

The use of sustainable tourism indicators for evidence-based policy: a case study of the European Tourism Indicator System

The European Tourism Indicator System, in steps

60,000 downloads in multiple European languages

1. Create Awareness

- Existence of local destination coordinator
- Communication decision to stakeholders (methods used?)
- Gaining political support, publicly announced

2. Create destination profile

- Destinations that have completed a destination profile form or equivalent

3. Form stakeholder working group (SWG)

- Presence of Stakeholder Working Group
- Evidence of SWG activity (meetings, action lists, reported results...)

4. Establish roles and responsibilities

- agreement on setting targets, taking action and planning how to achieve these aims

5. Collect and record data

- List of data already existing, how regularly
- List of data not existing, and which of this data has been collected, how regularly
- Number of indicators for which there is data

6. Analyse results

- Short term prioritisation
- Setting a short term action plan

7. Enable ongoing development and continuous improvement

- Medium-long term sustainability plan

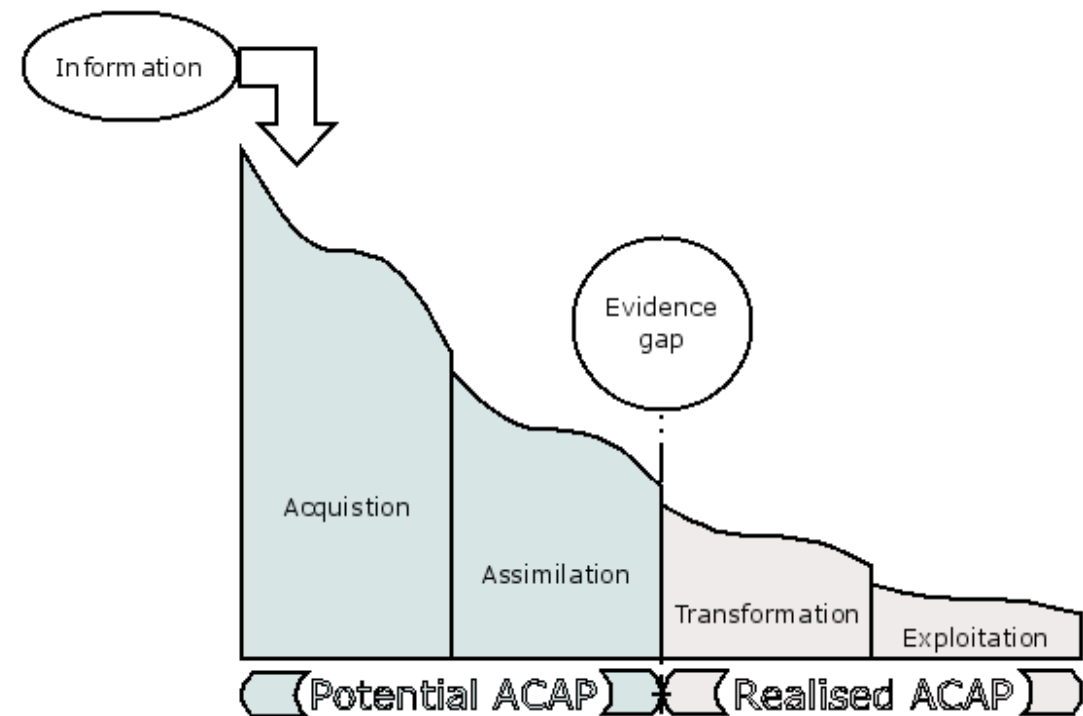
The theory: absorptive capacity can help us understand how organisations learn

Organisations gain competitive advantage by acquiring and making use of information found in its external environment.

Absorptive capacity helps us understand how organisations transform knowledge/data about their operating environment into evidence that can be used to improve organisational performance.

Potential Absorptive capacity comprehends the capacities to identify and collect relevant external information (*acquisition*) as well as to understand and interpret this information (*assimilation*).

Realised Absorptive capacity speaks to an organisation's abilities to merge its existing and newly acquired knowledge (*transformation*) and to apply this synthesised knowledge to create a new product or service (*exploitation*).



| | |
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| | a. Why generate management information with sustainability indicators?p7 |
| | b. What instruments do you use to collect sustainability information in your destination?p10 |
| | c. What kind of indicators can we elaborate in the measurement of sustainability?p13 |
| 2 | Step 2. Adopt indicatorsp16 |
| | a. How has the system of indicators been adjusted to your needs and your territorial reality?p17 |
| | b. How have stakeholders collaborated in the collection and transfer of the necessary data?p19 |
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| 3 | Step 3. Use indicatorsp24 |
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| 4 | Step 4. Benefit from indicatorsp34 |
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Methodology: 3 stage data collection

Google scraping on ETIS documents

We found 105 URLs and 99 PDF documents published between 2013 and 2019

This includes 39 research papers (journal articles, proceedings, doctoral theses and reports).

43 documents contained case studies on tourism indicators, 38 specifically on ETIS

Workshop on sustainable tourism indicator design and use

114 people representing European destinations from 11 countries, international organisations such as UNWTO, the European Statistical System, the European Commission...

Expert interviews

Over 50 DMO representatives and experts in sustainable tourism indicators



Pilot testing

200 destinations expressed interest in testing the ETIS toolkit in two pilot phases (2013-2014 and 2014-2015)

Less than 40% of them actually participated

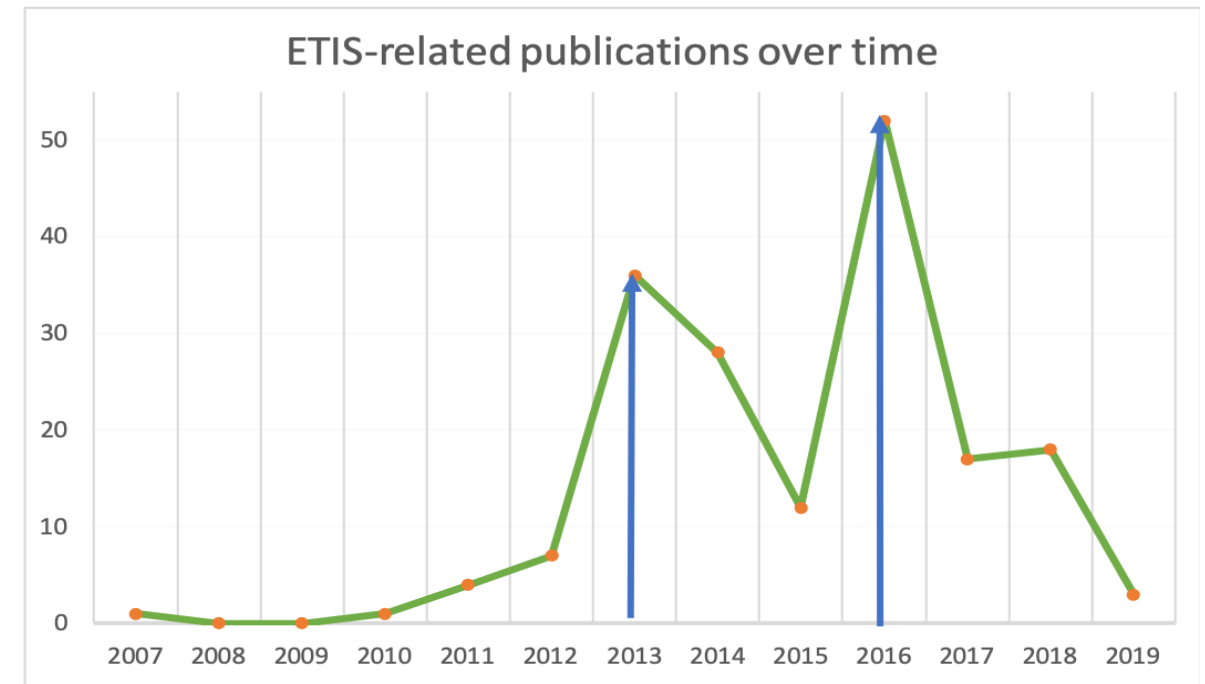
65% of destinations that participated in either phase were satisfied with ETIS toolkit

About 30-40% of the requirements of ETIS could be met with official statistical data

| ETIS step | Main conclusion |
|---|---|
| Step 1 Awareness raising | Lack of media support and co-operation from partner organisations |
| Step 2 Creation of a destination profile | Destination profile form applicable and minimal difficulties in filling it |
| Step 3 Forming Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) | Inactive members of the SWG, and more interest from the public sector than from the private |
| Step 4 Role/Responsibilities of SWG | Difficulties on agreeing about timeline for data collection, and minor challenges on responsibilities |
| Step 5 Collecting & registering data | Data difficult to obtain, and/or resources were not available |
| Step 6 Analysis of results | SWG agreement on priorities but difficulties to agree on action plans |
| Step 7 Continuity & Improvement | Indicators and data are not reviewed regularly and additional resources are difficult obtained |

17% of the documents openly identified challenges on the difficulties of implementing ETIS

- difficulty to involve actors to provide data
- lack of availability or reliability of the data,
- cost and lack of expertise to collect new field research
- lack of applicability of some indicators



Substantial efforts to generate awareness of ETIS and its contribution to tourist destination governance

DMOs are still learning which useful information sources exist, and how to use them.

Awareness that collecting data can be expensive, and the more proactive DMOs are finding out which information is already produced in-house, and how it can be combined with specific additional information needs.

Challenge: learning to collaborate with other stakeholders to agree on what are valid data, how to interpret the data, and what implications these data have for subsequent actions.

| | Yes, explicitly | Yes, implicitly | No | No data |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|------|---------|
| Acquisition | 48.6% | 10.8% | 8.1% | 32.4% |
| | 59.5% | | 8.1% | 32.4% |
| 1. Create Awareness | 40.4% | | 6.1% | 53.5% |
| 1.a. Existence of local destination coordinator | 24.2% | 21.2% | 6.1% | 48.5% |
| 1.b. Communication decision to stakeholders | 45.4% | 3.0% | 6.1% | 45.4% |
| 1.c. Gaining political support, publicly announced | 15.1% | 12.1% | 6.1% | 66.7% |
| 2. Create destination profile | 33.3% | | 6.1% | 60.6% |
| 2.a. Destinations that have completed a destination profile form or equivalent | 12.1% | 21.2% | 6.1% | 60.6% |

| Challenge | Identified Action | Importance (5= very important, 1= not important) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Capture basic information | Use of available Open Data | 4.5 |
| | Design and implement estimations of already existing data | 3.9 |
| | Make use of already existing (public and private) records for the local level on sustainability data | 3.7 |
| | Use of georeferenced data | 3.7 |
| | Design and implement new surveys | 3.1 |
| | Investment on Big Data | 2.8 |
| Methodological development | Design an indicator system that is sustainable over time | 4.7 |
| | Co-design methodologies with both producers and users of indicators | 4.7 |
| | Address geographical scale of the destination | 4.5 |
| | Use spatial data | 3.8 |

ETIS is often mentioned as the starting awareness raising point of many DMOs about the use of indicators

Destination consortia adapting ETIS for their own purposes:

- Interreg MITOMED+ consortium adopted 33 out of the 43 core ETIS indicators to the needs of regions and municipalities in the Mediterranean
- Green Destinations of South East Europe adopted the ETIS Toolkit steps and the complete ETIS set of indicators
- 13 of the 23 priority sustainable tourism indicators in the European Environment Agency's Tourism and Environment Reporting Mechanism rely on EUROSTAT databases and are deliberately mapped against ETIS indicators

| | Yes, explicitly | Yes, implicitly | No | No data |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|------|---------|
| Assimilation | 47.2% | 5.6% | 8.3% | 38.9% |
| | 52.8% | | 8.3% | 38.9% |
| 3. Form stakeholder working group (SWG) | 60.6% | | 6.1% | 33.3% |
| 3.a. Presence of SWG | 54.5% | 18.2% | 6.1% | 21.2% |
| 3.b. Evidence of SWG activity | 36.4% | 12.1% | 6.1% | 45.4% |
| 4. Establish roles and responsibilities | 33.3% | | 6.1% | 60.6% |
| 4.a. Agreement on setting targets, taking action and planning how to achieve these aims | 33.3% | -- | 6.1% | 60.6% |
| 5. Collect and record data | 36.4% | | 7.1% | 56.6% |
| 5.a. List of data already existing, how regularly | 9.1% | 21.2% | 6.1% | 63.6% |
| 5.b. List of data not existing, and which of this data has been collected, how regularly | 12.1% | 27.3% | 9.1% | 51.5% |
| 5.c. Number of indicators for which there is data | 30.3% | 9.1% | 6.1% | 54.5% |

| Challenge | Identified Action | Importance (5= very important, 1= not important) |
|---|--|---|
| Reconciliation of producers and users of data | Capacity building to use data for decision making | 4.3 |
| | Capacity building of data producers to communicate data in a user-friendly manner | 4.2 |
| | Consensus among producers and users of the aim of measuring sustainability – coherence with the tourism sustainable strategy | 3.9 |
| | Capacity building to media on how to interpret data | 3.3 |

Transformation and exploitation

Most tourist destinations have not reached the stage of transformation, that is the introduction of organisational changes in working practices that result from collecting sustainability indicators

Using indicators to identify the need for change is one of the hardest things that a DMO needs to do

Indicators are useful in:

- providing non-partisan evidence to build trust and momentum
- allocating funding to collectively agreed priorities

No exploitation of the data gathered and the actions taken at destination level in order to be more sustainable and competitive.

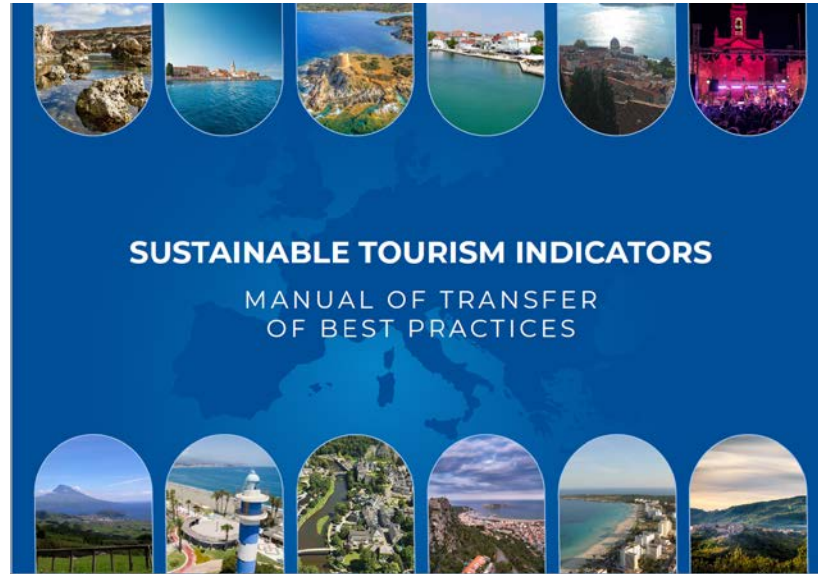
| | Yes, explicitly | Yes, implicitly | No | No data |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|------|---------|
| Transformation | 16.7% | 5.6% | 5.6% | 72.2% |
| | 22.2% | | 5.6% | 72.2% |
| 6. Analyse results | 16.7% | | 6.1% | 77.3% |
| 6.a. Short term prioritisation | 9.1% | 9.1% | 6.1% | 75.8% |
| 6.b. Setting a short-term action plan | 12.1% | 3.0% | 6.1% | 78.8% |
| Exploitation | 5.6% | 2.8% | 5.6% | 86.1% |
| | 8.3% | | 5.6% | 86.1% |
| 7. Enable ongoing development and continuous improvement | 18.2% | | 9.1% | 72.7% |
| 7.a. Medium-long term sustainability plan | 18.2% | -- | 9.1% | 72.7% |

Knowledge transformation: challenges identified in workshop

| Challenges | Identified Actions | |
|---|---|-----|
| Make organisational changes to optimise the management of sustainability | Create audit reports and improvement plans as result from the indicators. | 4.5 |
| | Create a participatory entity with different stakeholders, e.g. local economic cluster. Get the destination staff to redesign and adapt the system. | 4.4 |
| | Re-design the role of the DMO from marketing towards management | 4.3 |
| | Create a sustainability dashboard with easy traffic light system. Make data simple, pre-analyse it (provide numbers that are digested). | 4.3 |
| | Value the role of data development. Create ownership of data. Get government buy in to approve action plans and budgets. | 4.1 |
| | Upstream delegation. Use the locally collected data to push issues at national agendas and national institutions. | 3.9 |
| | Delegate the sustainability management process to specific business unit or separate NGO. | 3.2 |
| Introduce sustainability measures based on evidence from indicators | Benchmark: Compare with other destinations | 4.2 |
| | Develop trust amongst stakeholders for the implementing body. | 4.1 |
| | Cost: Find way of making the measure cost-neutral or for cost to be absorbed within general budgets. | 4.0 |
| | Create new products that act as demonstration examples. | 3.9 |
| | Buy in: Identify an issue that most stakeholders agree is important at the same time. | 3.9 |
| | Relevance: Learn to make indicators audience-relevant. | 3.8 |
| | Timely: organise events that highlight experiences from other destinations and that get your organisation to have to showcase their own work. | 3.8 |
| | Time: Allocate expert input to manage the action. | 3.7 |

| Challenges | Identified Actions | |
|--|--|-----|
| Upscale from an individual sustainability measure to a complete sustainability strategy | Skills: reskill staff to understand what sustainability is and how it affects their job. | 4.5 |
| | Merge sustainability and quality criteria. Integrate sustainability indicators in broader policy debates. | 4.5 |
| | Co-production: improve communication amongst departments. | 4.2 |
| | Ensure that sustainability is written within the legal framework and or the organisational objectives. | 4.1 |
| | Values: change what is considered important. | 4.1 |
| | Link one's own indicators to Sustainable Development Goals, Green Destinations, ETIS, global foot printing/supra-regional programme for justification, funding and framework of understanding. | 3.9 |
| | Create index for overview of sustainability in the destination. | 3.7 |

We share the results in a manual of transfer of best practices



[Download HERE](https://mitomed-plus.interreg-med.eu/) or search <https://mitomed-plus.interreg-med.eu/>

CASE STUDY: VISIT SOUTH SARDINIA, SARDINIA, ITALY



Use sustainability indicators to create dialogue amongst stakeholders

OUR STORY

[Prof. Patrizia Modica](#) (project coordinator of Visit South Sardinia) has worked with five mayors to promote and to improve the competitiveness of their municipalities in collaboration, by making use of sustainability indicators. Five years of systematically collecting data on sustainability has facilitated a number of policy decisions.

OUR ACTIONS

Implementing the ETIS methodology meant that the five mayors had to meet with local stakeholders to discuss possible sustainability initiatives that could improve competitiveness and benefit the entire tourism industry. These meetings created a dialogue which raised awareness about unsustainable behaviours, improved their self-efficacy, gave them skills and created momentum. Having both local government and private sector at the same table meant that quick and effective decisions could be made.

Actions taken resulting from these meetings include 1) the adoption of an urban development plan in all five municipalities; 2) the establishment of a marine protected area; 3) the increase of cycle paths in Cagliari; 4) the establishment of a sustainability and environmental education centre to increase sustainability awareness to tourists and locals alike.

As a result, Visit South Sardinia was awarded as the best sustainable tourism destination among all destinations implementing ETIS in 2016.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use the ETIS seven-step guide to help you create dialogue amongst stakeholders.
- Create a participatory process in which both local government and private sector are present to accelerate policy implementation.
- Communicate the use of indicators as an instrument to convince local stakeholders to participate.

1. DMOs have **acquired** knowledge about the importance of sustainability indicators.
2. They have **assimilated** it by developing their own systems of evidence.
3. BUT: Few DMOs or their policies have been **transformed** as a result of the use of sustainability indicators,
4. and even fewer instances with tangible evidence of how indicators are **exploited** to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of these tourist destinations.

Complex data for complex decisions

Limited investment in innovation

Resistance to change

Evidence used to support preconceived politically palatable ideas.

We do not like data that questions our actions

When evidence contradicts us, we question the evidence and require further research before acting

We reject evidence that makes us redundant, or that means needing to relearn entire new skill sets

01 Reduce environmental and social impacts

Normalise the consumption of sustainable tourism products and services

Public sector as buyer of services

Benefits for certified businesses

Copenhagen 70% hotels certified, 80% of food bought by the public sector is organic

Vegetarian diet as normal, not as the exception

Indicator: Percentage of tourism services certified as sustainable



Sustainable Copenhagen



Photo: Mikael Colville Andersen

Copenhagen is truly a green city surrounded by water and parks, with climate-friendly citizens to match. Copenhageners excel in combining sustainable solutions with growth and a high quality of life. In fact, Copenhagen was European Green Capital 2014. The ambitious green profile of the city has a clear goal: The City of Copenhagen aims to become the world's first CO2

02 Reduce the carbon footprint from transport

Reduce the distance travelled by tourists
Increase length of stay
Optimise methods of transport

Target to fight climate change: 2 tonnes CO₂
Average consumption in Europe 6.5-10 tonnes

New York to Barcelona flight: 2.3 tonnes London-
Barcelona flight: 0.5 tonnes

*Indicator: Carbon footprint for transport
per traveller per day*



03 Normalise the behaviour of travellers

Target tourists that the local community can accept and absorb

Increase customer loyalty

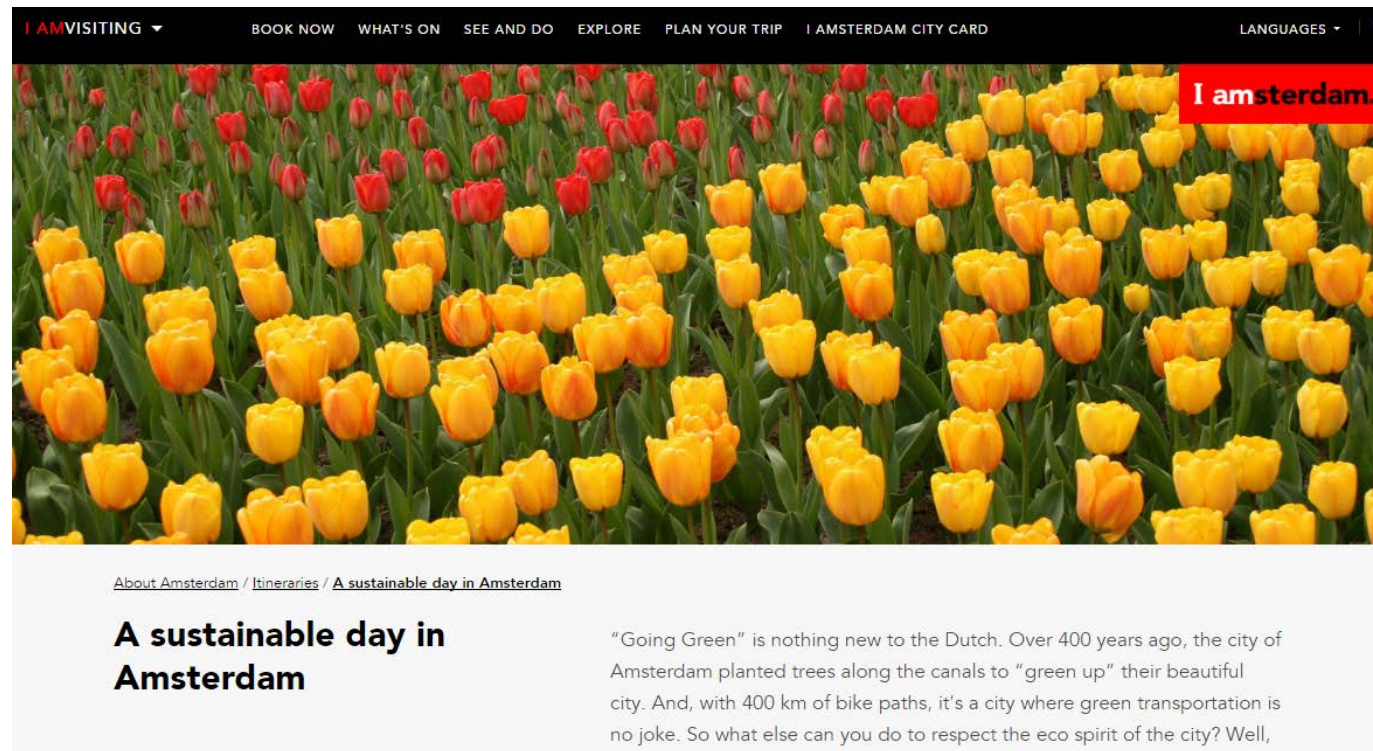
Target families and small groups

Target tourists that are not visible

Indicator: Social impact assessment per market segment



04 Reduce seasonality and redistribute tourists



Indicator: Index of saturation of tourism

05 Optimise sustainable profit

If profit is sanity and volume is vanity...

Increase visitor expenditure on products and services benefiting the destination

Promote small, new and locally owned businesses

Promote businesses employing minority and disadvantaged groups

Indicator: Visitor expenditure that benefits the destination (Triple bottom line Tourist Satellite Account applied to products and market segments)



50 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU'RE 11 $\frac{3}{4}$

Sign up online to get your own virtual explorer, plus top tips and extra secret challenges!

Adventurer

1. Climb a tree ☐
2. Roll down a really big hill ☐
3. Camp out in the wild ☐
4. Build a den ☐
5. Skim a stone ☐
6. Run around in the rain ☐
7. Fly a kite ☐
8. Catch a fish with a net ☐
9. Eat an apple straight from a tree ☐
10. Play conkers ☐

Discoverer

11. Go on a really long bike ride ☐
12. Make a trail with sticks ☐
13. Make a mud pie ☐
14. Dam a stream ☐
15. Play in the snow ☐
16. Make a daisy chain ☐
17. Set up a snail race ☐
18. Create some wild art ☐
19. Play pooh sticks ☐
20. Jump over waves ☐

Ranger

21. Pick blackberries growing in the wild ☐
22. Explore inside a tree ☐
23. Visit a farm ☐
24. Go on a walk barefoot ☐
25. Make a grass trumpet ☐
26. Hunt for fossils and bones ☐
27. Go star gazing ☐
28. Climb a huge hill ☐
29. Explore a cave ☐
30. Hold a scary beast ☐

Tracker

31. Hunt for bugs ☐
32. Find some frogspawn ☐
33. Catch a falling leaf ☐
34. Track wild animals ☐

Explorer

35. Discover what's in a pond ☐
36. Make a home for a wild animal ☐
37. Check out the crazy creatures in a rockpool ☐
38. Bring up a butterfly ☐
39. Catch a crab ☐
40. Go on a nature walk at night ☐
41. Plant it, grow it, eat it ☐
42. Go swimming in the sea ☐
43. Build a raft ☐
44. Go bird watching ☐
45. Find your way with a map and compass ☐
46. Try rock climbing ☐
47. Cook on a campfire ☐
48. Learn to ride a horse ☐
49. Find a geocache ☐
50. Canoe down a river ☐

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