



NEWSTouR



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In this edition...

From Milan With Momentum.....	Page 02
NECSTouR AGM 2025: Launching the Governance Hub & Showcasing Europe's Tourism Storytelling.....	Page 03
The Governance Hub goes live: a new dimension to NECSTouR.....	Page 03
NECSTouR AGM 2025: Living Lab Sessions showcasing the work of our hubs.....	Page 04
Sharing best practices: A regional roundtable.....	Page 04
NECSTouR and the EU	
Tourism Advocacy Group meets at the European Parliament.....	Page 05
Shaping the Future: Smart Specialisation & Tourism in EU Investment Policy.....	Page 05
NECSTouR Data Hub (Tourism of Tomorrow Lab)	
ToT Lab 2025: Shaping the Future of EU Tourism Data.....	Page 06
D3HUB: Driving Smart, Sustainable Tourism Across Europe.....	Page 06
NECSTouR Leads Regional Action in DEPLOYTOUR and the European Tourism Data Space.....	Page 06
NECSTouR in European Tourism Projects	
Projects Hub workshop guides members to submitting successful funding applications.....	Page 07
Wrapping up Euro-Emotur.....	Page 08
Community4Tourism	Page 09
NECSTouR on the road	
NECSTouR AT FITUR in Madrid.....	Page 10
NECSTouR AT ITB Berlin.....	Page 10
Climate Hub Updates	
Climate Hub: review of first half year	Page 11
Climate Hub at Work: NECSTouR Webinars Empower EU Communities Through Knowledge sharing.....	Page 11
NECSTouR Members Stories	
Walking Through Culture: Puglia's Slow Tourism Vision.....	Page 13
The Colours of the Lodzkie Region: ecological trips in Lodzkie.....	Page 13
The Map of Quietude Expands with New Serene Spots Across Skåne.....	Page 14
South Limburg Welcomes Two New Wine Hubs in Cross-Border Tourism Project.....	Page 14
Normandy: 2027 marks the millennium of the birth of William the Conqueror.....	Page 15



FROM MILAN, WITH MOMENTUM

Presiding over my first AGM in Milan last month was a rewarding experience. Almost 100 NECSTouR colleagues attended the event from far corners of our continent to learn, debate, network and enjoy the fantastic setting provided by our host region Lombardy. We are most grateful to them. In this edition of NEWSTouR you can read up on the detail of our General Meeting. We also provide coverage about interesting developments from our members. With the launch of the consultation for a new European Tourism Strategy at the end of May and the planned Committee of the Regions Opinion on sustainable tourism for which NECSTouR member the Balearic Islands is the rapporteur, the work of our Tourism Advocacy Group takes on added significance at an important time with preparations in full swing for the next Multiannual Financial Framework post 2027. NECSTouR's EU funded project work is growing with two more recent project acquisitions.



Elena Baena

NECSTouR Board of Directors
President

As we head towards a well earned summer break, we can look back on a very full first half year of NECSTouR activities that also brought about the launch of our new Governance Hub to complete the third leg of operations with our climate and data hubs (Tourism of Tomorrow Lab). We expect the second half of 2025 to be equally as busy. We look forward to your continued engagement and if you are a region that is not yet a member of NECSTouR, please do get in touch – the power is in the pack. Enjoy the summer!

MEETING IN MILAN: NECSTOUR AGM 2025

NECSTOUR AGM 2025 IN MILAN: LAUNCHING THE GOVERNANCE HUB AND SHOWCASING EUROPE'S TOURISM STORYTELLING FUTURE

From 20–22 May 2025, NECSTouR members gathered in Milan for the Annual General Meeting, hosted by the Region of Lombardy. Welcoming over 100 delegates from 15 countries, the event served as a milestone for European regions committed to driving regenerative, data-driven and resilient tourism strategies. This year's thematic focus "Rethinking Tourism Communication: Storytelling & Conscious Marketing" reflected the network's vision of more meaningful engagement with visitors through destination authenticity and digital innovation. During our time in Milan, we also welcomed two new members to the network: Ibiza and Veluwe Arnhem Nijmegen. Their addition brings energy and expertise to NECSTouR's growing community and further enriches the network as we move forward together in promotes regenerative tourism practices.



THE GOVERNANCE HUB GOES LIVE: A NEW DIMENSION TO NECSTOUR



A main highlight of the AGM was the official launch of the NECSTouR Governance Hub, which is designed to strengthen regional leadership, collaboration, and strategic direction across the network through its three thematic pillars: unbalanced tourism, conscious marketing and political engagement. Its launch was marked by a high-level debate featuring Andreea Staicu from the European Commission's Tourism Unit, emphasising the importance of regional involvement in shaping Europe's forthcoming Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

The overarching objective of the Governance Hub is to create stronger structures for co-creation, advocacy, and leadership within the network, while reinforcing the capacity of regions to steer the transformation of tourism in Europe.

NECSTOUR AGM 2025: LIVING LAB SESSIONS SHOWCASE THE WORK OF OUR HUBS

The AGM also featured two impactful Living Labs sessions. The first explored climate storytelling and stakeholder engagement, with case studies from Atlantic Technological University, Visit Finland, and the Canary Islands Tourism Board. This living lab session focused on providing participants with ideas and successful case studies on how to involve tourism stakeholders in climate action processes at regional and local levels.

The second Lab focused on data-led governance, showcasing how NECSTouR supports DMOs like the Region of Madrid in using data for informed tourism policymaking. Providing participants with insights on both tools and methodologies to integrate into policy making focusing on management of destinations and marketing.

Both of these sessions provided participants an opportunity to experience the services that NECSTouR offers its members to learn more about how we can support regions in developing effective strategies to promote sustainable tourism.



SHARING BEST PRACTICES: A REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE



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Storytelling took centre stage on the second day of our AGM through the roundtable "Voices from the Territories", where members presented insightful examples of how tourism has been positioned as a useful tool for cultural diplomacy and community connection. During this roundtable discussion, Normandy previewed their campaign for the 1,000th anniversary of William the Conqueror "William the Connector", linking history and European unity. Kotka-Hamina, Finland introduced Ulko-Tammio, the internationally acclaimed phone-free island offering visitors a full digital detox. Murcia, Spain shared how Interreg Europe has supported the development of slow pilgrimage tourism during Caravaca de la Cruz's Jubilee celebrations. Meanwhile, Sligo, Ireland presented the Ideas Engine, a co-creative tool fostering visitor and community storytelling along the Wild Atlantic Way.

NECSTOUR AND THE EU

TOURISM ADVOCACY GROUP MEETS AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

With a new European Commission in place, NECSTouR is helping to shape the EU's sustainable tourism agenda. Its Tourism Advocacy Group (TAG), chaired by Executive Vice President Mathieu Cuip (Île-de-France), convened during the Committee of the Regions' February and April plenary sessions to gather regional insights and strengthen the voice of territories in EU tourism policymaking.

NECSTouR is contributing actively to two major EU initiatives: the consultation on a new European Tourism Strategy and the Committee of the Regions' Opinion on sustainable tourism, led by the Balearic Islands. Supported by its "Pathway to 2030" Strategy, Board Champions, and Brussels-based regional delegations, NECSTouR is well positioned to deliver a coordinated and impactful response. Its upcoming position paper will reflect key regional priorities and guide engagement throughout the second half of 2025.



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SHAPING THE FUTURE: SMART SPECIALISATION & TOURISM IN EU INVESTMENT POLICY



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In March, NECSTouR hosted a webinar to explore how Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) can support innovation in tourism, helping regions align with the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework. The event showcased how tourism can drive regional competitiveness through innovation, sustainability, and digitalisation. NECSTouR highlighted practical examples and policy insights, reinforcing tourism's role in place-based innovation. By promoting cross-sector collaboration and better integration of tourism into S3, NECSTouR helps members position tourism as a strategic sector. This support enables destinations to access EU funding, influence policy, and implement transformative projects aligned with future EU priorities.



NECSTOUR DATA HUB

TOT LAB 2025: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF EU TOURISM DATA

At FITUR in January, NECSTouR's Tourism of Tomorrow Lab (ToT Lab) launched its 2025 Work Programme, reaffirming its leadership in data-driven sustainable tourism. The 2025 Work Programme is organised into integrated projects that Premium Members collaboratively have selected. The work programme is primarily focused on the implementation of three integrated projects, designed to address common and shared challenges facing Premium Members:

- The development of a Sustainable Indicators Platform that will provide a core set of indicators to measure tourism sustainability across NECSTouR European regions and enable benchmarking amongst them.
- The testing of AI solutions applied to real use cases proposed by Premium DMOs. The purpose is to provide a hands on approach in the development of practical solutions for Premium Members.
- The ToTLab Academy launch is a specialised capacity-building programme segmenting knowledge to data scientists, destination managers, decision-makers, and tourism SMEs. It provides expertise and knowledge on measurement methodologies, data sets, tools, and data-driven policy making.



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D3HUB: DRIVING SMART, SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ACROSS EUROPE

The D3HUB project's main objective is to design the future EU Competence Centre for Tourism which is now advancing into the implementation of its pilot phase. In January, 40 destinations were selected to participate in this phase, running from February 2025 to February 2026 to test and refine the services that will be provided by the future EU Competence Centre focusing on four clusters.

- Cluster 1: Redistributing tourism flows in space and time.
- Cluster 2: Managing the balance between residents, visitors, and stakeholders.
- Cluster 3: Climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Cluster 4: Supporting emerging destinations to attract quality and sustainable tourism.

NECSTouR co-leads on Cluster 2 with Visit Flanders (NECSTouR and ToTLab Premium Member) and Cluster 3 with NIT with NECSTouR as associated members. From March to June, NECSTouR co-hosted several Cluster 2 workshops on short-term rentals, resident perceptions, forecasting, and carrying capacity calculation, while also delivering other webinars focusing on Cluster 3 which included emissions tracking, and low-impact travel incentives.



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NECSTOUR LEADS REGIONAL ACTION IN DEPLOYTOUR PROJECT AND THE EUROPEAN TOURISM DATA SPACE

NECSTouR is playing a leading role in DEPLOYTOUR, a strategic EU project working to establish the European Tourism Data Space (ETDS). As a core partner, NECSTouR contributes to defining the governance framework, ensuring that the needs of regions and DMOs are reflected in the structure of this future data ecosystem. NECSTouR also supports member participation in two of the five pilot projects: enhancing resilience and competitiveness in mature destinations led by Andalusia region (NECSTouR ToT Lab Premium Member) and empowering SMEs in tourism led by Lapland (NECSTouR ToT Lab Premium Member). Furthermore, NECSTouR is collaborating to build a community around this project that will integrate different tourism stakeholders.



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DEPLOYTOUR partners met in Paris in early May for a day of strategic alignment, technical workshops, and practical planning to advance the five real-life pilots. NECSTouR's active involvement ensures strong regional representation and accelerates Europe's transition to a smarter, more connected tourism data future.

NECSTOUR IN EUROPEAN TOURISM PROJECTS

PROJECTS HUB WORKSHOP GUIDES MEMBERS TO SUBMITTING SUCCESSFUL FUNDING APPLICATIONS

Networks bring together like-minded organisations looking for opportunities to collaborate to cement working relationships. Even though EU funding for tourism activities is far from straight forward there are many relevant and accessible doors of entry. NECSTouR's workshop in March brought together a mix of regions and associate members including academics to better understand the EU funding landscape, provide a platform for sharing fledgling project ideas and pick up tips on how to do things better in the future. There is still much to play for as this funding perspective winds down. Through the projects hub NECSTouR members have a ready-made template for consortium building. The event's slides are available in the members' platform with a follow-up planned for the autumn term.



WRAPPING UP EURO-EMOTUR

At the beginning of the year 2025 we closed a successful three-year project co-funded by the COSME programme where NECSTouR partnered with 3 members: the Gran Canaria Tourism Board, the University of Las Palmas Gran Canaria, and the International Centre of Studies on the Tourism Economy (CISSET), alongside partners the European Tourism Association (ETOA) and the Haag-Helma University of Applied Sciences.

Euro-Emotur's objective was to increase the uptake of digitalisation and innovation by tourism SMEs through transnational cooperation and capacity building. Additionally, it aimed to generate a digital innovation hub to improve competitiveness in the market through digitalisation. Euro-emotur was also successful in introducing the concept of 'neurotourism', a discipline that explores and harnesses tourists' emotions to create unique and immersive experiences to help build a better understanding of their customers to foster deeper and more memorable connections.

The Euro-Emotur project successfully reached over 20 countries, helping more than 100 SMEs benefit from:

- A methodology to self-assess their digital maturity
- A matchmaking process to receive personalized consultancy from specialized technology service providers.
- Direct funding to implement the improvements needed for their digitalization
- Access to the Euro-Emotur Digital Hub with tools and learning opportunities

Through dissemination and capitalisation efforts, NECSTouR has helped maximize the impact of the project within the broader European tourism ecosystem, bridging the gap between SMEs and DMOs.



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COMMUNITY4TOURISM

Community4Tourism, one of the governance projects of the Sustainable Tourism Mission of Interreg Euro-Med, recently welcomed 10 new thematic projects expanding the community to a total of 20 projects working together to enhance sustainable tourism.

After the publication of the Blueprint for Tourism Climate Action Plans, we continued to organize capacity building activities to ensure the adoption of this key resource. Through a series of 3 online sessions led by The Travel Foundation, a total of 230 participants benefited from expert training on how to develop a climate action plan with step-by-step guidance. Covering a wide range of topics from sustainable tourism practices and destination marketing to digital transformation and enterprise development, the webinars have become an essential platform for collaboration and innovation.

Through actions like these, we continue to support European regions, in the Mediterranean and beyond, to become more climate-resilient whilst also reaffirming our commitment with the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. One key output of the project in the last months has been the launch of the Join the Med platform, a knowledge hub that highlights sustainable tourism practices in the Mediterranean and provides policy extensions of tourism-related activities.



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NECSTOUR ON THE ROAD

NECSTOUR AT FITUR IN MADRID

NECSTouR was well represented at FITUR 2025 in Madrid, participating in two highly productive days of strategic engagement at the end of January. Managing Director John Fitzgibbon and Strategy Director Cristina Nuñez held bilateral and group meetings with members to present the NECSTouR 2025 Work Programme and discuss the NECSTouR 2030 Pathway. A key moment was the Tourism of Tomorrow Lab's hybrid meeting, where Premium members explored the ambitious 2025 ToTLab Work Programme. These exchanges reaffirmed NECSTouR's commitment to innovation, collaboration, and sustainability as we shape the future of European tourism together.



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NECSTOUR AT ITB BERLIN

In March, NECSTouR attended the key tourism congress ITB Berlin, where Managing Director John Fitzgibbon spoke on the high-level panel From Promise to Progress: Steering Tourism in Challenging Times, moderated by Professor Willy Legrand and Heleri Rande. He emphasised the critical role of NECSTouR in empowering regions and Destination Management Organisations to deliver on EU tourism policy goals.

He showcased key initiatives including the Tourism of Tomorrow Lab, support for the Glasgow Declaration, and the work of the Tourism Advocacy Group ensuring regional voices influence the future European Tourism Strategy.

John also held numerous bilateral meetings with regional representatives, reinforcing partnerships and expanding the network's outreach. These efforts underline NECSTouR's commitment to championing its members and strengthening sustainable, resilient tourism.



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NECSTOUR CLIMATE HUB UPDATE

CLIMATE HUB: OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST HALF YEAR



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The NECSTouR Climate Hub is a dedicated platform supporting regional destinations in advancing climate action within tourism. Since its launch, half of NECSTouR's members have begun implementing climate initiatives, with ten regions signed up to the Glasgow Declaration and three workshops delivered in 2025 alone.

NECSTouR is guiding members toward measurable emission reductions and climate adaptation by 2030. The Hub features expert-led workshops and best practice exchanges. A dedicated framework will support the development, implementation, and monitoring of Climate Action Plans, while regular webinars and toolkits offer hands-on guidance.

The Climate Hub represents a cornerstone of NECSTouR's 2030 Pathway, helping regions align with EU climate objectives and lead the way in sustainable tourism.

TOURISM CLIMATE ACTION PLANNING TRAININGS FOR REGIONAL AUTHORITIES AND DMOS

We organised three Online Training Sessions on the *Blueprint for Tourism Climate Action Plans* organised in the context of the Community4Tourism of the Sustainable Tourism mission. Which focused on:

- The first initial assessments and enabling conditions for climate actions planning
- Identifying objectives and selecting actions for climate planning
- Creating your own climate action plan, implementing its actions and monitoring its progress.

These sessions provided attendees with valuable insights, practical tools, and, most importantly, inspiration to drive real change. Mainly targeted at Regional Authorities and DMOs, the sessions attracted around 230 participants attending to learn about the entire Climate Action Planning process, which include the initial steps all the way through to implementation and monitoring.



NECSTOUR COMMUNICATIONS UPDATES

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNICATIONS: NEW FACES AND FRESH DEVELOPMENTS AT NECSTOUR

Our communications team has also taken steps to enhance how we share our message, support our members, and amplify regional voices at the European level. From welcoming a new team member, publishing our activity report and continuing to develop the NECSTouR Members Platform, we have taken important steps forward since our last edition of NEWSTouR.

We are delighted to introduce our new Communications Officer, Joseph Park, who joined NECSTouR in April. Joseph's role centres on producing key internal communications such as the Live from Brussels newsletter and NECSTouR's activity reports, as well as boosting visibility for member projects and labs that are advancing the NECSTouR 2030 Pathway. His arrival marks a renewed commitment to ensuring that our network's impact is not only felt but also seen, understood, and celebrated widely.

In May we published the NECSTouR 2024 Activity Report, which documents a year defined by project successes, innovation, and regional engagement. The Activity Report highlights our initiatives such as the Tourism of Tomorrow Lab and the Climate Hub, which delivered forward looking outputs including the work of our Climate Hub, updates on our projects such as C4T project and D3HUB aiming to pave the way to create a self-sustainable European Tourism Data Competence Centre.

The ongoing development of the NECSTouR Members' Platform continues to provide a key communications mechanism for our members, providing a digital space designed to foster collaboration, streamline knowledge sharing, and support joint action across the network. The platform now boasts over 600 registered members and serves as a central hub for communication between different working groups, offering access to exclusive documents, resources, agendas, and a calendar of network related events. Members can follow working groups, stay updated on discussions, project developments, and funding calls, and explore the Projects Hub for partner opportunities, and practical tools to enhance their application for EU funding.



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NECSTOUR MEMBERS' NEWS

WALKING THROUGH CULTURE: PUGLIA'S SLOW TOURISM VISION



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Over the past decade, Puglia Region has redefined itself as a slow tourism destination by promoting lesser-known inland areas, small villages, and natural parks through the “Puglia Experience.” This approach connects culture, nature, and sustainable travel to boost off-season cultural and rural tourism. A key focus has been developing a regional network of cultural routes, supported by infrastructure improvements and stakeholder-driven governance. The creation of an Atlas of Cultural Routes ensures better coordination and increased visibility across the region.

To support walkers and slow travelers, Puglia launched POP (Pubblici Ostelli di Puglia), the first regional hostel network along major routes such as the Via Francigena and Via Appia. These hostels incorporate eco-friendly practices and reflect the local identity, while also acting as community hubs developed in partnership with local groups. Complemented by workshops and training, the initiative strengthens hospitality services and fosters sustainable tourism practices throughout the region.

THE COLOURS OF THE LODZKIE REGION: ECOLOGICAL TRIPS IN LODZKIE

For a decade, Lodzkie has offered residents free nature trips to the region's most stunning attractions. The initiative provides modern rail and coach transport, guided tours, landscape park visits, camping and nature talks. In 2025, the project marks its 10th year, with growing participation highlighting a rising interest in local exploration.

Aimed at strengthening regional tourism and environmental awareness, the programme promotes respect for Lodzkie's natural heritage. Recent additions include bicycle and kayak trips, commemorative tree plantings, and seedling giveaways. A cultural highlight of this year's edition is the participation of the Łódź Philharmonic, which will perform five outdoor concerts, celebrating the deep connection between nature and tradition.

Each trip integrates ecological education, highlighting climate care and sustainable travel. By offering direct access to nature, the project inspires residents to value and protect their local environment.



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SKÅNE'S MAP OF QUIETUDE EXPANDS WITH NEW SERENE SPOTS



Photo: Tobias Nydesjö

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After a successful first year, the Map of Quietude campaign continues to grow, attracting increasing interest both domestically and internationally, including in media such as Berliner Zeitung and among visitors seeking tranquility. The Map of Quietude is a curated guide to Skåne's most peaceful locations, places where visitors can unwind, disconnect, and enjoy silence and natural beauty. Ahead of autumn 2025, an enhanced version of the map will launch, featuring a refreshed visual identity new formats aimed to deepen visitor engagement while also adding ten new sites, expanding the map to 26 locations across Skåne. The campaign aims to meet the rising demand for calm travel experiences while promoting sustainable tourism. By highlighting lesser-known destinations, it eases pressure on busy sites and supports local communities and businesses across the region.

SOUTH LIMBURG WELCOMES TWO NEW WINE HUBS IN CROSS-BORDER TOURISM PROJECT

The Interreg Flanders–Netherlands project Wijnstraat has gained new momentum with the addition of two wine hubs in South Limburg: Watersley in Sittard and Wijndomein D'Hunes in St. Geertruid. This cross-border initiative promotes sustainable wine tourism across the region, connecting Dutch and Belgian wine landscapes.

Watersley, located in a historic monastery on the edge of the South Limburg hills, is an international sports campus that blends heritage, nature, and innovation. Its vineyard, historic wine cellar, and tasting room make it a unique entry point to the region's wine culture.

Wijndomein D'Hunes is a well-established local winery rooted in the Mergelland landscape. As a new wine hub, it aims to share the passion and quality of South Limburg's winemaking tradition. Wijnstraat links four wine regions through a long-distance cycling route and a network of seven wine hubs, promoting tourism across borders. The project runs through 2027 with support from the ERDF and partners.



©Wine estate D'Hunes

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2027 MILLENNIUM OF THE BIRTH OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR



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In 2027, Europe will come together for the millennium of the birth of William the Conqueror, beginning a year of widespread celebrations showcasing the Norman influence across the continent. Initiated by Normandy Regional Council, the year long programme will highlight the vast and lasting impact of Norman history throughout Europe.

The celebration will unite countries historically connected to the Normans and aims to strengthen European cooperation through culture, tourism, education, and heritage.

The programme will feature large-scale public events, academic conferences, artistic collaborations, youth-focused educational projects, and new eco-conscious tourism offerings. It is designed to be both ambitious and sustainable, encouraging local initiatives while fostering European unity.

The Norman legacy shaped medieval Europe's political, legal, and cultural landscapes and can continue to be seen today. In 2027, this shared history will be brought to life across borders, celebrating a people whose influence still resonates today.

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The next NewsTour will be out in November, please forward any articles for inclusion by 18 November to communication@necstour.eu