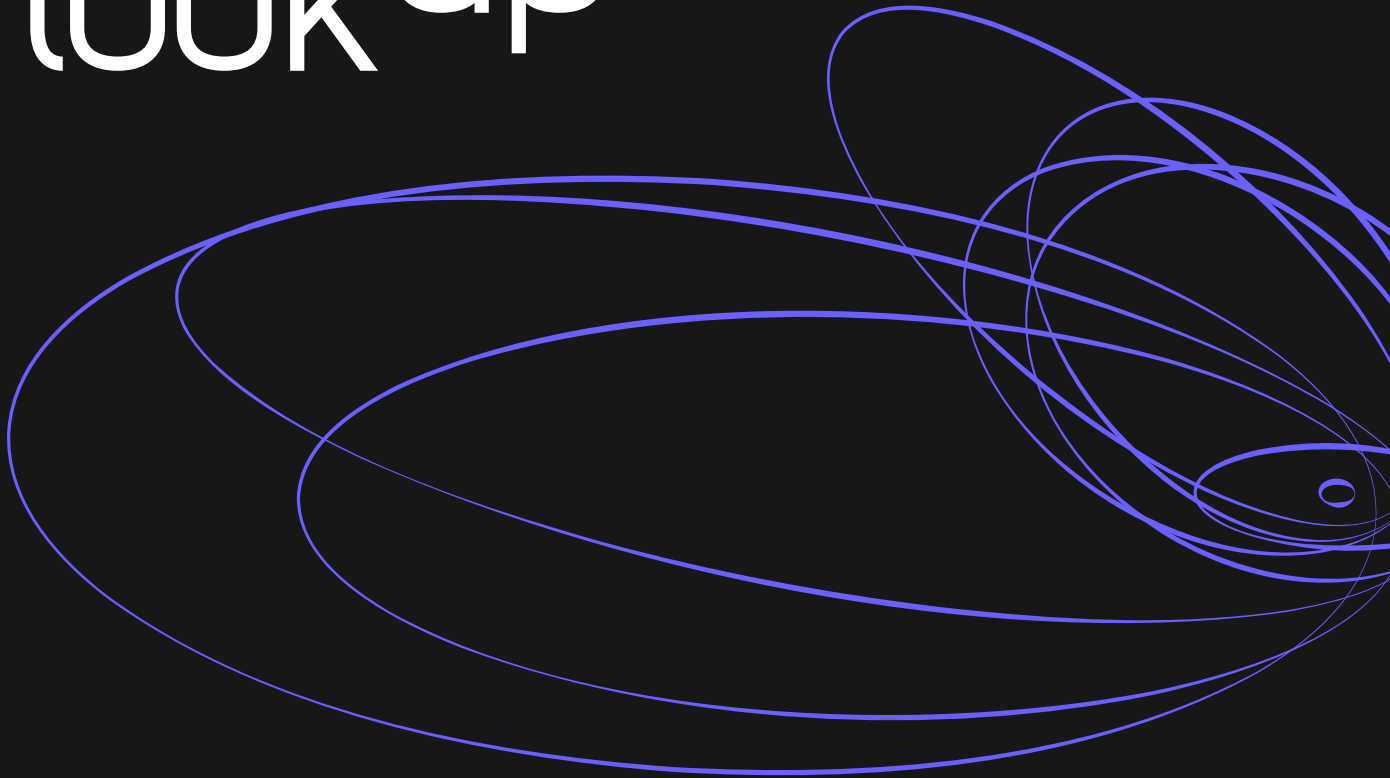


lookUp



Triple Transition for Tourism Playbook

Guidelines and Best Practices for SMEs in Tourism:
Implementing Sustainability, Resilience, and Digitalization
Principles

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Implementing Sustainability, Resilience, and Digitalization Principles

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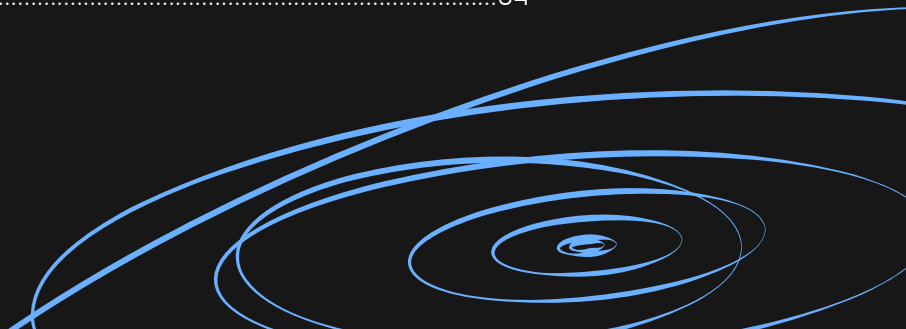
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See you in Transylvania!

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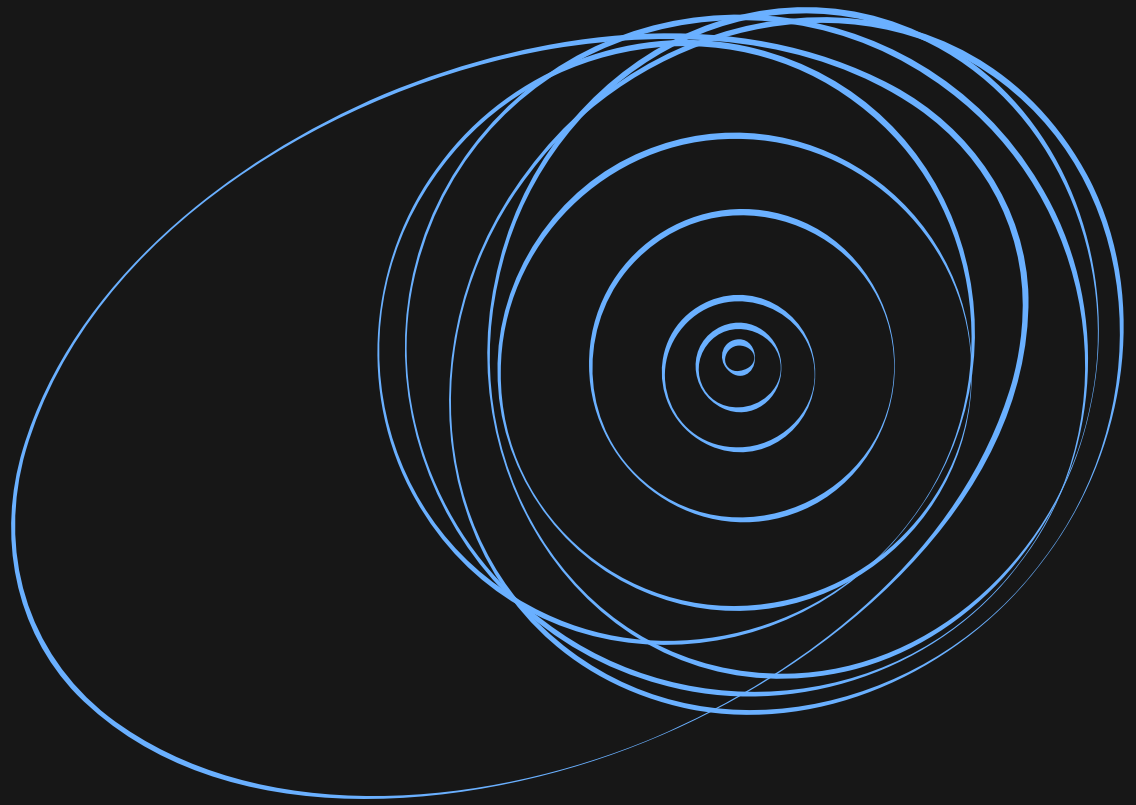
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Introduction

This playbook was created in collaboration with partners in the Single Market Programme project LookUP, which aims to strengthen support for the development of tourism and other activities in rural areas in birdwatching, astronomy, and stargazing. The LookUP project is a set of support actions for businesses funded by the European Union. Within the project, it promotes the development of businesses from the perspective of sustainability, digitalization, and resilience. The project addresses not only strengthening the capacity and quality of services in companies, but also promoting innovation in management, knowledge transfer, a higher level of resilience to crises, and promoting the development of business in a more green and digital direction. With this type of support, the project seeks to contribute to the empowerment of local communities, the popularization of science, and the preservation of cultural, environmental, historical, ethnographic, and biological elements as part of efforts for (more) sustainable development of Europe.

The playbook is intended for businesses, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders that want to learn more about the definitions and methods of implementing sustainability, digitalization, and resilience in businesses. The content in the playbook is structured so that each of the three concepts is first briefly defined, followed by a description of how to implement them and their contribution to the business of the company. The playbook showcases examples of how the concepts of sustainability, digitalization, and resilience are implemented in good practices from the four European Union countries where the project partners are based: Finland, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain. With examples of good practices, we want to familiarize readers with the use of concepts in the real business world and show that it is possible to promote development in these directions in companies despite numerous challenges. At the end of the playbook, a few relevant contributions and web resources are also collected that allow independent further research and collection of additional examples of good practices.



Sustainability

Sustainability is a critical pillar for business success in today's world. It encompasses responsible practices that not only benefit the environment and society but also drive long-term profitability and resilience. This playbook explores how SMEs can implement principles of sustainability in a practical and understandable way.

Sustainability is a conscious and strategic approach to conducting business in a way that minimizes negative impacts on the environment, society, and future generations. It involves balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

Three Key Principles of Sustainability

- 1. Environmental Responsibility:** Focusing on reducing the ecological footprint by conserving resources, minimizing waste generation, adopting renewable energy, and promoting sustainable practices in the supply chain.
- 2. Social Engagement:** Embracing social responsibility by considering the wellbeing of employees, promoting diversity and inclusion, ensuring fair labor practices, supporting local communities, and fostering ethical business conduct.
- 3. Economic Viability:** Driving economic growth while integrating sustainability practices. Developing innovative products and services that meet market demands, enhance operational efficiency, and capitalize on cost-saving opportunities.

There are several benefits of sustainability

Cost Savings. Sustainable practices often lead to reduced resource consumption, waste management costs, and energy expenses. By optimizing resource utilization and adopting energy-efficient technologies, SMEs can achieve significant cost savings in the long run.

Competitive Advantage. Sustainability enhances brand reputation, attracting environmentally and socially conscious customers that prioritize ethical businesses. It differentiates SMEs in the marketplace, expanding the market share and customer loyalty.

Risk Mitigation. Sustainable practices help SMEs adapt to regulatory changes, market shifts, and emerging consumer demands. By identifying and managing risks proactively, businesses become more resilient and better prepared for potential disruptions.

Employee Engagement. Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability fosters employee engagement and pride. Employees appreciate working for businesses aligned with their values, leading to higher job satisfaction, retention, and productivity.

What are the implementation strategies of sustainability?

Conducting Sustainability Assessment. Evaluating current practices, identifying areas for improvement, and setting sustainability goals aligned with the business's vision and resources.

Engaging Stakeholders. Involving employees, customers, suppliers, and local communities in sustainability initiatives. Encouraging their participation, gathering feedback, and incorporating diverse perspectives for effective implementation.

Resource Optimization. Reducing waste, minimizing energy and water consumption, and adopting circular economy principles to maximize resource efficiency throughout operations.

Sustainable Supply Chain. Collaborating with suppliers that adhere to sustainable practices, prioritizing local sourcing, and promoting fair trade principles.

Employee Education and Training. Enhancing employee awareness and knowledge through training programs, workshops, and internal communications. Empowering employees to contribute to sustainability goals.

Measurement and Reporting. Implementing performance indicators and measurement systems to track progress. Regularly reporting sustainability achievements to stakeholders, enhancing transparency and accountability.

Embracing sustainability principles is not only an ethical imperative but also a smart business strategy. By integrating sustainable practices into daily operations, SMEs can achieve cost savings, a competitive advantage, risk mitigation, and employee engagement. This playbook provides a starting point for SMEs to embark on their sustainability journey, fostering a more sustainable and prosperous future for their businesses and the world.

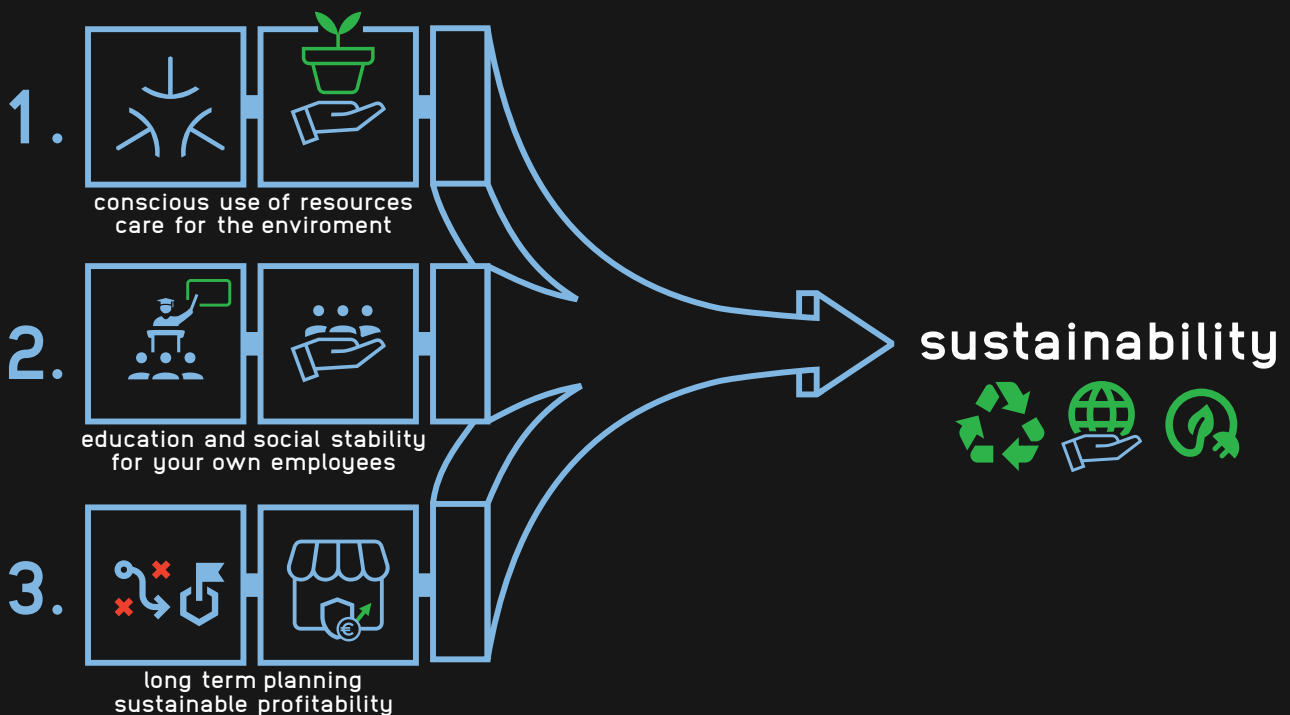


Illustration: Miha Brvar, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 1

Arctic Summer Nightwalk (Finland)

A magical summer night walk in arctic nature, in Finnish Lapland, takes you to experience the midnight sun, a nightless night, when the sun does not fall below the horizon. Summer night in north is a bluish-green, serene world, tranquil lakes, silent forest, misty bogs, and magical summer night light. Piritta Liikka, the owner of MyTrail takes nature-lovers to Riisitunturi National Park that is known for its landscape, which opens up in all directions from the top of the fell. When walking in nature they choose destinations in a way that they're saving the terrain. This means using built trails and existing facilities, such as fireplaces. The tour is private so it allows guests to walk at their own speed and the guide will choose the route based on your wishes. The local nature and culture are strongly present in all their activities and programs. The guide tells a lot of facts about the surrounding nature, culture, and nature-based culture of the north. Sustainability is being considered in different aspects; preferring local and sustainable products, that also supports sustainable tourism and increase year-round employment in the area. MyTrail also donates part of income to the environmental conservation every year, for ex WWF or Finnish Natural Heritage Foundation.

<https://www.mytrailfinland.com/summer-night>



Photo: RKMY / Harri Tarvainen, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 2

Night Sky Tour with Snowshoes (Finland)

MyTrail perceives seasonality as a business opportunity to capitalize on and expand its tourist offerings, especially during winter. In this season, characterized by long nights, extremely low temperatures, and abundant snowfall, tourists anticipate a unique set of experiences. MyTrail aims to meet these expectations by crafting a distinct tourist business offer tailored to the winter conditions.

The starry sky in long winter nights is full of amazing stories. During this trip, one learns how to navigate according to the stars and hears stories about the mythological heroes running in the sky. You may find your own zodiac sign, spot the brightest star, and hear its many names in Arabic, Greek, and Sámi language that is (are) indigenous language(s) in Lapland. Northern lights may also appear in the sky during the trip depending on the weather conditions. Then it is nice just to lie on your back with reindeer skin underneath to keep you warm and watch auroras dance up there in the sky. Or you can just listen to the sounds of silence, as we don't use any motorised vehicles during the tour. During the tour, warm berry juice is consumed from recyclable or washable dishes. MyTrail leaves no trace in the nature, so all garbage is brought back, recycled and sorted following the local recycling guidelines. Stargazing can also be arranged at your preferred location, even at your own cabin according to your wishes.

MyTrail has a deep appreciation for nature and its wellbeing. Sustainability is taken into account in every product, and the company has Green Activities Certification as well as a Sustainable Travel Finland badge. For each campfire they make, MyTrail donates a sum to plant a tree somewhere in the world. Sustainability has also been taken into account so that the tours are available year-round, and each of the four seasons can offer nature lovers something amazing to find in the sky.

MyTrail's environmental program: <https://www.mytrailfinland.com/sustainable-travel>

MyTrail's Starry Sky Stories: <https://www.mytrailfinland.com/starry-sky-stories>

Short MyTrail video: <https://www.ruka.fi/en/blog/wellbeing-from-nature-and-for-nature>



Photo: RKMV / Simo Vilhunen, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 3

e-EyE: Entre Encinas y Estrellas (Spain)

Entre Encinas y Estrellas (e-EyE) is a cutting-edge initiative located in Fregenal de la Sierra that offers telescope hosting, astrotourism accommodation, and astronomical activities. e-EyE offers seven perfectly equipped accommodations to enjoy astrotourism. All of them are either restored buildings, using local construction products and techniques, or prefabricated building solutions that can be dismantled, avoiding major changes in the landscape.

They have implemented a waste separation-at-source process to reduce waste and make compost for leftover food. They work hand in hand with local producers (farmers and agroindustry) to offer their products and natural activities to tourists as a way of ensuring the preservation of traditional practices and avoiding rural depopulation. Among other initiatives, they have planted 130 holm oaks and are currently involved in a project to help recover the nocturnal bird population in the area.

<https://www.e-eye.es/en/e-eye-en/>



Photo: Entre Encinas y Estrellas, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 4

Extremadura Buenas Noches (Spain)

Dark sky is considered as a differential asset for developing tourism companies and initiatives, particularly in rural areas, but the increasing light pollution is the main sustainability issue to care about for this matter.

The regional government of Extremadura, working together with AGENEX (the regional agency for energy) and FEMPEX (the federation of local municipalities and provinces) through Extremadura Buenas Noches (EBN), a regional cross-cutting strategy, is committed to preserve the dark sky by fighting against light pollution, and therefore contributing to social well-being. To achieve this objective, two sets of regulations have been developed not only to prevent light pollution from increasing, but also to reduce it. These new bylaws help the SMEs (and all the citizens) to understand the effects of the lighting, and encourage them to adopt better environmental practices and reduce their footprint, in order to ensure the future of their enterprises. Monitoring light pollution is also key to this sustainable objective. A network of photometers has been located all over the region in recent years. Extremadura is also taking part in research initiatives directed by the IAC (Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias), such as EELabs and STARS4ALL.

These initiatives, among others, present new opportunities for both established tourism companies and newcomers to venture into sustainable businesses related to lightning measurement, environmental consultancy, photometer installation and maintenance, and more. Importantly, they underscore the benefits of embracing sustainable practices. The introduction of tourism-oriented products such as celestial viewpoints and night tracks across the region, coupled with the release of publications related to astronomy and other sky-related sciences, and their dissemination to high schools and municipalities, sparks heightened interest among the public and other stakeholders. This growing interest results in a demand from tourism SMEs for new policies centered on sustainability. For SMEs in the tourism sector, there's an opportunity to draw inspiration from these strategies, incorporating elements like celestial viewpoints and sustainable practices to meet the evolving demands of environmentally conscious tourists.



Photo: Extremadura Buenas Noches, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 5

Paths toward Sustainability in Škocjanski zatok Nature Reserve (Slovenia)

The Škocjan Lagoon Nature Reserve is a unique ecosystem that is home to a variety of plant and animal life. It is located in the Municipality of Koper, Slovenia. It is a 122-hectare area of brackish lagoon, freshwater marshes, reedbeds, and wet meadows. The reserve is home to a variety of rare and endangered plant and animal species, including over 260 species of birds. The area was designated a nature reserve in 1998 and is also part of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. The main threats to the reserve are pollution, invasive species, mass tourism, and climate change. The reserve is managed by the NGO DOPPS – BirdLife Slovenia, which works to protect the reserve’s natural resources and promote sustainable tourism. The brackish lagoon is a mix of freshwater and saltwater, which creates a diverse habitat for a variety of species. The reserve is also home to several rare and endangered species, including the little bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*), Kentish plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), and little tern (*Sternula albifrons*).

Discovering inspiration from Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve, SME or other similar companies can embrace effective sustainable practices. As in Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve fight against pollution, each SME can implement control observations and measures tailored to their industry and agricultural processes. They can evaluate and adapt to minimize their environmental impact. SMEs can encourage sustainable tourism within their business by promoting eco-friendly activities as in Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve. SMEs can, as in Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve, develop infrastructure, such as observation points, to enhance customer experiences without harming the environment. Similar to Škocjanski Zatok Nature Reserve, SMEs can take on the role of an educator in their community and offer educational programs, host public events, and create online resources to inform audience about the importance of sustainability and the shared environmental challenges. SMEs should consider integrating local flora and fauna into business practices. Whether through green spaces, supporting local biodiversity, or symbolically adopting a native species, contribute to the local ecosystem. Embarking on a sustainable journey not only minimizes ecological footprint of SME but also positions business as an environmental steward. By incorporating sustainability into strategies of SMEs, they will contribute to a healthier environment and cultivate a positive brand image.

<https://www.skocjanski-zatok.org/en/>



Photo: Tilen Basle, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 6

Villa Abbatis Equestrian Center, Apos (Romania)

Bianca and Mihai Barbu are a new generation of entrepreneurs that are changing the rural environment in Transylvania. Their dedication matches their passion for horses, biodiversity, architecture, and people. They promote outdoor activity through horseback riding and the discovery of remote medieval villages and natural landscapes in an environmentally friendly way, along former farm roads and riding trails. Their horseback riding tours and guest rooms are Eco-Romania certified.

Some of their sustainable actions are:

- Organizing guided tours of sites of great cultural and environmental value in a non-invasive way, on horseback.
- Providing winter experiences to reduce seasonality, such as birdwatching on horseback with a professional guide and ornithologist.
- Creating job opportunities in craftsmanship (tile making, masonry, and carpentry), organic farming, or horse care.
- Developing projects to preserve local architecture, wildflower meadows, and ancient orchards.
- Organizing cultural events and summer schools to enhance the region's appeal as a tourist destination.

In everything they do, they carefully choose their guests and partners. They are an active member of the Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination.

<https://villaabbatis.com/>



Photo: Villa Abbatis, 2023



Photo: Gabriela Cuzepan, 2023

G O O D P R A C T I C E 7

Bassen Pension, Bazna (Romania)

Cornel Posea has extensive experience in managing medium and large hotel establishments. In the spa resort of Bazna, a Transylvanian Saxon village with large courtyards, he engages in ecotourism out of passion.

He transformed a Transylvanian Saxon household into guest rooms with hand-painted wooden furniture made by a social enterprise. He created a sensory trail and a corner with aromatic plants to welcome bees and families with children. Every summer, he opens the season with a Transylvanian brunch featuring an abundance of buffalo milk and Bazna pork products, and other local dishes. He integrates farmers, craftsmen, and local resources throughout the entire range of visitor experiences, which he promotes through a newspaper printed on recycled paper.

He leads guests on bicycle tours through the deciduous forests along the Terra Saxonum segment of Romania's newest long-distance trail, the Via Transilvanica.

Some of Bassen Pension's sustainable and resilience actions are:

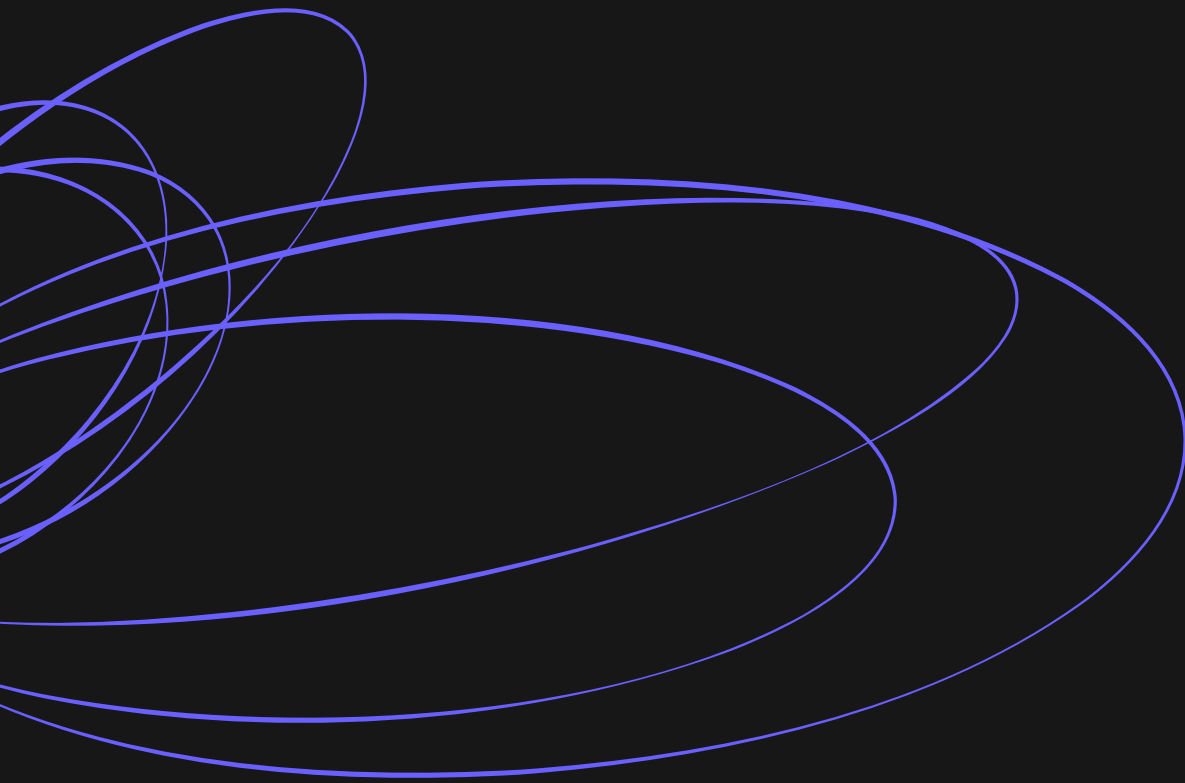
- Innovating the range of experiences and adapting to visitors' needs, from hikers on the Via Transilvanica to extended stays for treatments.
- Offering a package with discounts for hikers and cyclists.
- Providing a Sibiu local breakfast and "local taste" meals.
- Organizing forest and hiking trail cleanup campaigns.
- Maintaining strong collaboration with local farmers.

The Bassen Guesthouse is certified by Eco-Romania and is an active member of the Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination.

www.bassen.ro · Gazeta de la Bassen Pension: <https://www.bassen.ro/index.php?id=21>



Photo: Dragos Dumitru, 2023



Resilience

Resilience is a crucial concept for businesses in today's dynamic and uncertain world. It refers to the ability to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of challenges and disruptions. We now explore how SMEs can implement principles of resilience in a practical and understandable way, enabling them to navigate through uncertainties and emerge stronger.

Resilience is the capacity of a business to withstand and recover from setbacks, disruptions, and changing circumstances while maintaining stability and adaptability. It involves proactive planning, flexibility, and the ability to quickly respond to challenges.

Measurement and evaluation processes must be established as key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the effectiveness of resilience strategies. Regularly reviewing and evaluating progress against these KPIs identifies areas for improvement and ensures ongoing resilience-building efforts.

Three Key Principles of Resilience

- 1. Risk Management.** Identifying potential risks and vulnerabilities that may impact a business. Developing strategies to mitigate these risks and creating contingency plans to minimize the impact of disruptions.
- 2. Business Continuity Planning.** Establishing protocols and processes to ensure the continuity of operations during crises. Planning for various scenarios, including natural disasters, economic downturns, or supply chain disruptions.
- 3. Flexibility and Adaptability.** Embracing a flexible mindset and being willing to adapt to changing market conditions and customer needs. Emphasizing agility in decision-making, resource allocation, and business strategies.

There are several benefits of resilience

Sustainable Growth. Resilient businesses are better equipped to withstand challenges, ensuring long-term sustainability and growth. They can seize opportunities arising from market changes and emerging trends.

Customer Trust and Loyalty. Resilience builds trust and loyalty among customers. When businesses navigate challenges effectively, customers perceive them as reliable and trustworthy partners, leading to stronger relationships and repeat business.

Employee Engagement and Retention. Resilient businesses prioritize employee wellbeing and engagement. They foster a supportive work environment, empower employees to contribute to decision-making, and provide opportunities for skill development and growth.

Implementation Strategies

Risk Assessment. Identifying potential risks and vulnerabilities specific to your business. Conducting a comprehensive risk assessment to understand the likelihood and potential impact of each risk.

Contingency Planning. Developing a robust contingency plan that outlines actions and protocols to be implemented during disruptions. Considering various scenarios and establishing communication channels to ensure the smooth flow of information.

Diversification. Seeking opportunities to diversify revenue streams and the customer base. Exploring new markets, ranges of product and services, or strategic partnerships to reduce reliance on a single source of income.

Adaptation and Innovation. Embracing innovation and staying agile to adapt to changing circumstances. Encouraging experimentation, leveraging technology, and fostering a culture that values continuous improvement and learning.

Collaborative Networks. Building relationships with other businesses, industry associations, and local communities. Collaborative networks provide support, resources, and shared knowledge during challenging times.

Measurement and Evaluation. Establishing KPIs to measure the effectiveness of resilience strategies. Regularly reviewing and evaluating progress against these KPIs to identify areas for improvement and ensure ongoing resilience-building efforts.

Resilience is a fundamental concept for businesses to thrive amid challenges and uncertainties. By implementing principles of resilience, SMEs can proactively plan for disruptions, adapt to changing circumstances, and foster sustainable growth. This playbook serves as a guide to help SMEs build resilience, ensuring their long-term success and the ability to navigate through any obstacles that come their way.



Illustration: Miha Brvar, 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 8

Palosaari Reindeer and Fishing Farm, Kuusamo (Finland)

For the Palosaari Reindeer and Fishing Farm, resilience means constant development of new products and services as well as appreciating nature and what it offers, such as wild berries, mushrooms, fish, and wild herbs. In their own words, the Palosaari Reindeer and Fishing Farm has no customers, only guests, and most of them are international. The farm itself is an authentic working reindeer farm, and the guests are part of their way of life. Even before the pandemic, the entrepreneurs Satu Palosaari and Mika Lappalainen developed various traveler's products based on their own interests and strengths and also according to guests' feedback and wishes. During COVID-19, they came up with a new idea of how to be more resilient and complemented their offerings with new innovative accommodation. ReindeerNook is a self-catering suite with all the facilities, including a wood-heated sauna—naturally, because this is a “must” in Finland! ReindeerNook is heated by a fireplace, and the solar panel-charged air-conditioner cools it down during summer months. In ReindeerNook one can enjoy the nightless night through the large landscape windows and relax in a safe haven on an authentic reindeer farm. Resilience was also shown during pandemics because the reindeer farm visits could be made virtually online. In the video, the guide describes the everyday life of reindeer and the traditions linked to reindeer herding.



Photo: Palosaari Reindeer and Fishing Farm, 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 9

Ways toward Resilience: Goričko Nature Park, Slovenia (Slovenia)

Goričko Nature Park is nestled in the northeastern part of Slovenia, in close proximity to the borders of Austria and Hungary. This enchanting haven received official protected area status from the Slovenian government on October 9th, 2003. Goričko's history is as captivating as its natural splendor, with evidence of human habitation tracing back to prehistoric times and the Early Middle Ages. The park boasts exceptional natural attractions, including unique trees, geological wonders, and diverse habitats, all holding the prestigious designation of valuable natural features. Complementing these treasures are the region's historical gems, which encompass churches, memorials, mills, manors, and homesteads. Each of these structures tells compelling stories of the resilient people that once thrived in this terrain and speaks eloquently of the enduring harmony between humanity and nature that defines the unique character of Goričko Nature Park. The primary goal is the preservation of primary and secondary habitats as well: meadows that have arisen due to land use in connection with livestock farming.

In the dynamic realm of tourism and business, Goričko Nature Park stands as a resilient guide for SMEs and other companies. For instance, in the ever-changing landscape of tourism, adaptive management is paramount. Much like Goričko Nature Park, businesses should exhibit flexibility and responsiveness, fine-tuning strategies based on evolving information and conditions. For tourism companies, acknowledging the interconnectedness of various aspects is crucial. An ecosystem-based approach, akin to Goričko Nature Park, aligns with crafting holistic experiences, ensuring the preservation not only of individual components (companies, associations, infrastructure, tourist sites and other stakeholders) but the overall health of the tourism ecosystem. At the core of sustainable tourism beats the rhythm of community involvement. Similar to Goričko Nature Park actively engaging local stakeholders and SMEs through their activities, businesses should empower communities, presenting opportunities and benefits. This not only fosters a sense of ownership but also constructs robust local support. A pivotal lesson in resilience lies in financial diversification. Goričko Nature Park, exemplifying this through public funding, EU funds, and ecotourism revenue, showcases the importance of stability. Tourism businesses can glean insights on securing various income streams, thereby reducing dependency on a single source. Goričko Nature Park transcends being just a haven for nature enthusiasts; it serves as a classroom for resilient tourism practices. For SMEs and companies in the tourism sector, Goričko Nature Park imparts invaluable insights, compelling them to adapt, acknowledge interconnectedness, engage communities, and fortify diversified financial foundations for enduring success.

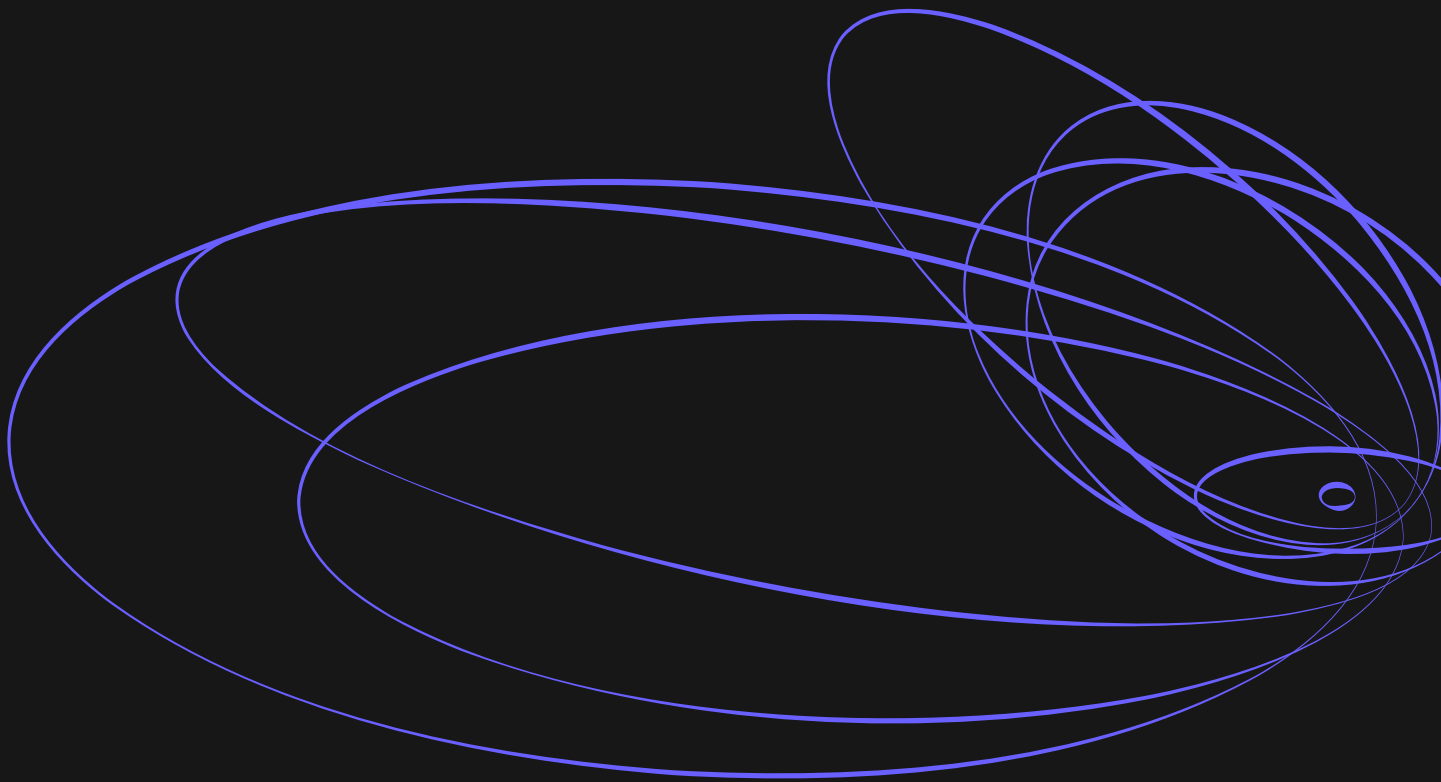
GOOD PRACTICE 10

Ad Astra and E-Bikes: Tourist Activity Companies from Hervás (Spain)

These companies offer astronomical activities as well as bike rental and guided bike and life science tours. To deal with seasonality and be able to offer new services to their clients, therefore increasing revenues and resilience, they have not only increased their own selection of services, but have also established contact with other companies in the area (e.g., for water activities and hiking). This allows them to present a more complex range of activities and also offer more value to tourists, facilitating a better experience and achieving a higher rate of repeat visits.

They have concluded an agreement to implement this cooperation system, arranging economic relations among partners and with clients, ensuring a high level of quality in the activities offered.

<https://adastrahervas.com/> • <https://ebikeshervas.com/>



GOOD PRACTICE 11

Carta Estelar Tentudía (Spain)

Carta Estelar Tentudía is an astrotourism activities company located in Monesterio in the province of Badajoz, Spain. It came about as a result of the true passion of its owner, Víctor Guareño, who, apart from being an architect, is an astronomy enthusiast, specially attached to popularizing the skies.

From the very beginning of his activities, his concept of collaborative and multidisciplinary astrotourism, astrotourism for everyone and with everyone, has led him to create stargazing experiences with local and regional companies: from introducing live music in his astronomical observations to combining them with tastings of local products (cheese, Iberian ham, wine, etc.), strengthening and scaling up not only his company, but other businesses as well. Services have become resilient because of their diversity.

In addition, he has developed a new astronomical architectural resource, the Astronomical Viewpoint Square, a new line of astronomical business, in this case with the local authorities as his client. It is a public space designed to help people of all ages understand and interpret the sky, oriented to solstices and equinoxes and with areas to set up telescopes or just enjoy the night sky with the naked eye.

<https://www.cartaestelartentudia.es/>

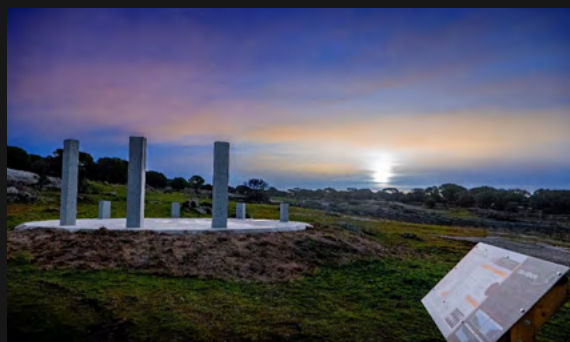


Photo: Carta Estelar Tentudía, 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 12

Cata con Cati (Spain)

Cata con Cati is a company from Almendralejo in the province of Badajoz, Spain, oriented to promoting quality tourism in Extremadura and the dissemination of wine in an entertaining and intimate way. This company offers not only wine-related activities, such as experiences in wineries, tastings, and gastronomy, but also culture, nature, and birdwatching.

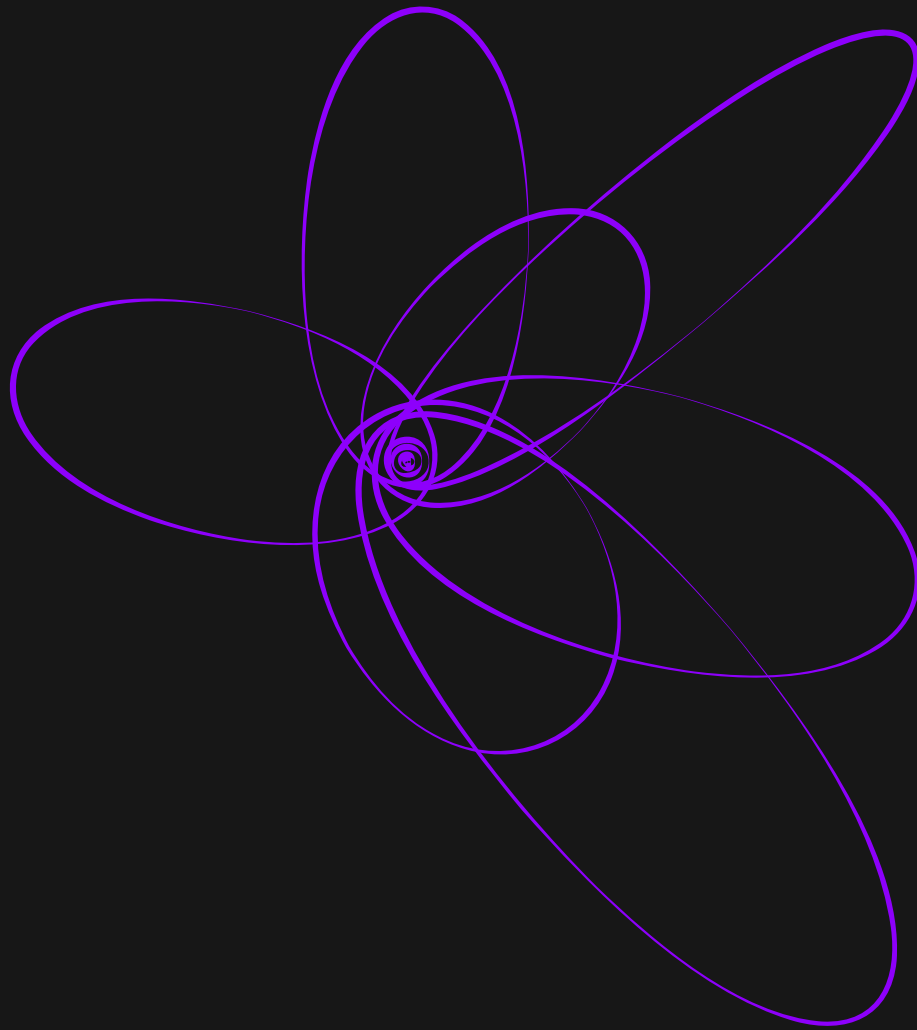
Seeking new ways to deal with sector seasonality and to dazzle clients with differentiated services, as a way to strengthen its company revenues, Cata con Cati has extended its tasting services portfolio (from wines to cheese or olive oil), offering access to production by local producers.

To increase the company's visibility and gain access to other markets, it also offers activities and services directly to hotels and other accommodation in the region, adapting its services to various needs and demands.

<https://cataconcati.es/>



Photo: Cata con Cati, 2023



Digitalization

Digitalization has become an essential driver of success and growth in today's business landscape. It involves leveraging technology to transform operations, enhance customer experiences, and drive innovation. We now explore how SMEs can implement principles of digitalization in a practical and understandable way, enabling them to unlock new opportunities and thrive in the digital era.

Digitalization is the process of integrating digital technologies and systems into various aspects of a business to streamline operations, improve efficiency, and create value for customers. It involves adopting digital tools, automating processes, and leveraging data to drive decision-making and innovation.

Key Principles of Digitalization

- 1. Customer-Centricity.** Focusing on delivering exceptional customer experiences through personalized interactions, convenience, and accessibility. Leveraging digital technologies to understand customer preferences, gather feedback, and tailor products and services accordingly.
- 2. Process Optimization.** Identifying areas in your business operations that can be digitalized and automated. Streamlining processes, reducing manual tasks, and eliminating inefficiencies through the use of digital tools and systems.
- 3. Data-Driven Decision-Making.** Embracing data analytics and insights to make informed business decisions. Leveraging data to understand market trends, customer behavior, and operational performance, enabling agile decision-making and proactive strategies.

Benefits of Digitalization

Enhanced Efficiency. Digitalization automates repetitive tasks, eliminates manual errors, and accelerates processes. It enables SMEs to streamline operations, improve productivity, and allocate resources effectively, resulting in cost savings and increased efficiency.

Improved Customer Experiences. Digitalization allows SMEs to provide personalized and seamless customer experiences across various touchpoints. From online bookings and self-service portals to personalized recommendations and targeted marketing, digital tools enhance engagement and build customer loyalty.

Innovation and Adaptability. Digitalization fosters innovation by creating opportunities for new products, services, and business models. It enables SMEs to adapt to changing market dynamics, anticipate customer needs, and stay ahead of the competitors through continuous technological advancements.

Implementation Strategies

Digital Infrastructure. Assessing your current technological capabilities and investing in the necessary digital infrastructure, such as robust internet connectivity, hardware, and software systems. Ensuring scalability and flexibility to accommodate future growth.

Digital Marketing and Online Presence. Developing a strong online presence through websites, social media platforms, and digital marketing campaigns. Utilizing search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and social media advertising to reach and engage your target audience.

Automation and Integration. Identifying manual and repetitive processes that can be automated. Implementing integrated software solutions, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems, inventory management systems, and accounting software, to streamline operations and improve efficiency.

Data Analytics and Insights. Leveraging data analytics tools to gain actionable insights. Implementing data tracking and analysis methods to understand customer behavior, market trends, and operational metrics. Using these insights to drive informed decision-making and tailor business strategies.

Employee Training and Upskilling. Equipping employees with the necessary digital skills to adapt to digital transformation. Providing training programs and resources to enhance digital literacy, encourage continuous learning, and foster a digital-first mindset within the organization.

Digitalization presents a transformative opportunity for SMEs to drive growth, improve efficiency, and deliver exceptional customer experiences. By implementing the principles of digitalization, SMEs can harness the power of technology to remain competitive, adapt to changing market dynamics, and unlock new opportunities for innovation and success. This playbook serves as a practical guide to help SMEs navigate their digital transformation journey, ensuring they thrive in the digital era.

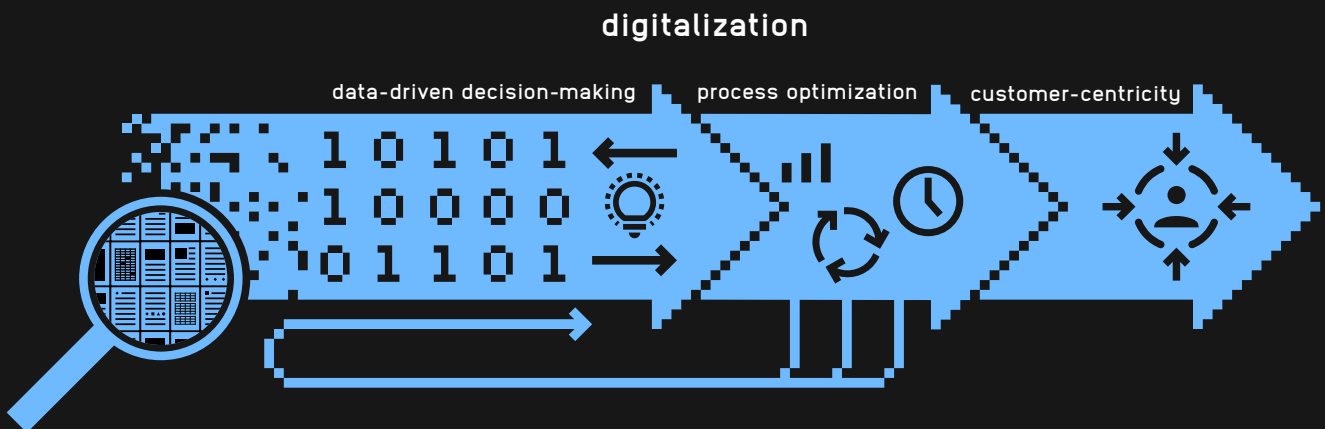


Illustration: Miha Brvar, 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 13

Adventure Apes, Kuusamo (Finland)

Nature nurtures the body and soul. Spending time outdoors reduces stress and boosts energy levels. Nature relaxes and relieves stress. You sleep better in the countryside and even food tastes better outdoors. Nature helps you recover from work. Nature helps people survive pandemics or other unpredictable changes in circumstances. If you feel a bit insecure about taking an overnight hike during the winter, Adventure Apes' online course helps you overcome any barriers in your mind. Heidi Savolainen is the owner of Adventure Apes in Kuusamo, Finland. Sustainability is one of the company's core values, and Adventure Apes has obtained several sustainability certificates. Heidi Savolainen believes that nature belongs to everyone, and she provides accessible travel for those with visual impairments and other disabilities as well as offering digital accessibility for people that are not familiar with nature and hiking.

One of Adventure Apes' digital products is Winter Hiking Basics. Winter Hiking Basics is a four-week course that takes place entirely online and is designed for everyone that dreams of winter hiking. There is no need for previous experience with hiking in winter conditions; all you need to know is taught in various topics starting from planning the hike to gear, camp life, and safety issues. The course consists of various forms of online studies such as weekly pre-recorded webinars, self-study on the course platform, and live Q&A virtual campfire sessions to create team spirit. Participants that have completed the online course will have the opportunity to practice their new skills and get the most out of the experience on the Adventure Apes' guided winter hikes. More than eighty percent of the online course participants have been confident enough to take their new skills to the next level on a guided winter hiking expedition afterward.

<https://www.adventureapes.fi/adventure-packages/talvivaelluksen-perusteet-verkkokurssi-yrityksille>



Photo: Adventure Apes, 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 14

e-EyE: Entre Encinas y Estrellas (Spain)

Entre Encinas y Estrellas (e-EyE) stands out as an excellent initiative based in Fregenal de la Sierra, offering telescope hosting, astrotourism accommodation, and a range of astronomical activities. Remarkably, it boasts the title of the largest astronomical complex for remote hosting in Europe, housing over ninety-five telescopes that can be controlled remotely from anywhere globally, spanning seventeen countries, thanks to its robust fiber-optic connectivity. The reliance on digitalization and technology is pivotal to its success, with completely automated facilities reducing maintenance and personnel costs.

In response to growing demand, particularly from telescope owners visiting their facilities, e-EyE has expanded its services, delving into accommodation. This addition not only caters to tourists seeking sustainable activities in nature but also fulfils the annual (if not more frequent) visits from telescope owners, fostering a sense of camaraderie among sky enthusiasts.

Digital engagement is at the core of e-EyE's operations. They've developed an online reservation system for their tourist business and actively maintain a presence on social networks. Through these channels, they share content, activities, and offers, while also disseminating astronomy-related news and breakthroughs. This proactive digital approach helps in fostering connections with various stakeholders.

In the realm of maintenance and service management, e-EyE has successfully integrated technology. The software they developed efficiently controls programmed maintenance orders or user-requested services, ensuring high-cost equipment is always ready and monitored, thereby minimizing failures and losses. Additionally, stringent cybersecurity measures are in place to safeguard telecommunications and systems.

As part of their ongoing commitment to innovation, e-EyE continues to explore new digital initiatives to maintain its leading position in the sector and implement novel activities and projects. For SMEs in the tourism sector, this case study underscores the importance of leveraging digital tools for automation, customer engagement through online platforms, and the integration of technology for streamlined operations and maintenance.

<https://www.e-eye.es/en/e-eye-en/>

GOOD PRACTICE 15

Center of Space Technologies Herman Potočnik Noordung (Slovenia)

The Noordung Center is a public institute in the village of Vitanje, Slovenia, dedicated to the promotion of space technologies and the presentation of human achievements in space. It was founded in 2009 as a private institute and reorganized into a public institute in 2017 under the Ministry of Economy, Tourism, and Sport.

The core mission of the Noordung Center is to delve into the realms of space and space technologies, fostering a connection between these scientific wonders, the economy, tourism, and art in an easily accessible manner. Through a myriad of activities including exhibitions, educational programs, and public events, the center weaves a narrative that captivates audiences of all ages. Its six permanent exhibitions, such as “The Artistic Science of Cosmology” and “Images of Earth,” offer an immersive journey into the wonders of the cosmos.

A distinctive feature of the Noordung Center is its commitment to education. Tailoring programs for all age groups, from schoolchildren to adults, the center explores diverse topics such as space exploration, astronomy, and space technology. This educational facet positions the center as a valuable resource for families, students, and individuals seeking a deeper understanding of the cosmos. At the forefront of its success is the innovative application of digitalization processes. Rarely seen in similar institutions, the Noordung Center introduces cutting-edge technologies that have garnered enthusiastic responses. The utilization of gamification processes, including an Augmented Reality (AR) orrery, and immersive experiences like the SPACE 360 room, elevate the understanding of space technology and astronomy.

For the tourism industry, the Noordung Center stands as a paradigm of successful digitalization. The incorporation of virtual reality and other innovative technologies adds a layer of excitement, making the visitor experience more dynamic and engaging. The introduction of gamification processes enhances interactivity, particularly attractive to younger audiences. In summary, the Noordung Center serves as a model for the tourism industry, showcasing how technological innovation and digitalization can elevate the visitor experience. By adopting similar approaches, tourism businesses can not only attract a diverse audience but also inspire a sense of wonder and exploration in the realm of technology and science.

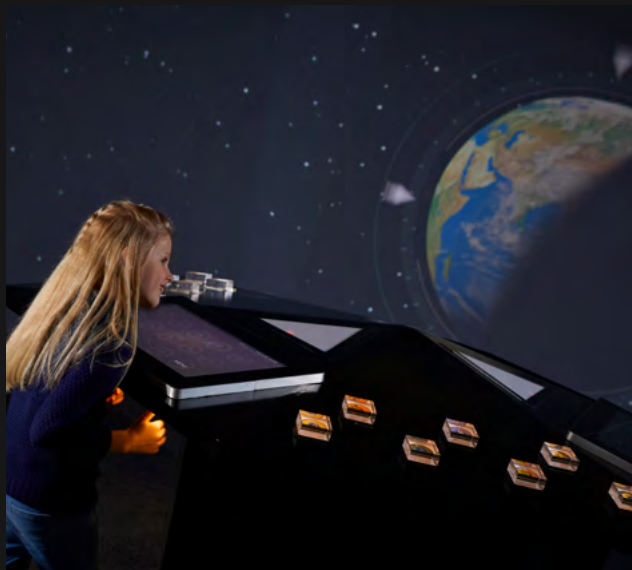


Photo: Dan Briški, 2023



Photo: Pisar Vanč, 2023

Photo: Igor Rosina (Digitalna kamera), 2023

GOOD PRACTICE 16

Sibiu Hiking Years: Digitalization of Nature-Based Tourism (Romania)

When crafting your digitalization strategy, pinpoint local business networks, destination management and marketing organizations, and global platforms that align with your business model. Many of these entities boast digital platforms with extensive visibility among travelers who could evolve into your customers.

Take, for example, the website aniidrumetiei.ro, which provides well-organized and engaging content on ecotourism offerings in Sibiu County Destination. It serves as a digital tool that you can join for free to showcase your services and offerings. This collaboration becomes especially crucial when your business is in its infancy, and you haven't established your own booking channels. In addition to the substantial marketing impact, these digital platforms often feature integrated reservation facilities that you can harness, such as the BookTes ticketing system.

The Sibiu County Council and Sibiu County Tourism Association have proactively implemented the Sibiu Hiking Years program as a recovery policy to mitigate the impacts of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. This initiative seeks to expedite the resurgence of sustainable tourism by leveraging cultural identities, natural resources, local communities, and the participation of tourism SMEs.

Within the program, a thousand kilometers of hiking trails in the Carpathian Mountains have been revitalized and digitalized in collaboration with Outdooractive, a leading platform for outdoor tourism. Tourist guides, whose business has been significantly impacted by the decline in incoming tourism, have been invited to offer guided tours every weekend. Throughout the week, the focus shifted to schools in the region. The impact is positive both in the community, expanding the pool of responsible nature hikers, and for tourists, providing access to a high-quality and safe group-priced experience all year round. The tours are accessible online through the BookTes ticketing system.

Furthermore, an Education for Nature program was established to enhance the skills of guides and teachers, enabling them to provide experiential and outdoor learning opportunities on the hiking trails. This comprehensive approach not only boosts tourism but also contributes to community development and environmental education.



Photo: Anii Drumetiei, 2023

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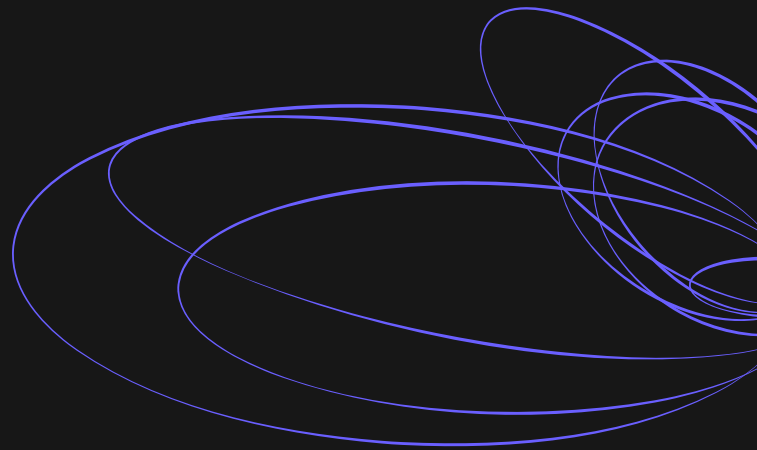
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Digitalization


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lookUP




Are you interested in knowing more about the Single Market Programme project LookUP and project partners?

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The LookUP project consortium consists of a cohesive and multidisciplinary team comprising the following.



Barrabés

Barrabés.biz (Spain) was founded in 2000. After creating the first e-commerce shop in Europe in 1993 and building a successful business, Barrabés.biz was created to help others create new businesses with innovative solutions. It provides its expertise and knowhow in innovation, digitalization, and enterprise to help leading businesses, public authorities, SMEs, and start-ups. It also applies the new skills required by the digital era and assists in the cultural transformation of organizations by implementing new digital habits using flexible and effective methodologies. Barrabés.biz has a set of tools that help boost innovation: a proprietary platform to efficiently manage innovation following the open innovation principle, a proprietary platform for easy and active training of SMEs in digital capacities (the Attitude

Academy), and innovation spaces managing La Nave (the urban innovation space of the Municipality of Madrid), Madrid in Motion (the Madrid urban mobility hub), and the Circular Economy Innovation Centre of Madrid. Since 2019, Barrabés.biz has also held Mañana (Tomorrow), an event inspired in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals involving stakeholders interested in sustainability. Finally,

Barrabés.biz leads Distrito Turismo (the Tourism District) in the Valencia Region to build and support a tourism innovation ecosystem.



B·Link
BARCELONA
STRATEGIC PROJECTS

B.LINK (Spain) is a small enterprise founded in 2014. The firm has an international and multidisciplinary team of consultants specializing in EU and international funding, offering support services that cover all cycles of a project, from identifying suitable funding opportunities to project development, as well as management of project funds following the specific rules and procedures of

the donor. Building on this solid experience, B.LINK offers a wide array of training and consultancy services to public, private, and academic entities. In tourism competitiveness and sustainability,

B.LINK has offered consultancy services for developing and implementing several projects with European funding.

JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sports of Junta de Extremadura

(Spain) is responsible for setting guidelines and developing them for tourism promotion and planning in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura, exercising administrative powers in tourism business and activities, programming and carrying out tourism promotion plans, achieving the greatest and best training in the sector, and developing inspection tasks in line with approved plans. It is also responsible for managing and administering tourist facilities owned by the Autonomous Community of Extremadura.



Naturpolis Ltd (Finland) is owned by the city of Kuusamo and

the municipality of Taivalkoski. Its task is to promote the creation of profitable businesses and new jobs in the Kuusamo region, to develop the operational preconditions for enterprises and the business environment in the region, and to promote regional business cooperation. In addition, Naturpolis administers regional development projects. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Naturpolis helped SMEs apply for funding to cover the loss in their turnover. It has strong SME networks in the area and works closely together with tourist associations. Tourism is the main business branch in the area. Sustainability and responsible tourism development are the main points in development activities in ongoing and past tourism projects. Naturpolis led a sustainable tourism project to help SMEs obtain sustainability certificates and participate in Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland program, which aims to acquire sustainability certificates for tourism destinations in Finland.

Naturpolis also heads the tourism project Gateway to Land of National Parks. The project brings all the tourist regions served by Kuusamo Airport together to collaborate on increasing international tourism and year-round accessibility of the region, especially by foregrounding the national parks of the area. In this project, particular attention is paid to the fact that the area will develop so

that it will be known for its quality services and sustainable business practices. With the help of digital service paths and improving the findability of tourism services and making them easier to purchase online, the area will also be more easily accessible. Naturpolis also has a tourism project on data and knowledge management that is relevant to the current project.



ZRC SAZU

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) is a leading Slovenian research center in the

humanities and a cutting-edge academic institution in central, eastern, and southeast Europe. It encompasses eighteen research institutes and conducts research on a variety of topics linked with cultural heritage and sustainable tourism. ZRC SAZU has its own publishing house, audio-visual laboratory, and numerous collections. ZRC SAZU is member of the Sustainable Tourism Community, operating within the Interreg MED program. It has the following experience in sustainable tourism and SME support:

- Creating support tools for sustainable tourism certification.
- Organizing capacity-building activities for tourism providers and DMOs
- Improving national sustainable tourism certification.
- Researching tourism business experiences with certification
- Setting up sustainability criteria for developing tourism products
- Facilitating the cooperation among SMEs, between SMEs and public authorities
 - Facilitating the development of tourism products, including testing



QUANTITAS

QUANTITAS (QUA) is a tech start-up, incubated at VEGA Technology Science Park in Venice, and its mission is to develop and offer businesses services and products related to the entire data processing and evaluation chain. Quantitas was created to develop decision support systems in highly complex contexts, designing tools and setting itself the challenge of implementing methodologies for collecting, processing, analyzing, and simulating real-world data related to business decisions. Quantitas helps private and public organizations extract data knowledge and inform business decisions with advanced predictive analytics tools for impact valuation and cost effectiveness analysis, and products with interactive modes and high-impact, eye-catching dynamic data animation for presentations and demonstrations.



SIBIU

See you in Transylvania!

Sibiu County Tourism Association (Romania) ensures the coordinated management and marketing of Sibiu County as a tourism destination by making responsible use of the territory's natural and cultural resources with benefits for businesses, residents, and guests

alike. Their efforts build on the UN sustainability goals, and they are eager to work through nature with local SMEs and partner regions to achieve more sustainable and creative use of natural resources.

Fifty percent of Sibiu County's territory is covered by protected areas. The Carpathian Mountains and the Transylvanian Highlands are rich reservoirs of biodiversity and a valuable part of ecotourism destinations. The sky as a natural resource will be integrated in nature-positive tourism roadmaps because they aim to transform Sibiu County into an ecotourism destination with diversified and high-quality nature experiences (wildlife watching, dark sky, and nature wellness).

The Sibiu County Tourism Association has expertise in the following fields:

- Developing quality and sustainability guidelines for SMEs (e.g., green accommodation within the European Tourism Going Green 2030 project, the Sibiu local breakfast, and guidelines for sustainable events).
- Promoting ICT-based knowledge tools and platforms for SMEs (the RU Ready for Certification? tool, aniidrumetiei.ro website/app).
- Transferring experiences and knowledge through workshops, conferences, and field visits at the local and European level.
- Capacity-building programs to develop and promote new sustainable tourism products that enrich the destination's identity, respond to new travel trends, and accelerate sustainable tourism revival.
- Working with multidisciplinary teams to document, develop, and promote ecotourism policies, infrastructure, services, and experiences.
- Measuring sustainability performance. This is a key activity of the organization; the destination is assisted by experts to improve its sustainability KPIs through the Smart Tourism Destinations program.

