



# The MEET Model & Standard

*For ecotourism products*

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# The MEET Network

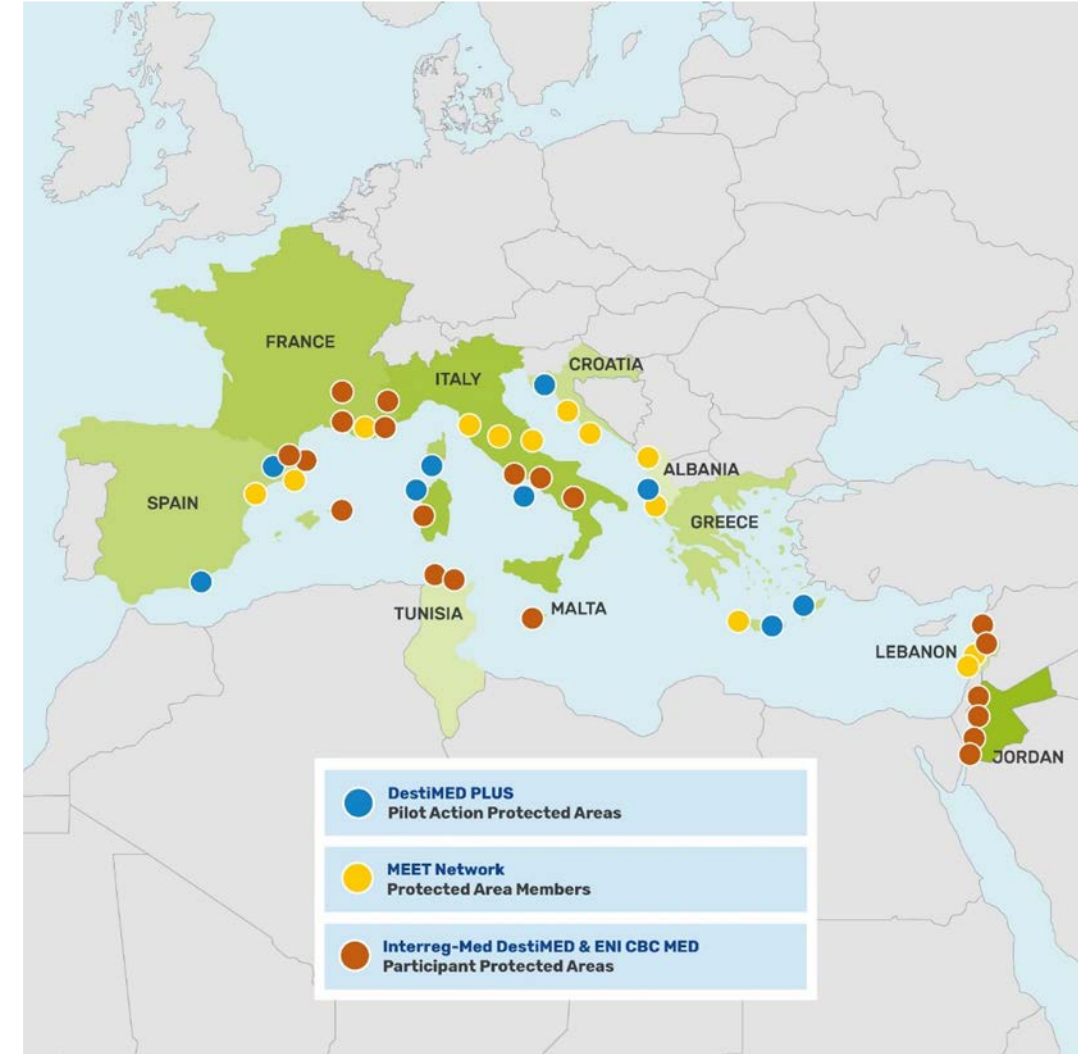
Bringing together conservation and tourism

## CONSERVATION & PUBLIC SECTOR

- Parks and Protected Areas
- Policy Makers and PA Management bodies
- Conservation & sustainability organisations

## TOURISM & PRIVATE SECTOR

- Local tour operators
- Local service providers
- International tour operators
- DMOs and Tourism boards



# MEET Network

What do we do?



1

Local Ecotourism Cluster Development

2

Ecotourism Product Development

3

Quality & Sustainability Assessment & Monitoring

4

Market Access through Commercial Brokerage

# MEET brand values





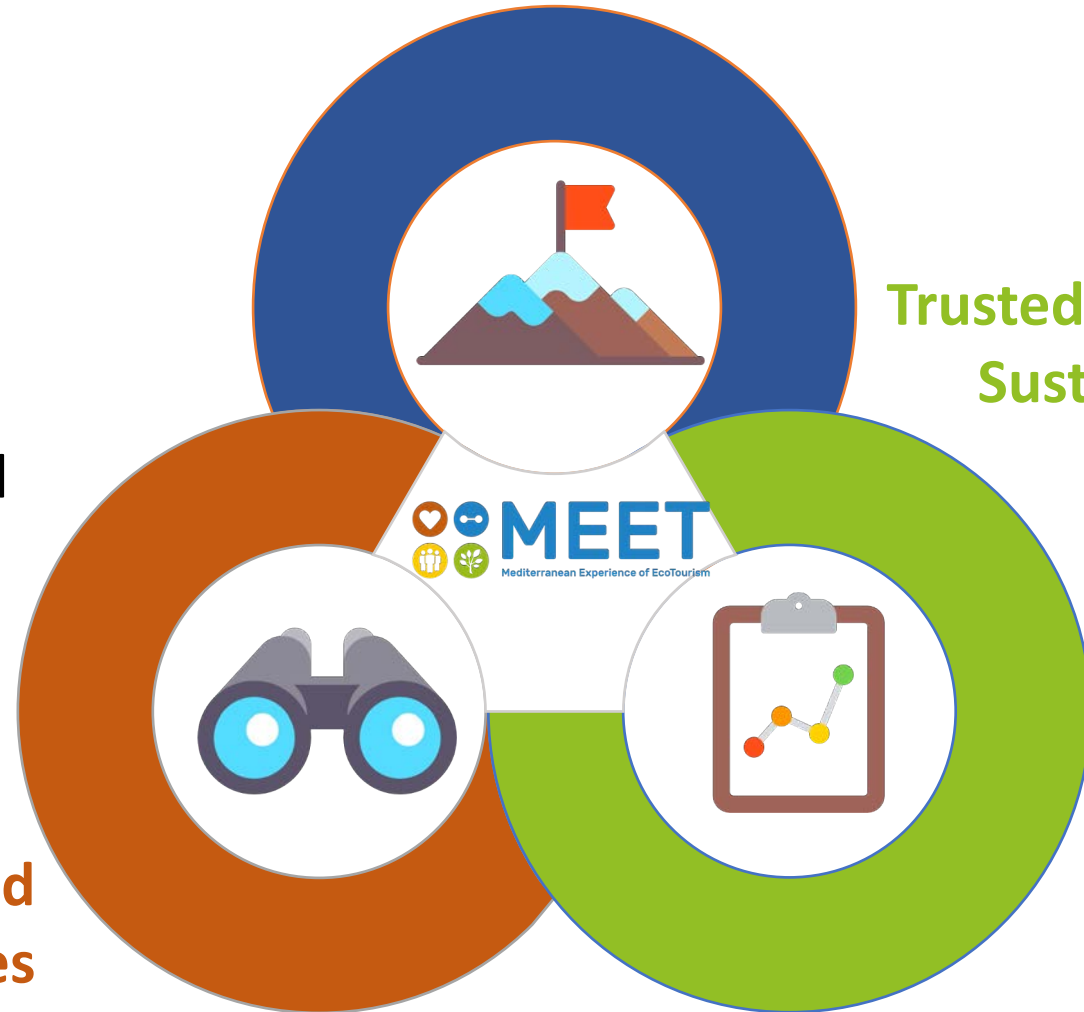
# MEET Brand Promise

Park-Led (eco)tourism

Park-Led and **Conservation** Centered  
**Community** Engagement and Benefit  
**Localized** Supply Chains  
**Measured** Environmental Impact  
Immersive Nature-Based and Cultural  
Travel **Experiences**

Trusted & Measured  
Sustainability

Locally-Crafted  
Travel Experiences





# The MEET Model



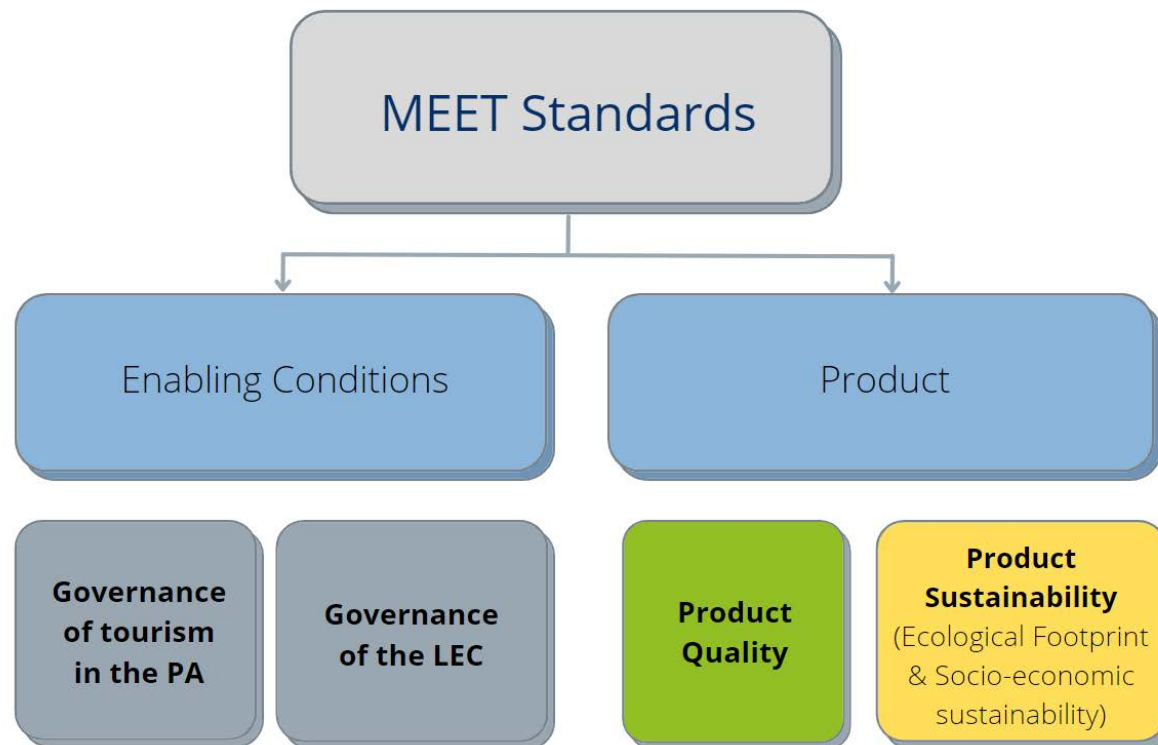


# MEET Standard

A complete **set of criteria** and indicators to help manage the **quality and sustainability** of ecotourism products (namely: **packages**).

**Enabling conditions** (governance and conservation) include the framework **pillars** that facilitate and support ecotourism development, often encompassing elements beyond the sphere of influence of the LEC.

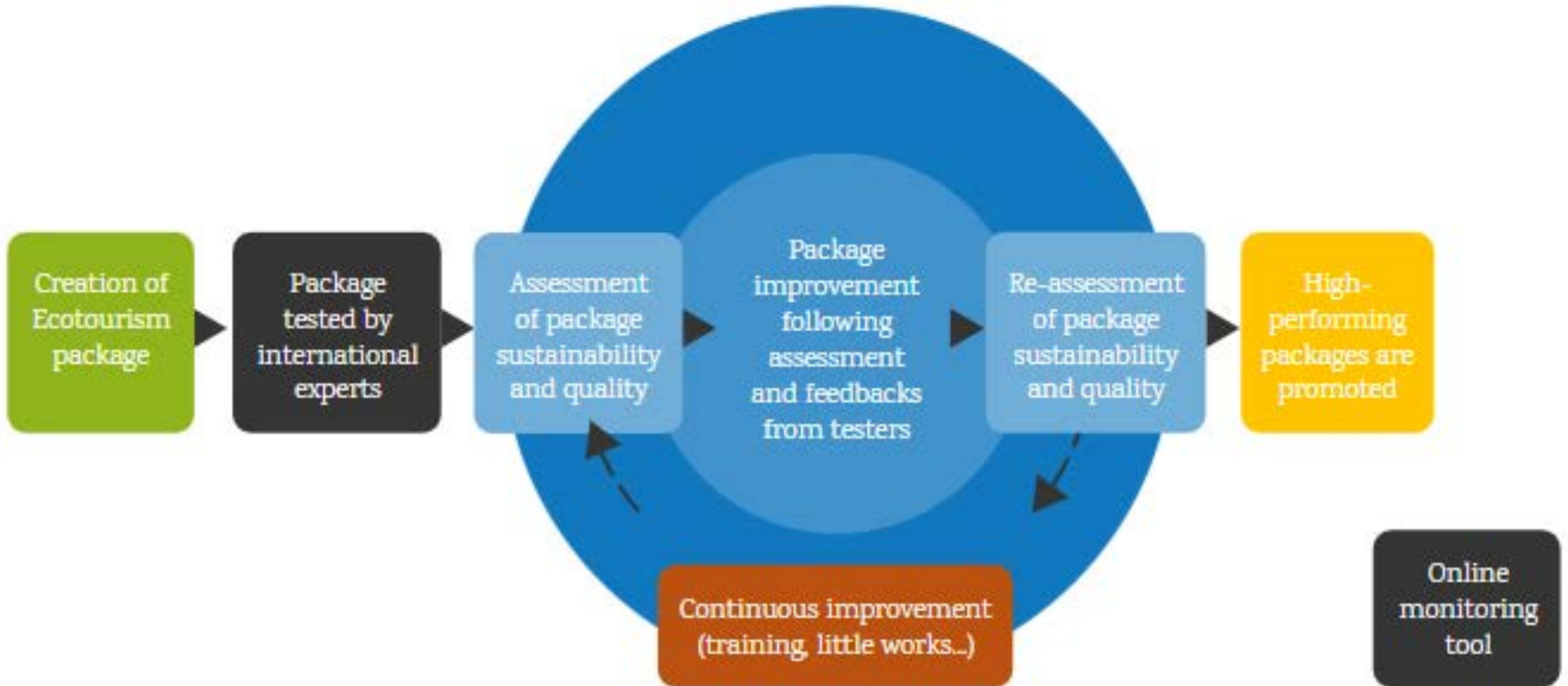
**Product-related pillars** are to assure a high quality – from tourism attractiveness point of view – and actual sustainability of the product.



2	Ideal performance
1	Intermediate positive performance
0	Compliance
-1	Intermediate negative performance
-2	No data or Non-acceptable performance

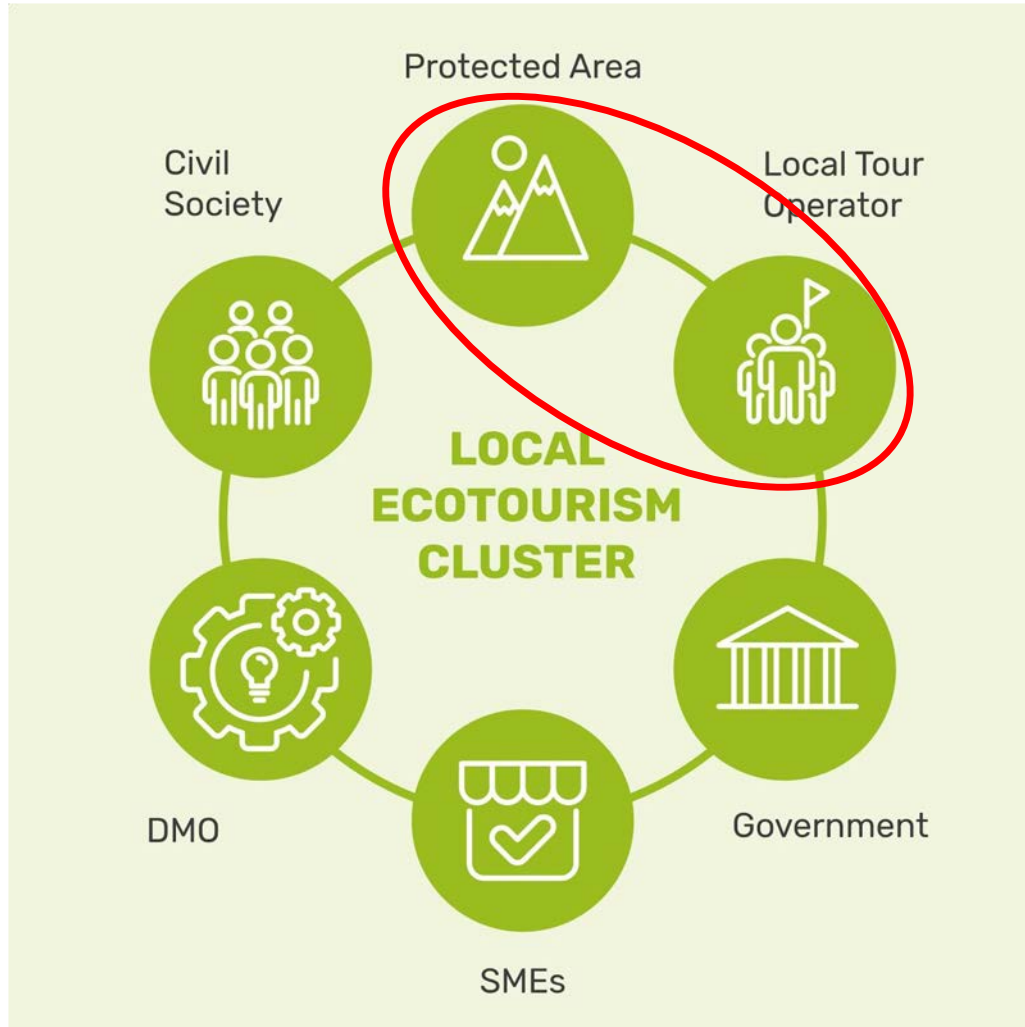
Table 2. Generic scale to assess product performance

# How is the MEET Standard used?





# P1.1 GOVERNANCE: Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)



**Public-private working groups** initiated or supported by the protected area and composed of multi-sector stakeholders.

Collaborate to **develop, plan, manage and promote ecotourism products** according to a common vision.

An alternative is a **Destination Management Organization (DMO)**, i.e. a formally established public-private partnership for drafting and promoting the tourism policy of the destination

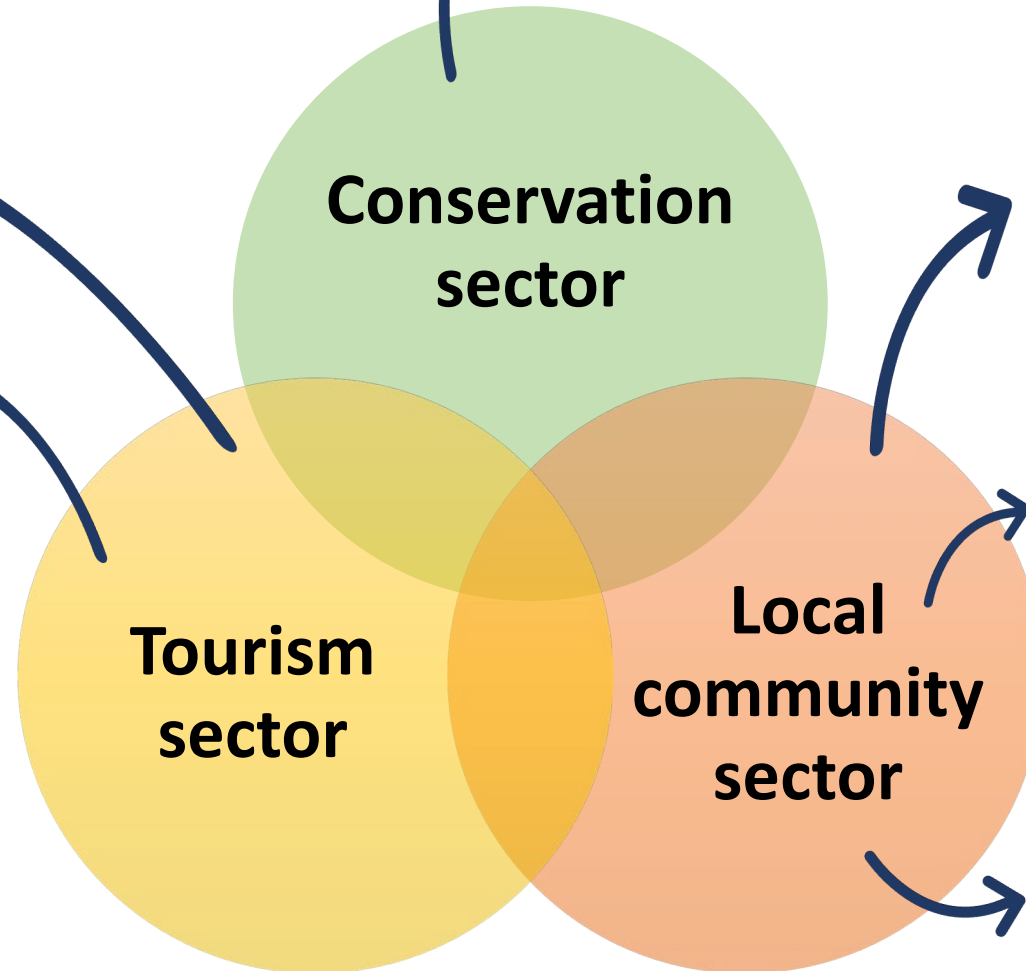
# LEC - Composition



## Local Inbound Tour Operator

## Locally owned small and medium enterprises

- Required for ecotourism product implementation
- Help to foster a sense of ownership of the destination
- Entry point for economic gains
- Keep tourism revenue within the destination



## Protected area / park authority

- Ensure conservation is respected, promoted and an integral part of the ecotourism product

## Local community organisations or representatives

- Act as facilitators and ensure that the strengths, needs and concerns of the local community are comprehended

## Local Destination Management Organisation representatives

- Help align policy, regulation and marketing efforts with ecotourism product development, conservation and sustainable Development

## Local government representatives

- Help remove barriers regarding infrastructure needs

# P1.2 CONSERVATION: Issues of Tourism in Nature

## BY PARK

- Only if project-based, i.e. **isolated products**
- **Supply focused**, lack of market orientation and **stand-alone products** (i.e. not coordinated in an overall destination offer)
- Weak understanding of **business needs**
- **Conservation is the unique priority**

## BY TOURISM OPERATORS

- Lack of knowledge on **conservation goals**
- Weak awareness of **PA needs**
- Lack of a **public-private partnership** framework
- **Misalignment** of product with the nature-based Demand
- Difficulty to reach **target markets**

## BY HOSTING COMMUNITIES & BUSINESS OWNERS

- **Unclear benefits** from the tourism, but **suffering impacts**
- Subjects to **external decisions**
- Lack of a **permanent structure for collaboration** and **continuous improvement**



# P1.2 CONSERVATION: main criteria

## Legal and regulatory enabling conditions:

- Legal **designation**
- Existence of **Management/Conservation plan**
- Existence of **visitor management/monitoring** regulation/plan

## Ecotourism package and visitor use:

- **Compliance of the T.O.** with park regulations
- **Compliance of the package** with the conservation targets
- Package includes activities providing clear **impacts on tourists' knowledge about key conservation values** of the PA
- Evidence that the environmental impacts of the package are not threatening conservation goals (**visitor impact monitoring**)



# P2.1 QUALITY of the product

- A multi-day product for small groups (max 14 pax), run by a local operator (DMC/TO/Travel Agent)
- A participatory-led product design process, where the different stakeholders are part of product development
- A market-oriented product, with a deeply analyzed target customers and high quality distribution channel.
- A sustainable product, with a standard product needs to comply with, including a comprehensive set of indicators.

Nature and Culture Itineraries  
Designed by Mediterranean Parks



## GREECE: SAMARIA GORGE NATIONAL PARK

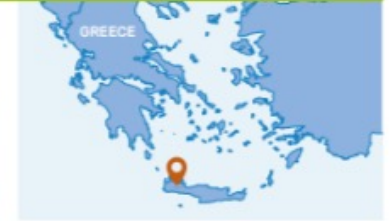
From the Mountain to the Sea: Trails of the Gods (6 days)



Trek the White Mountains, playground of the Greek Gods, and the Samaria Gorge. Swim in the turquoise waters of the Mediterranean Sea, taste and learn about traditional Cretan cuisine, and meet unique species of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world.



- Hike to Kalergi Refuge and enjoy sweeping panoramic views of the mountains and the Samaria Gorge
- Trek the famous Samaria Gorge with a local guide, ending at the shores of the Mediterranean sea, where you'll overnight in an isolated coastal village



- Enjoy a guided nature walk getting to know the local landscape on a walking path developed by the MEET Network!
- Live, eat, and dance like a local in small hotels with incredible food and plenty of live music provided by villagers.

## ITALY: MONTE RUFENO NATURE RESERVE

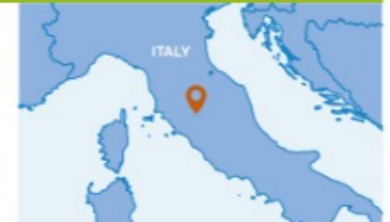
Central Italy's Hidden Beauty (5 days)



Sense the perfumes and colors of nature, wandering from medieval towns to beautiful forests in an unspoiled land between Rome and Florence.



- Explore the life of a farmer while staying at the guesthouse of a local agriturismo
- Harvest edible wild plants, fruits and mushrooms while hiking, then learn how to prepare them from local chefs
- Enjoy a guided walk through the



- fairytale Sasseto Woods in the shade of monumental trees along a carpet of moss-covered stones
- Meet the woman whose family has owned a medieval castle for 400 years, then dine on regional wine and cuisine inside her fortress.

# MEET Ecotourism experiences



## Components of an ecotourism product



# Quality criteria

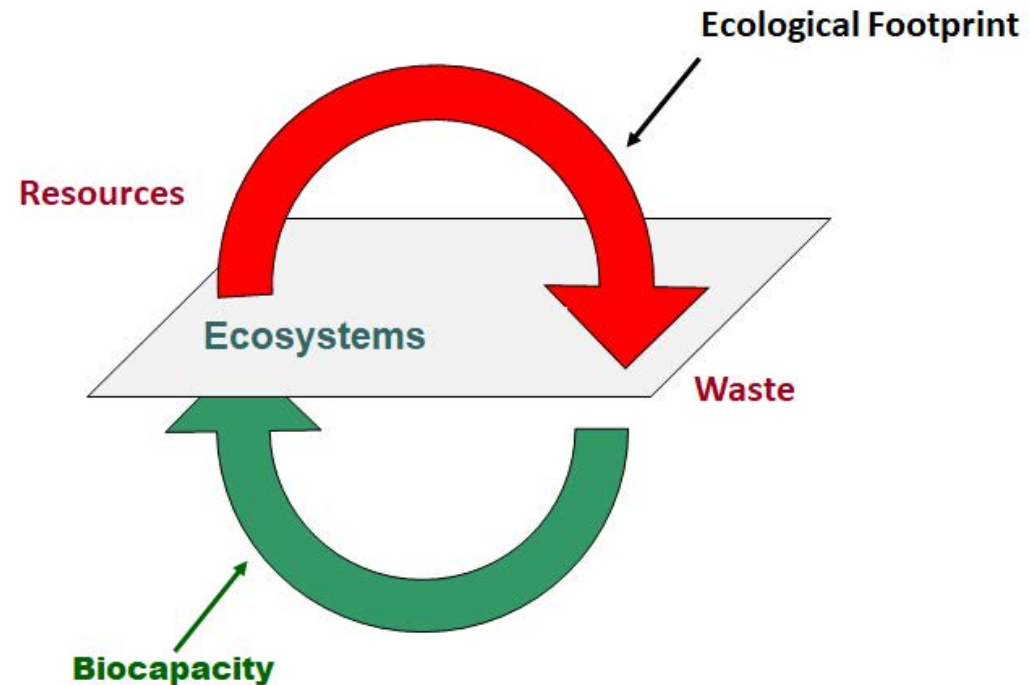
- **Ecotourism-related** activities/attractors
- **Experiencing** slowly and not seeing quickly
- **Actual interaction with local community**
- **Low seasons:** best periods to enjoy places and experiences
- **Small groups**, guided by a **Tour Leader** for the whole package duration
- **Accommodation integrated** in the natural environment and local culture
- **Meals offering local food and traditional recipes**
- Special attention to **safety**



# P2.2.a ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

The Ecological Footprint is an **environmental accounting tool** that tracks competing demands on the planet's regeneration by comparing humans' demand for and ecosystems' supply of ecological assets.

In practice, the Ecological Footprint measures **how many natural resources**, expressed in terms of surface, **we use to produce the goods/services we consume** and how many we need **to absorb our emissions**.

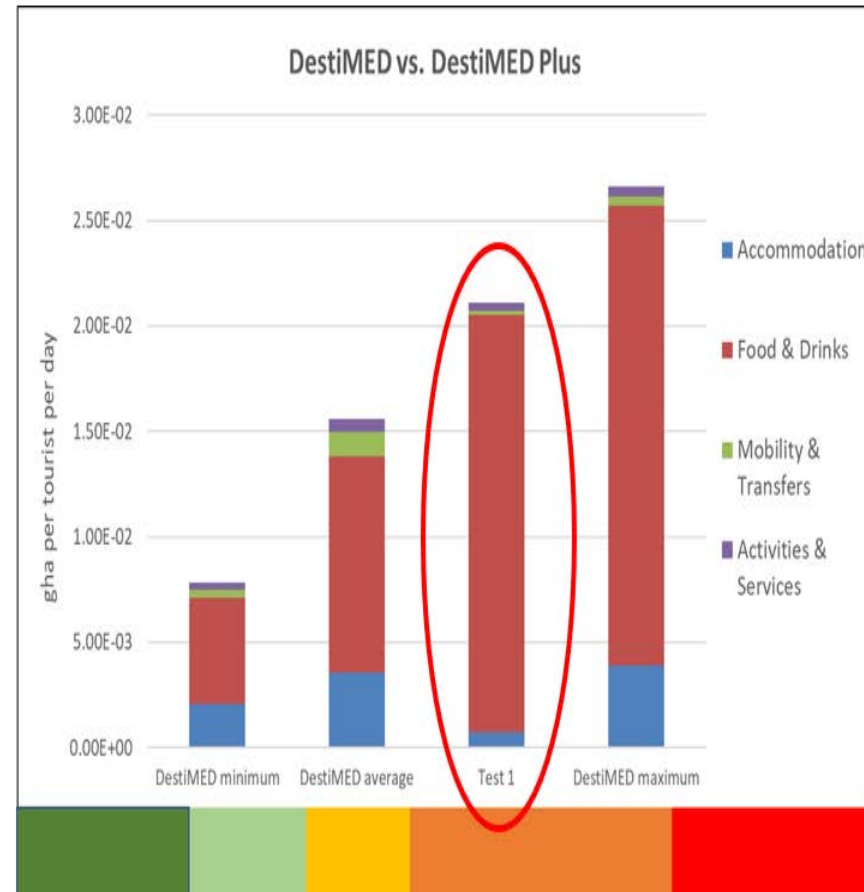




# Ecological Footprint functions

- Allows us to **quantify tourism pressures** on natural resources and ecological services
- Assesses the product's **accommodation, transport, activities services** and **food and drink** offers
- Data is collected and entered into the **Ecological Footprint Calculator** – results of calculator guide recommendations for product improvement.

**Recommendation example:** opt for simpler meals reducing the quantity of food served.



## Porto Conte's package RESULTS

- + 36% of average DestiMED value
- - 21% of the maximum
- + 169% of the minimum value;

## Standards performance:

**"-1 – intermediate negative performance"**

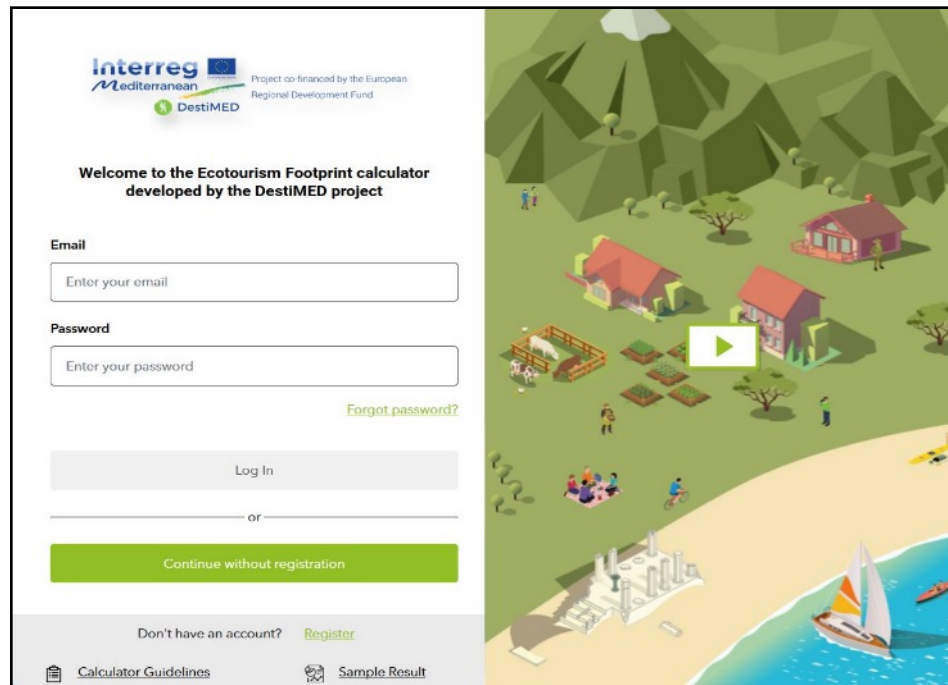
## Comparison with DestiMED averages

- Food & Drinks +94%
- Accommodation -80%
- Mobility & Transfers -86%
- Activities & Services -32%

# The Ecological Footprint Calculator



<https://www.meetnetwork.org/ecological-footprint-calculator>



Interreg Mediterranean  
Project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund  
DestiMED

Welcome to the Ecotourism Footprint calculator developed by the DestiMED project

Email  
Enter your email

Password  
Enter your password  
[Forgot password?](#)

Log In

or

Continue without registration

Don't have an account? [Register](#)

[Calculator Guidelines](#) [Sample Result](#)

### Accommodation

This category includes parameters related to each housing facility involved in the ecotourism product to host the tourists. For each housing facility included in the ecotourism product, please answer the following questions:

Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3 | Day 4 | Day 5

Accommodation Name:

Is the accommodation used for the entire stay?  
 Yes  No

Accommodation type:  
 Broom  
 Hotel  
 Apartment/Studiohouse  
 Bungalow  
 Apartments/rooming B&B  
 Campsite (check stay in tent)  
 Other

Is this housing facility open all year long or only in holiday season?  
 All year  Seasonal opening

### Food & Drink

This category includes parameters related to each consumption that is associated with an ecotourism product, including breakfast, lunch, dinner and any other type of food and beverage that is associated with the ecotourism product. The meal must be included in the ecotourism product, please answer the following questions:

Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3

Meal type:  
 Breakfast  
 Lunch  
 Dinner  
 Other (specify in the comments field)

Indicate the service provider and its name and the place for the meal:  
 Name:   
 Location:   
 Address:

Meal/Menu	Item	Origin	Mode of Production	Qty
Breakfast	Cereals, proteins	INTERNATIONAL	Local	600 kg
Dinner	Meat	LOCAL (up to 20 km away)	Local	100 kg

### Mobility & Transport

This category includes parameters related to all of modes and instruments involved in the ecotourism product to transport tourists from one place to another. For each mode of transport involved in the ecotourism product, please answer the following questions:

Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3

Name of the transport instrument:

Describe the point of origin and point of destination for the service:  
 From airport/station/terminal  
 From hotel or accommodation  
 From local business  
 From restaurant  
 From local activity  
 From agency/boat  
 Mode of equipment for activity  
 From activity provider  
 From museum or entity  
 From vehicle or aircraft  
 Other

### Activities & Services

This category includes parameters related to the services and activities involved in the ecotourism product (i.e. excursions, visits, Wi-related activities, birdwatching, kayaking, etc.) For each activity mentioned in the ecotourism product, please answer the following questions:

Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3

Name of the activity:

Does the activity have any green/sustainable label or certification?  
 Yes  No

Does the activity require any material or equipment that is necessary to be moved from the storage to the venue of the activity?  
 Yes (please fill in mobility name)  No

Indicate the number of staff involved in providing the service/activity:

Indicate the duration of the activity in hours:

Indicate the distance covered during the activity (e.g. walking or cycling):

Does the activity include any waste activity?  
 Yes  No

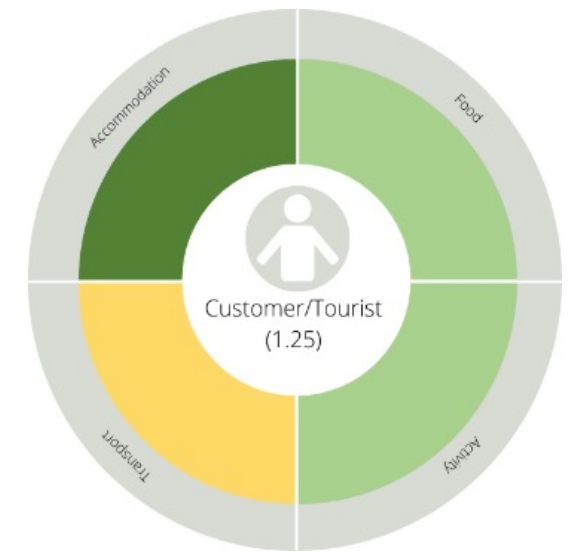
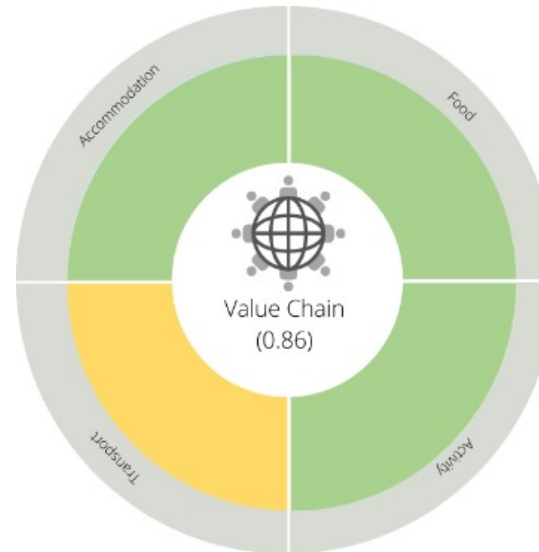
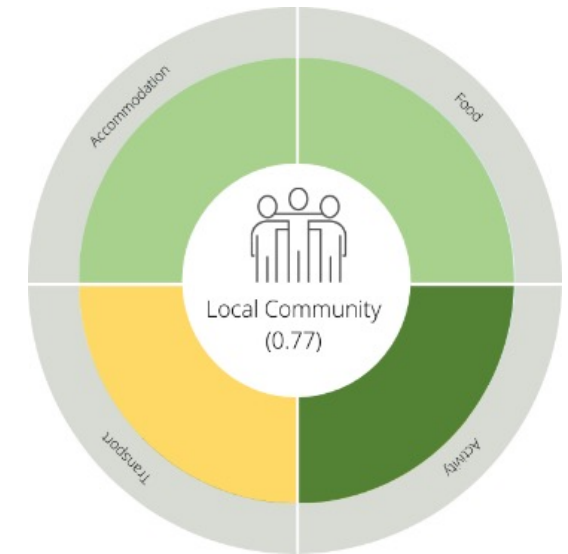
# SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

- Indicators follow the **Product Social Impact Assessment methodology (PSIA)**, to assess the **positive** and **negative** social impacts of products and services along their value chain (Social Life Cycle Assessment).
- **Data is collected** through **surveys to service providers** and is then assessed to produce **recommendations & an improvement plan** for the Local Ecotourism Cluster.



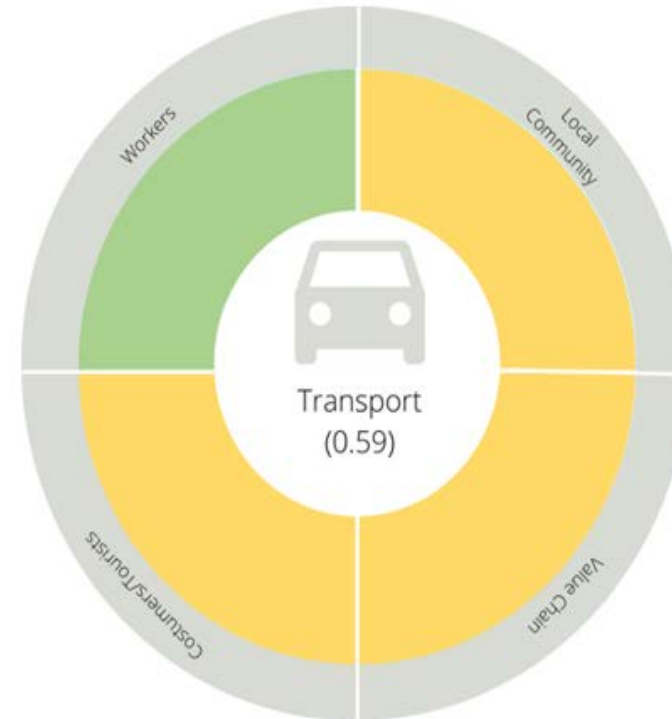
## P2.2.b SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

- 4 **target groups**: workers, local community, customers, service providers
- 12 **criteria**: Working Conditions, Health and Safety, Training, Local Capacity Building, Local Employment, Wellbeing, Tourism, Integration of sustainability on supply chain, Payments on time to Suppliers, Quality of the service, Health & Safety, Feedback Mechanism



# SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

## TRANSPORT



*Recommendation Example: Service providers should start producing regular sustainability reports.*

Recommendations
To increase the hours of training, along with the specificity, and also provide particular training for sustainability performance improvement.
To establish a system to monitor the resident's perception on tourism.
To take action based on the information gathered to start improving the environmental performance of what they offer.
To, at least, elaborate a sustainability report.

Social Topic	Indicator	Performance
Working Conditions	Forced labour/ Illegal labour	Green
	% of jobs in tourism that are seasonal	Green
	Working hours / Overtime	Green
Gender Equality	Fair salary	Green
	% of employment for each gender and gender wage gap	Yellow
Health & Safety	Presence of a formal policy concerning health and safety	Green
Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	Workers are free to join unions of their choosing	Green
Training	Training hours per year	Red
Local Capacity Building	Partnerships involving the local community	Green
Local Employment	% of workforce hired locally	Green
	% spending on locally based suppliers	Yellow
Well being	Residents' perception of tourism impacts	Red
Tourism	The service favours local tourism/residents	Yellow
	Environmental/social criteria for supplier selection	Yellow
Integration of sustainability on supply chain	The company works to reduce the environmental impact of its products	Red
Supplier Relationships	Payments on time to suppliers	Green
Transparency	Use of voluntary verified certifications/labelling for environmental/sustainable quality and/or a sustainability report	Red
Quality of service	Accessibility to people with disabilities	Yellow
Health & Safety	Risk management plan	Green
Feedback mechanism	Presence of a mechanism for customers to provide feedback	Yellow

# Product overall assessment



## ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE MEET STANDARD CABO DE GATA-NÍJAR NATURAL PARK, ANDALUSIA (ES)



**Ecotourism claims to bring benefits to both conservation and local communities in protected areas.** [DestiMED PLUS](#) and [MEET Network's](#) goal is to develop ecotourism multi-day products with evidenced sustainability around the Mediterranean. **How do we know this is actually happening?**

The [MEET Standard](#) has been developed to ensure that, and includes a series of indicators to assess the enabling conditions for ecotourism to be developed in a protected area and destination, and the sustainability and quality of the product being developed. Below follows a summary of the rigorous assessments carried out in in the project. More information will be available in the project website.

### ENABLING CONDITIONS

#### TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN THE PROTECTED AREA

This assessment aims to understand if the protected area has appropriate tourism management mechanisms, to ensure a low-impact and conservation-friendly design of the ecotourism offer, based on a simplification of the [IUCN Green List Global Standard](#) for Protected Areas.

CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT
<b>1. Legal and regulatory conditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal designation (Green)</li> <li>PA Management plan (Green)</li> <li>Visitor-related park regulations (Green)</li> <li>Visitor mgmt. plan (Red)</li> <li>Active visitor management (Yellow)</li> <li>Visitor monitoring (Yellow)</li> </ul>
<b>2. Ecotourism package and visitor use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compliance with park rules (Green)</li> <li>Package content (Yellow)</li> <li>Conservation compliance of package design (Green)</li> <li>Visitor impact (Green)</li> </ul>
<b>3. Added values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LEC conservation activity (Yellow)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideal (Green)</li> <li>Compliance (Yellow)</li> <li>Non-compliant situation (Red)</li> </ul>

#### GOVERNANCE OF THE LOCAL ECOTOURISM CLUSTER

This assessment aims to measure if the protected area and the different tourism stakeholders in the cluster and destination operate under the main principles for good governance. It has been developed drawing on the [IUCN Best Practice Guidelines for the Governance of Protected Areas](#).

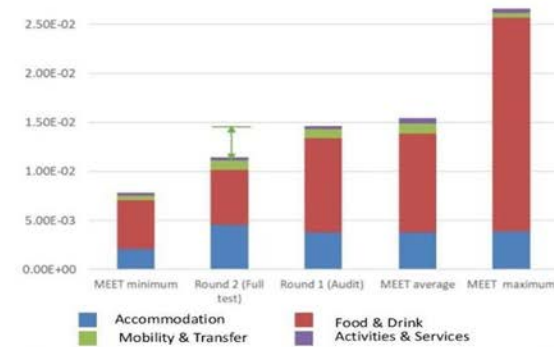
CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT
<b>1. Legitimacy and Voice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representation of stakeholders (Green)</li> <li>Diversity (Green)</li> <li>Standards (Yellow)</li> </ul>
<b>2. Direction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy and action plan (Green)</li> <li>General alignment (Green)</li> </ul>
<b>3. Performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation, monitoring &amp; learning (Green)</li> <li>Participatory product development (Green)</li> <li>Cooperation (Yellow)</li> <li>Policy and lobbying (Green)</li> </ul>
<b>4. Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication and information (Yellow)</li> <li>Feedback (Yellow)</li> <li>Control (Green)</li> </ul>
<b>5. Fairness &amp; Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect (Green)</li> <li>Fairness (Yellow)</li> <li>Legal alignment (Green)</li> </ul>

### PRODUCT SUSTAINABILITY

#### ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OF THE PRODUCT SERVICES

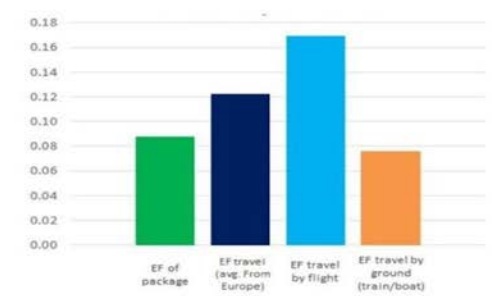
The [ecological footprint \(EF\)](#) assesses the human appropriation of the biosphere's capacity to provide renewable natural resources and key ecological services. To accurately measure the ecological footprint of an ecotourism package, the project is using a new [methodology](#) and the [EF Calculator](#), that collects data and calculates the footprint of the different package components: accommodation, food, mobility & activities. Carbon and water footprints have been also measured for some products and will be soon available as well.

#### Ecological Footprint of the package (gha per tourist per day)



The total ecological footprint of this package performs well, with a lower footprint than the MEET average, with Food & Drinks being the component with the highest footprint as in all packages. The footprint of the package decreased by 22% from the baseline done (round 1) versus the final assessment (round 2). The reason for the reduction lies in the food & drinks (~47%) category, as the quantity of food provided was reduced, along with the quantity of meat and fish.

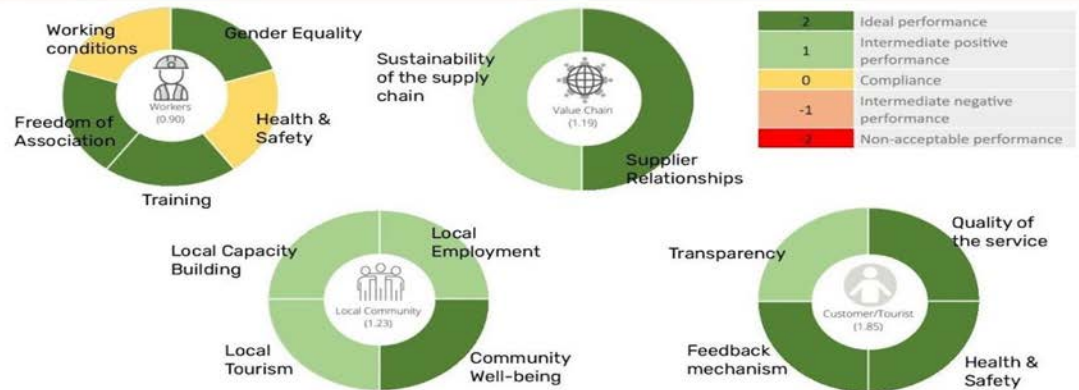
#### Ecological Footprint of travel to the destination from Europe (gha per tourist)



This graphic shows the average EF of travelling to Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park from an average European city, and the difference between air and ground travel. The EF of travelling to the destination is slightly higher than the EF of the actual package (1.4 times the per capita EF of the package). To this destination, the average EF of travelling by ground (train/boat) is 55% lower than the average EF of travelling by flight from Europe.

#### SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE PRODUCT SUPPLIERS

The socio-economic assessment aims to measure the social impact of the different suppliers and facilities on 15 social topics covering 4 stakeholder groups (workers, local communities, value chain and visitors). The methodology is based on a simplified version of the [Product Social Impact Assessment](#).



# Selected criteria for FLAGs (1)

## GOVERNANCE

1. **Cooperation**, during the product design phase, **with an existing LEC/DMO**
2. Compliance with a **visitor-related strategy/management plan/regulation** for the destination
3. Compliance with a **visitors monitoring/assessing system** for the destination
4. product is developed in a **participatory way**

## CONSERVATION

1. Existence of a **Protected Area**
2. Compliance with **PA's conservation-related management plan**
3. **Impact on visitors' knowledge** of PA's existence, goals and rules
4. Contribution to the **PA's conservation goals**

# Selected criteria for FLAGs (2)

## PRODUCT QUALITY

1. Product includes sustainable **nature-based experience/s**
2. Product includes non-invasive **experience/s on traditional/cultural heritage**
3. Cultural activity is designed in a way that the **tourist is actively participating** to
4. Product includes experience/s for tourists of **actual interaction with local community**
5. **De-seasonality**: product is for shoulder/off-season
6. **Accommodation** is integrated with the natural environment and deeply connected with the area's local culture.
7. **Meals** included in the product feature primarily local ingredients, recipes and cooking methods.
8. Product's **safety**: difficulty of activities, diet restrictions, and other health and sanitation issues are taken into consideration



# Selected criteria for FLAGs (3)

## SUSTAINABILITY

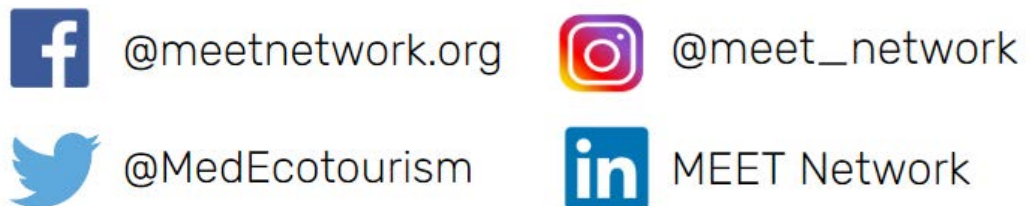
1. Product fixes a **maximum capacity of tourists**
2. **Ecological Footprint** is measured and actions are taken to improve the results
3. Amount of food served is adequate
4. **Water Footprint** is measured and actions are taken to improve the results
5. Service providers have a **waste management plan** for waste reduction and recycling increase
6. Service providers in the product has an **energy management plan** for maximizing use of renewable energy, reducing consumption, and changing tourists' behaviors
7. Product includes **sustainable transportation** anytime is possible
8. **Service providers** are mainly **locally owned/operated**.
9. **Socio-economic sustainability assessment** is done and actions are taken to improve results
10. Service providers do **NOT buy, trade, sale or have captive endangered, rare wild animals and plants or products**, unless there is evidence of a registered rehabilitation program and or documented management plan addressing animal welfare.



## Contact

- **Website:** [www.meetnetwork.org](http://www.meetnetwork.org)
- **Email:** [secretariat@meetnetwork.org](mailto:secretariat@meetnetwork.org)

## Social Media



## Key Resources

- **MEET Catalogue:** <https://www.meetnetwork.org/ecotourism-experiences>
- **MEET Manual:** <https://www.meetnetwork.org/methodological-manual>
- **MEET Members:** <https://www.meetnetwork.org/mediterranean-parks>
- **MEET Training Modules:** <https://www.meetnetwork.org/online-learning>
- **MEET Ecological Footprint Calculator:** <https://www.meetnetwork.org/ecological-footprint-calculator>