projects:** Experience in projects funded by the European Commission.

In addition to the technical assessment, geographical scope was a key consideration in allocating experts. Experts were matched with destinations based on linguistic proximity, regional market knowledge, and geographical closeness, ensuring effective communication and contextually relevant support. The evaluation process was carried out by AnySolution and ARCTUR and subsequently validated by the D3HUB consortium.

To ensure strong alignment between the experts' contributions and the project objectives, the consortium implemented a train-the-trainer scheme comprising group meetings, webinars, and bilateral sessions.

During the pilot phase, the experts were responsible for:

- Guiding DMOs throughout the data-gathering process.
- Providing the specialised knowledge required for data collection and analysis.
- Reviewing the action plans developed by the DMOs.
- Supporting the data-driven implementation of those action plans.

Their involvement continued beyond the formal conclusion of the pilot phase. Under their contracts, the experts remained available to provide ongoing assistance to the DMOs, mainly in two areas:

- Supporting continued data-collection activities and the further development of the dashboards.
- Following up on and monitoring the action plans submitted by the DMOs at the end of the pilot phase.

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3 Implementation of the testing phase

The following subsections describe the activities delivered during the pilot phase to operationalise and test the D3HUB support scheme. They cover the capacity-building and peer-learning activities implemented across the thematic clusters, the tailored support provided to individual destinations, and the testing of the methodology for measuring tourism sustainability, including the formats applied, the stakeholders involved, and the main implementation arrangements.

3.1 Capacity building activities: workshops, webinars, peer learning

The D3HUB pilot phase was structured around four thematic clusters designed to address major challenges faced by European tourism destinations through data-driven management, peer-learning, and capacity building. These cluster-specific work programmes were designed to:

- Strengthen destination management capacities;
- Promote evidence-based tourism governance;
- Foster collaboration and peer-learning among destinations;
- Develop practical action plans supported by data and digital tools;
- Test the future European Competence Centre support scheme in real destination contexts.

The capacity-building activities implemented during the testing phase are described below for each thematic cluster, covering the workshops, webinars, peer-learning exchanges, and tailored support provided to participating destinations.

Cluster 1 – Redistributing Tourism Flows in Space and Time

Cluster 1 focuses on the uneven spatial and temporal distribution of tourism flows across destinations. The objective is to support destinations in managing seasonality, overcrowding, overtourism, and uneven visitor concentration through data-driven approaches, monitoring systems, forecasting tools, and visitor management interventions. The cluster promotes practical solutions to improve destination sustainability, optimise tourism distribution, and enhance stakeholder collaboration.

The table below summarises the webinars delivered within Cluster 1, covering the data sources, indicators, digital tools, and management approaches used to monitor and redistribute visitor flows across space and time.

Table 1 Webinars delivered during the pilot phase of Cluster 1 – Redistributing Tourism Flows in Space and Time

Session	Date	Main Topic	Key Themes / Activities
Session 1	21 March 2025	Understanding and Measuring Visitor Flows	Introduction to visitor flow management; seasonality and spatial concentration metrics; dashboards; local sensor data; WiFi tracking; beacons; camera systems.



Session 2	3 April 2025	Data from Mobile Devices & Interventions 1	Mobile network data; forecasting; stakeholder involvement; nudging strategies; GPS-based data; tourism apps; PlaceSense solutions.
Extra Session	4 April 2025	Q&A on WiFi Tracking	Technical discussion on WiFi tracking methodologies and implementation challenges.
Session 3	8 May 2025	Special Data Sources & Interventions 2	PMS data; occupancy and pricing data; reservation systems; stakeholder involvement; protected area monitoring tools; sustainability interventions.
Session 4	2 June 2025	Sustainability Indicators & Forecasting	Point-of-interest data; Google Popular Times; sustainability indicators; forecasting tools; practical exercises.
Session 5	July 2025	Action Plan Feedback Session	Review and discussion of destination-specific action plans and implementation approaches.

Cluster 2 – Managing the Balance Between Residents and Tourists

Cluster 2 addresses one of the most pressing challenges in European tourism destinations: balancing tourism development with residents' quality of life and local community well-being. The cluster aims to support destinations in analysing tourism pressures, resident perceptions, tourism intensity, short-term rentals, and carrying capacity, while fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism governance.

The following table presents the Cluster 2 webinar programme, which explored key aspects of resident–visitor balance through expert contributions, destination case studies, peer exchange, and practical exercises.

Table 2 Webinars delivered during the pilot phase of Cluster 2 – Managing the Balance Between Residents and Tourists

Session	Date	Main Topic	Key Themes / Activities
Session 1	24 March 2025	Kick-off Meeting	Introduction of participants; validation of subtopics; presentation of work programme and methodology.
Session 2	11 April 2025	Short-Term Rentals	STR data collection; touristification and gentrification; governance challenges; spatial analysis exercises.;



Session 3	9 May 2025	Resident Perceptions	Resident surveys; quality-of-life indicators; attitudes toward tourism; participatory governance approaches.
Session 4	12 June 2025	Forecasting	Tourism forecasting models; predictive analytics; scenario development; data-driven visitor management.
Session 5	18 June 2025	Carrying Capacity	Destination carrying capacity; tourism intensity; environmental and social pressures; management approaches.

Cluster 3 – Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Cluster 3 focuses on equipping destinations with the knowledge, tools, and governance approaches needed to address climate change mitigation and adaptation in tourism. The programme supports destinations in climate action planning, emissions measurement, adaptation strategies, and sustainability monitoring.

The table below provides an overview of the capacity-building sessions organised for Cluster 3, focusing on sustainability indicators, carbon footprint measurement, climate risk assessment, and destination adaptation.

Table 3 Webinars delivered during the pilot phase of Cluster 3 – Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Session	Date	Main Topic	Key Themes / Activities
Session 1	28 March 2025	Introduction & Climate Measurement	Climate action planning; Glasgow Declaration; Scope 1–3 emissions; governance challenges; peer exchange on climate measurement practices.
Session 2	15 April 2025	Sustainability Indicators	Climate indicators; tourism sustainability metrics; carbon footprint calculators; emissions estimation exercises; peer discussions.
Session 3	16 May 2025	Measuring Destination Carbon Footprint	Emissions measurement methodologies; case studies from Flanders, Westtoer and Valencia; peer exchanges on actionable climate insights.



Session 4	13 June 2025	Climate Adaptation & Risk Assessment	Climate risk assessment; adaptation indicators; vulnerability analysis; adaptation measures; Azores case study; peer group exercises.
Session 5	7th July 2025	Action Plan Development	Introduction to action plans; mentoring hours; D3HUB tools; expert support.

Cluster 4 – Emerging Destinations to Attract Quality and Sustainable Tourism

Cluster 4 supports emerging tourism destinations seeking to grow responsibly and attract quality and sustainable tourism. The cluster addresses topics such as branding, sustainability, resilience, visitor segmentation, skills development, and stakeholder engagement. The objective is to help destinations use data-driven approaches to improve competitiveness while maintaining sustainability and local value creation.

The following table outlines the webinars implemented within Cluster 4 to support destinations in developing more sustainable and resilient tourism models through data-informed branding, skills development, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning.

Table 4 Webinars delivered during the pilot phase of Cluster 4 – Emerging Destinations to Attract Quality and Sustainable Tourism

Session	Date	Main Topic	Key Themes / Activities
Session 1	31 March 2025	Introduction & Attracting Quality Visitors	Targeting quality tourists; audience diversification; sustainable positioning; destination case studies from Rhodes, Emilia, Northern Norway and San Benedetto del Tronto.
Session 2	22 April 2025	Sustainability & Resilience	Sustainability frameworks; resilience strategies; environmental sustainability; short stays and seasonality challenges; stakeholder engagement.
Session 3	20 May 2025	Branding & Promotion	Branding in smart destinations; sustainable marketing; communication strategies; branding rooted in local identity and authenticity.



Session 4	17 June 2025	Skills, Ownership & Tourism for the Future	Local & the	Upskilling and reskilling; AI and digital transformation; tourism skills gaps; stakeholder engagement; data-driven governance.
Session 5	7 July 2025	Action Plan Development	Plan	Introduction to action plans; dashboard implementation; D3HUB tools; expert support; local implementation strategies.

Cross cluster webinars

The D3HUB pilot phase also included a series of cross-cluster webinars and meetings designed to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among all participating destinations, regardless of their thematic cluster. These sessions created opportunities for destinations to present pilot experiences, exchange methodologies, discuss common challenges, and reflect collectively on the implementation of data-driven tourism management approaches. The cross-cluster activities also supported the development and benchmarking of destination action plans and contributed to strengthening the future European Competence Centre community of practice.

Table 5 Cross-cluster webinars delivered during the pilot phase

Session	Date	Main Topic	Key Themes / Activities
Cross-cluster Event 1	30 April 2025	Cross-cluster Learning & Exchange	Sharing initial experiences across clusters; presentation of methodologies; peer learning among destinations; discussion of common tourism sustainability challenges.
Cross-cluster Event 2	7 November 2025	Action plans & Pilot Results Exchange	Presentation of action plans; exchange of pilot implementation experiences; discussion of lessons learned and future collaboration opportunities.
Cross cluster Event 3	27 January 2026	Lessons learnt, Ways forward & Reflection on pilot phase	Sharing of expert insights by invited speakers; Peer-to-peer exchanges on action plans and experiences in data management; reflection on the pilot experience and ways forward for a European Competence Centre

3.2 D3HUB Academy: thematic capacity-building webinars

Building on the cluster-specific webinar programmes described above, the D3HUB Academy emerged during the pilot phase as an additional capacity-building activity in response to participating DMOs' interest in exploring selected topics in greater depth. Unlike the cluster webinars, which focused on

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the specific challenge assigned to each group, the Academy sessions were open to all pilot destinations, regardless of their cluster, allowing participants to access knowledge and expertise on transversal issues relevant to data-driven destination management.

Through focused online webinars delivered by consortium partners and external experts, the D3HUB Academy complemented the broader combination of expert input, peer learning, mentoring, practical exercises, and digital tools tested through the D3HUB support scheme. The thematic format enabled the programme to respond flexibly to needs and areas of interest identified through the cluster webinars, discussions, and exchanges with participating destinations.

The positive reception of these sessions confirmed the value of maintaining a cross-cluster capacity-building offer beyond the core pilot programme. Consequently, the D3HUB Academy continued after the pilot phase through a 2026 programme whose themes were selected based on the interests and knowledge needs gathered from destinations during the webinars and wider pilot activities. This continuation provides regular access to specialised expertise, practical examples, European initiatives, and emerging technological developments.

The themes addressed included data visualisation and dashboard design, visitor satisfaction and sentiment analysis, European tourism indicators and monitoring tools, smart destination roadmaps and digital transformation, data interoperability and artificial intelligence, the European Tourism Data Space, and European strategies for sustainable tourism.

3.3 Tailored support to destinations

Throughout the pilot phase, destinations received tailored support through a combination of bilateral consultations, expert mentoring, and capacity-building activities. Support was adapted to the specific needs, priorities, challenges, and levels of maturity of each destination, ensuring that participants could address local issues while advancing the implementation of their action plans.

Cluster 1 – Redistributing Tourist Flows in Space and Time

For Cluster 1, tailored support was organised around a sequence of bilateral sessions, action plan reviews, expert exchanges, and technical discussions aimed at helping participating DMOs address the spatial and temporal concentration of tourism flows. The work focused on supporting destinations in preparing and refining their action plans, while also guiding data collection, measurement approaches, visitor flow monitoring, and the practical use of insights to define evidence-based interventions.

The support was adapted to the needs and maturity level of the participating destinations:

- **Ayuntamiento de Málaga, Fryslân, Langhe Monferrato Roero, Zuid Limburg and Sevilla City Office** received tailored guidance through bilateral sessions and follow-up exchanges focused on the development, review, and improvement of their action plans. The work addressed the coherence, feasibility, and alignment of the proposed actions with the tourism flow challenges previously identified by each DMO. Particular attention was given to clarifying data needs, assessing the usefulness of available information, exploring measurement approaches, and supporting destinations in transforming evidence into practical interventions for the spatial and temporal redistribution of tourism flows.

Cluster 1 has further fostered collaboration and knowledge exchange through initiatives including the D3HUB brainstorming session for DMOs' pilot phase feedback, maintaining a consistent emphasis on capacity building, enabling DMOs to interpret data effectively and transform it into robust, evidence-based actions.

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Furthermore, in 2026, and after the finalisation of the pilot phase in February, the project continues this collaborative approach through a new series of meetings with all experts assigned to Cluster 1, focusing on the redistribution of tourism flows in space and time, thereby reinforcing the strategic alignment between expert knowledge and DMO implementation processes.

Cluster 2 – Managing the Balance between Residents and Visitors

Within Cluster 2, the ten active DMOs were supported through multiple one-on-one consultations, tailored to individual needs and prospective action plans. In addition to the initial candidate interviews organised throughout February 2025 with each destination to identify relevant needs and challenges and co-construct an activities list for the pilot phase, dedicated additional meetings ensured personal follow-up focusing on unique challenges within a destination's specific context.

The one-to-one consultations were organised around the main thematic priorities emerging from each destination, ranging from resident perception and tourism taxation to visitor cards and the use of existing indicators:

- **Visit Košice** received dedicated support on resident satisfaction research, including feedback on data collection methods and resources, discussion of survey tools, and follow-up guidance on the design, implementation, and analysis of a resident survey.
- **Hradec Králové Regional Tourism Board** was supported in the setup of its resident perception survey, with feedback provided on the survey structure and its alignment with the destination's objectives.
- **Romantischer Rhein Tourismus GmbH** received tailored guidance on the design and implementation of a resident perception survey, with a focus on ensuring that the data collected could inform the destination's Action Plan and future decision-making.
- **Autonomous Province of Trento** was supported throughout the full lifecycle of resident research, from the review of the survey template and operationalisation of data collection to the analysis of the results and their translation into actionable insights.
- **Ljubljana Tourism** received support related to the interpretation of its existing resident survey data, including both quantitative and qualitative analysis and the potential development of compound indicators for more advanced analytical approaches.
- **City of Dubrovnik** was supported in exploring tourism taxation schemes, with discussions focused on implementation approaches, relevant benchmarks, and lessons learned from other destinations.
- **Algarve Tourism Board** received guidance on the development of a stepwise Action Plan approach for the operationalisation and monitoring of tourism taxation, including how to integrate citizen participation into decision-making processes.
- **SalzburgerLand Tourismus GmbH** was supported in exploring the implementation and analytical potential of visitor cards, including how resulting data could be used to generate insights for destination management.
- **Oberösterreich Tourismus GmbH** received guidance on exploratory research opportunities based on existing data, particularly regarding the relationship between the Tourism Acceptance Score and the potential effects of nature-related initiatives.

In addition to destination-specific support, all Cluster 2 destinations were assisted in drafting and refining their action plans. The pilot leaders of the D3HUB consortium provided feedback on the structure, coherence, feasibility, and relevance of the proposed actions, helping destinations translate their specific challenges into practical, data-informed measures.

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Cluster 3 – Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

Cluster 3 “Climate Mitigation and Adaptation” - provided targeted and practical support to destinations by combining expert guidance, peer-learning opportunities, and structured analysis of action plans. Through detailed reviews, bilateral meetings and « mentoring hours » with DMOs, each destination, including **Visit Skåne, SPIL-Turismo Lanzarote, Azores DMO, Westtoer, Ibiza Town Hall, Ayuntamiento de Valencia, Vorarlberg Tourismus GmbH and Salek Valley Tourist Board**, was supported in the assessment of their current situation, identification of implementation gaps, and drafting of tailored recommendations and action plans.

This process enabled destinations to refine their thematic focus across key areas such as data collection, carbon footprint measurement, resilience, governance, and stakeholder engagement. A central contribution of Cluster 3 was reinforcing the importance of data as a foundation for effective climate action, supporting DMOs in improving data collection or navigating a lack of data availability when this is not an option. The Cluster's objective has been to guide destinations towards developing user-friendly dashboards and reliable monitoring systems that support decision-making and benchmarking.

The cluster also played a critical role in helping destinations move from strategy to implementation by highlighting the need for clear methodologies, practical indicators, and operational tools that can translate plans into concrete actions through webinars and dedicated bilateral meetings with experts from different fields.

In addition, Cluster 3 fostered a strong culture of peer-learning, creating spaces for destinations to exchange experiences, benchmark progress, and explore collaboration opportunities despite varying levels of maturity. This collaborative approach responded to a clear demand for shared structures and practical knowledge, particularly in areas such as decarbonization and climate adaptation.

The cluster also created an environment for practical peer exchange, enabling participating destinations to compare approaches, share implementation challenges, and learn from different levels of maturity in climate action. These exchanges helped identify common needs across the cluster, particularly around decarbonisation, climate adaptation, resilience, risk management, and early warning systems. The insights gathered through this process also informed the design of future D3HUB Academy capacity-building activities, with an emphasis on applied, implementation-oriented training.

Cluster 4 – Emerging Destinations to Attract Quality and Sustainable Tourism

Within Cluster 4, the consortium provided highly tailored support to nine distinct destinations, each possessing unique operational profiles and highly specific needs. To address this diversity, the core methodology relied on dedicated bilateral meetings to guide the DMOs through their action plans, tackle data challenges, and support capacity building.

The advisory support was closely customised to the specific context and maturity of each destination:

- **Varna Municipality** proved to be one of the most active destinations regarding data provision. Bilateral sessions focused on helping them extract actionable insights from their datasets and customise the dashboard to meet their specific operational needs.
- **Northern Norway** provided API connections and was subsequently selected as a frontrunner destination. Support encompassed dashboard integration, strategies for effectively collaborating with the various municipalities it represents, and the generation of high-quality tourism products.

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- **Scheldevallei National Park** received guidance tailored to the realities of a newly established DMO, with a strong focus on the specific management requirements of a national park environment.
- **Rhodes** focused its consultations on improving the management of incoming tourism flows to the island and developing premium, quality-driven tourism products.
- **The Islands of Sicily region** (Aeolian Islands, Egadi Islands, Pelagie Islands, Pantelleria, and Ustica) utilised the sessions to address their primary structural challenge: accessing granular data that accurately reflects the distinct needs and realities of each island.
- **Nordhessen** concentrated on the development of quality tourism products. Discussions also delved into the complexities of data access and navigating the specific management frameworks operated by the German state.
- **Visit Emilia** (Provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia) received strategic advice on extracting data insights to promote a more sustainable tourism model. Furthermore, they requested and received targeted support for their application to join the UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO).
- **San Benedetto del Tronto** has deployed an extensive network of sensors across the destination. Meetings focused on analysing the technical feasibility of integrating these near-real-time data feeds directly into the general dashboard.
- **Zagreb County** participated in the comprehensive bilateral consultation process, receiving individualised support for the drafting, refinement, and monitoring of their strategic action plan.

Beyond the specific objectives of each destination, a rigorous follow-up of all action plans was conducted across the entire cluster. External experts were actively integrated into this process; they participated in joint sessions when invited and conducted independent bilateral meetings directly with the DMOs to provide specialised, domain-specific insights.

Finally, industry events were leveraged to strengthen these collaborations. Notably, in-person bilateral meetings were successfully held with **Nordhessen**, the **Islands of Sicily**, and **Rhodes** during the ITB exhibition, further consolidating the strategic alignment between the destinations and the project's long-term objectives.

3.4 Testing the methodology for measuring tourism sustainability

The pilot phase included the operational testing of the D3HUB methodology for measuring tourism sustainability. Building on the indicator framework established in D3.1, the exercise focused on exploring the practical conditions required to calculate, update and visualise the indicators across destinations with different territorial scales, data systems and institutional capacities.

The methodology applied during the pilot phase was based on the common indicator framework previously detailed in Deliverable [D3.1: Sustainable Tourism Indicator Dataset and Implementation Guide for Benchmarking](#) and reviewed through the D3HUB governance and consultation structures, including the Statistical and Research Board and the DMOs and Ecosystem Board, with contributions from relevant statistical and policy institutions, and further D3.1 also established the connection between the selected indicators, destination challenges and possible policy and management responses.

The testing of the methodology for measuring tourism sustainability followed a structured workflow encompassing the translation of the D3.1 indicators into data requirements, the launch of a data collection survey, the collection and validation of datasets provided by destinations, the analysis of the

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collected information, and the integration of complementary data sources, including Eurostat. This testing exercise therefore focused not only on the calculation of indicators, but also on the operational implementation of data collection, dashboard population, benchmarking activities, and destination engagement processes.

A significant effort during the pilot implementation was devoted to collecting the different datasets available within participating DMOs to support the calculation of the common sustainability indicators. To facilitate and standardise this data-gathering process, destinations were provided with two complementary submission mechanisms: an Excel-based template (Figure 4) and an online data submission tool (Figures 5 and 6). Both systems followed a common structure and covered economic, environmental, social, and governance-related variables, including standardised fields for metric identification, reporting frequency, units of measurement, geographical breakdowns, statistical geographic codes, reporting periods, and observed values. These tools constituted the main mechanisms through which destinations submitted data during the testing period and were designed to ensure consistency across participants and enable the systematic integration of the information into the dashboard for indicator calculation and benchmarking. The pilot also helped identify opportunities to further streamline the reporting process and adapt it to the different institutional settings, resource capacities and levels of data access across destinations, particularly for regular data updates.

Figure 4 Excel data collection template

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Figure 5 Online data collection form tool

The 'Select Form' interface allows users to choose a form to continue. It features a grid of nine options, each with an icon, a title, a description, and a 'Visitors' button. The options are: General (Demographic and infrastructure data), Arrivals (Tourist arrivals by country and month), Air Passengers (Air passenger arrivals by country and month), Nights (Number of nights by country and month), Same Day Visitors (Same-day visitors by country and month), and By Transport (Percentage by means of transport). A URL is visible at the bottom: https://template.dmo.d3hub-competencecentre.eu/form_same_day_visitors?dmo_name=&country=&year=2024

Figure 6 Online data collection template

The 'Tourist Arrivals' template is a monthly visitor arrivals by country of residence. It includes a header with the D3HUB logo and a title 'Tourist Arrivals'. Below the title, there are filters for DMO (Admin DMO), Country (N/A), and Year (2024). The main table displays data for 17 countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania) across 12 months (JAN to DEC) and a TOTAL column. Each cell contains a small input field for data entry.

COUNTRY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
Austria													
Belgium													
Bulgaria													
Croatia													
Cyprus													
Czechia													
Denmark													
Estonia													
Finland													
France													
Germany													
Greece													
Hungary													
Iceland													
Ireland													
Italy													
Latvia													
Lithuania													

The pilot implementation generated valuable insights into the operational dimensions of data collection and dashboard management. Significant differences emerged across destinations in terms of data availability, internal analytical capabilities, reporting resources, and access to relevant datasets.

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These differences directly influenced both the completeness and frequency of updates of the indicators requested during the pilot phase.

The testing process provided an opportunity to assess the extent to which the data required for the common indicator framework could be obtained through direct reporting. It also helped identify which underlying variables were more readily available and which required additional official, administrative or alternative data sources. It also enabled the consortium to evaluate challenges associated with periodic data updates, dashboard utilisation, benchmarking exercises, and destination engagement with monitoring functionalities. Additional implementation aspects monitored during the pilot included dashboard access and consultation patterns, feedback sessions with destinations, requests and questions received from participants, examples of dashboard use for benchmarking and monitoring purposes, and qualitative feedback collected from destinations and experts.

The experience also revealed several operational, organisational, and technical challenges affecting data collection and management:

- **Time and resource requirements:** the data-gathering process proved to be time and resource-intensive. During the initial stages, several DMOs reported limited internal capacity to identify, retrieve, and prepare the requested data. This challenge was progressively addressed by providing targeted guidance, clarification, and technical support to help participating DMOs complete the process.
- **Ownership and privacy:** In several cases, DMOs stated they were not the owners of the data and therefore could not share it. They also requested data privacy, explaining that the data is not public and cannot be shared unless it is aggregated with data from other DMOs.
- **Lack of quality and structure:** The data received varied considerably in terms of format, structure, and level of detail. In some cases, relevant information was available only within reports or other unstructured documents rather than in reusable datasets. Differences in the way data was organised and reported across DMOs also required additional processing and harmonisation before it could be analysed consistently.
- **Technical inconsistencies:** Differences were identified in the terminology, definitions, and units of measurement used across the data sources. In some cases, values within the same report were presented using different scales, such as individual units, thousands, or millions. These inconsistencies required additional validation and harmonisation before the data could be compared or combined reliably.
- **Limitations in KPI calculation:** In some cases, the available data did not fully match the level of detail, update frequency or territorial scope required for destination-specific analysis and the monitoring of concrete interventions. This highlights the complementary role of more granular and timely data alongside the D3.1 indicators, which provide a common basis for sustainability assessment and benchmarking.
- **Limitations and potential of official data sources:** Eurostat was explored as a complementary source, particularly for variables collected through harmonised and mandatory European statistical reporting. Its geographical coverage and level of detail did not always correspond to the boundaries of local destinations, and not all variables required for the D3.1 indicators were available. The pilot therefore confirmed the need for a broader source-mapping approach, also covering national statistical institutes, regional and local

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statistical authorities, administrative registers, the EU Tourism Dashboard and other relevant European and national data infrastructures.

- **Time and processing requirements:** Due to differences in the format, structure, and level of detail of the datasets received, each submission required an individual review and preparation process. The validation, cleaning, and harmonisation needed to ensure consistent and reliable analysis therefore represented a substantial time and resource commitment for the D3HUB technical team.

Overall, the data collection exercise involved 40 participating DMOs, and the results are summarised in the table below.

Table 6 Main data collection figures for testing the tourism sustainability measurement methodology

Participating Organisations (DMOs)	40
Individual Metrics Requested	39
Total Datasets Requested	1521
Datasets Identified as Available	624
Datasets Finally Received	359

The results demonstrated that dataset availability and delivery were not homogeneous across destinations, reflecting differences in local data ecosystems, institutional arrangements, and organisational capacities.

The pilot phase generated important practical lessons for the future operationalisation of the European Competence Centre and its associated services. In particular, it highlighted the importance of progressively reducing the reporting burden placed on destinations, especially for indicators already available through official statistical systems or other European initiatives. The testing activities also stimulated reflections on the potential future integration of automated data collection mechanisms, enhanced interoperability with official statistical sources, and the increased reuse of publicly available datasets, including those accessible through Eurostat and other European tourism monitoring initiatives. These findings provide a valuable basis for the further development of the D3HUB dashboard, data collection processes, and destination monitoring services.



4 Results and outcomes

This section presents the main results and outcomes generated through the implementation of the D3HUB pilot phase. It examines how the support scheme was translated into concrete outputs at destination level, including the development of action plans and the identification of good practices.

4.1 Action plans developed by destinations

The action plans developed by the participating D3HUB pilot destinations constitute one of the main outcomes of the pilot phase. Each participating DMO prepared its own destination-specific action plan, designed to perform two complementary functions. First, it consolidates the knowledge, methodologies, tools, examples, and practical lessons considered most relevant to that destination from the pilot activities. Second, it translates these learnings into an implementation roadmap for a concrete priority project selected by the DMO according to its specific challenges, needs, and strategic objectives.

The action plans therefore constitute the operational legacy of the pilot phase. Rather than serving only as summaries of the activities undertaken, they provide practical and context-specific guidance for moving from learning to implementation. Each roadmap defines the proposed project, its objectives, key actions, data and resource requirements, expected results, implementation steps, and potential follow-up needs, supporting the continued transition towards more sustainable, resilient, and data-driven destination management.

The plans were developed through a process combining thematic webinars, peer-learning exchanges, expert mentoring, cross-cluster collaboration, dashboard experimentation, and practical exercises. In this way, they reflect both the collective knowledge generated through the D3HUB pilot community and the individual circumstances and priorities of each participating DMO.

More specifically, each action plan includes:

- A synthesis of the main lessons and insights gathered during the pilot activities;
- An identification of the most relevant methodologies, tools, and practices explored within the cluster activities;
- A destination-specific analysis of challenges, opportunities, and available resources;
- A tailored roadmap defining strategic objectives, priority actions, and potential next steps for implementation;
- Reflections on governance needs, stakeholder involvement, data requirements, and long-term continuity.

To ensure consistency, comparability, and methodological alignment across all participating destinations, the D3HUB consortium developed and shared a common action plan template with all pilot destinations and cluster leaders. This template provided a harmonised structure and common guidance for preparing action plans, while still allowing sufficient flexibility for destinations to adapt the content to their own territorial context, governance structure, priorities, and maturity level.

This template established a shared framework covering key components such as destination challenges and context, strategic objectives, proposed actions, expected results and KPIs, methodologies and tools, governance and investment needs, monitoring systems, implementation timelines, and long-term legacy considerations. It also included guidance notes for both cluster leaders and destinations to facilitate the translation of pilot learnings into concrete implementation roadmaps

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and to support a coherent reporting process across the four thematic clusters. Furthermore, the template encouraged destinations to explicitly connect their action plans with broader destination strategies, existing sustainability initiatives, and future collaboration opportunities with the European Competence Centre.

The development of the action plans was carried out through a collaborative process involving the participating destinations, the D3HUB cluster leaders, and a pool of external experts engaged throughout the pilot phase. Cluster leaders played a central role in guiding destinations during the definition of challenges, identification of priorities, selection of methodologies, and formulation of concrete actions and indicators. Their support ensured coherence between the action plans and the broader objectives, methodologies, and learnings generated within each thematic cluster. In parallel, external experts contributed specialised knowledge, strategic recommendations, methodological guidance, and technical feedback, helping destinations refine, validate, and strengthen their proposed roadmaps and data-driven approaches.

Following the conclusion of the pilot phase in February 2026, the D3HUB consortium has continued to maintain dialogue and follow-up activities with participating destinations to support the initial implementation stages of selected action plans. This follow-up process aims to facilitate the transition from planning to operational deployment, helping destinations address early implementation challenges, identify additional expertise or data needs, and maintain the collaborative momentum established during the pilot phase. This continuity further reinforces the long-term vision of the future European Competence Centre for Tourism as a permanent support structure accompanying destinations beyond the pilot and capacity-building phases towards concrete and measurable transformation processes.

The topics addressed within each action plan were not predefined in isolation, but rather emerged organically from the collaborative learning process developed throughout the D3HUB pilot phase. More specifically, the thematic priorities and intervention areas were derived from the main topics explored during the cluster webinars, peer-learning sessions, expert exchanges, cross-cluster discussions, and practical exercises organised during the first phase of the pilot. These activities enabled destinations to progressively identify the challenges, methodologies, tools, and data needs most relevant to their local realities and strategic ambitions.

At the same time, destinations were encouraged to align the Action Plan topics with their own internal strategies, ongoing projects, governance priorities, sustainability agendas, and operational needs. This ensured that the proposed actions would not remain isolated pilot exercises but instead contribute directly to existing destination development processes and long-term policy objectives. In many cases, the action plans therefore build upon ongoing initiatives, observatories, monitoring systems, climate strategies, visitor management plans, or destination branding programmes already under development within the participating DMOs.

This approach was intentionally designed to maximise the practical value and long-term applicability of the pilot phase for participating destinations. In addition, it allowed the D3HUB consortium to simulate the future operational model of the European Competence Centre for Tourism: a collaborative support ecosystem where destinations receive guidance, methodologies, expertise, peer-learning opportunities, and data-driven tools to address real and concrete tourism management challenges. In this sense, the action plans constitute both an operational outcome for destinations and

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a practical demonstration of how the European Competence Centre could support evidence-based decision-making, strategic planning, and sustainable tourism governance across Europe.

The following table provides an overview of the principal action plan topics addressed by destinations within each cluster, illustrating how destinations converged around shared challenges while adapting proposed solutions, methodologies, and data-driven approaches to their own territorial context and tourism ecosystem.

Table 7 Overview of pilot destination action plans by cluster

Cluster 1: Managing balance between residents and tourists	Regulation / Access Control: Carrying capacity management, regulated transport systems, peripheral parking, visitor flow control.
	Data-driven marketing & communication. Dynamic and segmented campaigns based on data; promotion of less-visited areas; adaptive communication and nudging.
	Digital dashboards & monitoring systems. Real-time data dashboards and sustainability observatories to monitor and plan tourist flows.
	Smart signage, transport & accessibility. Intelligent signage, alternative routes, and improved accessibility and mobility to redistribute visitors.
Cluster 2: Managing balance between residents and tourists	Resident perceptions measurement through surveys
	Tourism taxation development to involve residents in decision-making and communicating the potential positive impacts of tourism
	Destination tourism card development: Exploratory analysis of visitor data and focus on introducing a resident-specific card
	Implement a data-driven visitor management system that balances ecological protection, local stakeholder interests, and quality nature experiences in highly frequented natural areas.
	Establishing a Climate Resilience Framework (CRF)



Cluster 3: Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation	Develop a portfolio of transformative and fundable projects.
	Data Collection and Management for Environmental Indicators
	Methodology to measure tourism's climate impact
	Measurement of the touristic carbon footprint
Cluster 4 Emerging destinations to attract quality and sustainable tourism	Repositioning/reinventing the destination and extending the season
	Certifications in sustainability
	Attract quality tourism and sustainable tourism.
	New geographical description, carrying capacity

The action plans reinforce one of D3HUB's central objectives: strengthening data-informed decision-making within tourism destinations. Through the pilot experience, destinations explored how data, indicators, dashboards, forecasting methods, stakeholder consultation, and sustainability measurement frameworks can support more balanced and future-oriented tourism management. Conceived as evidence-based and adaptable instruments, the action plans enable destinations to translate the knowledge acquired during the pilot into actionable strategies, while also providing valuable input for the continued development of the future European Competence Centre for Tourism. In this way, they create a bridge between the testing phase and the future operational deployment of the Centre's support services, contributing to the refinement of methodologies, capacity-building formats, and advisory mechanisms that can later be scaled across Europe.

4.2 Benchmarking, peer learning, and good practices identified

The D3HUB pilot phase enabled a collaborative benchmarking and peer learning process through which participating destinations exchanged experiences, compared governance approaches, tested methodologies, and identified transferable practices related to data-driven tourism management. Rather than functioning as a traditional benchmarking exercise focused exclusively on quantitative comparison, the pilot adopted a peer-learning approach in which destinations with different governance structures, territorial profiles, and levels of data maturity collectively explored solutions to shared tourism challenges. This approach allowed the pilot programme to generate practical

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insights not only on specific technical tools and indicators, but also on governance models, organisational capacities, and implementation processes required to support sustainable and data-driven destination management.

The peer learning activities confirmed that European destinations are facing increasingly interconnected challenges linked to tourism pressure, climate adaptation, seasonality, community acceptance, and the need for more sustainable tourism development models. Across the four pilot clusters, destinations consistently demonstrated the importance of adopting integrated approaches that combine tourism management objectives with broader social, environmental, and territorial considerations. The peer-learning exchanges also highlighted that many destinations, despite operating in different geographical and governance contexts, share common implementation barriers such as limited access to harmonised data, insufficient analytical capacities, fragmented governance structures, and difficulties in translating data insights into operational decision-making.

One of the main peer learning insights emerging from the pilot phase concerns the importance of adapting support services and methodologies to different levels of data maturity. The pilot programme intentionally involved destinations with varying levels of experience in data collection, dashboard use, sustainability monitoring, and digital governance. This diversity demonstrated that benchmarking should not only compare tourism indicators and management outcomes, but also acknowledge organisational readiness, governance capacities, and technical capabilities. Destinations with more advanced analytical systems often shared practical experiences related to predictive analytics, dashboard integration, and data governance. In contrast, destinations at earlier stages of digital transition contributed valuable perspectives on implementation barriers, capacity-building needs, and stakeholder engagement challenges. This confirmed the importance of designing flexible support services capable of responding to different institutional and technical realities across Europe.

A second important lesson concerns the growing relevance of combining quantitative tourism indicators with qualitative information related to resident perceptions, stakeholder expectations, and community wellbeing. Throughout the pilot phase, destinations increasingly recognised that traditional tourism performance indicators alone are insufficient to support balanced and sustainable destination governance. As a result, several pilot activities explored approaches for integrating resident sentiment surveys, stakeholder consultations, carrying capacity considerations, and quality-of-life dimensions into tourism monitoring systems. This reflected a broader shift from purely growth-oriented tourism management models towards more holistic governance approaches centred on long-term sustainability and community acceptance.

The benchmarking exchanges within the cluster focused on balancing residents and visitors, particularly reinforcing the importance of resident-centred tourism governance. Destinations explored practices related to resident perception monitoring, tourism taxation mechanisms, visitor management in sensitive areas, and approaches to balancing tourism development with local quality of life. These discussions demonstrated that effective tourism governance increasingly depends on the ability to integrate social indicators into destination management systems and to strengthen communication and participation mechanisms involving local communities and stakeholders.

Similarly, the pilot activities dedicated to redistributing tourist flows in space and time highlighted the growing importance of combining real-time monitoring systems, predictive analytics, and behavioural management strategies. Destinations exchanged experiences on the use of dashboards, mobility data,

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visitor flow analysis, intelligent signage systems, adaptive communication campaigns, and carrying capacity management approaches. The peer learning process showed that visitor redistribution strategies are most effective when data-driven monitoring tools are combined with governance interventions capable of influencing visitor behaviour, promoting alternative destinations or periods, and improving coordination between tourism, mobility, and territorial planning policies.

Within the climate change mitigation and adaptation cluster, benchmarking activities demonstrated both the increasing priority of climate governance within tourism policy and the methodological challenges that destinations still face in measuring tourism-related environmental impacts. Participating destinations explored practices related to carbon footprint measurement, environmental indicator development, climate resilience planning, and integrating tourism within broader territorial climate action frameworks. A recurring lesson throughout the exchanges was the need for more harmonised and interoperable methodologies that support comparable sustainability assessments while remaining adaptable to local conditions and available data sources. The pilot also highlighted that climate-related tourism governance requires long-term institutional coordination and cannot be addressed solely through isolated tourism policies.

The cluster dedicated to emerging destinations further illustrated that peer learning and the exchange of good practices are relevant not only for destinations experiencing overtourism pressures, but also for those seeking to develop tourism sustainably from earlier stages. Discussions focused on destination positioning, quality tourism strategies, sustainability-oriented branding, local ownership, reducing seasonality, and developing more resilient tourism models. These exchanges confirmed that emerging destinations often require support in building foundational governance and data capacities, while benefiting significantly from access to peer-learning networks and transferable experiences from more mature destinations.

Across all thematic clusters, the pilot phase confirmed the value of peer learning and benchmarking as interconnected governance and capacity-building mechanisms. Participating destinations highlighted the benefits of exchanging practical experiences, openly discussing implementation challenges, and learning from peers facing comparable issues. The experience also showed that benchmarking in tourism governance should extend beyond statistical comparison and be understood as a collaborative learning process that supports organisational development, policy innovation, and data-driven sustainability transitions. These findings reinforce the importance of embedding structured peer exchange, transferable good practices, and comparative learning opportunities within the future European Competence Centre service portfolio.

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5 Lessons learned and integration into the European Competence Centre

The D3HUB pilot phase confirmed the relevance and need for a European Competence Centre focused on supporting tourism destinations in their green and digital transition through data-driven destination management. The testing process demonstrated that destinations across Europe share many common challenges related to sustainability monitoring, tourism governance, data integration, forecasting, climate adaptation, and stakeholder engagement, while simultaneously differing significantly in terms of data maturity, organisational capacity, governance structure, and technical expertise.

The pilot phase also validated the peer-learning approach proposed in the D3HUB support scheme. Thematic clustering of destinations around shared challenges facilitated collaboration, benchmarking, and the exchange of practical solutions among destinations with different levels of maturity and tourism pressures. In particular, destinations appreciated the combination of expert-led sessions, collaborative discussions, examples of practical implementation, and opportunities to co-develop action plans aligned with their local realities.

At the same time, the testing phase highlighted several transversal challenges that remain barriers to the large-scale adoption of data-driven tourism management across Europe. These include fragmented data ecosystems, difficulties in accessing granular and interoperable datasets, limited internal human resources within DMOs, challenges in translating data into operational decision-making, and the need for stronger governance mechanisms to support public-private data collaboration.

The main lessons learned from the pilot phase are outlined below for each of the four thematic clusters.

Cluster 1 – Redistributing tourism flows in space and time.

One of the strongest findings from the pilot phase was the importance of combining multiple data sources to understand tourism flows effectively. Destinations highlighted that official accommodation statistics alone are insufficient for understanding real visitor movements, especially in destinations characterised by high volumes of day visitors, excursionists, or informal accommodation.

Several destinations experimented with integrating mobile device data, local sensor systems, traffic information, parking occupancy, and dashboard visualisation tools to improve monitoring capacities. This confirmed the growing importance of near real-time data for tourism management, particularly in destinations affected by overcrowding and mobility pressures.

Another key learning was that visitor flow management requires a strong connection between tourism data and wider territorial governance systems, including mobility planning, public transport management, environmental protection, and urban planning. The pilot demonstrated that tourism management cannot operate in isolation and requires cooperation across departments and institutions.

The peer-learning sessions also showed that data-driven communication and behavioural nudging strategies can play an important role in redistributing visitor flows. Several destinations explored dynamic communication campaigns promoting less-visited areas, alternative itineraries, and off-season experiences.

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The pilot activities additionally demonstrated the value of predictive approaches and forecasting models. Destinations increasingly recognised the need to move beyond retrospective analysis towards anticipatory management approaches capable of supporting preventive action.

Cluster 2 – Managing the balance between residents, visitors, and stakeholders

A major lesson from the pilot phase was the growing importance of resident perception data as a core component of sustainable tourism governance. Destinations recognised that traditional tourism indicators such as arrivals, overnight stays, and expenditure are insufficient to capture tourism impacts on communities. During the pilot in this cluster, there was strong interest in developing resident surveys, sentiment analysis approaches, and participatory governance mechanisms to integrate community perspectives into tourism planning processes.

A further insight from the pilot was the importance of adopting holistic approaches that connect tourism management with housing policies, mobility, public services, environmental quality, and cultural preservation. Tourism impacts are closely interconnected with broader territorial challenges and therefore cannot be addressed through tourism policy alone.

The discussions within the cluster also highlighted the importance of communication and transparency. Destinations emphasised that improving residents' understanding of tourism benefits, taxation systems, and reinvestment mechanisms can help strengthen social acceptance of tourism. An ongoing challenge that some destinations are currently dealing with is establishing a fair taxation system that also includes excursionists and day visitors and moves beyond taxation of bed nights.

Additionally, the pilot confirmed the value of combining quantitative indicators with qualitative insights. While dashboards and monitoring systems provide important evidence, destinations stressed that focus groups, interviews, and local stakeholder dialogue remain essential for understanding social tensions and perceptions.

Cluster 3 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation

One of the most important findings from the pilot phase was the high level of interest among destinations in measuring tourism-related carbon footprints and integrating climate indicators into destination management systems. The pilot demonstrated that destinations increasingly recognise the need to embed tourism within broader regional climate action frameworks and sustainability strategies.

A key learning was that climate governance in tourism requires cross-sector collaboration involving tourism authorities, accommodation providers, transport operators, municipalities, and environmental agencies. However, the pilot also revealed that governance and institutional frameworks are often not yet sufficiently developed to enable the effective coordination and integration of climate actions across stakeholders and administrative levels.

The pilot further showed that action plans represent an effective tool for structuring discussions, assessing the current status of destinations, and guiding the next steps towards implementation. Despite differences in thematic priorities and levels of maturity, participating destinations shared several common challenges and needs, particularly in relation to data management, governance structures, and implementation support.

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A strong common priority identified across destinations was the need to build a solid data foundation, as data availability, quality, accessibility, and governance continue to represent major barriers to evidence-based decision-making. The selection and use of indicators also emerged as a critical challenge, with destinations preferring practical, feasible, data-driven metrics rather than highly complex monitoring frameworks.

The testing process further demonstrated the importance of developing practical and understandable methodologies for emissions measurement. Destinations expressed strong interest in simplified tools and frameworks that support decision-making without requiring highly specialised technical expertise. In addition, the testing process highlighted the need for methodologies that address data gaps when primary data are unavailable, including the use of proxies, estimations, modelling approaches, and default values to ensure consistent indicator calculation while maintaining transparency regarding data quality and limitations.

Another important insight concerned the growing relevance of adaptation strategies alongside mitigation efforts. Destinations increasingly acknowledged the need to prepare for heatwaves, water scarcity, biodiversity degradation, extreme weather events, and changing tourism seasonality patterns. At the same time, the pilot confirmed that many destinations remain at relatively early stages of implementation, particularly about decarbonisation initiatives and the operational integration of climate measures into tourism management practices.

More broadly, the testing exercise highlighted a persistent gap between strategic planning and operationalisation. While destinations increasingly recognise the importance of climate action and sustainability monitoring, many require additional support to translate strategies into concrete actions, scalable solutions, and measurable outcomes.

One important finding was that sustainability indicators and dashboards can support awareness-raising among both tourism stakeholders and policymakers, helping to make climate considerations more visible within tourism governance. Destinations also showed significant interest in peer-learning opportunities, benchmarking exercises, and exchanges with other DMOs facing similar challenges, confirming the value of collaborative learning approaches within the European Competence Centre framework.

Finally, the pilot revealed strong demand for practical, applied knowledge, particularly on how to operationalise data collection processes, implement monitoring systems, develop climate adaptation and resilience measures, and design concrete sustainability projects. These findings suggest that future European Competence Centre activities should focus on implementation-oriented capacity-building actions, especially in areas where destinations currently lack sufficient internal expertise.

Cluster 4 – Supporting emerging destinations to attract quality and sustainable tourism

Within the Cluster 4 pilot, it became clear that emerging destinations require different support approaches compared to mature or overtouristed destinations. While some European destinations focus on mitigation and redistribution, emerging destinations often prioritise positioning, visibility, diversification, and sustainable growth management.

The pilot demonstrated strong interest in defining and attracting “quality tourists” whose profiles and behaviours align with local sustainability objectives, cultural identity, and community values. It also confirmed the importance of local ownership and stakeholder engagement in tourism development,

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as destinations emphasised that sustainable tourism strategies should be firmly rooted in local communities and supported by local actors. This reinforces the value of destination branding approaches centred on sustainability, authenticity, nature, culture, and regional identity.

Additionally, the cluster highlighted the need for data-driven decision-making even in destinations with comparatively lower tourism volumes. Emerging destinations recognised that access to reliable data can help avoid future overtourism pressures and support more resilient development pathways. The feedback provided by the cluster participants showed that peer-learning was particularly valuable for emerging destinations, which often have limited access to international expertise and benchmarking opportunities. These kinds of contacts and inputs help them build awareness of such topics in their ecosystem.

Beyond the cluster-specific learnings, the pilot phase generated several transversal insights relevant for the future development of the European Competence Centre:

- **Peer-learning and benchmarking as highly valuable support mechanisms**

The cluster-based peer-learning structure proved to be one of the strongest elements of the support scheme. Destinations consistently highlighted the value of exchanging experiences with peers facing similar challenges. The combination of practical case studies, expert guidance, collaborative discussions, and action-plan development created a highly participatory learning environment.

- **Need for adaptable support services**

The pilot phase confirmed that European destinations are characterised by very different levels of maturity, governance structures, technical capacity, and tourism challenges. Consequently, future European Competence Centre services must remain modular and adaptable to different destination profiles.

- **Data availability remains a structural challenge**

Across all clusters, limited access to granular, interoperable, and comparable data remained one of the most important barriers to implementing data-driven tourism management. In this regard, destinations repeatedly highlighted challenges related to:

- Access to private-sector data;
- Interoperability between systems and datasets;
- Standardisation of indicators and methodologies;
- Financial costs of advanced datasets;
- Data governance and legal considerations.

- **Human capacity and expertise gaps persist**

Many destinations, particularly smaller DMOs, continue to face limitations in terms of internal technical expertise and dedicated staff resources. The pilot demonstrated that competence-building activities remain essential for enabling destinations to operationalise data-driven governance approaches.

- **Importance of governance coordination**

Most tourism challenges explored during the pilot phase extend beyond the remit of tourism departments alone. Effective implementation requires coordination with transport authorities, environmental agencies, housing departments, municipalities, and private stakeholders.

- **From monitoring to implementation**

The pilot phase demonstrated that many destinations are already collecting data but still face difficulties transforming data into concrete policy interventions and operational measures. Future

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European Competence Centre services should therefore place strong emphasis on implementation support, governance facilitation, and action-oriented methodologies. A key lesson for the future Competence Centre is therefore the need to support destinations at two complementary levels: through a common, internationally aligned indicator framework for monitoring and benchmarking, and through tailored assistance to identify the more granular or frequently updated data required for specific policy interventions and action plans.

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6 Conclusion

The D3HUB pilot phase provided a practical test of the support scheme designed for the future European Competence Centre, moving from a theoretical service model to its application with 40 destinations representing different geographical contexts, governance levels, tourism profiles, and degrees of data maturity. Through the four thematic clusters, the pilot demonstrated that destinations across Europe share many common challenges, while differing considerably in their capacity to access data, apply methodologies, mobilise stakeholders, and implement data-informed solutions.

The pilot highlighted the importance of developing a holistic, modular, and integrated service portfolio capable of supporting destinations throughout their data-driven transformation journey and adapting to different levels of maturity. This portfolio should combine capacity building, practical toolkits, expert thematic and technical guidance, peer learning, benchmarking, bilateral mentoring, shared digital infrastructure, and implementation support. Such an approach would allow the European Competence Centre to assist both destinations requiring foundational guidance on data sources, indicators, and governance and more advanced organisations seeking specialised methodologies, technical assistance, and support in applying solutions within their specific territorial and organisational contexts.

The preparation of destination action plans was a particularly important outcome. These plans created a structured connection between the knowledge acquired during the pilot and each destination's operational priorities, helping participants define their challenges, objectives, data requirements, proposed interventions, stakeholder responsibilities, monitoring approaches, and resource needs. They also served as a practical mechanism for conceptualising the types of real projects and initiatives that the future European Competence Centre should be prepared to support. As such, the action plans constitute both an operational legacy for the destinations and concrete evidence of how the European Competence Centre can accompany organisations from the initial identification of a challenge through the design, preparation, and implementation of tailored responses.

Testing sustainability indicators, data-collection processes, and dashboard-related activities also generated valuable conclusions directly linked to the main objective of the future European Competence Centre: helping and guiding European DMOs in adopting a data-driven destination management approach. Reliable, accessible, and comparable data are essential to this transition, yet the pilot showed that collecting and operationalising such information requires substantial preparation, validation, cleaning, and harmonisation. Data availability varied considerably across destinations, while geographical coverage, definitions, formats, measurement units, ownership conditions, and institutional responsibilities were often inconsistent. These findings highlight the need for the European Competence Centre to provide practical support not only in interpreting and using data, but also in identifying appropriate sources, improving data quality, and establishing robust collection and governance processes. Future monitoring services should also progressively reduce the reporting burden on destinations by reusing official and publicly available information, improving interoperability, and exploring automated data-collection mechanisms wherever feasible.

More broadly, the pilot confirmed that the transition towards data-driven destination management is not primarily a technological challenge. Access to platforms, dashboards, and analytical tools is important. Still, their effective use depends on organisational capacity, appropriate skills, stable resources, clear internal responsibilities, political support, and cooperation among the different actors that produce or use tourism-related information. In this context, benchmarking and peer learning

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proved particularly valuable, as they enabled destinations to share how they apply methodologies, tools, governance arrangements, and data-driven practices in real operational settings. Comparing these experiences helped participants identify transferable approaches, understand how similar challenges are addressed under different territorial and institutional conditions, and adapt relevant solutions to their own context.

The pilot validated the core concept of a European Competence Centre supporting tourism destinations in their green and digital transition. It also provided clear evidence of the adaptations required to make its services accessible, practical, scalable, and responsive to different local realities. The experience and lessons documented in this deliverable establish an operational foundation for developing a long-term centre capable of connecting European standards and expertise with the concrete challenges faced by destinations, ultimately strengthening more sustainable, resilient, and evidence-informed tourism governance across Europe.

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