Research on Sustainability Systems for Tourism SMEs

(WP5 – T5.1)

January 30th, 2026

fuTOURiSME
Digital and Sustainable Transition

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Executive summary

Task 5.1 aimed to collect, analyse and validate sustainability systems[1] relevant for tourism SMEs across the participating countries (Greece, Spain, Cyprus, France, Germany and Italy), based on a partner-led mapping exercise carried out using a shared methodology.

The task combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative elements focused on identifying the sustainability systems most commonly used or considered relevant by partners in their national contexts, analysing their geographical presence, sectoral coverage and sustainability dimensions. Qualitative analysis drew on national reports and fiches to identify emerging trends, implementation challenges, governance patterns and barriers faced by tourism SMEs when engaging with sustainability systems.

The outcome is a consolidated European overview of sustainability systems mapped under Task 5.1—including certification schemes, ecolabels, management standards and management schemes—covering both internationally recognised systems and country-specific or territorial initiatives.

The mapping reflects partner expertise and SME-relevant practices, so it is not intended as an exhaustive inventory or academic assessment of all existing certifications in Europe. This document must be understood as an evidence-based compilation reflecting partner knowledge and SME-relevant practices in the participating countries.

This work provides the foundation for:

- the European Catalogue of Sustainability Systems (to be integrated into the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit, D5.1 in Month 35),
- the design of the self-assessment tool (Task 5.3),
- the WP5 training and coaching activities (Task 5.2),
- and a structured, informed pathway for tourism SMEs to navigate sustainability options.

The guidelines and national fiches were finalised and published in January 2026, fulfilling Milestone M5.1 of the fuTOURiSME Project.

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[1] The term "sustainability systems" is used as an umbrella term, explicitly defined to include certifications, ecolabels, management standards, schemes and frameworks.

Introduction

WP5 contributes to fuTOURiSME's overall objective of supporting tourism SMEs along a structured pathway, from an initial self-assessment of their sustainability practices to the progressive adoption of recognised sustainability systems.

The relevance of sustainability certifications and related systems for tourism SMEs is further reinforced by recent developments in the European regulatory framework. In particular, the EU's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive (EU) 2024/825 seeks to strengthen consumer protection by increasing the transparency, credibility and substantiation of environmental and sustainability-related claims.

Within this evolving context, tourism SMEs face increasing pressure to ensure that their sustainability practices and communications are grounded in verifiable and reliable systems. At the same time, the diversity and fragmentation of sustainability schemes across Europe make it challenging for SMEs to identify appropriate pathways and to communicate their efforts in a clear and credible way.

Sustainability systems play a key role in addressing these challenges by:

- structuring internal sustainability management processes,
- providing recognisable and trusted signals to consumers and tourism intermediaries,
- supporting destination-level sustainability governance, and
- contributing to the Transition Pathway for Tourism (Topic 8: Green transition of tourism companies and SMEs).

Within this framework, Task 5.1 represents the first step of WP5. It establishes a shared evidence base on sustainability systems relevant for tourism SMEs across partner countries, which will inform subsequent activities, including guidance tools, coaching actions and the development of the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit.

The following section explains how the results of this research are structured and how the document should be read and used.

How to read this document

This document presents the results of Task 5.1 of the fuTOURiSME project, which aimed to identify and map existing sustainability systems relevant for tourism SMEs across the partner countries.

Scope of the research

The research is based on a coordinated desk-based mapping exercise carried out by project partners in Greece, Spain, Cyprus, France, Germany and Italy, using a common template and shared criteria.

The scope of Task 5.1 is limited to a partner-based mapping exercise with a strong qualitative component, focusing on sustainability-related systems applicable to tourism SMEs.

For the purposes of Task 5.1, the term "sustainability systems" is used as an umbrella concept to refer to a broad range of sustainability-related instruments encountered by tourism SMEs in practice. These include formal third-party certifications, ecolabels, management standards, management schemes, normative schemes and framework-based systems.

It is acknowledged that, in other institutional or sectoral contexts, some of these instruments may also be referred to as "certification schemes". However, within the scope of Task 5.1, the term "sustainability systems" is deliberately adopted to reflect the diversity of governance models, verification approaches and levels of formalisation identified through the partner-based mapping exercise.

This inclusive scope reflects the fragmented and heterogeneous landscape faced by tourism SMEs, which often interact with multiple types of sustainability instruments rather than a single, uniform category.

Two complementary levels of classification are used in this document. At data collection level, the information fiches apply a functional classification ("Type of system") reflecting how sustainability systems operate and are encountered by tourism SMEs in practice (e.g. certification, eco-label, verification-based systems, self-declaration).

For analytical purposes, the comparative analysis applies a higher-level typology that groups systems into broader analytical categories (such as certifications, ecolabels, management standards and management schemes or frameworks). This analytical typology supports cross-country comparison and policy-oriented interpretation, and is derived from, but not identical to, the functional categories used in the fiches.

The objective is not to assess the performance, market penetration or future regulatory compliance of sustainability systems, nor to rank or endorse them, but to provide an overview of the existing landscape and support SMEs in understanding available options as a first step towards structured sustainability pathways.

What was mapped per country

Each project partner conducted a desk-based mapping exercise in their respective country, using a common template and agreed methodological criteria. The mapping focused on sustainability systems relevant for tourism SMEs, as identified by partners within their national contexts.

The information collected for each system included:

- the type of system (e.g. certification, ecolabel, management standard, management scheme or framework),
- scope and sectoral coverage,
- sustainability dimensions addressed (environmental, social, economic)[2],
- and the type of verification, audit or assessment approach applied[3].

The results of the mapping are presented using three complementary categories:

- **Cross-country sustainability systems**, meaning systems identified by partners in multiple participating countries (Greece, Spain, Cyprus, France, Germany and Italy), regardless of their legal or geographical scope;
- **International sustainability systems mapped in specific national contexts**: systems with international scope or recognition that were fully documented in one specific country but not systematically mapped across multiple partner countries; and
- **Country-specific additional sustainability systems**, meaning systems identified by partners in one or more countries, but not across the full set of countries analysed.

This distinction reflects the evidence gathered through the partner-based mapping and does not imply differences in formal recognition, legal status or intrinsic value of the systems.

Key definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following definitions apply:

- o **Certification**: A structured system through which an organisation is assessed against a defined set of sustainability criteria, typically involving third-party verification by accredited bodies and periodic reassessment (e.g. Travelife, Green Globe, or certification schemes based on GSTC Standards).
- o **Ecolabel**: A specific type of sustainability system focused primarily on environmental performance, often linked to public or institutional frameworks (e.g. EU Ecolabel).
- o **Management standard**: A normative standard defining requirements for a management system that organisations can implement and be audited against by accredited bodies. These standards may also serve as the basis for

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[2] For the purposes of this analysis, sustainability coverage is presented using the three dimensions of the Triple Bottom Line (environmental, social and economic). Where governance or management requirements constitute a distinct pillar within a system, these are considered as cross-cutting elements and explicitly noted within the system description.

[3] The terminology used to describe *verification*, *audit* or *assessment approaches* follows internationally recognised practices, including those reflected in ISO management system standards, and distinguishes between third-party certification, independent verification, and self-declared assessment mechanisms.

certification schemes when applied through recognised certification bodies (e.g. ISO 21401, GSTC Standards).

- o **Management scheme**: A structured system combining regulatory or policy-based requirements with third-party verification, often linked to public authorities or institutional frameworks (e.g. EMAS).

These categories are used consistently throughout the document under the field "Type of system" to clarify the nature of each sustainability instrument mapped under Task 5.1.

Last checked date

The information presented in this document reflects the status of the mapped sustainability system as last checked in January 2025. Given the dynamic nature of the sustainability standards landscape, updates may occur beyond this date.

Access to supporting materials

Detailed fiches and national reports, prepared by the project partners, are available online and grouped by country for ease of reference. These materials provide the underlying evidence supporting the synthesis presented in this document and allow readers to explore the information at national level.

- Research on Sustainability Systems for Tourism SMEs [This document]
- Guidelines for Tourism SMEs: How to Navigate Sustainability Systems and Certification Pathways
- Country specific fiches and reports:
  - o Greece
  - o Italy
  - o Cyprus
  - o France
  - o Germany
  - o Spain

Objectives of Task 5.1

The specific objectives of T5.1 were to:

1. Identify and catalogue existing sustainability systems (certification, ecolabels, management standards and management schemes) relevant to tourism SMEs across partner countries and Europe.
2. Ensure harmonised and comparable data collection through a shared methodology, guidelines, and fiches.
3. Analyse each sustainability system in terms of:
   - o The dimensions of sustainability it covers (environmental, social, economic),

- o   Its applicability to tourism sectors (NACE codes),
- o   Its relevance, usability, and market recognition,
- o   Its governance, technological integration and reporting processes.
4. Compile a validated set of guidelines and fiches for publication on the project website (Month 27).
5. Provide the input base for the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit (D5.1 – Month 35).

Methodology

Development of guidelines and fiche template

The development methodology included **Guidelines for Research on Sustainability Systems** and **Information Fiche** (Annex I), to be filled out by the partners.

The template ensures consistent data collection, including:

- Entity details
- System details
- Applicable tourism sectors (NACE codes, selectable via checklist)
- Collaboration ecosystem
- Market recognition
- Digital tools and reporting usability
- Indicator coverage (social, environmental, economic)

In order to ensure analytical clarity despite this diversity, the Information Fiche explicitly distinguishes between different types of sustainability systems. Each mapped system is classified under a specific "Type of system" (certification, ecolabels, management standards and management schemes), allowing for a transparent interpretation of the results while maintaining a comprehensive mapping approach.

While the information fiches capture the functional characteristics of sustainability systems through the "Type of system" field[4], the comparative analysis aggregates these data into broader analytical categories to support interpretation at European level. This approach allows operational diversity at system level to be retained, while enabling structured comparison across countries.

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[4] The "Type of system" field in the Information Fiche reflects a functional classification based on the way sustainability systems are structured and implemented in practice. It distinguishes between systems based on third-party certification, ecolabelling schemes, verification-based approaches, self-declaration mechanisms and other hybrid or framework-based systems. This classification supports an SME-oriented reading of the sustainability landscape and does not imply a hierarchy of robustness or formal recognition.

Partner research process

Each project partner carried out a national-level desk-based research exercise on sustainability systems relevant for tourism SMEs in their respective countries. The research focused on systems that are commonly used, promoted or considered relevant for tourism SMEs within each national context, rather than aiming at an exhaustive inventory of all existing systems.

The mapping included a broad range of sustainability-related systems, such as:

- internationally recognised certification schemes relevant for tourism,
- national or regional ecolabels and sustainability labels,
- sector-specific or territorial sustainability systems,
- destination-level certification frameworks,
- management standards and management schemes,
- and systems linked to agriculture, food, culture or mobility, where relevant for tourism SMEs and tourism value chains.

For each country, partners produced:

- **a national dossier** including completed information fiches for the mapped systems, and
- a concise **executive summary/report** (approximately two pages) highlighting key findings, trends and challenges at national level.

Countries covered and volume of sustainability systems collected

Country	Nº of sustainability systems identified	Governance level/scope[5]	Notes
Greece	10	Mix of international. + national	Strong use of ISO, EMAS; growth of GSTC recognized standards.
Spain	15	National + regional + international.	Rich territorial ecosystem; strong destination focus
Cyprus	10	International. + sectoral	Growing adoption of EU Ecolabel + EMAS
France	10	Territorial + international.	Strong destination-level schemes (Valeurs Parc, Destination d'Excellence)

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[5] "Governance level / scope" refers to the primary level at which sustainability systems are designed, governed and applied (international, national, regional or territorial).

Germany	11	National + international.	Very mature ecosystem (TourCert, GreenSign, Viabono, Reisen für Alle)
Italy	22	National + territorial + international.	Largest ecosystem; strong FEE labels + agriculture-linked schemes

Table 1. Countries covered and volume of sustainability systems collected.

Note: The figures presented reflect the number of sustainability systems identified and documented by project partners through the Task 5.1 mapping exercise and should not be interpreted as evidence of national uptake or availability. The mapping is based on partner-led desk research and focuses on systems considered relevant for tourism SMEs within each national context.

Consolidated list of sustainability systems mapped in T5.1

Clarification on the structure of the mapping

For the purposes of Task 5.1, the mapping distinguishes between:

- **Cross-country sustainability systems**, meaning systems that were identified by partners in multiple participating countries (Greece, Spain, Cyprus, France, Germany and Italy), regardless of whether they are present in all of them;
- **International sustainability systems mapped in specific national contexts:** systems with international scope or recognition that were fully documented in one specific country but not systematically mapped across multiple partner countries; and
- **Country-specific additional sustainability systems**, meaning systems that were identified only in one or more countries, but not across the full set of countries analysed.

To ensure full transparency and traceability, the fiches, together with the national reports prepared by partners, are available online and grouped by country for ease of reference. Direct access to these materials is provided in this document (see page 21).

This section presents the consolidated list of sustainability systems mapped under Task 5.1, structured according to the logic explained above.

Cross-country sustainability systems

List and standardized summary

To improve transparency and comparability for SMEs and other readers, a standardised summary is provided below for the sustainability systems identified

across multiple participating countries. Each summary follows the same structure and includes:

- **Analytical classification of sustainability system**: nature of the sustainability system (certification, ecolabels, management standards and management schemes);

- **Sector fit**: main tourism subsectors targeted;

- **Sustainability coverage**: environmental (E), social (S), economic (Ec) or integrated;

- **Verification approach**: type of audit or assessment applied;

- **Official website**: link to the official website (where available).

This summary is indicative and aims to support orientation and comparison. Detailed information is available in the national fiches.

- *EU Ecolabel – Tourist Accommodation*
    - Analytical classification of sustainability system: Eco-label
    - Sector fit: tourist accommodation.
    - Sustainability coverage: Environmental (E), with selected social requirements.
    - Verification approach: Third-party verification by national competent bodies.
    - Official website: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/eu-ecolabel-home_en
- *Green Key*
    - Analytical classification of sustainability system: Eco-label
    - Sector fit: accommodation, campsites, restaurants, tourist attractions.
    - Sustainability coverage: Environmental (E), with social and management-related aspects.
    - Verification approach: Third-party audit, with periodic reassessment.
    - Official website: https://www.greenkey.global/
- *Travelife*
    - Analytical classification of sustainability system: Certification.
    - Sector fit: accommodation, tour operators, travel agencies.
    - Sustainability coverage: Integrated, balanced across Environmental, Social, Economic dimensions.
    - Verification approach: Third-party audit for certification levels.
    - Official website: https://www.travelife.info/
- *EMAS – EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme*
    - Analytical classification of sustainability system: Management scheme (EU regulatory scheme).
    - Sector fit: cross-sectoral, including tourism SMEs.

- o Sustainability coverage: Environmental (E), with governance and transparency requirements.
  - o Verification approach: Third-party verification by accredited EMAS verifiers.
  - o Official website: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/sustainability/emas_en
- *EarthCheck*
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Certification.
  - o Sector fit: accommodation, tourism services, destinations.
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated, balanced across Environmental, Social, Economic dimensions.
  - o Verification approach: Third-party verification and benchmarking.
  - o Official website: https://earthcheck.org/
- *Green Globe*
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Certification.
  - o Sector fit: accommodation, tourism services, destinations.
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated, balanced across Environmental, Social, Economic dimensions.
  - o Verification approach: Third-party certification and on-site audits.
  - o Official website: https://www.greenglobe.com/
- *Biosphere Responsible Tourism*
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Certification.
  - o Sector fit: accommodation, tourism services, destinations.
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated (Environmental, Social, Economic).
  - o Verification approach: Third-party assessment, with continuous improvement framework.
  - o Official website: https://www.biospheretourism.com/
- *ISO 21401 – Sustainable Accommodation*
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Management standard.
  - o Sector fit: tourist accommodation.
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated (Environmental, Social, Economic).
  - o Verification approach: Third-party certification by accredited bodies.
  - o Official website: https://www.iso.org/standard/70869.html
- *Good Travel Seal by Green Destinations*
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Certification.
  - o Sector fit: accommodation, tour operators, visitor attractions, tourism services
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated (Environmental, Social, Economic)
  - o Verification approach: Third-party assessment, with progressive levels and periodic review
  - o Official website: https://www.greendestinations.org/good-travel-seal/

- Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Global sustainability standards framework and accreditation scheme.
  - o Sector fit: Accommodation (Hotels), tour operators, destinations, MICE, attractions.
    - ▪ Specific reference for accommodation: GSTC Hotel Criteria, which define the global baseline requirements for sustainability management in accommodation establishments. They are structured around four main pillars: effective sustainability management, social and economic benefits for the local community, cultural heritage protection, and environmental impact reduction. These criteria are directly applied by GSTC-accredited certification bodies when certifying hotels and other accommodation providers. Certification is therefore granted by independent third-party bodies using the GSTC Hotel Criteria as the underlying standard, in line with GSTC accreditation requirements.
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated (Environmental, Social, Economic and Governance).
  - o Verification approach: Third-party certification carried out by independent certification bodies accredited by GSTC, applying GSTC standards (including the GSTC Hotel Criteria).
  - o Official website: https://www.gstcouncil.org/

Presence of cross-country sustainability systems across partners countries

An important outcome of Task 5.1 is the identification of sustainability systems that appear in multiple partner countries, indicating higher levels of international recognition, market visibility, transferability, and potential value for tourism SMEs.

Table 2 provides an overview of the presence of cross-country sustainability systems across the partner countries, based on the mapping carried out under Task 5.1. Please note that presence reflects partner mapping, not market share or regulatory endorsement.

Sustainability System	GR	ES	CY	FR	DE	IT	Countries
EarthCheck	✓	✓		✓			3
Green Key (FEE)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	5
EU Ecolabel (Tourist Accommodation)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
EMAS			✓			✓	2
ISO 21401	✓					✓	2
Biosphere (RTI)		✓		✓		✓	3
Green Globe	✓			✓	✓		3
Travelife	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5

Good Travel Seal	✓	✓					2

Table 2. Presence of cross-country certifications across partners countries.

(✓) *indicates that the certification was identified by the partner in the corresponding country during the mapping exercise.*

International sustainability systems mapped in specific national contexts

In addition to the cross-country sustainability systems identified across multiple partner countries, Task 5.1 also mapped a limited number of sustainability systems with international scope or recognition that were documented through fiches in one or a small number of national contexts only.

These systems are international in nature and are widely recognised or applied globally; however, they were not systematically identified and mapped by multiple project partners. Their inclusion in this dedicated category reflects the partner-based nature of the mapping exercise and the differentiated uptake, visibility or relevance of international systems across countries.

Unlike cross-country systems, which were consistently mapped across several national contexts, these international systems were identified by partners as particularly relevant or commonly used by tourism SMEs in their respective countries. They are therefore presented separately in order to:

- acknowledge their international relevance,
- ensure methodological transparency,
- and preserve the integrity of the comparative mapping.

The sustainability systems included in this category are documented using the same standardised summary structure applied to cross-country systems, allowing readers to understand their scope, verification approach and potential relevance for tourism SMEs. At the same time, their classification as "mapped in specific national contexts" does not imply limited importance or lower credibility, but rather reflects patterns of national adoption and partner reporting under Task 5.1.

- *Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)*
  - Analytical classification of sustainability system: International certification standard applied through accredited third-party certification bodies
  - Sector fit: Accommodation, tour operators, destinations, attractions, MICE
  - Sustainability coverage: Integrated (Environmental, Social, Economic)
  - Verification approach: Third-party certification by GSTC-accredited certification bodies
  - Mapped through national fiches in: Greece
  - Official website: https://www.gstc.org/
- *HACCP / ISO 22000 – Food Safety Management*

- o Analytical classification of sustainability system: International management standard / certification
- o Sector fit: Food and beverage services, accommodation with food services, catering
- o Sustainability coverage: Environmental and social (health, safety), with operational and governance aspects
- o Verification approach: Third-party certification by accredited bodies
- o Mapped through national fiches in: Cyprus
- o Official website: https://www.iso.org/standard/65464.html
- *Bioscore Sustainability*
  - o Analytical classification of sustainability system: Digital ESG-based certification system
  - o Sector fit: Accommodation, hospitality services
  - o Sustainability coverage: Integrated (Environmental, Social, Economic)
  - o Verification approach: Digital data-driven assessment combined with periodic verification
  - o Mapped through national fiches in: Spain
  - o Official website: https://www.bioscore.com/

Country-specific sustainability systems

Sustainability systems identified only in one participating country are included as *country-specific additional sustainability systems*. Due to their diversity in scope, sectoral focus and governance models, these schemes are not summarised using a standardised template in this document.

Detailed and standardised information for each of these systems is available in the national fiches prepared by the project partners, which follow a common structure and are accessible online. This approach ensures methodological consistency while respecting national and contextual specificities.

Spain (ES)

- *Q de Calidad / S de Sostenibilidad (ICTE)*
- *SPAIN is EXCELLENCE*
- *Hoteles + Justos*
- *Eventsost*
- *Europark*
- *SICTED – Integral Quality System for Tourism Destinations*
- *Club Ecoturismo de España*
- *Ecostars* (digital ESG certification)
- *Bioscore Sustainability* (digital ESG certification)

Greece (GR)

- *GSTC (Global Standards for Sustainable Travel and Tourism)*

- *ETHOS*

Cyprus (CY)

- *ISO 14001*
- *Cyprus Breakfast*
- *ISO 22000 / HACCP / ISO Food Safety*
- *Taste Cyprus Delightful Journeys*
- *ISO 45001 – Occupational Health and Safety (international)*
- *ISO 9001 – Quality Management Systems (international)*

France (FR)

- *Valeurs Parc Naturel Régional*
- *Destination d'Excellence*
- *Vignobles & Découvertes* (wine tourism)
- *Tourisme & Handicap*

Germany (DE)

- *TourCert*
- *GreenSign*
- *Viabono / UmweltCheck*
- *Reisen für Alle* (accessibility)
- *Bio Hotels*
- *Blaue Schwalbe*
- *Ecocamping*

Italy (IT)

- *Ospitalità Italiana*
- *Legambiente Turismo*
- *Programma VIVA*
- *Care's ethical restaurant*
- *EcoWorldHotel*
- *Azienda Bike Friendly – FIAB*
- *Biodistretti (AIAB)*
- *GEOfood (UNESCO Geoparks)*
- *Spighe Verdi* (FEE Italia)
- *Bandiere Arancioni* (Touring Club Italiano)
- *Bandiera Blu*
- *Carta Europea del Turismo Sostenibile (CETS – Federparchi)*
- *EcoCamping Italia / FEDER Camping*
- *B-Corporation*
- *EcoBio Turismo ICEA*
- *Made Green in Italy*

- *TripAdvisor GreenLeaders*

Comparative analysis (European level)

The comparative analysis is based on the mapping of different types of sustainability systems, including certifications, labels, standards and frameworks, as identified by partners in their national contexts and classified accordingly in the Information Fiches. It combines quantitative and qualitative perspectives derived from the mapping exercise carried out under Task 5.1.

Quantitative elements are based on the systematic review of national reports, national fiches and the cross-country comparison presented in Table 2, including aspects such as geographical presence, sectoral coverage and sustainability dimensions addressed.

In parallel, qualitative insights draw on partners' national analyses and fiches to identify emerging trends, implementation challenges, costs, governance issues and barriers faced by tourism SMEs when engaging with sustainability systems.

This combined approach allows the analysis to both describe the structure of the sustainability systems landscape and interpret its practical implications for SMEs across different national contexts.

Analytical classification of sustainability system

The sustainability systems identified through Task 5.1 can be broadly grouped into the following categories:

- **Integrated sustainability certifications**, combining environmental, social and economic dimensions (e.g. TourCert, Green Key, Green Globe, Biosphere, GSTC).

- **Environmental ecolabels**, primarily focused on environmental management and performance (e.g. EU Ecolabel, EMAS, ISO 14001, EcoCamping).

- **Social and accessibility-oriented standards**, addressing inclusion, accessibility and social responsibility (e.g. Reisen für Alle, Ospitalità Italiana).

- **Economic and local value chain systems**, linked to territorial development, short supply chains and local production (e.g. Biodistretto, GEOfood).

- **Destination-level certifications and frameworks**, targeting governance and sustainability at territorial level (e.g. CETS, Valeurs Parc, Bandiere Arancioni, Destination d'Excellence, GSTC).

- **Sector-specific tourism systems**, addressing the needs of particular subsectors (e.g. bike-friendly labels, marina and beach labels, gastronomic seals).

Coverage by tourism sector (NACE codes)

Most sustainability systems apply to:

- **Accommodation (I5510 / I5520)**.
- **Food & beverage (I5610 / I5630)**.
- **Travel agencies and tour operators (N79)**.
- **Cultural/recreational activities (R90–R93)**.
- **Transport-related services** → limited but present (especially in Germany & France)

Destination-level frameworks (such as CETS, Valeurs Parc, Bandiere Arancioni, GSTC) adopt a cross-sectoral approach, covering a wide range of tourism-related activities within a defined territory.

Coverage of sustainability dimensions (Triple Bottom Line)

Across the mapped sustainability systems, environmental aspects are consistently addressed, forming the core of sustainability requirements in all schemes analysed.

Social dimensions, including labour conditions, accessibility and community engagement, are increasingly incorporated, while economic aspects related to local value creation and governance are present in a more limited but growing number of systems.

Overall, the analysis points to a progressive shift towards integrated sustainability approaches, particularly visible in countries such as Germany, France and Italy, where certifications increasingly combine environmental, social and economic dimensions.

Cross-country occurrence of sustainability systems and European relevance

Based on the comparative mapping carried out under Task 5.1 and the cross-country presence illustrated in Table 2, sustainability systems identified in multiple partner countries show different levels of geographical spread and relevance at European level. The analysis highlights the following patterns:

1. **Sustainability systems with broad cross-country presence (4–6 partner countries).** Schemes such as EU Ecolabel – Tourist Accommodation, Green Key and Travelife show a broad presence across partner countries. These systems represent a common reference point for tourism SMEs operating in different national contexts. Their widespread adoption reflects:
   a. strong alignment with European policy frameworks,
   b. relevance for SMEs operating in more than one country,

    c. recognition by tourism intermediaries (tour operators, platforms), and

    d. increasing visibility among consumers.

2. **Sustainability systems with moderate cross-country presence (2–3 partner countries).** Systems such as EarthCheck, Biosphere Responsible Tourism, Green Globe, EMAS, ISO 21401 and Good Travel Seal are present in a more limited number of partner countries, but still demonstrate cross-border relevance. Their adoption highlights:

    a. the transferability of sustainability management approaches,

    b. relevance for SMEs engaged in international markets or benchmarking activities, and

    c. the coexistence of global and European sustainability systems.

Overall, the cross-country comparison shows that European tourism SMEs are exposed to a diverse but partially converging sustainability landscape, where a limited number of systems achieve wide geographical coverage, while others play a complementary role across selected markets.

Beyond their geographical presence, the cross-country relevance of these systems is also influenced by their nature. As reflected in the mapping exercise, the systems identified include different types of instruments—such as ecolabels, certification, management standard and management schemes —each characterised by distinct governance models and verification approaches. This diversity helps explain variations in adoption patterns and perceived relevance across countries.

These findings will inform the subsequent phases of WP5, including the design of coaching activities and the development of the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit (D5.1 – Month 35).

Key trends identified

The comparative analysis of national reports and fiches reveals a set of consistent trends shaping the sustainability systems landscape for tourism SMEs in Europe:

1. **Transition from environmental-focused labels to integrated sustainability systems.** While environmental performance remains a core component of all systems, there is a clear shift towards schemes that integrate social and economic dimensions, particularly in countries such as Germany, France and Italy. This reflects a broader move towards holistic sustainability management approaches.

2. **Growing relevance of destination-level and territorial certification frameworks.** Destination-based schemes (e.g. CETS, Valeurs Parc, Bandiere Arancioni, Destination d'Excellence) are expanding, reflecting the increasing importance of place-based governance models and public–private coordination in tourism sustainability strategies.

3. **Role of internationally recognised sustainability frameworks (e.g. GSTC).** Across several national reports, the Global Sustainable Tourism

Council (GSTC) is identified as an important international reference within the tourism sustainability landscape. GSTC is not a certification body itself, but the global organisation responsible for developing and maintaining internationally recognised sustainability standards for tourism subsectors such as accommodation, tour operators, destinations and attractions. GSTC accredits independent third-party certification bodies, which carry out audits and issue valid certificates based on the GSTC standards. Tourism enterprises therefore obtain certification through GSTC-accredited certification bodies, rather than directly from GSTC.

4. **Digitalisation of sustainability monitoring and reporting.** Several sustainability systems increasingly rely on digital tools, online platforms and, in some cases, GIS-based monitoring to streamline reporting processes, reduce administrative burden and support continuous improvement, particularly in France and Italy.

5. **Strong links between sustainability system and local value chains.** National schemes in countries such as Italy and Spain show strong connections between sustainability system, local food systems, agriculture and short supply chains, reinforcing the role of tourism SMEs in territorial development.

6. **Growing need for SME-oriented support mechanisms.** Across all countries, SMEs face challenges related to costs, reporting complexity and technical capacity. This highlights the need for phased approaches, guidance tools and tailored support mechanisms—an issue directly addressed in the subsequent WP5 activities.

Barriers identified across countries

Across all partner countries, the analysis highlights a set of recurrent barriers limiting tourism SMEs' access to and effective implementation of sustainability certification schemes.

1. **Financial and administrative burden.** Initial certification costs, recurring audit fees and the administrative workload associated with data collection and reporting remain a significant obstacle for SMEs. These challenges are particularly acute for micro-enterprises with limited staff and seasonal operations.

2. **Fragmentation of the landscape.** The coexistence of multiple certification schemes at local, regional, national and international levels—especially evident in countries such as Italy, Spain and Germany—creates confusion for SMEs when selecting appropriate pathways and assessing the added value of the system.

3. **Uneven market recognition and visibility.** While some international or widely recognised labels benefit from higher consumer awareness, several national or sector-specific schemes suffer from limited visibility. This affects

SMEs' perception of return on investment and reduces incentives to engage in certification processes.

4. **Gaps in technical and organisational capacity.** Many SMEs lack the internal expertise required to interpret sustainability requirements, collect relevant data and maintain ongoing compliance. This gap is particularly relevant for schemes involving complex environmental or social indicators.

5. **Limited harmonisation across governance levels.** Differences between regional, national and international standards, as well as varying public policy frameworks, hinder coherence and increase complexity for SMEs operating across territories or supply chains.

Together, these barriers underline the need for clear guidance, simplified pathways and tailored support mechanisms, which are directly addressed through the subsequent activities of WP5, including self-assessment tools, coaching actions and the development of the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit.

Online availability of research materials

For full transparency, all research outputs compiled by partners—including national executive summaries and detailed fiches—have been made available online. The hyperlinks below grant direct access to the country-specific documentation that supports the consolidated analysis presented in this report.

- Greece
- Italy
- Cyprus
- France
- Germany
- Spain

Conclusions and next steps

Task 5.1 establishes a consolidated and evidence-based overview of sustainability systems relevant for tourism SMEs, based on a partner-led mapping exercise carried out across the participating countries. By combining quantitative insights (geographical presence, sectoral coverage, sustainability dimensions) with qualitative analysis (trends, barriers and governance patterns), the task provides a robust foundation for subsequent WP5 activities.

In particular, Task 5.1 delivers:

- a structured overview of sustainability systems identified by partners as relevant for tourism SMEs within their national contexts,

- a shared methodological framework and validated guidelines to support consistent data collection and informed decision-making,
- a solid evidence base for the development of the self-assessment tool (Task 5.3),
- and a high-quality input for the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit (Deliverable D5.1, Month 35).

Building on these results, the next steps of WP5 will focus on supporting tourism SMEs in translating this knowledge into practice:

- Task 5.2 will deliver online awareness-raising and training seminars addressing environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability, tailored to SME needs.
- Task 5.3 will develop a self-assessment tool enabling SMEs to evaluate their sustainability practices and identify appropriate pathways for improvement.
- Task 5.4 will consolidate the outputs of WP5 into the Sustainable Tourism Toolkit (Deliverable D5.1, Month 35), providing practical guidance, tools and resources for tourism SMEs.

Task 5.1 fulfils the requirements of Milestone M5.1 by delivering the collection and publication of validated sustainability systems and guidelines, and by laying the groundwork for a structured, progressive sustainability pathway within fuTOURiSME.

Annex I – Fiche Template for Information Collection

For each system, please complete the following fiche. All partners are encouraged to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information gathered. The consolidated results will form the basis of the fuTOURiSME Sustainable Tourism Toolkit and future training materials under WP5.

A. Company/Entity details	
Company/Entity name	
Type of company/entity	
Website	
Address	
Person in charge (name and role)	
Department/Area	
Phone	
Email	
Years of existence of the entity	
B. System details	
Type of system. *Please select one*.	Certification Eco-label Verification Self-declaration Other (Specify)
Name of the system	
Applicable tourism sector(s). *Please tick all sectors where is applicable*	☐ Transport services 　☐ H4910 – Passenger rail transport, interurban 　☐ H4932 – Taxi operation 　☐ H4939 – Other passenger land transport n.e.c. 　☐ H5010 – Sea and coastal passenger water transport 　☐ H5030 – Inland passenger water transport 　☐ H5110 – Passenger air transport ☐ Accommodation services 　☐ I5510 – Hotels and similar accommodation 　☐ I5520 – Holiday and other short-stay accommodation 　☐ I5530 – Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks 　☐ Food and beverage services 　☐ I5610 – Restaurants and mobile food service activities

	☐ I5630 – Beverage serving activities
	☐ Renting services – leisure
	  ☐ N7710 – Renting and leasing of motor vehicles
	  ☐ N7721 – Renting and leasing of recreational and sports goods
	☐ Travel agency and organisational services
	  ☐ N79 – Travel agency, tour operator reservation service and related activities
	  ☐ N823 – Organisation of conventions and trade shows
	☐ Cultural and creative industry
	  ☐ R90 – Creative, arts and entertainment activities
	  ☐ R91 – Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities
	  ☐ R92 – Gambling and betting activities
	  ☐ R93 – Sports activities and amusement and recreation activities

Website	
Years of existence of the system	
Years of presence in the country	
Connection/ collaboration with other national or international certification bodies (ecosystem).	
Tourism market connections	
Use of specific friendly technologies, in case	
Usability of the reporting	
Number of staff involved	
C. Indicators covered by the system	
Social dimension: number and type of indicators	
Environmental dimension: number and type of indicators	
Economic dimension: number and type of indicators	

→ Important note: Some companies may use specific certifications focused on sustainable and responsible tourism, while others may apply broader environmental, social, or economic certifications.