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TOURISM

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: BUSINESSES PROPOSE CONCRETE SOLUTIONS

FACED WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND CUSTOMERS' NEW EXPECTATIONS, THE EVOLUTION OF TOURISM BUSINESSES TOWARD MORE SOBER MODELS, WITH LOW CARBON EMISSIONS AND SAVINGS IN RESOURCES IS A NECESSITY. IT CAN ALSO BE THE SOURCE OF NEW COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES: HOW CAN THEIR PRACTICES BE TRANSFORMED WHILE REMAINING REALLY COMPETITIVE ON THE MARKETS?

A major economic sector, tourism is mutating faced with today's environmental imperative. If the economic benefits and jobs that it generates have long been promoted and encouraged by local policies, the pressures and constraints exerted on the environment and the host populations can be major: impacts on the landscapes, pressures on natural resources, pollution, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions... The French Environmental and Energy Management Agency (ADEME) estimates that the tourism sector in France emitted 118 million tons of CO₂ equivalent in 2018,¹ or the annual carbon footprint of 11 million French people: transportation represented 68% of these GHG emissions (this concerns the arrival and departure modes on the national territory, as well as mobility within the territory visited – the choice of transportation has a major influence on the carbon footprint of the visitors' stay); the hosting and restaurant sectors represented respectively 7% and 6% of emissions (this concerns building materials, buildings operations – energy consumption and the purchase of consumables – and supply modes); sports, leisure and cultural activities represented 1% of emissions.

The environmental and societal impact of tourism raises questions on the activity itself, to the point that its sustainability now seems closely linked to its capacity to adapt to these challenges. To contribute to the evolution of the tourism model, L'Institut Paris Region has been running workshops with travel companies and businesses that provide accommodations to tourists in the European TouriSME project. It aims at encouraging the latter (hotels, vacation residences, etc.) and the former (travel agencies, tour operators, etc.) to explore and adopt solutions, through a collaboration between SMEs in France, Spain, Italy and Cyprus. L'Institut Paris Region has committed, in the framework of this project, to accompany 20 French businesses in establishing sustainable tourism practices, through four training workshops and two seminars also involving businesses in partner countries.

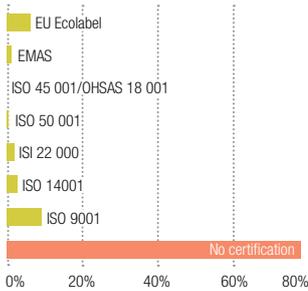


SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines it as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

TouriSME’s aim is “Improving sustainable tourism development and capacity of tourism SMEs through transnational cooperation and knowledge transfer, [...] enhancing SMEs’ capacities and skills for assessing their current environmental performances and taking up solutions which would allow them to align their businesses with certain circular economy principles.”

Rates of certifications adopted by the businesses queried



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Source : TouriSME 2022

Several fields have been investigated: energy savings, water management, waste management, the purchasing process, responsible consumption, mobility and the conception of trips. The businesses were selected after a call for applications published in the four partner countries in June 2021. Out of 158 SMEs that submitted applications, 65 were chosen.

STILL TIMID COMMITMENTS AND PRACTICES

When the TouriSME project started, the University of Pisa, which is one of its partners, conducted a survey² from January to March 2021 with tourism SMEs located in the four countries, and then analyzed the 256 responses it obtained. The first observation was that 78% of the responding businesses had no certification at all. Only 9% and 27% of the SMEs respectively had an ISO 9001³ and an ISO 14001⁴ certificate. Moreover, scarcely more than 6% of them were certified by the European Ecolabel,⁵ this percentage dropped to 1.2% for the European Environment Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS⁶; see graph opposite).

The SMEs explain this observation by indicating that the demand or expectations of partners, suppliers and professional associations concerning the adoption of an environmental certification or ecolabel in the tourism industry is still very low.

If we take an interest in the practices already implemented, the survey shows that most of the SMEs are focused on waste management. 47.3% of them already practice recycling, while 19.1% have started to implement it. As for energy consumption and food waste, 34.4% and 31.6% of the SMEs have already reduced them. 32.4% and 31.6% of the SMEs have also successfully implemented measures aiming

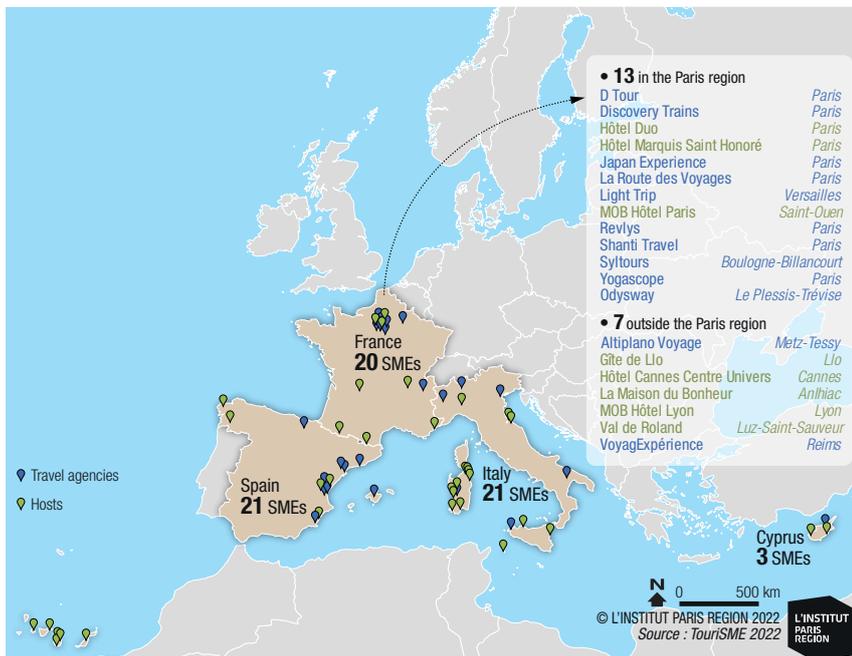
at reducing respectively the use of plastic and water consumption. The reuse of water shows, on the contrary, the lowest adoption rate. As for other practices, the overall adoption level is not high, notably that of promoting sustainable mobilities and even more so that of reusing water (see graph below).

CURBS ON THE ADOPTION OF GOOD PRACTICES

Feedback from French businesses involved in changing their practices makes it possible to identify a certain number of curbs on their adoption. Thus, waste sorting is implemented by all of the SMEs queried, but seems improvable for some of them. If sorting bins are installed in the common areas of a hotel, it turns out that there is little follow-up of their correct use, in terms of the customers as well as the personnel. There is a real challenge on follow-up, awareness-raising and information in order to have businesses adopt this practice. Putting sorting recipients in each room also raises the question of their aesthetics and the space available for them. Lastly, in a more global manner, a reflection is to be carried out on the choice of collection and recycling service providers to ensure that their task is done in the best way possible. The time the hosts devote to the implementation of waste management in its totality (awareness-raising, signs, follow-up, choice of equipment and service providers, etc.) is a major obstacle.

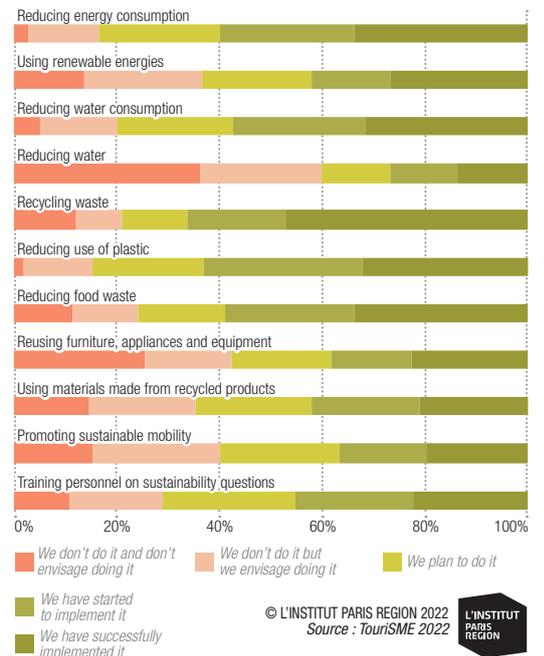
As for energy saving and water consumption reduction on the scale of the building, apart from the cost that their implementation can involve (insulation work, renovation of the heating and air-conditioning system, etc.), the status of the

The businesses involved in TouriSME in France, Spain, Italy and Cyprus



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Source : TouriSME 2022

Practices identified in the survey



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Source : TouriSME 2022

SIX ECO-RESPONSIBLE OBJECTIVES DRAWN UP BY TOURISM SMES

To fulfill the expectations expressed by French businesses, workshops were set up to imagine solutions or strength the effectiveness of practices already implemented. These collective reflections, enriched by their feedback and expert opinions, have made it possible to go into more depth on six objectives.

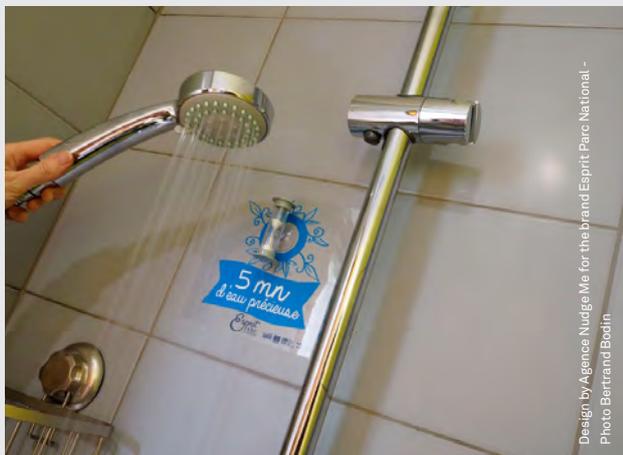


Marion Tillet / Institut Paris Region

Raising the personnel’s awareness on eco-responsible behaviors

It appears that a strong commitment of the management is essential to implement and successfully carry out an awareness-raising policy. Time and a budget must be devoted to it and an “eco-responsible behaviors” project leader even be identified. Likewise, in order to get the largest number of people to adhere, it is important to co-build an eco-responsible strategy with the employees. This permits a collective and shared approach to be created. An idea box, the creation of discussion groups or CSR* experience-sharing in a team, for example, facilitate this group work. Lastly, the management should bring up the business’s “eco-responsible” culture right from the recruitment of employees in order to make it a strong identity and value.

* Corporate social responsibility



Design by Agence Nudge Me for the brand Esprit Parc National - Photo Bertrand Bodin

Raising the clientele’s awareness without creating a feeling of guilt

The objective of this measure is to make eco-responsible behavior the clientele’s own wish. To achieve this, awareness-raising actions, like the justification of the business’ eco-responsible commitments or the promotion of the local offering’s benefits (restaurants, small traditional enterprises, mobility, etc.) can be carried out. The SME applicants also envisaged creating an eco-responsible loyalty card, the acquisition of whose points would be based on moderate behavior (in terms of water consumption, mobility choices, etc.). These points could be used in a partner network. The implementation of this action would nevertheless require precisely defining what a “moderate consumption” (a 5-minute-maximum shower, for example) represents and creating a partner network.



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Developing a “sustainable” and desirable offering

This objective necessitates in-depth work on identifying the partners and suppliers that incorporate the challenges of sustainable development. This requires that the business invest time upstream. The building of a common culture on the characteristics of the local sustainable offering as well as the organization of a training program for employees on these subjects seems indispensable. In order to gradually raise awareness in tourist clienteles, proposing a “sustainable” offering as an alternative to a traditional offering, then little by little converting it into a dominant offering, is an interesting lever. Lasting, clear and effective communication on the business’s real commitment is necessary in order to avoid it being perceived as greenwashing.



Attributing regenerating values to sustainable tourism

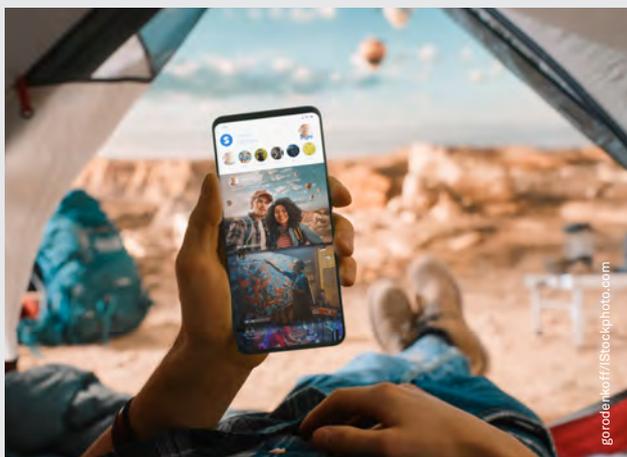
To be effective, the commitment to sustainable tourism must be conveyed by concrete benefits for the clientele. That is why any action permitting positive contributions of their travel choices to be promoted to them is essential. This concerns, for example, explaining what these actions have made possible to finance, preserve and improve, or to show the regenerative impact when this is the case. To illustrate their recommendations, the businesses indicated that a travel agency that proposes to its customers a financial contribution to finance projects with a social or environmental value would involve informing them of the use that is made of it or results obtained in the country visited so that they are fully aware of the benefits of their commitment.



Eco-designing a tourism business's Internet site

Promotion through the image is indispensable for marketing a trip, but it is also a source of a strong digital footprint. Therefore migrating to a sober Internet site often involves a complete revamping of the existing site and the implementation of new practices.

After ensuring that the site's host has an eco-responsible approach, it will be necessary to conduct a technical audit as well as a design audit. The technical audit will make it possible to verify the good optimization of the site, notably in terms of storage (format and size of the images) and flow, to limit the number of clicks. The design audit will make it possible to ensure that the site reflects the eco-responsible vision of the business it represents.



Communicating wisely on the social networks

It is difficult to drastically reduce communication efforts on the social networks (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, etc.), as they are privileged contact points for several generations. Nevertheless, to keep an effective communication while limiting its digital carbon footprint, several tracks were identified:

- sharing sustainable travel practices on the social networks;
- ensuring a sober, useful and effective content;
- limiting newsletters to once or twice a month, compressing the visuals;
- keeping a watch on the effectiveness of the posts, proposing sober "e-travel logs" (format and size of the images).

owner-operator or the operator alone is impactful. Insulation and energy-saving work decreases the site user's operating costs, but increases the owners' investment expenditures, which will not result in immediate economic benefits, not being directly concerned by the energy savings generated.

THE COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM RAISES CONSTRAINTS

A national study,⁷ conducted in January 2022 by Tourisme Bretagne in partnership with ADN Tourisme and the National Union of Tourism Associations (UNAT) shows the growing interest of French people in more responsible tourism. Out of 5,000 vacationers queried, 70% envisage traveling in a more ecological manner. Among them, 66% have committed to respecting the natural environment in the areas they visit, 56% to buying local products, 53% to better managing their waste and lastly 50% to better choosing their accommodations. Moreover, a recent study⁸ by the Regional Tourism Committee (CRT) of Nouvelle-Aquitaine (sample of nearly 1,800 people) underlines the impact of the stay on the environment and on local life, and the commitments made by the destination

on sustainable tourism have still not become the decisive criteria on the choice of a vacation place. The study brings out the following feelings: a higher price of services for 44% of the people queried, tourism that would be too constraining for 35%, a loss of comfort for 24%, a shortage of information and a lack of visibility of the offering for 24% and lastly messages that make the visitors feel guilty for 17%. Sustainable tourism gives the clientele an image of tourism that is expensive, sober and reasonable, whereas they wish to take advantage of their vacation, not be restricted and to leave behind their sometimes very constraining daily life. According to their perceptions, sustainable tourism will therefore run counter to their sought-after objectives. This difficulty is pushing the businesses to provide a positive and appealing discourse to make sustainable tourism more desirable. The promotion of the charms of the territories and their inhabitants or the preservation of patrimonial wealth and local biodiversity are put forward as rich experiences to take part in.

For a travel agency, this commitment to sustainable tourism involves renewing the initial offering and devoting time to identifying new services and service providers. The actors of businesses

WHAT IS THE SITUATION OF THE TOURISM SECTOR ?

On the European scale, the tourism activity generated nearly 710 million international arrivals in 2018, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). France (89 million arrivals), Spain (83 million) and Italy (62 million) are among the top 5 destinations worldwide, with a frequentation that constantly grew until the 2020 health crisis.

Identified as the third economic sector in Europe, the tourism industry employed 17 million people in 2017 on the continent and contributed nearly 10% of the European Union's GDP until it came to a complete standstill in 2020.

Tourism however remains one of the principal activities having a strong impact on economic growth. If it is still too soon to identify major post-Covid trends, the UNWTO notes that domestic tourism is turning the sector around in an increasing number of destinations. Trips close to people's homes, outdoor activities, products connected to nature and rural tourism appear among the major travel trends that characterize tourism in 2022.

In 2022, the Paris region has seen a revival of tourism activity.⁹ The relaxing of restrictive measures linked to the health crisis made possible a ramping up of tourist frequentation as of July. Consequently, in the first half year, 18.2 million tourists visited the Paris region, 5.4 million fewer than in 2019, but 12.5 million more than in 2021 over the same period. There were more French visitors than usual, the international clientele having decreased by 30% compared to 2019.

On the other hand, from June to August 2022, frequentation reached 94% of that of summer 2019, with 12.6 million tourists, confirming the recovery, mostly due to an international clientele over this summer period.



THE GENIALLY TOOLBOX

L'Institut Paris Region has developed a toolbox facilitating the implementation of sustainable tourism practices in businesses. The practices described are classified according to the following main tracks:

- Awareness-raising and change in behavior of the business's personnel and clientele
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) of tourism businesses
- Energy management
- "Green" purchases
- Mobility
- Waste prevention and management
- Water management
- The eco-design of buildings

Each practice successively presents the description and application field of the practice, the operational phases to follow, the stakeholders to involve (employees, suppliers, etc.), the economic aspects to consider (costs, savings, revenues and financing), as well as the evaluation and follow-up of the practices (proposal of follow-up indicators).

They are accessible by using the following interactive interface or by downloading the Notebook of Good Practices: <https://bit.ly/genialitytourisme>.

that host tourists also have many action levers that can however be a source of major financial investments when the question, for example, is one of upgrading the heating or air-conditioning system. Furthermore, the hotel owners' desires for sobriety to limit, for example, welcome kits, the recipients of hygiene products, minibars in the rooms or digital tools are often poorly understood, and even more so in luxury hotels.

The time of accompaniment and awareness-raising is a parameter to take into consideration in the marketing of a trip or in a visitor's welcome. It requires training efforts (acculturation on the environmental stakes), structuring of the offering (on which practices the business wants to position itself, in what order of priority, etc.) and the availability of the personnel to carry out this work.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO ACCELERATE THE MOVEMENT IN THE PARIS REGION

Whereas 2022 has marked a major renewal of tourism, and the Paris region is gradually recovering its place in the top 5 tourist destinations worldwide, this year is also one of awareness-raising on the challenges of climate change: repeated heat waves, droughts and wildfires in vacation destinations that have never had them before (in Brittany, notably)... In this context, an appealing and positive discourse on sustainable tourism, and especially an acceleration of eco-responsible tourism offerings with clientele of the Paris region are essential. To succeed in this endeavor, it is important to accompany tourism businesses concerned about making their offerings evolve. The European TouriSME project has made it possible to identify nearly 70 good practices that are easy to appropriate and are directly accessible online in order to facilitate their dissemination (see Genially toolbox, p. 5). ■

Maxime Kayadjanian, geographer
Regional Waste Observatory (ORDIF) (*Helder de Oliveira, director*)
Marion Tillet, geographer
Economics department (*Vincent Gollain, director*)

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RESSOURCES

- Report no. D3.1 Transactional and cross-sectoral schemes.
- Report no. D2.2 Scientific article.
- Report no. D2.3 Compendium of Best Practices.
- <https://tourisme-project.eu>

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1. <https://bibliothèque.ademe.fr/changement-climatique-et-energie/4688-bilan-des-emissions-de-gaz-a-effet-de-serre-du-sec-teur-du-tourisme-en-france.html>.
2. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jms.v11n1p218>.
3. ISO 9001 defines the criteria applicable to a quality management system.
4. ISO 14001 defines the criteria of an environmental management system.
5. The European Ecolabel, created in 1992 by the European Commission, aims at designing products (goods and services, including tourist accommodations) that respect the environment and health.
6. EMAS: a premium management instrument developed by the European Commission for companies and other organizations to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance.
7. <https://www.adn-tourisme.fr/etude-sur-les-nouvelles-aspirations-des-francais-en-matiere-de-vacances/>
8. <http://www.crt-nouvelle-aquitaine.com/Nos-actualites/Publication-des-resultats-de-l-etude-Le-tourisme-durable-en-region-Nouvelle-Aquitaine>.
9. <https://pro.visitparisregion.com/chiffres-du-tourisme/conjoncture/bilans/bilan-semestriel-et-estival-a-paris-ile-de-france-aout-2022>.

PUBLISHER

Fouad Awada

HEAD OF COMMUNICATION

Sophie Roquelle

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Laurène Champalle

LAYOUT DESIGN

Jean-Eudes Tilloy

GRAPHICS/CARTOGRAPHY

Pascale Guéry

PRODUCTION

Sylvie Coulomb

TRANSLATION

Eileen Powis

MEDIA LIBRARY/PHOTO LIBRARY

Inès Le Meledo, Julie Sarris

MEDIA RELATIONS

Sandrine Kocki

33 (0)1 77 49 75 78

L'Institut Paris Region

15, rue Falguière
75740 Paris Cedex 15
33 (0)1 77 49 77 49

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