BLUE TOUR

guidelines

Introduction:
BlueTour project

BlueTour is a transnational cultural cooperation project aimed at enhancing the capacity of emerging cultural organisations and practitioners to become a key stakeholder in the development and implementation of sustainable cultural tourism strategies of three nascent coastal areas along the Mediterranean Sea (Ancona-IT, Lesvos-GR, Faro-PT). The objective is to improve the cooperation between locally-rooted cultural organisations and practitioners and a broad range of stakeholders involved in - or affected by - the localised tourism industry, addressing the 21st Century challenges faced by threatened Mediterranean coastal areas and enhancing their cultural tourism by contributing to their environmental protection and sustainable development.

BlueTour involves artists and cultural practitioners who, alongside experts from the tourism industry, environmental sciences, policy makers and local communities, engage in hands-on co- creation and participation in socially-engaged and locally-embedded arts activities. Through this process, local cultural practitioners and communities will simultaneously build their capacity to become ambassadors for the preservation of their coastal habitat and raise awareness amongst tourists, tourism developers, local economy stakeholders and the cultural sector, in adopting sustainable development and consumption practices that support the blue economic growth of their coastal area.

The project also aims at equipping emerging CCS organisations with necessary knowledge, skills and networking that will enable them to contribute to the implementation of EU policy initiatives in Mediterranean coastal areas and regions. Focus will be placed on the New European Bauhaus (due to the content of the project and expertise of partners) and the European Green Deal (due to the focus on sustainable tourism and blue growth). CCS organisations, though able to implement policies through their activities, are often disconnected from the wider context of the policy as well as from policymakers. BlueTour aims to change this narrative by involving policymakers (Cultural Department of the Municipality of Faro) as an integral and core partner who will provide the necessary expertise on how to utilise transnational cultural cooperation for the advancement of EU policy in targeted localities.

1. Culture and Civic Engagement for

Blue Tourism in Mediterranean areas

Culture

Civic Engagement

Mediterranean areas

Blue Tourism

The three elements that the project aims to strategically combine for the promotion of sustainable Blue Tourism are the Mediterranean areas, the Cultural and Creative sector, and coastal zone citizens. The starting point for figuring out how to bring value to each of these elements is defining the needs that characterize them:

# 1.1 The needs of Mediterranean areas

The Mediterranean coast is both the most populated EU coastline as well as the leading EU tourist destination. Unfortunately, it is also the most polluted EU Sea basin; tourism is one of the main forces behind the ecological loss and destruction in the Mediterranean region, particularly in coastal and marine areas that still maintain high natural value and are important to safeguard biodiversity. Through inappropriate practice and development, once pristine locations have been damaged, sometimes beyond repair.

With current tourism development models based on quantity, the projected growth of tourism development in the region will continue to damage landscapes, cause soil erosion, put pressure on endangered species, further strain available water resources, increase waste and pollution discharges into the sea and lead to cultural disruption. This need was explicitly reported by the Municipality of Faro, which is struggling with the adverse effects of overtourism, and wants to shift its current tourism model to a sustainable tourism paradigm focused on culture and nature.
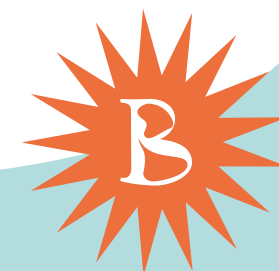
1.2 The needs of Cultural and Creative Sector
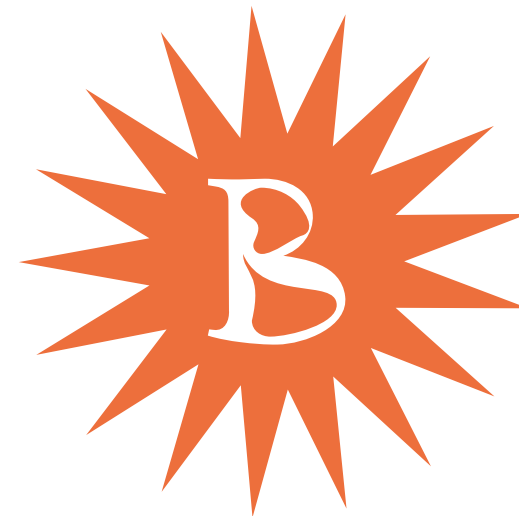
Emerging and grassroots CCS organisations have been particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as they are situated in geographic peripheries, they are struggling to develop new audiences, markets and new innovative practices. Blue innovation and blue sustainable development are emerging agendas and sectors and can be their pathway both by becoming a prominent local sustainable cultural tourism stakeholder as well as raising their transnational cultural cooperation profile and internationalisation capacity.

BlueTour will therefore seek to enhance the capacity of CCS organisations and practitioners who already work with - or are interested in working with - water elements (e.g., blue cultural heritage, maritime heritage, coasts, aquatic landscapes, etc). The coastal areas we have selected to work with, although very diverse in terms of coastal landscape, have shared characteristics. They are all located in the Mediterranean Sea, which is the most populated EU coastline. Their citizens, especially women, face a high unemployment risk in comparison to the coastal regions of the Northeast Atlantic Ocean. The communities of those coastal areas face imminent climate change challenges due to their locality or socio-economic status, and they are struggling to address the adversities it creates as well as influence the qualitative characteristics of their local tourism industry.

1.3 The needs of
Citizens

According to research by the TRAN Committee (Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses)[1], tourism has a greater impact on local residents than other stakeholder groups, and yet they are the group that are most often excluded from the process of defining the tourism strategy for their area. As a result, local communities may often view tourism development with skepticism and remain passive - or even excluded - bystanders in the process. Particularly affected are society's marginalised groups, as their socio-economic status and vulnerability becomes an additional barrier in engaging with public consultation processes and are excluded from harnessing economic or other benefits. For example, people with disabilities have limited access to cultural activities or to the coastal habitat due to poor - or non-existent - infrastructure to accommodate their needs.

[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/629184/IPOL_STU(2018)629184_EN.pdf

Similarly, refugees and racial minorities in Lesvos are completely excluded from the cultural tourism economy and as a result they cannot yield any economic benefits from one of the largest local job sectors. Enhancing participation of local communities in public consultations regarding tourism development is also a priority for local governments. This was reported by public administrators of rural areas engaged in SINEGLOSSA's Nonturismo project[2], as well as by the Municipality of Mytilene in a public consultation organised by LATRA alongside other CSOs involved in sustainable cultural tourism. Public authorities have recognised that projects have a long-term impact if citizens develop a sense of ownership towards them, and they are in need of methodologies and tools that can help them support and promote citizens' participation and engagement.

[2] https://sineglossa.it/en/projects/nontourism/

Starting from these needs, the question is:

How to implement a strategy aimed at sustainable Blue Tourism in the Mediterranean areas through the involvement of citizens and cultural organizations?

To provide an answer, we involved local stakeholders in an analysis of obstacles and desires on tourism strategies through three focus groups conducted in the three geographical areas covered by the project.
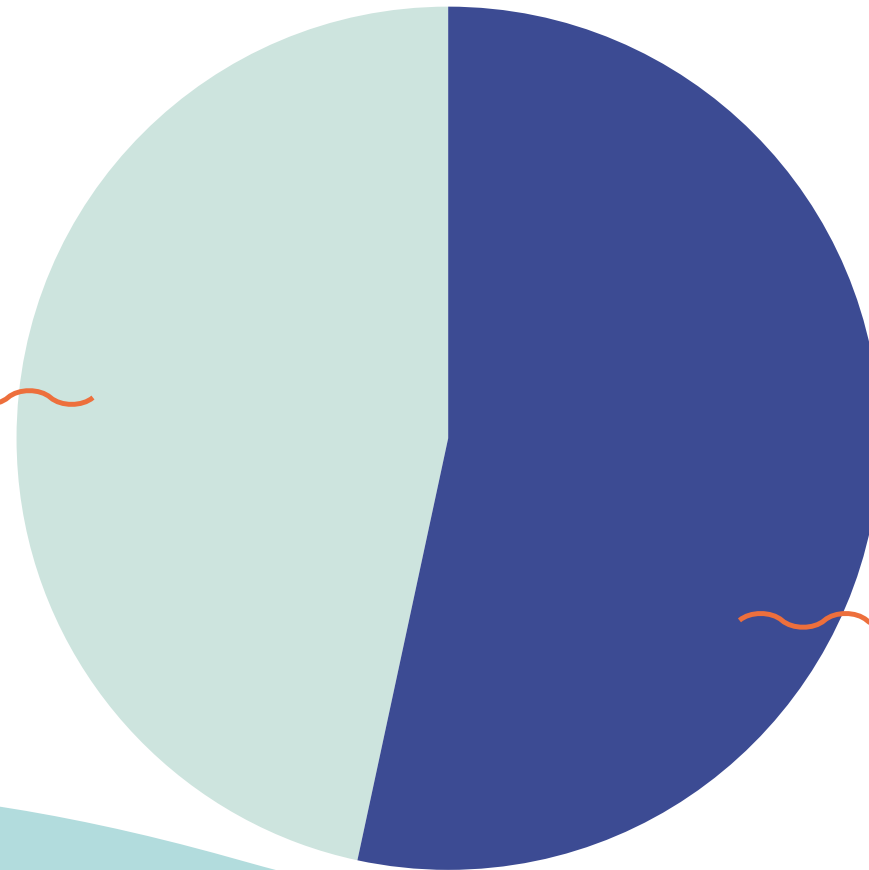
2. **BlueTour** *focus groups*

With a view to a bottom-up approach to the development of the guidelines - actively involving local realities (administrators, citizens, cultural workers, tourism operators) in the analysis of obstacles and desires on tourism strategies - a focus group was conducted in each of the project areas, with a total of 20 participants from heterogeneous sectors, equally distributed with respect to both gender and age group:
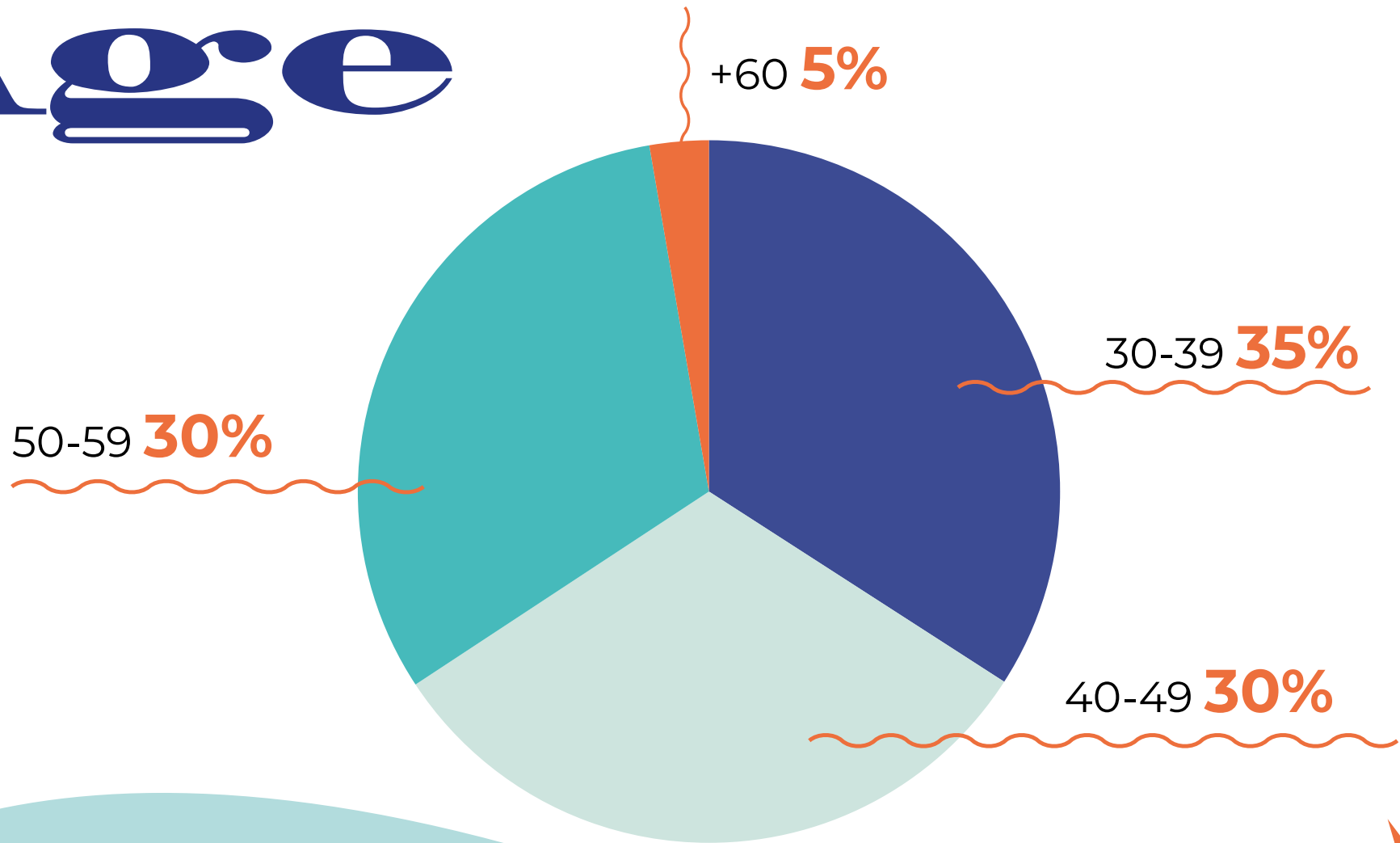
BlueTour focus group
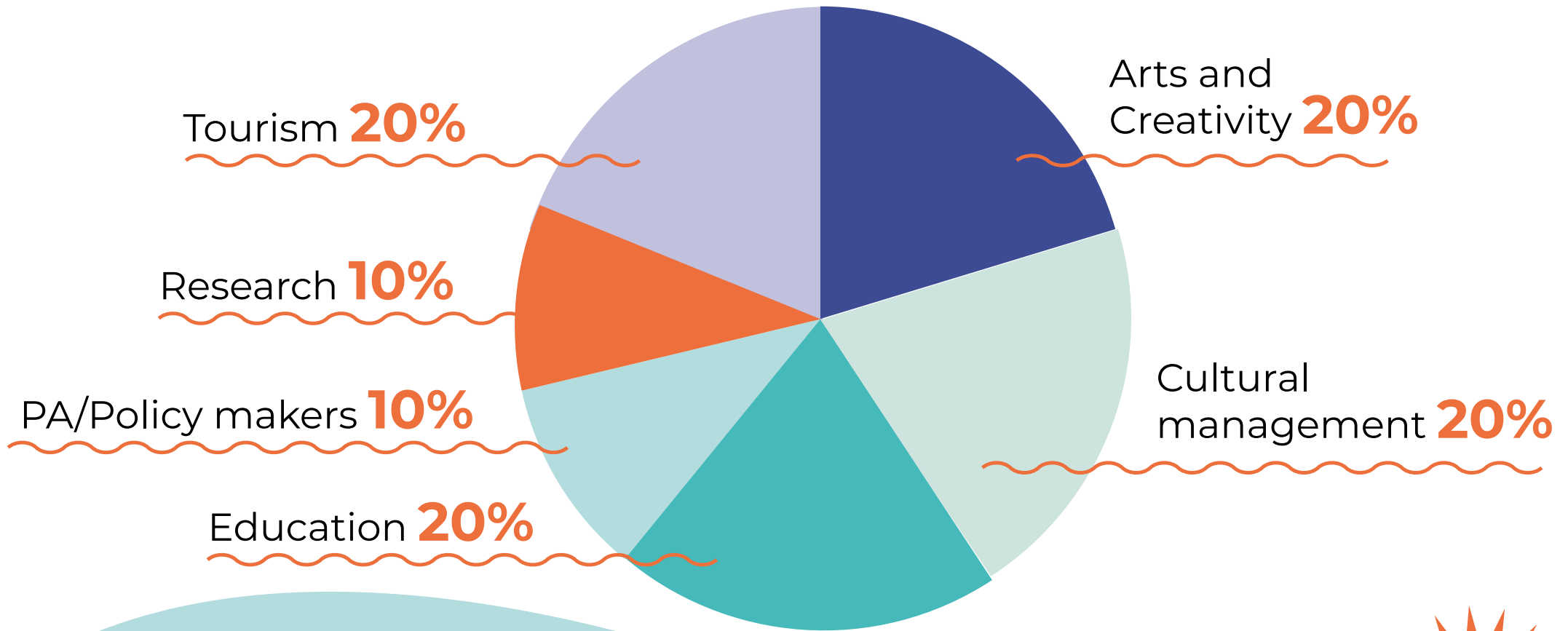# Gender

Male **45%**

Female **55%**

BlueTour focus group
Age

+60 **5%**

50-59 **30%**

30-39 **35%**

40-49 **30%**

BlueTour focus group
Field

Tourism **20%**

Arts and Creativity **20%**

Research **10%**

PA/Policy makers **10%**

Cultural management **20%**

Education **20%**

The main topics addressed by focus groups were:

Tourism Strategy,

with the aim of understanding stakeholders' vision in relation to tourism, their desires projected into the future, and the obstacles they perceive in the present.

Citizens' engagement,

with the aim of understanding the stakeholders' perceived value with respect to citizens' engagement in tourism strategies.

Role of art and culture,

with the aim of understanding what value stakeholders perceive with respect to the involvement of artists in tourism strategies.

In order to facilitate replicability of the analysis process by other organizations, guidelines for organizing and conducting a focus group - including sample questions for each of the above themes - are available in the appendix of this document.

2.1 Focus groups' results:

main obstacles to Blue Tourism strategy in Mediterranean areas
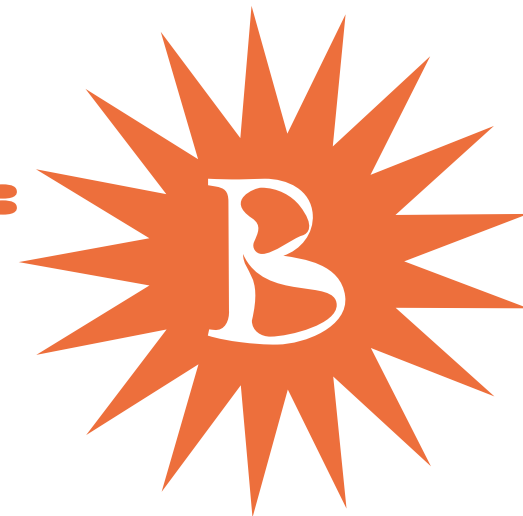
All of the focus groups highlighted the potential of the geographical areas covered by the project, a potential that could be extended to other areas of the Mediterranean since it concerns recurring elements that emerged in all three focus groups: the quality and variety of local artisanal and gastronomic products, the richness of the naturalistic offerings, with particular reference to the biomarine environment, and the historical and cultural richness. Yet, all groups agreed on the failure to exploit this potential.

Cross-referencing the responses of the three focus groups, these seem to be the main obstacles to the activation of sustainable strategies of culture-based tourism promotion:
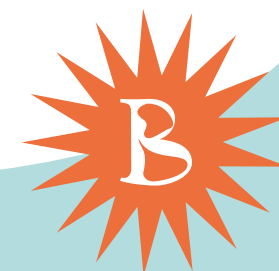
| *BlueTour guidelines*

2.1
Focus groups' results:
main obstacles to Blue Tourism strategy in Mediterranean areas

Fragmentation

Tourism strategies affect a range of actors: tourism operators and public administrations, of course, but also citizens and cultural organizations. One of the most consistent problems highlighted by the focus groups is excessive fragmentation, that is, a lack of communication, dialogue, and listening among the different actors who deal more or less directly with tourism. On the one hand, this fragmentation is motivated by "bureaucratic" reasons: as administrations change, policy makers change, and they often do not place themselves in dialogue with previous policies; at the administrative level, moreover, the divisions dealing with different sectors (e.g., tourism and culture) are not connected. On the other hand, this lack of communication is also highlighted outside the administrative sphere, for example between the business sector and the cultural and creative sector, or between citizens and tourists: as was recounted in the Lesvos focus group, "a narrative of 'locals and tourists' has been developed, where the two groups are not interacting." Fragmentation among the different actors dealing with tourism is at the root of the second problem that emerged most from the focus groups, namely the lack of a strategic vision for the future.

2.1
Focus groups' results:
main obstacles to Blue Tourism strategy in Mediterranean areas

Poor enhancement of strategic areas

Speaking of potential not being fully exploited, there are specific areas, for example, the Ria Formosa Nature Park in Faro or the port of Ancona, that participants in the focus groups believe are poorly put to value (referring, for example, to the lack of cultural initiatives hosted by the aforementioned places), or used in an unsustainable way, without sufficient attention to environmental risks (referring, for example, to the lack of innovation with respect to green mobility or the poor implementation of actions to assess the environmental impact of tourism). Without dialogue between the parties and a strategic vision for the future, some of the potentially most attractive places from a tourism perspective remain untapped potential.

2.2 Guidelines for Blue Tourism strategy in Mediterranean areas

In an ideal world, we would be able to witness a tourism strategy that marries marine heritage, innovative cultural activities, and coastal regeneration.

(From the focus group in Lesvos)
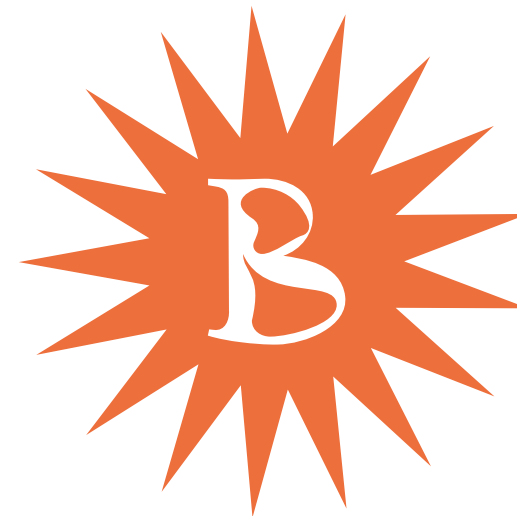
What are the actions to be taken to improve the strategic capacity of Mediterranean areas in relation to culture-based Blue Tourism? The results of the focus groups suggest possible actions in response to the obstacles mentioned in the previous paragraph, which emerged both from the practices already experienced or known to the participants and from their desires for the future of their areas.

From Fragmentation to Ecosystems

The answer to fragmentation is an ecosystemic approach, characterized by the interconnectedness of different actors and initiatives. In order to foster an ecosystemic approach, aimed at the creation of what was called a "local chain for the management of the tourism experience" in the Faro focus group, it is necessary to undertake actions that stimulate sharing, dialogue and secondarily negotiation among the parties, such as, for example, focus groups such as those carried out for the present project and cross-sectoral working tables open to citizen participation. To facilitate the participation and dialogue of heterogeneous stakeholders, it is useful to identify the territory's "strategic agents", i.e., representatives of different sectors with a strong relationship with the territory and the communities that inhabit it.
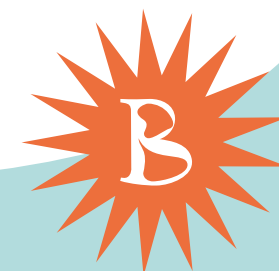
From Lack of vision to Identity

In order to create a forward-looking strategy, it is necessary for those implementing the strategy to agree on the priorities to be pursued: to set these priorities, it is necessary to understand what is important, what is to be preserved, and what is to be innovated. In other words, it is necessary to understand what is the identity of the place on which a strategy is being devised. The theme of identity emerged from several participants in the focus groups, in terms of "identifying what differentiates us" and "growing community self-esteem". Beginning a tourism strategy process from the identification of the territory's identity helps to define what the priorities are and figure out what actions to take, while also helping to address fragmentation by providing milestones that can be shared across sectors and passed on over time. Involving citizens in the identification of the local identity, as we will see in the next section, further contributes to strengthening the community and promoting an active role of citizens in the implementation of tourism strategies.
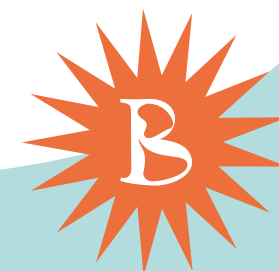
From Poor enhancement of strategic areas to Pilot projects

Several participants in the focus groups stressed the importance of taking small steps. Since this is a complex process, requiring negotiation between parties with different skills and interests, it is necessary to build trust between the parties; at the same time, it is necessary to collect data and information in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Blue Tourism strategy. At the strategic level, the most effective approach is therefore to use a specific area as a "template" on which to test the entire process, from conception to implementation of the strategy, with a view to replicating and/or extending what has been learned from the experience to a larger area.
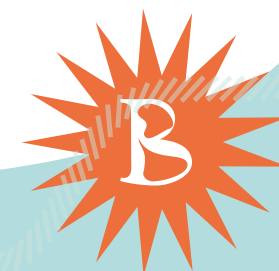
2.3 Guidelines for
citizen and artist engagement

What, strategically, is the advantage of involving citizens and artists in the process of devising and implementing a tourism strategy?

B

If the locals are fine, the tourists visiting the place are fine

(From the focus group in Faro)

CITIZENS: As mentioned in the previous section, involving citizens both in the identification of a place's identity and in the design of a tourism strategy has a twofold advantage: first, citizens are the holders of knowledge about a place's history and traditions, and can therefore bring a significant contribution to the identification of its identity characteristics; second, a strategy co-designed by citizens is more integrated into the social fabric and is therefore more likely to be supported. For these reasons, it would be important not only to include citizens in the process outlined in the previous paragraph, but to to stimulate their participation in public life as early as school education, with the aim of strengthening the sense of belonging to the community.

Culture is welfare.

(From the focus group in Ancona)

ARTISTS:

Even in the case of artists, two main advantages of their involvement emerged from the focus groups: first, artists can be mediators of the engagement processes themselves, enhancing citizen participation through their empathic and relational skills; second, artists can be ambassadors of a place's identity, increasing its attractiveness to broad and diverse audiences through their creative and storytelling skills. Several participants also highlighted the importance of involving artists from the conception stage of strategies, given their abilities to find alternative solutions to problems and trigger imaginaries, that is, to stimulate visions.

Appendix

BlueTour Focus Group

Guidelines

Section I.
Selection of Participants, Professional Background

Each partner/country will select **5-10 stakeholders** to be involved in national focus groups.

The rationale of the selection is to collect knowledge, experiences, and needs of stakeholders with **diverse backgrounds in tourism**: public policy makers in the fields of tourism and culture; tourism strategists in coastal regions; environmental experts; artists and cultural operators.

In selecting stakeholders, it is important to **ensure age and gender balance.**

Here are a few sampling methods you can choose from to help you recruit and select participants:

- **Voluntary response sampling**, such as sharing an open call and finding participants based on responses.

- **Convenience sampling** of those who are most readily accessible to you.

- **Judgment sampling** of a specific set of participants that you already know you want to include.

Section II.
Organisation of the
Focus Group

Select a co-moderator

It is important to have more than one moderator.

The facilitator's job is to guide the discussion and foster new ideas from participants. This task can get easily derailed if the facilitator also needs to pause the discussion to write down big, bold ideas and reactions from participants.

To avoid this possibility of disruption, **appoint a notetaker** before going into the focus group who can coordinate the technology, take notes, and observe the behavior of the participants.

In addition, **you can also record the meeting**, subject to consent from the participants (see below -> consent form).

Time

Exhaustion and the law of diminishing returns are real, so keep them in mind when planning the time frame for your focus group. Focus groups usually meet for **45–90 minutes**: if you think your session needs to last longer than 90 minutes, schedule a few breaks.

🟦 Atmosphere

It is important to create a comfortable atmosphere for the focus group discussions, so ensure that everyone has access to coffee and water and some light refreshments.

Provide participants with tools, such as pens and paper, sticky notes, markers.

🟦 Questions

Below are the **main themes** to tackle throughout the focus group. For each theme, you will find some sample questions. You can adapt the questions according to your needs (e.g., time, type of stakeholders). Overall, your focus group questions should be:

- **Open-ended and flexible**
- **Impossible to answer with "yes" or "no"**
- **Unambiguous, getting straight to the point while still stimulating discussion**
- **Unbiased and neutral**

Structure your questions in such a way that the flow of the conversation makes sense (e.g., by theme, chronological order, etc.).
Before the focus group begins, you should prepare **a list of 5 to 10 questions**.

MAIN THEMES ···········

Tourism Strategy. Through this theme we want to understand what stakeholders' vision is in relation to tourism, their desires projected into the future, and the obstacles they perceive in the present.

Sample questions:

~ What would you like tourism to look like in your city/geographical area ten years from now?

~ What steps do you think are needed to realize your vision for tourism?

~ What are the obstacles to the realization of this vision?

~ What strategies/actions already exist that move in the direction of this vision?

~ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the currently applied tourism strategy?

~ What kind of experience would you like tourists to have in your city/geographical area?

~ What is the difference between the experience tourists currently have and the experience you would like them to have?

~ What steps could be implemented to provide tourists with what you think is the ideal tourism experience in your city/geographical area?

Citizens' engagement. Through this theme, we want to understand what the stakeholders' perceived value is with respect to citizens' engagement in tourism strategies.

Sample questions:

~ What is the added value of citizens' engagement in tourism strategies?

~ What is the area in which citizens' engagement could express the most value (e.g., designing a tourism strategy, storytelling addressed to tourists, etc.)?

~ What are the biggest obstacles to citizens' engagement in tourism strategies?

Role of art and culture. Through this theme, we want to understand what value stakeholders perceive with respect to the involvement of artists in tourism strategies.

Sample questions:

~ What is the added value of artists' involvement in tourism strategies?

~ What is the area in which artists' involvement could express the most value (e.g., designing a tourism strategy, storytelling addressed to tourists, etc.)?

~ What are the biggest obstacles to artists' involvement in tourism strategies?

Section III.
Focus group discussion

1 Welcome the focus group participants

First, you'll want to welcome the participants in the focus group and introduce yourself and your co-moderator, as well as BlueTour project. Then, have the participants introduce themselves. Consider starting out with an icebreaker which will allow participants to relax and settle into the space a bit.

Before you start your focus group discussion, remind participants of the purpose of the group and hand out a consent form. The **consent form** should reiterate the purpose of the event, outline the participants' rights, list the facilitators' contact information, and prompt participants to sign.

2 Lead the focus group

Here are some tips to consider when leading a focus group:

- As a moderator, strive to **remain neutra**l. Refrain from reacting to responses, and be aware of your body language (e.g., nodding, raising eyebrows).

- **Active listening skills**, such as parroting back answers or asking for clarification, are good methods to encourage participation and signal that you're listening.

Seek equal representation from the group. Your session involves an entire group of people, so you have to make sure you hear from each and every one of them! That may seem obvious, but a focus group can quickly turn into an interview of one or two of the most talkative members. If you run into this problem, be ready to jump in when someone has been quiet for too long by thanking the most active participants for their input and re-opening the floor to the other participants.

Don't stick to your list of questions. Sticking too closely to your list can hamper natural and effective conversations. If the group takes a slightly different turn than you were expecting, don't be afraid to allow the conversation to veer off-course if it seems productive. Additionally, you may not ask every question on your list, depending on the direction of the conversation. Make sure you ask the most important questions first and follow up on certain discussion points to keep things flowing rather than hosting a pure question-and-answer forum.

3 Wrap up final thoughts

Once you've reached a stopping point during the conversation, wrap up any lingering questions and ideas within the group. Finally, thank everyone for their time and end the session.

4 Analyze your results

After concluding your focus group, you and your co-moderator should debrief, recording initial impressions of the discussion as well as any highlights, issues, or immediate conclusions you've drawn.
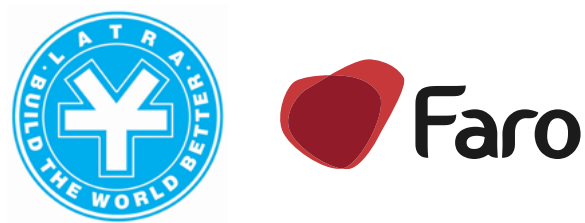
The next step is to transcribe and clean your data, **looking for commonalities or categories of responses.**

These guidelines were developed by

Sineglossa

With the support of BlueTour partners