UST

UPSKILLING MUNICIPAL STAFF COMPETENCES ON PLANNING AND MANAGING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

THE UST PROJECT

GAP ANALYSIS

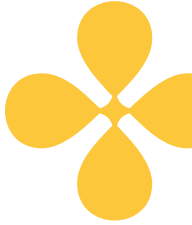### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABILITY ASPECTS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

SVENSK DESTINATIONS UTVECKLING

FALKÖPING KOMMUNEN

SERN

COMUNE DI SCANDIANO

AYUNTAMIENTO DE JIJONA

CARDET

THE
PROJECT IN SHORT

ACRONYM	**UST**
TITLE	Upskilling municipal staff competencies in planning and managing sustainable tourism
FUNDING PROGRAMME	ERASMUS+
LENGTH	2022 - 2025

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of the project is to strengthen the development of sustainable local tourism and increase the attractiveness of medium-sized municipalities through up-skilling the staff of municipalities

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives are:

1. To increase knowledge and competencies of local authorities staff in sustainable tourism planning and management;
2. To develop innovative local strategies to define the city's territorial marketing to promote the cities as a tourism destination, boosting the active participation of local stakeholders;
3. To promote sustainable local tourism that takes into full account current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts.

TANGIBLE RESULTS

- **SELF-ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**: a self-assessment tool that will help the Municipalities understand where the knowledge and practice gaps are in key areas of tourism.
- **ONLINE TRAINING COURSE:** new training content for civil servants and managers working in the field of tourism responding to essential competencies for the staff of the Municipalities.
- **FINAL HANDBOOK**: a collection of good practices and concrete examples of sustainable tourism at the European level.

LEAD PARTNER

SveDest (Svensk Destinationsutveckling) (SE)

OTHER PARTNERS

SERN (Sweden Emilia Romagna Network), Municipality of Scandiano (IT); Municipality of Falköping (SE); CARDET (CY), Municipality de Jijona (ES)

WEBSITE

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THE UST PROJECT
GAP ANALYSIS

This UST PROJECT GAP ANALYSIS is a summarized version of the key findings in the work done to create a Self-assessment framework, aimed at increasing the awareness of public authorities about their needs in knowledge and practice in the areas of sustainable tourism promotion.

The main result of the Self Assessment framework developed by UST project partners, has been the **Self-assessment questionnaire,** tested by the partners but intended to be a tool that can be used by any other interested municipality in identifying the maturity of a municipality's strategy, policymaking, and execution in relation to sustainable tourism development and up-skilling opportunities.

This tool was initially tested in the municipalities of the project partners, Municipality of Scandiano (IT), Municipality of Xixona (ES), Municipality of Falköping (SE) and in other municipalities that are associated partners of the UST project; Municipality of Bertinoro (IT), Municipality of Limasol (CY), Municipality of Polemida (CY) and Municipality of Agios Athanasios (CY) but its definitive version can be used in different areas and countries all over Europe. The tool becomes effective if the questionnaire is administered in the form of a workshop in which not only the Municipality staff who deal with the specific tourism sector are present, but also all the stakeholders interested in planning sustainable tourism strategies.

**The Self Assessment Questionnaire can be found here**

Each partner summarised the results of the interviews and workshops conducted in the different municipalities, and the lead partner Svensk Destinationsutveckling (SveDest) starting from the materials collected, compiled this comparative gap analysis of the results in October 2023.

**Co-funded by
the European Union**

INTRODUCTION

There are many different ways of working with sustainability in tourism. Many municipalities have policies in place and have made progress, but there is no single right way to do it or established method that handles this multi-faceted field. Within the UST project different partners started with different perspectives on sustainability, some leaning towards social issues of community, some leaning toward green initiatives. The goal of Work Package 2 (WP2) was to develop and utilize a self-assessment questionnaire designed to assess and understand the work of municipalities in the field of sustainable tourism development in a non-prescriptive way. By using the full set of SDGs, the self-assessment questionnaire will help identifying good practices, areas of improvement and blind spots. The overarching aim is to use the self-assessment questionnaires to pinpoint upskilling opportunities for the stakeholders in each of the partner municipalities and make the framework available for others to use.
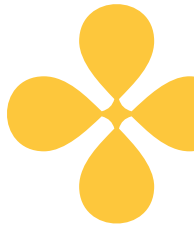
SUMMARY

SveDest, as the lead partner, initiated the project by workshopping the understanding and focus for each of the parter organisations. Based on these insights a prototype questionnaire grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was tailored for municipalities. This prototype underwent tests and revisions based on structured feedback from the partnering municipalities of Falköping, Xixona, and Scandiano where the partners rated each question based on performance, relevance and ease of completion. The self-assessment questionnaire then underwent some changes, both in scope and refined version was then employed in dedicated workshops. Other project partners, SERN and Cardet, expanded its application by conducting workshops with their associated municipalities. The collective efforts have yielded a wealth of data highlighting areas of potential upskilling.

PROTOTYPE VERSION LEARNINGS

The prototype version of the questionnaire, while ambitious in its scope, presented certain challenges. A major observation was the disparity in maturity levels across municipality organisations, particularly in terms of strategic discussions related to the SDGs. While some municipalities actively engaged with a strategic perspective, some were focused on more tactical or operational tasks. The notion of "sustainability" also posed interpretative challenges, with definitions varying not just between different municipalities, but even within them. This led to concerns about how the academic nature of the questionnaire would be received in workshops with the municipalities and whether they would find relevance in the topics and questions. Such feedback was invaluable, leading to the iterative refinement of the questionnaire to make it more accessible and impactful for all participants. There was also the question of scope overwhelm where the questionnaire was made easier to complete. This should make the final version accessible for municipalities that have not been involved in the processes as well, which was tested and confirmed in with two non-partner municipalities, Bertinoro and Polemidia, by SERN and Cardet respectively.

FINAL VERSION RESULTS

In the final version of the questionnaire the questions were divided into two sections, a mandatory section with general questions and section with a deep dive into the focus areas of each SDG where the municipalities self-selected the areas if they opted for the half day workshop. Most municipalities completed all the questions in one sitting, dividing stakeholders into relevant groups based in the SDGs in the workshop. The streamlined structure of the final version of the questionnaire yielded a more concise and focused response from the municipalities.

This bifurcation, comprising of a mandatory section and an elective deep dive, catered to the diverse knowledge base and strategic priorities of the participating municipalities. By allowing self-selection based on their comfort and interest zones, the engagement levels saw a considerable uptick during the workshops. It was particularly noteworthy to see stakeholders rallying together, forming SDG-centric groups, and converging their collective wisdom towards the common goal of sustainable tourism development.

The power of this approach was evident in the uniformity and depth of the responses received. Not only did it shed a light on the current standing of the municipalities in relation to the SDGs, but it also accentuated the variance in approach, shedding light on unique strategies, innovative interventions, and specific challenges faced by different municipalities.

Final version findings

Relevance and validity of questions

In the pursuit of understanding the nuances of sustainable tourism, the questions crafted for the municipalities were designed to be both relevant and valid. However, relevance, by its very nature, is situational. It's not uncommon for certain questions to resonate deeply with some municipalities while being perceived as less pertinent by others, due to their specific situations and priorities. This shows the complexity of sustainability and the strength of an approach that allows situational priorities to surface through a broader approach.

Self-selection bias

Given the elective nature of some sections, there is an inherent risk of self-selection bias. This means that municipalities, driven by their own experiences and focus areas, might opt for sections they are more comfortable with, potentially overlooking areas where they could benefit from outside perspectives.

While this self-selection enables the gathering of detailed insights in chosen areas, it could also limit the breadth of understanding across the entire spectrum of sustainable tourism. The self-selection bias is also evident when comparing the results of the partners in the project who generally score much higher on both performance and relevance than the two non-project municipalities who also completed the questionnaire.

Individual differences and common opportunities

A closer analysis of the data reveals a spectrum of individual strengths and opportunities among the municipalities. Each municipality showcases its unique approach to sustainable tourism, stemming from its cultural, geographical, and socio-political context. However, amidst these individual narratives, certain common threads emerged, signifying universal challenges or strategies that transcend individual boundaries.

Upskilling opportunities for individual municipalities

Each municipality, through the self-assessment, identified areas where upskilling could lead to enhanced outcomes. These ranged from honing specific skills to understanding and adopting best practices from peers. A tailored list of upskilling opportunities was drawn up for each municipality, providing a roadmap for targeted development.

Common upskilling opportunities

A meta-analysis of the collected data unveiled several common upskilling opportunities. These are areas where a significant number of municipalities felt the need for enhancement. Such commonalities present a chance for collaborative learning and shared strategies.

Vertical progression and upskilling

On assessing the vertical progression of municipalities, it became evident that while some were well-entrenched in their sustainable tourism endeavours, others were in the early stages, get to grips with foundational challenges. There exists a pronounced upskilling opportunity in aiding municipalities to kickstart their initiatives. Providing them with the tools, knowledge, and strategies to get things off the ground can catalyse their journey towards sustainable tourism.

In summary, while individual strengths and nuances are pivotal, there's an undeniable value in collaborative learning and shared upskilling opportunities. Recognizing and acting upon these common challenges can lead to a more cohesive and robust sustainable tourism framework for all involved municipalities.

GAP ANALYSIS RESULTS

In the results we are looking for areas with high relevance where performance can be improved. This would indicate that the area is a priority which means that stakeholders are more likely to engage in upskilling. The gap analysis looks at the difference between the relevance and the performance.

Key finding for upskilling – general

1 To what extent does our municipality have a clearly defined vision and mission that guide our strategy and policymaking efforts? (Partner gap 1,7, Gap+ 1,3)

2 How well does our municipality communicate and engage with stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and community organizations, in the strategy and policymaking process? (Partner gap 1,7, Gap+ 1,3)

6 To what extent does our municipality have a comprehensive understanding of the sustainability challenges and opportunities related to tourism in our destination, including economic, social, and environmental impacts? (Partner gap 1,7, Gap+ 1)

8 To what extent does our municipality have a collaborative approach to sustainable tourism development, working with other local, regional, and national stakeholders to achieve shared goals? (Partner gap 1, Gap+ 1)

TABLE 1. GENERAL UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES

		PARTNERS			PARTNERS AND NON-PARTNERS		
		PERFORMANCE	RELEVANCE	GAP	PERFORMANCE	RELEVANCE	GAP
1	**To what extent does our municipality have a clearly defined vision and mission that guide our strategy and policymaking efforts? (Partner gap 1,7, Gap+ 1,3)**	2,3	4	1,7	2,2	3,5	1,3
2	**How well does our municipality communicate and engage with stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and community organizations, in the strategy and policymaking process? (Partner gap 1,7, Gap+ 1,3)**	2,3	4	1,7	2,2	3,5	1,3
6	**To what extent does our municipality have a comprehensive understanding of the sustainability challenges and opportunities related to tourism in our destination, including economic, social, and environmental impacts? (Partner gap 1,7, Gap+ 1)**	2,3	4	1,7	2,2	3,2	1
8	**To what extent does our municipality have a collaborative approach to sustainable tourism development, working with other local, regional, and national stakeholders to achieve shared goals? (Partner gap 1, Gap+ 1)**	3	4	1	2,4	3,4	1

The four areas to focus on in WP3 is vision and mission, communication, understanding impacts and collaboration with partners. That is not to say that the other areas are not interesting, but these four areas are the most relevant both for the partners and for the non-partners and the conclusion can be drawn that this is most likely the case for a lot of other municipalities.

Key finding for upskilling – SDGs

These are the high relevance areas and the partner gap and the gap+ (partners and benchmark municipalities) for each one.
SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 7, SDG 12, SDG 14, SDG 15 and SDG 17.

TABLE 2. SDG UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES

	PERFORMANCE	RELEVANCE	GAP	PERFORMANCE	RELEVANCE	GAP
SDG 1	3,0	3,7	0,7	2,6	3,4	0,8
SDG 2	2,3	3,3	1,0	2,6	3,4	0,8
SDG 7	2,0	3,3	1,3	1,6	2,8	1,2
SDG 12	2,3	4,0	1,7	2	3,4	1,4
SDG 14	1,7	3,3	1,7	1,25	2,5	1,25
SDG 15	2,0	3,7	1,7	1,5	2,75	1,25
SDG 17	2,3	3,7	1,3	2	3	1

From this list we have selected SDGs that match the strengths shown in the questionnaire and the partner profiles. Each municipality partner can match their strengths to one of the SDGs and provide good practice examples.

- Xixona will provide good practice examples from their work with SDG 1 and SDG 2 with focus on community engagement, entrepreneurship and promoting local culinary experiences.
- Scandiano will provide good practice examples from SDG 12 with focus on circular practices, community engagement and tourism infrastructure.
- Falköping will provide good practice examples from their work with SDG 14 and SDG 15 with focus on preserving ecosystems, integration of tourism activities and alignment with conservation goals. The exact focus will be decided during WP3.

GAP ANALYSIS RESULTS

General questionnaire results show us issues of primary importance and will be used as the primary talking points in the educational modules in WP3. Given the learnings of WP2 we draw the conclusion that WP3 modules should have an introduction level and an advanced level focusing more on good practices.

This means that the proposal for WP3 is as follows:
Module 1 introduction: Community engagement in the tourism product, entrepreneurship and promoting local culinary experiences.
Module 1 good practice: Xixona municipality.

Module 2 introduction: Circular sustainability practices, community engagement and tourism infrastructure for sustainability.
Module 2 good practice: Scandiano municipality.

Module 3 introduction: Preserving ecosystems, integration of tourism activities and alignment with conservation goals.
Module 3 good practice: Falköping municipality.

SveDest will oversee all introductory materials as well as help with project structure for the good practice modules.

The format discussed for WP3 has been animated videos where we can use multiple language tracks, a study companion with the module in text format, a checklist for good practice and a quiz to check key learnings from the respective module.

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