



supporting  
tourism  
eco-investors

RECOMMENDATIONS BOOK



conception - AGRISTUDIO  
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1.1 THE ICER PROJECT: INNOVATIVE CONCEPT OF ECO-ACCOMMODATION APPROACH IN RURAL REGIONS

Rural regions know that tourism can be an essential vector for their economic development. Indeed, given the challenges facing the agricultural sector and the loss of industrial jobs, tourism development stands as an important possibility for creating rural jobs that are even more valuable for being impossible to outsource. Leaders of public authorities, notably at the regional level, clearly have the message. However, though the promotion of tourism has long been included in public policy making, sustainable development assistance is less organised. And yet this assistance is crucial. The fact is that tourism spending in rural areas is lower than in other destinations. Thus, it is harder to make investments in tourism profitable, meaning that the number of projects is more limited than on the coast or in cities; there are also more obstacles to attracting investors and project developers.

Yet the demand for countryside tourism is growing, with customers who demand quality accommodation in addition to an environmentally friendly approach to services, construction, energy management and more. This opportunity cannot be missed. Actions should be taken so that local governments can propose ambitious public policies adapted to investors' needs but which also meet the requirements of market demand. Naturally, accommodation should be a particular focus of such action, as this is the cornerstone of tourism consumption. However, auxiliary tourism services cannot be ignored. Developing a sustainable tourism sector depends upon protecting and augmenting a destination's overall rural tourism product, and not just the provision of appropriate accommodation. Of course, this development must respect the intrinsic values of each location and align with a non-negotiable vision of sustainable development. This is the purpose of the ICER project. Based on exchanges about the experiences of each partner region, this project has enabled the

definition of recommendations in terms of financial, technical policy tools to guide investors' operations in the framework of sustainable development programmes.

In particular, the following were analysed and discussed:

- tourism development strategies in each region;
- concrete sustainable development policies;
- the new consumption habits of customers in the region and the types of accommodation created to match their profiles;
- existing labelling policies;
- activities emphasised to make the region appealing;
- existing private or public marketing tools;
- investor search efforts;
- efforts to identify «opportunities» to propose to private operators;
- requirements for investors/their networks;
- examples of successful accommodation created recently thanks to these efforts;
- programme guidance by the local government;
- existing financial aid schemes and their terms of use;
- operational structures for sponsoring accommodation operations;
- research, training and education.

The project was very ambitious with the goals of providing guidance on public policies concerning project support, making the regions more attractive in the eyes of investors and equipping regional development entities with practical tools to enable them to add value to the content of operations. Thus ICER seeks to address the current development challenges of rural European regions while respecting the three principles of sustainable development—the economy, the environment and society—and concretely applying them to

- local tourism policies. The project's core activities are based on a four-step approach:
- overall project organisation, with an emphasis on sharing experiences and identifying best practices;
  - local interaction between public policymakers and tourism project developers, during the course of which each partner organises workshops with small businesses in the tourism sector to determine what they need from public policies;
  - drafting of this guide to public policy recom-

mendations based on discussions of best practices and the conclusions of the workshops;

- improvement of public policies in each partner region/country based on the final content of the recommendations manual.

**SINCE ITS INCEPTION AND INTO THE FUTURE THANKS TO THIS GUIDE, ICER SEEKS TO EDUCATE THE RELEVANT DECISION MAKERS ABOUT THE NEED FOR INNOVATIVE PUBLIC POLICIES FOR RURAL TOURISM WITH A VIEW TO BOOSTING THE ATTRACTIVENESS AND COMPETITIVENESS OF RURAL AREAS.**

## 1.2 PARTICIPATING REGIONS

The ICER project was forged by seven partners representing different levels of regional organisation from seven member states of the European Union.

1. **AUVERGNE REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD (FRANCE), LEAD PARTNER;**
2. **SHANNON DEVELOPMENT (IRELAND);**
3. **SOUTH TRANS-DANUBIAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (HUNGARY);**
4. **PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OF VALLADOLID (SPAIN);**
5. **CITY OF LAHTI (FINLAND);**
6. **MINISTRY FOR GOZO (MALTA);**
7. **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY MURA (SLOVENIA).**

## 1.3 HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Thanks to the diversity of the regions involved in the ICER project, this guide offers avenues of thought adapted to a variety of situations. For example, the strategies implemented in Gozo (Malta) and Villány (Hungary), which suffer from heavy land use pressures, are naturally different from the development approaches in regions like Auvergne (France) or Valladolid (Spain), for which many real estate opportunities exist.

However, for all the regions involved in the project, there is one common issue: how to incorporate respect for the environment into each tourism project and into the daily operations of every business in the sector, and how to derive value from sustainability. This compilation of recommendations presents different tools and strategies for public decision makers to use when searching for, supporting and working with investors in the tourism accommodation sector. Of course, the examples proposed address specific problems and must be adapted to the unique situation of each region, rather than replicated in full.

Therefore, the first thing to do, even before reading this guide, is to accurately determine the issues facing the region(s) under consideration in terms of the tourism business and the environment. This may consist in carrying out regional diagnostics or in meeting with tourism and environment stakeholders.

**OF THE MANY QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD BE ASKED, THESE QUESTIONS SEEM TO BE OF PARTICULAR VALUE:**

### tourism:

- What is the region's tourism potential?
- How does the region measure up against its «competitors» (ahead, behind, etc.)?
- What are the density, types and economic performance of existing accommodation establishments?
- Who are the main tourism clients in the region?

- What are the needs of these clients?
- Is there a potential demand for new accommodation or other type support facilities that are environmentally friendly?

### environment:

- To what degree does tourism activity make use of natural spaces (outdoor sport venues, accommodation, etc.)?
- Is tourism activity more diffuse or concentrated?
- Are natural resources being overused?
- Does the environment itself or the landscape present any particular appeal for tourists?
- Are the short distribution chains developed (for food products and more)?

### region:

- Are there real estate opportunities that lend themselves to the creation of new rural tourism developments? On the contrary, is there excessive real estate pressure?
- Does the region have an established identity or profile? What are its intrinsic values?

- How is the region perceived from the outside?
- How is it perceived by its inhabitants?
- What are the primary networks of stakeholders involved in developing the region?
- How dependent are the incumbent rural communities on the region's development or current environment/natural capital?
- What is the state of existing economic activity – is the community in decline (growing unemployment/poverty and outward migration)?

**ONCE THESE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, EACH REGION WILL BE FULLY PREPARED TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF THE MANY EXAMPLES OF TOOLS, STRATEGIES AND PUBLIC POLICIES CONTAINED IN THIS TECHNICAL GUIDE.**

## 1.4 STRUCTURE OF RECOMMENDATIONS BOOK

The recommendations book is divided into four sections. Each section is designed as a stand-alone document, thereby allowing readers to immediately focus their efforts upon the areas that are most relevant to them. To facilitate this, and avoid excessive repetition, when similar concepts exist within multiple sections, they are briefly introduced in each one, but a reference is made to a single section where the concept is explained in most detail.

Similarly, the case studies that have emerged from the Project are often relevant within multiple sections. To facilitate the flow of each section when read independently, the case studies are repeated in each instance and altered in order to stress the elements within the case study that are most relevant to the subject being discussed.

### THE FOUR SECTIONS ARE:

- dealing with Potential Investors - introduces the policy maker to the processes of attracting investors to the rural areas;
- providing advice and guidance, and fostering innovation - describes ways that the public sector may provide guidance and advice to help the private sector overcome the unique challenges faced by rural environments, and to further promote innovation and knowledge sharing;
- supporting Investment - describes the various mechanisms that the public sector may use to support investment in rural tourism developments;
- fostering Sustainability - presents an overview of the issues, challenges and opportunities of aiming for the sustainable development of rural tourism.

**THE ICER PROJECT SPONSORS WISH YOU AN ENJOYABLE AND FRUITFUL READ.**

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