



EXperiential **TO**urism for sustainable **R**ural development

WP2: Success stories and needs mapping for VET renewal in rural tourism

A2.3: Design of a common framework for VET renewal in rural tourism

COMMON FRAMEWORK FOR VET RENEWAL IN RURAL TOURISM



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Introduction

EXTOR Project

The Experiential Tourism for Sustainable Rural Development (EXTOR) project aims to foster sustainable development and economic growth in rural areas by promoting experiential forms of tourism and adopting environmentally sustainable practices. It also focuses on enhancing the skills of rural entrepreneurs, creating new multi-actor communication, digital marketing and networking channels, and increasing the capacity of VET providers and trainers to adapt their offerings to the evolving needs of the economy and society, thereby strengthening their resilience.

Common Framework for VET Renewal in Rural Tourism

The Common Framework for VET Renewal is inspired by current trends in rural tourism and insights gathered from the project's research phase. During this phase, 124 rural tourism entrepreneurs and professionals, along with 36 VET providers in tourism, were interviewed to collect data on national trends and VET-related offerings in rural tourism across Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Austria, Greece, and Iceland. The diverse geographic representation enables fruitful knowledge exchange and maximises the project's impact.

As part of the research, interviews with rural entrepreneurs in each country gathered success stories containing valuable insights to inspire future initiatives. These stories include overviews of each initiative, enterprise strengths, sustainability measures, green practices, and digital tools used. This EU-wide collection, which currently includes 19 examples of successful sustainable rural tourism, is presented on the [EXTOR Interactive Map](#), designed in an engaging way to foster stronger EU-wide exchanges and awareness of sustainable rural tourism practices.

In addition, individual interviews with rural tourism professionals were vital in identifying educational gaps, training needs, and interests, as well as gathering practical recommendations for sector improvement. Focus groups with VET providers allowed a deeper analysis of available training opportunities and specific needs in each country. Further, desk research conducted in each country provided key information on national contexts, including relevant legislation and the presence of public and private structures, support programs, and funding. The international report provides detailed information about the research conducted, including the methodology and results.

The findings of this research form the basis of this framework, which suggests ways to renew VET offerings in rural tourism to better meet the needs of rural tourism entrepreneurs and professionals. Additionally, the framework introduces the EXTOR innovative training program, which aims to upskill rural entrepreneurs and professionals with training tailored to their specific needs, supporting the sustainable development of rural areas.

Moreover, this framework highlights key EU policies and Sustainable Development Goals in Tourism that are highly relevant to the EXTOR project, emphasising the project's alignment with EU priorities for rural development, sustainable tourism, and skills development. Overall, this framework demonstrates how EXTOR contributes to achieving EU objectives and supports broader efforts to foster sustainable growth, community engagement, and skill development within rural tourism sectors.

Key EU Policies Related to the EXTOR project

The objectives of the EXTOR project align with the EU's goals for environmental protection and combating climate change, as well as with goals for adapting vocational education and training to meet labour market needs and increasing flexibility in vocational education and training opportunities. Several EU policies support the project's aims, including those that promote sustainable practices, rural development, skills development, lifelong learning, and the integration of digital tools. Key related EU policies include:

1. The European Green Deal¹

The European Green Deal is an EU strategy to address climate change and environmental challenges, aiming to transform Europe into a resource-efficient, competitive, and sustainable economy. It aims to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, decouple economic growth from resource use, and ensure no one is left behind. Key targets include reducing net greenhouse gas emissions and planting 3 billion trees in the EU by 2030. Tourism can help meet the European Green Deal goal of climate neutrality by 2050, as it contributes to 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions². Tourism has a potential to become an innovator in sustainable practices, promoting eco-friendly transportation, renewable energy adoption in hospitality, and responsible resource management in tourist destinations.

2. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)³

The Common Agricultural Policy stands as one of the EU's most fundamental and far-reaching policy frameworks, serving as a foundation for rural development and agricultural sustainability. Through its dual-pillar structure, CAP creates a support system that balances economic viability with environmental responsibility. The 'first pillar' provides crucial income support and market measures. The 'second pillar' which is rural development reinforces these objectives through targeted rural development initiatives. CAP is essential for the sustainable growth of rural areas, targeting three main long-term goals: improving agriculture and forestry's competitiveness, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources alongside climate action, and ensuring equitable development across rural regions by strengthening local economies and communities, including generating and preserving jobs.

3. European Skills Agenda⁴

The European Skills Agenda is a comprehensive five-year plan for skills development, addressing the challenges of building resilience, environmental sustainability, digital transformation, and social inclusion. The agenda is structured around four key areas: The first focuses on fostering collaborative action. The second emphasises developing the right skills for jobs, including those needed for the green and digital transitions, which are essential for the modern workforce. The third creates innovative tools for lifelong learning, such as digital platforms and recognition systems for informal learning. The fourth aims to

¹ European Commission (n.d.). The European Green Deal. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

² Lenzen, M., Sun, Y. Y., Faturay, F., Ting, Y. P., Geschke, A., & Malik, A. (2018). The carbon footprint of global tourism. *Nature Climate Change*, 8(6), 522-528.

³ European Commission (n.d.). *Rural Development*. Retrieved from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_en

⁴ European Commission. (n.d.). *European Skills Agenda*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1223>

improve the enabling framework to unlock investments in skills from both member states and the private sector.

4. EU Tourism Policy⁵

The EU tourism policy seeks to strengthen Europe's status as a top global destination while promoting sustainability, including social and environmental considerations. Key goals include enhancing the tourism sector's role in driving economic growth and employment, fostering collaboration among EU member states, and boosting Europe's appeal as a travel destination. The transition pathway for tourism, launched in February 2022, marks a pivotal shift in approach by identifying 27 key actions that support the green and digital transformation of the tourism sector and enhance its resilience. The European agenda for tourism 2030, adopted by the European Union Council in December 2022, is based on the transition pathway and outlines a multi-year action plan with initiatives to be undertaken by EU member states, the Commission, and tourism industry stakeholders.

More information on:

- [Green transition of tourism](#)
- [Digital transition of tourism](#)

5. Digital Education Action Plan⁶

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) is designed to help Member States adapt their education and training systems to the demands of the digital age. This Action Plan encourages enhanced cooperation across Europe to address both the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to create new possibilities for educators, students, policymakers, academia, and researchers at national, EU, and international levels. Its second key priority, "Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation," includes actions for developing common guidelines for teachers and educators to promote digital literacy and combat disinformation through education and training, updating the European Digital Competence Framework to include AI and data-related skills and providing digital opportunity traineeships.

Sustainable Development Goals in Tourism⁷

As part of the Universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all nations committed to work towards achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to eliminate extreme poverty, address inequality and injustice, and combat climate change by 2030. Tourism has the potential to support these goals directly or indirectly, fostering positive change. The SDGs in tourism related to the EXTOR project are the following:

Under **SDG 12, "Responsible Consumption and Production"** the tourism sector must adopt sustainable practices in consumption and production. This includes using tools to monitor the impact of tourism on sustainability, covering areas such as energy, water usage, waste management, biodiversity, and job

⁵ European Commission (n.d.). *Overview of EU tourism policy*. Retrieved from https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/policy-overview_en

⁶ European Commission (2020). *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age*. Retrieved from <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

⁷ UNWTO (2020). *Tourism for SDGs*. Retrieved from <https://tourism4sdgs.org/>

creation. In alignment with SDG 12 and travellers' increased preference for safer, cleaner, and greener solutions post-COVID-19, EXTOR promotes environmentally sustainable practices in tourism focusing on the natural and cultural heritage of rural areas, and on VET offer renewal.

Regarding **SDG 4 "Quality Education"** tourism plays a role in providing educational opportunities and promoting inclusiveness. A skilled workforce is essential for the growth of the industry. EXTOR will contribute to SDG 4 by supporting the renewal of the current VET offer in line with changing skill needs and economic cycles. It will promote the strength, resilience, and prosperity of rural areas and communities by exploiting local resources and focusing on competencies such as digital marketing, e-commerce, and video making.

Tourism's contribution to **SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth"** is also significant, as the sector creates diverse employment opportunities, providing one in ten jobs worldwide. It is suggested that, to strengthen the positive socio-economic effects of tourism, it is important to offer quality employment opportunities in the sector. EXTOR will help meet the goals of SDG 8, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030 by facilitating access to training and supporting the increase in the employment rate in rural areas. In addition, rural areas host almost 30% of the EU population (a long-term vision for EU's rural areas), implying an intrinsic risk of exclusion from education, training, and employment due to their location. EXTOR aims to overcome this threat by providing blended learning solutions and promoting attractive employment opportunities to increase the motivation of people living in rural and remote areas, including young people, to start a career in their territory. As stressed in the EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, this sector can help preserve smaller businesses and tackle social inequalities.

Analysis of Partners National Trends

Individual Interviews with Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs and Professionals

The research conducted with **rural tourism entrepreneurs** and **professionals** across Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Austria, Greece, and Iceland highlights common challenges within the sector.

- **Funding** was a significant concern for entrepreneurs in all countries, with many relying on personal investments to start and sustain their businesses. Bank loans were a secondary source of funding, particularly in Iceland and Spain, where entrepreneurs often struggled to access grants due to complicated application procedures. Some managed to obtain EU and national funding, especially in Italy, Spain, and Greece. However, awareness of funding opportunities varied, with entrepreneurs in Italy and Greece having higher levels of knowledge, while those in Iceland, Austria, and Cyprus were less informed.
- **Lack of financial support**, particularly for green and digital transitions. Financial support was a major concern also for rural tourism professionals. In Cyprus, half of the respondents consider the available financial support insufficient, while in Spain and Greece, there is a strong call for more resources and promotional policies. In Iceland, respondents highlighted the challenges posed by high living costs and a lack of financial assistance.
- **Limited availability of VET programs specifically designed for rural tourism.** Many expressed strong interest in training related to digital marketing, business management, and sustainable tourism practices. In particular, digital transformation training was in high demand, especially in Spain, Cyprus, and Greece, where entrepreneurs showed interest in upskilling in areas such as e-

commerce, social media marketing, and video development. Despite this, awareness of available programs was generally low. In Greece and Cyprus, less than half of the respondents were aware of existing VET programs, while Austrian and Icelandic entrepreneurs were slightly better informed but still identified gaps.

The limited availability of VET programs specifically designed for rural tourism was also a major challenge between rural tourism professionals. In Spain, Austria, and Iceland, professionals highlighted the lack of specialised training, particularly in areas such as digital marketing, experiential tourism, and sustainable practices. In Italy, while 90% of respondents have participated in some form of vocational training, they expressed a desire for further education in areas like ecotourism, cultural tourism, and sustainable practices. In Cyprus and Greece, there was a demand for additional training in video marketing, digital transitions, and EU funding norms.

- **Community involvement** emerged as a crucial factor for the success of rural tourism businesses across all countries. In Spain, Italy, and Cyprus, entrepreneurs particularly highlighted the importance of collaborating with local communities to provide authentic, culturally rich experiences for tourists. In countries like Italy and Cyprus, efforts were made to engage communities in sustainable practices, including educational workshops and agricultural tours. However, in areas like Iceland and Austria, entrepreneurs pointed to a lack of community engagement as a growth barrier, particularly in more remote regions.
- **Inadequate infrastructure and rural depopulation** were significant obstacles across all countries. Rural depopulation was particularly concerning in Austria, Cyprus, and Greece, where entrepreneurs faced difficulties in finding qualified staff and maintaining operations due to a lack of available personnel. The migration of younger people away from rural areas, combined with limited access to skilled workers, posed serious challenges. This issue was also identified by rural tourism professionals, with professionals in Spain and Greece noting that depopulation leads to a lack of skilled workers. Additionally, in Austria, professionals pointed to low salaries and a lack of respect for tourism workers as factors discouraging potential employees from joining the sector.

Focus Groups with VET Providers

VET offers/programs available:

- Apart from Spain and Cyprus, marketing and communication-related VET programs relevant to rural tourism and general tourism were identified.
- In Iceland, VET offerings are mainly short-term, ad-hoc programs focused on marketing and communication. There is a lack of formal education and emphasis on essential skills such as marketing, management, and communication, which is reflected in the high demand for courses in these areas from businesses. Overall, VET programs in Iceland are typically developed based on the specific needs or requests of tourism businesses.
- Programs focused on sustainable practices were reported in all partner countries except Spain and Iceland. In Cyprus, it was noted that some companies offer training on implementing sustainable practices for hotels and wineries. There is also a small emphasis on agritourism and sustainability within hotel management, with programs provided by the Deputy Ministry of Tourism and other organisations. In Austria and Greece, similar programs focused on green practices were identified, while in Italy, tourism management and ICT-related courses were

mentioned. In Greece, however, these programs are often part of broader VET offerings. In Spain, some programs are available for tour guides.

- **Professional development programs for rural tourism professionals:** Participants in Italy highlighted a lack of specialised training in Sicily. In Cyprus, some respondents mentioned the presence of general tourism programs rather than programs specific to rural tourism. In Austria, it was noted that programs are offered by tourism schools, VET providers, and businesses, often through internal projects, with support from tourism associations.
- **Gaps in VET provision for rural tourism:** In Italy, Cyprus, and Austria gaps include the insufficient focus on sustainable practices, lack of support for promoting rural tourism VET programs, gaps in technology and digital skills, and limited training opportunities. In Italy, while some training opportunities exist, they are often limited and do not address the specific needs of rural tourism professionals. In Spain, the main challenges include limited training opportunities, a lack of innovation in training beyond basic management, and insufficient local authority involvement.

Efforts made by authorities to promote rural tourism:

- Respondents from Italy, Cyprus, and Austria mentioned various informational and educational campaigns, such as seminars about rural tourism, infrastructure development, policy promotion, and the creation of informational resources.
- In Italy, some participants noted a desire from local authorities to foster collaboration and network at the local level, though others claimed there was little to no efforts being made.
- In Iceland, national and local authorities focus on promoting rural tourism through policies that support rural solutions and infrastructure development, with an emphasis on supporting smaller tourism businesses. While funding for training programs is considered essential, there are challenges in adapting courses to meet the needs of businesses and securing enough funding.
- In Greece, local authorities and chambers of commerce create periodic informational materials and publish articles to promote rural tourism. In Spain, marketing and communication efforts by provinces were noted as lacking strategy and monitoring. Additionally, few improvements in infrastructure were noted, particularly in access and transportation.

Recommendations:

- Participants from Italy and Austria suggested that collaboration between industries would benefit rural tourism VET providers, including partnerships between VET providers and rural tourism businesses, and professional development opportunities to stay updated on industry trends and best practices and support in promoting VET programs.
- In Cyprus suggestions also included enhancing promotional initiatives and improving information campaigns.
- In Italy, participants recommended providing additional support for promotion and training related to public calls for proposals.

These results indicate that there is a need to renew and improve VET offerings to better prepare rural tourism entrepreneurs and professionals with the essential skills and knowledge to address industry challenges. By enhancing VET programs, the sector can better align with the evolving needs of both professionals and travellers, fostering sustainable growth. EXTOR aims to contribute to this objective by upskilling the workforce in rural areas through a tailored training program in rural tourism that addresses their specific needs and priorities.

EXTOR Training Programme

The EXTOR training programme will be a tailored rural tourism training course for VET learners, offering cutting-edge theoretical content and practical learning experiences specifically designed to address the evolving priorities of the economy and society. The aim of the programme is to upskill the workforce, stimulate the adoption of environmentally sustainable solutions, and deepen learners' understanding of the key features, challenges, and policies related to rural tourism in the EU.

The training programme will contribute to the project's objectives, specifically improving the employability and competitiveness of rural entrepreneurs. It will enhance their competencies and knowledge in rural tourism, digital skills, and green sectoral practices, while also fostering new connections with local businesses and helping to reduce the outflow of people to urban areas. Furthermore, it will increase the capacity of VET providers and trainers to adapt their offerings to the real needs of the labour market, economy, and society by innovating their training programs in rural tourism. The programme will also promote the inclusion of people living in rural or remote areas by providing blended learning opportunities, making education more accessible to people with fewer opportunities.

After its completion the programme will be tested with VET learners to better adapt to their current needs, creating new connections with local businesses and contributing to the identification of new job opportunities in rural tourism. Additionally, the EXTOR kit will be developed as a resource for VET providers, containing clear guidelines on how to incorporate the EXTOR training program into their curriculum, thus increasing their resilience.

The programme will be open and free of charge, remaining available on the **EXTOR platform** in English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, German, Icelandic and French, enhancing its outreach and transferability. It will consist of 6 Learning Units (LUs), totalling 40 hours, including self-directed learning, and will be aligned with EQF Level 4.

Below is an overview of each LU, designed to contribute to the overall objectives of the training programme. Each LU is introduced with a brief description of why it is important for learners to engage with the topic, followed by the learning outcomes outlining the knowledge, skills, and competencies they will gain, as well as an overview of the lessons and subunits included in each unit.

LU1 - Rural Tourism: Key Concepts and Challenges at Local/EU Level

Theoretical insights of this Learning Unit explore rural tourism's resilience post-COVID-19 and its role in local economies, job creation, and environmental sustainability. The LU also explores challenges such as poor infrastructure, seasonality, environmental concerns, and marketing difficulties. Various self-assessment questions and additional resources enhance learning. Overall, the LU presents rural tourism as a growing and essential sector in community-driven strategies to ensure long-term success.

Learning Objectives

The Learning Objective of this Unit is to provide a comprehensive understanding of rural tourism by exploring its definitions, opportunities, challenges, and key trends that contribute to its growth as an industry. Learners will gain insight into the fundamental concepts of rural tourism, including the characteristics of rural areas, the role of special interest tourism, and the significance of experiential tourism in rural settings. Additionally, the Unit aims to emphasize the importance of a community

development approach in rural tourism by examining key elements, various approaches, and the process of identifying needs and interests to create sustainable tourism projects. Finally, learners will analyse the common challenges faced by rural tourism at both local and European levels and explore best practices to address these challenges effectively.

Training Content of the LU

1. **Introduction to Rural Tourism**
 - 1.1 Definitions
 - 1.2 Opportunities and challenges
 - 1.3 Key trends in rural tourism
 - 1.4 Rural tourism: a growing industry
2. **Key Concepts in Rural Tourism**
 - 2.1 Defining rural areas
 - 2.2 The key concept of Special Interest Tourism
 - 2.3 Experiential tourism in Rural Areas
3. **Community development approach in Rural Tourism. The importance of defining needs and interests**
 - 3.1 Principal elements of community development
 - 3.2 Community development approaches
 - 3.3 Importance of defining needs and interests in rural tourism
 - 3.4 Exercise: Planning and creating the tourism project
4. **Common challenges of rural tourism at the local and European levels**
 - 4.1 Local level challenges
 - 4.2 European level challenges
 - 4.3 Best practices to overcome rural tourism challenges

LU2 - Sustainable Tourism: Towards Slow and Regenerative Tourism

The learning unit “Sustainable Tourism: Towards Slow and Regenerative Tourism” is about the paradigm change in tourism sustainability. It starts by giving an overview of previous attempts (last decades) of global tourism authorities to foster tourism sustainability and moves then on to regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism is a new and holistic concept that sees small (rural) tourism businesses as “agents of degrowth”.

Learning Objectives

The learner will get an overview of the past and ongoing challenges that we face when trying to foster tourism sustainability. The main learning outcome is an in-depth understanding of regenerative tourism and what it implies. To gain in-depth understanding about this new paradigm, the learner will be led through the history of sustainable tourism development with a special focus on the concepts “sustainable” and “responsible” tourism. By focusing on individual values and “earthly” matters, we will then approach regenerative tourism. Through a series of best practise examples the learner will be introduced to

regenerative tourism tools and approaches. A special focus will be put on small tourism businesses and entrepreneurs, who play a leading role in the regenerative tourism paradigm.

Training Content of the LU

1. **Tourism at a Tipping Point - Finding the Limits, Seeking Solutions**
 - 1.1 Introduction
 - 1.2 Sustainable Tourism
 - 1.3 Responsible Tourism

2. **Travel That Gives Back - The Principles of Regenerative Tourism**
 - 2.1 What is regenerative tourism?
 - 2.2 Slow Tourism / Earthly Tourism
 - 2.3 Regenerative Tourism – a Nordic Pilot Initiative
 - 2.4 Criticism on Regenerative Tourism
 - 2.5 The First Mile (™) Approach – The Human Psyche matters in Sustainable Tourism

3. **Practical Tools for Regeneration - Inspiration for Rural Tourism Leaders**
 - 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Regenerative Tourism Best Case Studies
 - 3.3 Tools to apply in Regenerative Tourism - Triple Helix Approach
 - 3.4 Tools to apply in Regenerative Tourism - Citizen Science in Regenerative Tourism
 - 3.5 Other Citizen Science projects

4. **Tourism Lifestyle Entrepreneurs – Agents of Degrowth**
 - 4.1 Introduction: Tourism Lifestyle Entrepreneurs
 - 4.2 Tourism Lifestyle Entrepreneurs – Who Are They?
 - 4.3 Tourism Lifestyle Entrepreneurs – a matter of business intention and values
 - 4.4 Place Attachment: caring for local nature and communities
 - 4.5 Regeneration through Innovation: Innovativeness of small tourism businesses
 - 4.6 Challenge: Gap of Communication between Small Businesses and Tourism Authorities

LU3 - Ecotourism Practices

This Learning Unit explores the principles and practices of sustainable tourism, focusing on ecotourism, adventure tourism, agritourism, and cultural tourism. It examines how tourism can support environmental conservation, empower local communities, and provide meaningful experiences for travellers. The unit highlights responsible travel approaches that minimize negative impacts while fostering awareness, education, and socio-economic benefits for host communities. Through a combination of theory and best practices, learners will understand how to integrate sustainability into various tourism sectors.

Learning Objectives

The objective of LU3 is to provide learners with the knowledge and skills needed to implement sustainable practices across various sectors of rural tourism, including sport and adventure tourism, agritourism, farm tourism, and cultural tourism. Learners will develop the ability to design eco-friendly tourism experiences that promote local conservation efforts and preserve cultural heritage. The unit will also enable them to

evaluate the sustainability and cultural sensitivity of tourism activities, ensuring that their practices are respectful of local ecosystems and communities.

Training Content of the LU

1. **Introduction to Ecotourism Practices**
 - 1.1. Defining Ecotourism
 - 1.2. Characteristics/Principles of Ecotourism
 - 1.3. Benefits of Ecotourism
 - 1.4. Ecotourism practices
2. **Sport & Adventure Tourism**
 - 2.1. What is Adventure Tourism?
 - 2.2. How to reduce the impact of adventure tourism activities
 - 2.3. Use of eco-friendly equipment
3. **Agritourism & Farm Tourism**
 - 3.1. What is Agritourism & Farm Tourism?
 - 3.2. Agri-ecotourism
 - 3.3. Agri-ecotourism activities
 - 3.4. Core components of Agri-ecotourism
4. **Cultural Tourism**
 - 4.1 What is Cultural Tourism?
 - 4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of Cultural Tourism
 - 4.3 Eco-cultural Tourism

LU4 - Digital Marketing & E-commerce

The LU Digital Marketing and E-Commerce introduces essential digital marketing and e-commerce skills tailored for rural tourism enterprises. Learners will gain hands-on experience designing and executing digital campaigns, using social media, websites, and e-commerce platforms to improve visibility. The LU focuses on optimization of content to engage diverse audiences effectively, supporting rural tourism's growth and outreach.

Learning Objectives

Digital Marketing & E-commerce equips learners with the knowledge and skills to design and implement effective digital marketing strategies that enhance the visibility of rural tourism enterprises. Participants will learn to create and manage campaigns using social media, websites, and e-commerce platforms, optimising content to attract and engage diverse audiences. The unit includes practical guidance on using AI tools for generating creative content, graphics, and pictures. Additionally, learners will explore best practices in digital marketing and e-commerce specific to the rural tourism sector. By the end of the unit, participants will be able to develop and execute tailored digital marketing plans that align with the unique needs of rural tourism businesses.

Training Content of the LU

1. **Introduction to Digital Marketing & E-commerce in Rural Tourism**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Digital Tools and Platforms

- 2. Campaign Design & Execution**
 - 2.1 Social Media Marketing
 - 2.2 Website Optimization
 - 2.3 E-commerce Integration

- 3. Content Optimization Techniques**
 - 3.1 Content Creation and Storytelling
 - 3.2 Visual Optimization

- 4. Sustainable Practices in Digital Marketing**
 - 4.1 Sustainable Digital Marketing
 - 4.2 Alternatives to AI in marketing

LU5 - Video-making: A Course for Basic Skills Development

This learning unit aims to equip VET learners with essential skills to create engaging promotional videos tailored for experiential tourism, supporting sustainable rural development. Through practical lessons on storytelling, scriptwriting, and video editing, learners will develop short-form content suited for social media platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts. By the end of this module, learners will create a polished promotional video, applying skills from script to screen as a self-assessment task.

Learning Objectives

Video making for Experiential Tourism focuses on equipping learners with the foundational knowledge and practical skills needed to create compelling promotional videos that align with sustainable rural tourism values. Learners will develop an understanding of storytelling techniques, scriptwriting essentials, and platform-specific requirements for short-form videos on social media. They will also gain hands-on experience in video recording, editing, and using AI tools to enhance production quality. By the end of the unit, learners will be able to independently plan, produce, and assess video content tailored to the experiential tourism sector while integrating digital marketing strategies to effectively engage target audiences.

Training Content of the LU

- 1. Introduction to storytelling in video making for experiential tourism**
 - 1.1 Understanding storytelling and story elements: the experience, emotions, and call to action
 - 1.2 Aligning video content with target audiences and sustainability themes

- 2. Scriptwriting essentials for promotional videos**
 - 2.1 Crafting a message that highlights unique tourism aspects and sustainability
 - 2.2 Adapting scripts for different audiences and integrating persuasive language

- 3. Video Formats and Platform-Specific Requirements**
 - 3.1 Social media platform requirements (e.g., length, format, aspect ratio)

3.2 Matching video content style to platform-specific audiences

4. Introduction to basic video recording techniques

4.1 Recording techniques for mobile devices and entry-level cameras

4.2 Simple strategies for achieving professional quality with minimal equipment

5. Basics of Video Editing for Social Media

5.1 Adding captions, soundtracks, and transitions to enhance viewer engagement

5.2 Overview of beginner-friendly editing software (e.g., Canva Video, CapCut)

LU6 - EU Funding and Norms for SMEs Opening and/or Development

Studying this LU will equip learners with knowledge about various EU funding programs and mechanisms designed to support the development and expansion of SMEs in rural tourism. Knowledge of EU norms and legal frameworks will help learners understand the necessary regulations for opening and running an SME, including tax policies and environmental regulations. Business Planning and Development will become a valuable tool for opening or expanding through this LU. Overall, learners will gain a comprehensive understanding of how to access EU funding, comply with necessary regulations, and develop sustainable SMEs in rural tourism.

Learning Objectives

The aim of this LU is for learners to distinguish among the various EU funding programs available for SMEs, including Horizon Europe, COSME, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and other rural development initiatives. Furthermore, to be able to identify the legal and regulatory requirements for opening and operating SMEs within the EU, including taxation, environmental standards, and safety regulations. Business Planning and Development will be another learning objective in order for the learners to be capable of designing and implementing a strategic business plan for opening or expanding a sustainable SME in rural tourism, including financial projections, market research, and sustainability measures. Building networks with local businesses, municipalities, and tourism boards is going to be the last part of LU6.

Training Content of the LU

1. EU Funding Mechanisms for SMEs

1.1 The main EU funding mechanisms for SMEs in rural tourism and how to access

1.2 Step-by-step guide to applying for EU grants and loans.

1.3 Understanding the application process: documentation and timelines.

1.4 Best practices for successful applications

2. Setting up an SME in the EU: Licensing, tax structures, and legal compliance.

2.1 EU Norms and Regulations for SMEs in the EU

2.2 Data protection and privacy: The GDPR regulation

3. Rural Development Policies per Country

3.1 EU's rural development priorities and funding opportunities per country.

3.2 Supporting local communities through sustainable practices.

4. Business Development for SMEs in Rural Tourism

4.1 Strategic Business Planning

4.2 Developing a business plan for rural tourism: Key elements and sustainability focus.

4.3 Market analysis: Identifying opportunities in sustainable tourism.

5. Partnerships and Networking

5.1 Building networks with local businesses, municipalities, and tourism boards.

5.2 Cross-border and regional collaborations.

Summary

The Common Framework for VET Renewal in Rural Tourism highlights current trends, challenges, educational gaps, and potential areas for improvement in the rural tourism sector, based on extensive research involving rural tourism entrepreneurs, professionals, and VET providers across six countries: Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Austria, Greece, and Iceland. This research reveals the need for skill enhancement in digital marketing, and sustainable tourism practices which are key areas that participants identified as lacking in existing training programs. The findings also highlight the demand for greater access to specialised VET offerings and funding opportunities, especially for supporting green and digital transitions. Additionally, the framework takes inspiration from successful examples of experiential tourism - the success stories gathered to foster awareness and knowledge exchange across Europe. Designed to guide VET renewal in rural tourism, this framework addresses skills gaps in rural tourism and adapts to evolving economic and societal needs.

In addition, the framework emphasises EU policies relevant to the project's goals, such as the European Green Deal, Common Agricultural Policy, European Skills Agenda, and EU Tourism Policy, as well as related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

The framework concludes with an overview of the EXTOR Training Programme, created to meet the specific needs of rural tourism entrepreneurs and professionals. This programme offers a tailored curriculum that addresses the unique demands of the sector, supports the upskilling of rural entrepreneurs and professionals, and strengthens the resilience of VET providers and trainers, thereby contributing to the alignment of VET with labour market needs. Consisting of six Learning Units (LUs) totalling 40 hours of self-directed learning, the programme includes essential topics in rural tourism, sustainable practices, and key skills such as digital marketing and video production. With a blended learning approach, it accommodates diverse learning preferences, overcomes geographic barriers, and enables learners to progress at their own pace, thereby enhancing VET flexibility. Upon completion, the programme will enter a testing phase with VET learners to refine it further based on their specific needs. To enhance accessibility and transferability, the programme will be available free of charge on the EXTOR platform in English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, German, Icelandic, and French.

The Common Framework has been evaluated by stakeholders, rural tourism entrepreneurs, professionals, and VET providers who participated in interviews and focus groups during the research phase in Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Austria, Greece, and Iceland. More specifically, the evaluation involved 10 rural tourism entrepreneurs, 10 rural tourism professionals, and 6 VET providers/trainers in each country. The comments and suggestions received will be incorporated into the Training Programme and tested during the piloting phase to enhance the validity of the proposed content.

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