

Small Destinations and experiential tourism

EVENT REPORT

Webinar

10th of March

STW - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The seminar was the first seminar on **Sustainable Tourism** – the current theme of the **SERN Thematic Wall (STW)**. The purpose of the STW is to deepen the engagement of network members in topics crucial to the network's priorities. The focus on **Sustainable Tourism** during spring of 2025 seeks to promote SERN's work on **Green and sustainable communities**. This is done by examining how local actors can **reap the economic and social benefits of tourism**, while ensuring tourism does not interrupt social and ecological systems.

During this live webinar, **small destinations and experiential tourism** were discussed: first in four presentations, then through a wider discussion. As tourists demand more authenticity, **experiential tourism offers meaningful engagement with local cultures**. Small destinations, which might not have large tourist attractions, can offer experiences close to the local community, enabling immersive experiences.



More information at:
sern.eu



Speakers



**JOHAN
CAVALLINI**
Svensk
Destinations
utveckling



Opportunities and challenges for small destinations in relation to the trends of experiential tourism

Johan discussed **changing trends** in tourism, as micro-destinations become more accessible, and tourists crave more authentic experiences. This demand small destinations are able to fulfill, however, **a careful strategy are needed** as to not overwhelm the local community. Johan suggested working with **GAP-analysis**, and making sure to engage local people and businesses through **workshops and focus groups**. Only **with community, can competitiveness be ensured**.



Background

With travel becoming more accessible, the emergence of micro destinations has become increasingly evident. Defined as smaller, lesser-known locations with distinct tourist appeal, micro destinations offer visitors unique cultural, natural, and historical attractions that often contrast with mainstream tourism spots.

Micro destinations hence hold significant potential for developing and sustaining local experiential tourism. However, they are also vulnerable to tourism's negative impacts, as limited resources and knowledge can hinder efforts to create sustainable tourism strategies.



Whether you are focusing on experiential tourism or event-based tourism for your destination, good destination development strategy is needed.

A good way to start the work is through Focus group workshops and a gap-analysis with key stakeholders in the local tourism ecosystem.

- Different stakeholders, including other nearby micro destinations, regional Entities who often providing overarching policies, funding, and cross-municipal coordination for sustainable tourism initiatives
- Municipalities who are directly responsible for local infrastructure, community engagement, and integrating tourism with municipal services
- Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) focusing on destination management, marketing, brand development, tourism strategy, and relationship building often working closely with local businesses and community groups.

Additionally, the meetings are crucial to benchmark the best practices for the sustainable development of both established and emerging micro destinations among the participating members.



**SERENA
ANTINORI
&
FEDERICO
GAGGI**

Municipality
of Bertinoro



Wine as a tool for sustainable development

Serena and Federico presented how the municipality of Bertinoro has **worked with wine, to build sustainable practices for tourism**. Wine is an **important part of local culture** in the village, which has roots back to medieval times. The growing of wine also reflects the **unique natural landscape** of the area. By engaging local wine producers, Bertinoro has sought to develop tourism in a way which considers the unique area. **A key aspect has been to foster local cohesion**, and not developing only tourist areas but also the places where the local people live.





**PIA
AXELSSON**
Motala
Municipality



Sustainable Tourism linked to our Nature

Pia discussed the work the Swedish municipality of Motala has done to promote sustainable tourism in their area. Motala offers through its beautiful lake-covered landscape, a unique opportunity for **outdoor tourism**, which is important for the municipality and local businesses to take advantage of. Moreover, Pia highlighted how the municipality has worked with making **local inhabitants feel part of large events** hosted in the municipality, but also how the Motala **works with other municipalities**: seeing each other not as competitors but as complements to each other.



The big question

How do we
...turn experiences in nature into nature tourism?
...get tourism companies to make money on nature experiences?



...How do we get companies to put in the nature experience as an offer and take home the profit from it?
...get companies to package several of their own products or together with someone else's products?



**SONIA
GERONIMO**
GAL L'Altra
Romagna



Experiential tourism and place marketing: The Romagna Autentica Model

Sonia presented how GAL L'Altra Romagna has worked with promoting tourism in the eight inner mountain valleys of the Emilia-Romagna region. Recognizing that **each valley has its own unique customs, culture, and profile of experiences**, the organization embarked on a rigorous process to ensure the best possible framework for promoting tourism. This was done through:

- 1) mapping the **types of experiences** available,
- 2) promote through **institutional channels**,
- 3) using **typical product marketing** and
- 4) **project promotion** and a communication campaign.



Discussion

In the final part of the seminar, different aspects from the talks were brought up and discussed. Participants recognized how **difficult it can be to engage the local community in tourism endeavors**, making local inhabitants feel part of events and owners of investments made. Trying to **involve locals, also by targeting part of the experience** to them, as well as **trying to keep locals informed** were highlighted. It was also found important to take a **bottom-up approach** to planning.

The challenges of **larger scale cooperation** were also brought up. Is there a risk of **losing local identity**, when working together to promote a larger area? The benefits of larger collaborations were highlighted: it **makes it possible to make long-term strategic choices**, benefiting the community for years to come. A challenge for smaller municipalities can however be the **resources needed to build collaborations**, as in smaller municipalities one office will often be managing everything, making it hard to find time and staff enough to realise the visions and ambitions in the area.



Thank you to all speakers!

NEXT STW EVENT:

Attracting and retaining talents

1st of April 14.30-16.30 CET

Live webinar

