LIFE TOUR4CLIMA

GOVERNANCE FOR CLIMATE ACTION IN TOURISM

Governance criteria for regional climate action in the European tourism sector

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global tourism sector is a primary driver of economic wealth but remains highly vulnerable to the environmental degradation it helps to create. While international strategies like the Glasgow Declaration establish concrete climate mitigation targets, and national and regional governments elaborate tourism climate action plans, there is a clear need to focus on improving implementation. In this report, we focus specifically on this implementation at the sub-national level.

This report—developed within the framework of the LIFE TOUR4CLIMA project—analyses how to improve the underlying **governance frameworks of regional destinations**, providing an **actionable roadmap to help public administrations execute coordinated climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in the field of tourism**.

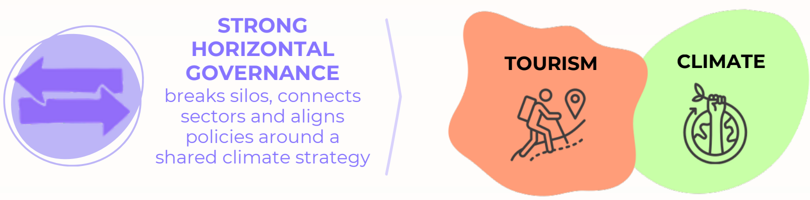
The findings, insights, and **checklists** compiled in this report are derived from qualitative primary and secondary research across European front-runner territories, heavily supported by the institutional knowledge network of NECSTouR. The research evaluates strategies, regulatory instruments, and governance innovations across a diverse **geographical sample,** including Scotland, the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Catalonia, Skåne, Flanders, Normandy, Valencia, Ireland, Centre-Val de Loire, and Finland. To anchor the analytical frameworks in operational reality, **18 semi-structured technical interviews** were conducted with senior destination practitioners, public officials, climate policy experts, civil society representatives, and environmental academics.

The report organises lessons learned and successful regional climate action criteria into three main structural pillars of intervention:

1. Horizontal coordination (breaking administrative silos)

Successful regional models transition to executive leadership groups that treat climate action as a core priority. Tourism is legally embedded in regional economic strategies alongside energy, mobility, and water departments to co-create policy through:

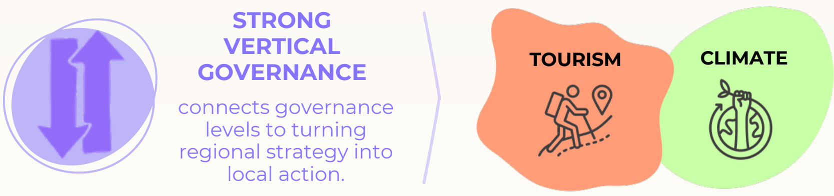
- **Integrating mandatory climate criteria** directly into core administrative checkpoints, such as public procurement, licensing, and regional tenders.
- **Establishing cross-departmental working groups to co-design shared solutions** for complex, systemic issues that cross ministerial lines.
- **Shifting performance evaluation** away from absolute visitor numbers toward responsible indicators that track seasonal spread, wider geographic distribution, and local economic value.



2. Vertical alignment (synchronizing regional vision with local action)

Rather than acting as distant regulators, regional authorities serve as capacity providers for local DMOs and SMEs, ensuring regional strategies are operationally realistic on the ground through:

- **Providing free, unified digital toolkits**—including carbon calculators and step-by-step pathways—to lower the barrier to entry and prevent fragmented efforts.
- **Deploying structured personal mentorship and coaching programs** through intermediate bridging organisations like provincial boards or business chambers.
- **Securing the destination's "social license"** by formally integrating resident groups and civil society into strategic forums, prioritising community liveability over tourist volume.



3. Operational enablers (data, finance, and technical capacity)

To turn plans into execution, regional administrations must build and sustain the practical machinery required to manage resources effectively:

- **Knowledge alliances**: Partnering with local universities to deploy territory-specific carbon and water footprint methodologies, focusing on actionable indicators that guide investment.
- **Internal expertise**: Professionalising tourism bodies by directly embedding climate specialists into core teams and using internal environmental agencies for staff training, reducing dependency on external consultants.
- **Soft governance**: Cultivating relational intelligence and soft skills to build voluntary agreements with transport providers where the tourism body lacks direct regulatory authority.
- **Innovative finance**: Establishing financial one-stop shops for green grants, launching visitor incentive programs that reward low-carbon mobility, and utilising dedicated tourism taxes strictly to fund climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration.

In conclusion, governance defines how a destination structurally "thinks" and "acts." While subnational administrations cannot on their own alter global macroeconomic forces or international travel trends, they possess the institutional levers necessary to manage localized risks and build systemic resilience. By systematically assessing and upgrading their horizontal, vertical, and operational structures against the criteria detailed in this report, European regional authorities can change tourism from an environmental burden into a positive activity that supports local recovery, community well-being, and long-term ecological health.

INTRODUCTION

The global tourism sector operates in a clear contradiction: it is a primary driver of economic wealth but remains highly vulnerable to the environmental damage it creates. In fact, **tourism-related emissions account for around 8.8% of global GHG emissions** (including direct, indirect, and supply chain emissions) [1]. In the Mediterranean basin and Southern Europe, this vulnerability has transitioned from a future risk to a present reality, characterised by coastal erosion, extreme heat events, and chronic water scarcity.

While international frameworks—such as the **Glasgow Declaration**—provide the necessary strategic ambition, a persistent implementation gap remains across multiple governance levels. Climate action plans frequently exist on paper, yet destinations repeatedly struggle to translate these strategies into operational reality. Furthermore, while previous projects have focused on how to design and draft these climate action plans for the tourism sector, the current challenge is making them work [3, 4 and 5].

This report, elaborated in the context of the **LIFE TOUR4CLIMA project**, addresses this bottleneck by focusing on the governance framework, which we define as the "structural DNA" of a destination. **Governance determines the fundamental instructions for how an organisation "thinks" and "acts."** Without a robust governance structure, climate policies often become fragmented, siloed, or purely symbolic.

Scope, boundaries, and practical nature of this report

This report focuses on the mechanisms of tourism governance. While a well-designed institutional framework is a necessary step for change, it does not operate in a vacuum. Current trends show that even as individual tourism businesses improve their processes and lower their own carbon footprints, the total number of tourists keeps growing [6]. Consequently, although efficiency improvements at an individual scale have a positive effect, overall resource use and total emissions continue to rise. On its own, regional governance cannot control the external forces that shape global travel, such as aviation fuel prices, international trade agreements, or shifting consumer behaviours. However, it provides the structure destinations need to navigate these outside factors, allowing them to better manage risks and adapt their climate strategies to the realities of the global market.

This document is neither a theoretical exercise nor a ranking of regional models. It is a practical guide to gather usable lessons from current real-world examples and help destinations move toward immediate action.

To ground these practical findings, Chapter 1 establishes a concise theoretical description outlining the contemporary debates shaping modern tourism policy. It contextualises three essential paradigms:

- **The core governance archetypes**: exploring how hierarchies, markets, networks, and communities affect decision-making power.
- **Multilevel governance**: analysing the mechanisms required to align supranational mandates with local execution.
- **Regenerative tourism**: shifting the institutional focus from merely minimising environmental harm to actively restoring living socio-ecological systems.

1 According to UN Tourism, a destination management/marketing organisation (DMO) is the leading organisational entity that may encompass various authorities, stakeholders, and professionals, and facilitates tourism sector partnerships toward a collective destination vision. DMO governance structures vary from a single public authority to a public/private partnership model, with a key role in initiating, coordinating, and managing activities such as implementing tourism policies, strategic planning, product development, promotion and marketing, and convention bureau activities. The functions of the DMOs may vary from national to regional and local levels depending on the current and potential needs as well as on the decentralisation level of public administration. Not every tourism destination has a DMO [7].

Key governance pillars

To address the above-mentioned implementation gap, this report focuses on three structural pillars identified by the LIFE TOUR4CLIMA project as the challenges in current regional management:

1. Horizontal coordination mechanisms (breaking administrative silos)

A primary challenge is policy fragmentation, where tourism promotion and development often operate independently of climate strategies. This pillar focuses on integrating tourism into the regional economic strategy, ensuring it is a proactive architect in an ambitious climate policy alongside departments like environment, energy, and water.

2. Vertical alignment (synchronizing the vision with local action)

This pillar ensures that regional mandates are territorially diffused. It moves beyond top-down regulation toward a shared ecosystem of responsibility, linking regional authorities with local DMOs, the private sector, and civil society to ensure that decarbonization and adaptation are operationally realistic and maintain its "social license."

3. Operational enablers (data, funding, and training)

Building the concrete administrative machinery required to ensure data flows, channel funding innovatively to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Destination Management Organisations[1] (DMOs), and training deficits are addressed. These enabling mechanisms should seek that clear sustainability criteria are integrated into every spending decision.

While these three pillars are presented separately for analytical clarity, in practice they are mutually reinforcing. Horizontal coordination ensures that tourism is embedded in broader climate and economic policy; vertical alignment ensures that regional objectives translate into local action; and operational enablers provide the data, finance, and capacity needed to make implementation feasible. Consequently, weakness in any one pillar can significantly undermine the effectiveness of the whole governance system.

Methodology

The insights and checklist criteria developed in this report are based on both qualitative primary and secondary research. While the research focuses on sub-national and regional governance, it includes specific state-level practices (such as those from Ireland or Finland) because of their relevance and the exportability of their tools to regional frameworks. Rather than starting from a baseline of empty data, this report relies on the institutional knowledge accumulated by **NECSTouR** [2], enabling the identification of these good practices and facilitating direct contact with the relevant regional authorities and experts. As a leading network of European regional tourism authorities, NECSTouR has spent years driving destination management through three core pillars: the Governance Hub (which benchmarks territorial governance models and political engagement), the Tourism of Tomorrow Lab (which coaches destination managers on data-driven sustainability measurement), and the Climate Hub (the network's central platform for Glasgow Declaration alignment, tools, and climate action planning).

The selection of the **case studies — including Scotland, the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Catalonia, Skåne, Flanders, Normandy, Valencia, Ireland, Centre-Val de Loire, and Finland** — was based on European territories that have explicitly developed and deployed climate action plans specific to the tourism sector, pioneering carbon/water measurement actions, or that have excelled in best practices for climate mitigation and adaptation within the tourism domain. This research included a review of strategies, good practices, and documentation in these regions. To ground these findings in operational reality, we conducted 18 semi-structured technical interviews with experienced practitioners and experts representing diverse institutional backgrounds. This included governmental representatives from regional tourism bodies and DMOs across Europe, internationally renowned academics specialising in the governance-climate-tourism axis, civil society leaders focused on environmental protection, and technical consultants with direct experience implementing European climate-tourism initiatives. The interviews achieved a balanced geographical distribution across Northern, Southern, Atlantic, and Central Europe, capturing varied institutional capacities and climate vulnerabilities.

2 The network currently comprises 47 regional tourism authorities (NUTS I and II territorial levels) and 27 associate members (including universities, research institutes, and sustainable tourism business associations), spanning across 19 European countries.

The conversations followed a structured framework covering successful models of cooperation, operational workflows, and mitigating conflicting departmental interests.

To ensure robustness and co-creation, the **checklist criteria** were sent back to the interviewees and key technical experts for verification, and their technical feedback and refinements were incorporated into the final criteria. While this methodology provides deep operational insights, several limitations must be noted. First, the reliance on a targeted sample of **18 interviews** offers significant qualitative depth but cannot fully map the administrative nuances of every sub-national destination across Europe. Additionally, the sample is intentionally biased toward front-runner regions and territories connected to advanced networks like NECSTouR to capture good practices, which may underrepresent the challenges and resource constraints faced by other destinations that have not been identified.

Although non-NECSTouR entities—including nations like Ireland and Finland —were included to broaden the scope of the study, the research may still have left aside other advanced regional models, as well as less advanced regions that could provide critical insights for broader policy implementation. Finally, translating highly contextual regional political dynamics into a standardised, universally applicable checklist inherently requires simplification that may overlook local regulatory constraints.

Chapter 1

Mapping governance frameworks for regional climate action in tourism

The study of tourism policy and destination planning has undergone a transformation, shifting the focus from "government" - the exercise of formal authority - toward "governance," which emphasizes the relational and interdependent nature of public and private actors. To address the implementation gap identified in the LIFE TOUR4CLIMA project, it is essential to understand the theoretical foundations that frame how regional destinations coordinate their responses to the climate crisis. This chapter provides the conceptual background for the report by mapping the evolution of tourism governance from the classic archetypes to contemporary multilevel and restorative approaches.

1.1 The Core Archetypes of Governance

According to C. Michael Hall [8], governance is essentially the "culture of decision-making." To move toward a practical checklist of success criteria, we must first identify the theoretical background of existing policy models. Hall identifies four ideal types based on the relationship between state intervention and societal self-regulation:

Hierarchical: This is the traditional model of administration based on "command and control" through vertically integrated state structures. While often criticized for being rigid or slow, hierarchies remain essential for establishing the legal anchoring of climate mandates and ensuring compliance with climate laws.

Market-based: Driven by neoliberal philosophy, this model treats the market as the most efficient mechanism for resource allocation. In tourism, it relies on incentives, carbon taxes, and industry self-regulation. However, "market failures" are common in climate issues; when natural resources like water or coastal stability are treated as "free goods," the market fails to protect them, necessitating a shift back toward regulation or social intervention.

Networks: Often viewed as a "third way," network governance facilitates coordination through public-private partnerships and stakeholder dialogues. This model enables active interaction among diverse organisations and institutions in policymaking, helping mobilise resources for sectors like tourism that the state cannot manage alone. However, networks face accountability challenges—who is responsible when a target is missed? —and power asymmetries where larger players may dominate the agenda.

Community-based: This approach advocates decentralised governance closer to residents. It emphasises direct participation and "social license," positioning host communities as autonomous decision-makers rather than passive recipients of tourism's effects. It relies on social capital and local knowledge to build resilience.

1.2 Multilevel Governance: integrating scales and actors

Multilevel Governance addresses the challenge of fragmented authority, recognising that no single level of government holds the complete capacity to tackle the climate crisis alone. Rather than a rigid top-down hierarchy, multilevel governance operates as a "web of relationships" whose distinct dimensions link supranational visions with local execution [9]. A core function of this framework is to reconcile the disconnect between central policy goals and local implementation while mitigating "horizontal fragmentation," where sectoral agencies (such as transport and environment) operate in silos. Within this architecture, regional authorities serve as strategic hubs and are tasked with translating broad national climate and sustainability mandates into territorial action plans [6]. Ultimately, the success of multilevel governance depends on its "institutional fit," ensuring that mandates, funding, and monitoring mechanisms are coordinated across all levels. In this light, regional and supralocal governments are increasingly seen as capacity providers that help smaller municipalities and local actors overcome resource constraints and adopt policies such as carbon accounting or the circular economy [10].

1.3 Toward a Regenerative Paradigm

The most recent shift affecting debates about tourism governance theory reflects an evolution that expands the traditional scope of "sustainability" into **"regeneration"** (actively restoring living systems). Rather than viewing them as opposing or alternative pathways, both frameworks act as complementary directions within a broader transition away from business-as-usual models that continue to degrade ecosystems. While sustainability secures long-term viability by safeguarding resources, regenerative tourism builds upon this foundation, reframing the sector as a proactive contributor to the renewal of communities, cultures, and ecosystems. Regenerative governance views destinations not as industrial machines for profit, but as living socio-ecological systems [11]. This restorative shift is increasingly viewed through a **"place-based" approach**, which adapts interventions to the unique social, cultural, and environmental contexts of specific localities, ensuring that transformation emerges from local dynamics. Governance, therefore, becomes a process of aligning the aspirations of local communities with tourism development, ensuring the industry acts as a vehicle for community empowerment rather than a catalyst for its displacement, moving from impact minimisation toward active restoration and flourishing [11].

1.4 Moving from theory to actionable frameworks

This document does not explicitly advocate for a single theoretical model. In practice, the complexity of climate adaptation and mitigation means that each destination will need to draw on different aspects of these models—for instance, using hierarchical regulation for legal mandates, market incentives for innovation, and networks for stakeholder coordination. However, the analysis of the European regions included in this study shows that while **administrative cultures** vary, the most effective responses to the implementation gap occur when regions move, at least partially, from rigid hierarchies or pure market-based approaches toward networked and community-based models. To ground this theoretical evolution, this report intends to complement, align and build upon major baseline agendas, including the global standards of the GSTC Destination Criteria[12], the commitments of the Glasgow Declaration[13], the strategic milestones outlined in the EU Transition Pathway for Tourism [14] and the Urban Agenda for the EU Sustainable Tourism Partnership [15], alongside broader climate adaptation and resilience frameworks. While these existing frameworks define what strategic targets, sustainability standards, and climate goals destinations must achieve, they often leave an operational gap regarding how regional administrations can structurally deliver them. This report seeks to complement them by focusing on the underlying **governance capacity**, institutional designs, and practical implementation mechanisms required to translate these international mandates into local reality. The checklists provided at the end of the following chapters are designed as frameworks for reflection, helping regional authorities audit their current setups and navigate their own transitions from drafting plans to coordinated, real-world execution.

Flanders, 2025

Chapter 2

Establishing horizontal climate governance within regional tourism

Horizontal governance represents the ability of a region to break down administrative silos and treat climate action not as a departmental "extra," but as a transversal pillar of the regional economy. Our analysis of regions reveals that successful horizontal integration is rarely achieved through formal committees alone. Instead, it requires a combination of practical coordination units, shared technical language, and the integration of climate criteria into standard administrative processes like procurement and budgeting. This integration must come from a unified regional strategy where climate action is the overarching priority and tourism is explicitly recognised among the key sectors—such as industry, mobility, and energy—where climate must be integrated. This creates a bidirectional process: while tourism departments must align their decision-making with the regional climate framework, climate policy departments must incorporate tourism—often overlooked despite its economic weight—into their strategic processes. In this framework, the tourism body translates broad regional climate goals into sector-specific actions while feeding essential data back into the "parent" strategy. Of course, this transversal dialogue must maintain strict coherence with other departments, specifically energy, mobility, water, and waste management.

2.1 Lessons learned

I. Integrating tourism and climate goals into the overarching economic framework

The analysis of European regions provides insights into how to dismantle horizontal silos. A primary lesson is that strategic alignment must be legally and operationally anchored in the region's economic core. Climate goals cannot exist as isolated environmental targets; they must be mainstreamed into the fundamental mission of the administration. This means that the region's primary economic development plans must serve as the "parent" strategy for all sectoral policies, while incorporating ambitious climate goals.

In **Scotland**, the national tourism strategy, **Scotland Outlook 2030**, is aligned with the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET). This ensures that the official tourism body (VisitScotland) and other economic agencies, such as Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland, work under a unified mandate to deliver a wellbeing economy. By placing the transition to a net-zero economy at the heart of this shared economic strategy, the region achieves a coherence that prevents common inconsistencies where tourism promotion goals might otherwise clash with Scotland's legally binding target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 [16].

II. Transitioning from consultative committees to executive leadership groups

Another fundamental lesson is that governance must transition from "formal consultation" to "active leadership groups." Administrative structures often limit themselves to committees where departments merely inform one another of actions (consultation), rather than making joint strategic decisions (leadership). An **active leadership group is characterised by executive capacity**, meaning that members have a mandate to modify their own department's plans to align with the common strategy. This transition also requires shared responsibility, where the success of climate goals is attributed to the whole group rather than being assigned solely to the environment department. Furthermore, direct sectoral presence is essential, ensuring that every sector with significant economic weight and emissions has a technical voice at the table to guarantee that all measures are realistic and effective. In this context, tourism must have a strong, dedicated voice; as a major economic driver that both contributes to and is highly vulnerable to climate change, it must be a proactive architect of the strategies it is expected to implement.

In **Andalusia**, regional governance is articulated through the **Interdepartmental Commission on Climate Change**, created by Decree 44/2020 [17] to coordinate and monitor the Andalusian Climate Action Plan (PAAC) across different ministries. The Andalusian tourism sector holds a permanent, direct seat on this Interdepartmental Commission, while Law 8/2018 [18] explicitly declares tourism a strategic area among the region's top ten priorities. The PAAC is further complemented by a dedicated sectoral strategy, the Climate Action Commitment in Tourism, launched in 2025.

This administrative structure of interdepartmental commissions is a common feature in other Spanish regions seeking to coordinate climate action transversally.

In the case of the **Canary Islands,** Law 6/2022 [20] on climate change and energy transition established the Canary Islands Commission for Climate Action and Energy. On an operational level, a Canary Islands Technical Commission on Climate Change has been constituted. **Turismo de Canarias** specifically requested to be included in these coordination efforts not only as a sector needing adaptation—as originally foreseen—but also as an actor in mitigation.

Catalonia has the **Interdepartmental Commission on Climate Change**, which was established by Law 16/2017 on climate change [19]. This law expressly includes tourism among the sectors that must adapt to climate impacts and mitigate their emissions, and the region has developed a specific Climate Action Plan for the Tourism Sector. Despite this legal recognition, the Commission only includes one representative per ministry. Since tourism is grouped inside the Ministry of Business and Labour alongside Industry, the sector lacks a direct seat at the climate decision-making table. The Tourism Department is now requesting direct inclusion in the Commission.

III. Embedding climate requirements into mandatory administrative gateways

On the other hand, climate action reaches its full potential when it ceases to be managed through isolated sustainability programs and instead becomes part of mandatory administrative "gateways." While independent programs are often voluntary and vulnerable to budget cuts, the insertion of climate criteria into core processes—such as public procurement, tenders, permits, etc. —ensures that environmental policy is executed automatically in every spending decision.

Turismo de Canarias incorporates sustainability criteria into all its tenders. An example was the recent hiring of a media agency, where a Sustainability Plan linked to the object of the contract was required, demonstrating that even in purely promotional areas, sustainability is a requirement for the award.

IV. Establish ad hoc task forces to resolve systemic issues

However, some governance problems are significantly more challenging than others due to a **structural lack of mandate**, particularly regarding transport and mobility. This is a key bottleneck given that transport is, by far, the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions within the tourism sector [1]. Many DMOs express the same constraint: 'I cannot stop planes or change rail networks.' Because transport is the primary source of emissions but remains under the jurisdiction of separate ministries, DMOs must interpret their role accordingly.

As long as more courageous national and international regulatory frameworks and control mechanisms for these emissions are not effectively enacted, tourism bodies and DMOs will need to rely heavily on soft governance. In such contexts, DMOs can focus on their core competencies—communication, promotion and training—such as providing low-carbon info and promoting low-carbon options to tourists, while using this 'soft governance' (persuasion and voluntary agreements) to engage with airlines and airport authorities.

On the other hand, **systemic challenges**—such as decarbonising long-haul transport—cannot be solved by tourism departments in a vacuum. In this context, the establishment of dedicated, interministerial ad hoc working groups may be a good option to align public policy, industrial capacity, and economic incentives.

In the **Canary Islands,** a working group is being established between the departments of Ecological Transition, Economy, and Tourism to tackle a complex challenge that exceeds the scope of any single administrative area, such as the development and implementation of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF). This is particularly strategic given that the Canary Islands account for approximately 17% of Spain's total kerosene consumption [21].

V. Harmonizing departmental performance through shared technical metrics

Another takeaway for horizontal governance is the need for joint targets and shared KPIs across departments. Currently, departments often operate with conflicting metrics; while Tourism traditionally seeks growth in volume, Environment seeks reduction in impact. Without shared accountability and clarity on "who does what," actors often "look up" or "look down" the hierarchy, leaving responsibility for systemic issues—like Scope 3 emissions and aviation—unassigned.

For horizontal integration to be effective, it requires a "shared technical language" where every administrative branch is evaluated based on the same definition of success.

VisitScotland provides a pioneering example of this approach through its **Measurement Framework**, which prioritises responsible growth rather than just traditional KPIs (such as simple visitor numbers) with a focus on responsible growth. This framework ensures that all departments—from marketing and events to infrastructure investment—work under a unified mandate structured around four strategic pillars known as the "4S" Outcomes:

- *Spread (Distribution)*: This metric tracks the geographic and seasonal distribution of tourism. Instead of just seeking "more" visitors, the goal is to spread them across rural areas and outside of peak summer seasons, reducing environmental and social pressure on some locations.
- Spend (Value): Shifting the strategy from "volume to value," this pillar prioritises growing the total value of the visitor economy. It encourages visitors to stay longer and spend more locally, thereby optimising the economic return for every unit of carbon emitted.
- Sustainability: This pillar explicitly measures progress toward Net Zero targets. It includes indicators for the sector's carbon footprint, the adoption of climate action plans by businesses, and the conservation of natural and cultural assets. By 2045, the target includes all Scope 3 emissions, ensuring no department ignores the broader supply chain.
- Satisfaction: This focuses not only on visitor satisfaction and the quality of the visitor experience but also resident and community satisfaction. Successful tourism governance needs to take into account both elements.

By integrating these "4S" outcomes into the Corporate Plan 2025-2028, a marketing officer is no longer evaluated solely on "clicks" or "arrivals," but on whether those clicks generate sustainable spread and spend [22].

2.2 Checklist of horizontal governance criteria

Following the lessons learned, here is a checklist of criteria to evaluate and improve horizontal governance for climate action in tourism.

Political framework and institutional design

This group focuses on the legal and organisational foundation required to give tourism substantial weight within the regional climate agenda.

- ☑ ***Regional climate strategy***: Does a "parent" strategy exist where climate action is the overarching priority for all sectors (industry, mobility, energy, and tourism)?
- ☑ ***Explicit sectoral recognition***: Is tourism officially recognised in climate laws as a key sector for both mitigation and adaptation?
- ☑ ***Executive mandate***: Do inter-ministerial commissions have the power to take joint strategic decisions and modify departmental plans, rather than just "informing" each other?

Representation and operational coordination

This block addresses how the tourism sector is integrated into day-to-day governance and decision-making processes.

- ☑ ***Direct sectoral presence***: Does the tourism body have a direct, dedicated seat at the climate decision-making table (rather than being represented by a "third party" like a general Ministry of Business)?
- ☑ ***Influence in the "parent" strategy:*** Does the tourism body/DMO act as a proactive architect and implementer of the shared regional strategy?
- ☑ ***Ad hoc working groups***: Are there specialised, cross-departmental task forces designed to resolve complex, systemic bottlenecks that intersect tourism and climate action?
- ☑ ***Data sharing***: Does the climate policy body actively incorporate tourism data into its core strategic processes?

Management tools and transversal action

This section includes the practical mechanisms, core competencies, and administrative levers that the tourism sector can activate to drive change.

- ☑ ***Mandatory climate criteria***: Are climate requirements integrated into core administrative "gateways" such as public procurement and permits in regional tourism bodies and DMOs?
- ☑ ***Persuasion role***: In areas where the tourism body/DMO lacks a direct mandate (like aviation or rail), does it have a strategy to act as a convener and influencer?
- ☑ ***Communication and education***: Are the tourism body/DMO core competencies— marketing and communication—being used to promote low-carbon options to tourists?

New metrics and success evaluation

This category brings together the criteria oriented toward redefining impact measurement.

- ☑ ***Value over volume:*** Have traditional KPIs (visitor numbers) been replaced with value-based metrics (Spend)?
- ☑ ***Geographic and seasonal distribution***: Are there specific metrics to track the spread of visitors to reduce pressure on specific locations?
- ☑ ***Holistic sustainability***: Do metrics include Scope 3 emissions (such as international visitor transport) and the adoption of climate plans/certifications by private businesses?
- ☑ ***Social license***: Is the satisfaction of host communities a formal metric of success for the administration?

Chapter 3

Connecting tourism vertically from regional vision to local action

Vertical governance is the administrative capacity to coordinate a regional strategic vision with local objectives, ensuring that policies at every level of the hierarchy reinforce one another. This alignment is a necessity for reaching climate neutrality; without it, regions face administrative inconsistencies and a duplication of efforts that lead to stakeholder fatigue and systemic inefficiency. Rather than a simple enforcement of rules, effective vertical integration creates a shared ecosystem of responsibility. In this model, regional authorities transition from being distant regulators to becoming "enablers." Their role is to provide the global milestones, such as Net Zero targets, alongside the essential resources—data, standardised tools, and financial incentives—that allow the rest of the sector to move forward. While national and regional tiers establish the broad framework, local destinations (DMOs), the private sector, and civil society associations act as the indispensable bridge to the ground. These **intermediate partners** hold the territorial intelligence and community trust that central authorities often lack. In an ideal ecosystem, the regional body provides the "blueprints"—standardised frameworks and methodologies for climate ambition—while local actors adapt and deploy these solutions to fit their specific environmental and social realities.

This functional partnership ensures that the regional strategy remains consistent across the territory while staying practical and relevant at the local level.

3.1 Lessons learned

I. Establishing a common framework and standardized toolkits

A primary lesson analysed in regions is the necessity of providing a common framework for tourism companies and local DMOs to improve their climate performance to avoid fragmented and redundant efforts. In the absence of a **centralised point of reference or one-stop shop** in the tourism sector, individual businesses and local destinations—particularly SMEs—frequently struggle in the transition towards sustainability when navigating a complex landscape of varying definitions, conflicting measurement tools, and multiple certification requirements. By establishing a common framework, regional and national authorities can lower the barrier to action. When the message is consistent, moves in the same direction, and utilises a shared set of tools, it becomes significantly easier to attract a larger number of businesses and local entities toward proactive climate performance.

The **Sustainable Travel Finland (STF)** program, developed by Visit Finland, stands as a global benchmark for this type of vertical alignment. Launched to help the industry respond to changing global demands, STF provides a systematic, 7-step pathway that guides tourism companies and destinations through the entire development process, from initial commitment to regular auditing and the awarding of a dedicated STF label.

- One of the program's greatest strengths is that it was not imposed top-down; it was built through continuous dialogue with the industry. By creating a shared understanding of what "sustainable tourism" actually means, Visit Finland aligned 1,500 users (businesses and destinations) under a single vision.
- STF provides a comprehensive digital platform, the STF Hub, which includes the Hiilikuri carbon footprint calculator, educational modules, and a progress-tracking dashboard. By providing these tools for free, the government seeks to ensure that even the smallest businesses can act without the need for expensive external consultants or having to search and identify reliable methodologies.
- When 93 Finnish organisations signed the Glasgow Declaration, they were not starting from zero; they used the pre-existing STF tools and terminology. This allowed Finland to produce one of the most coherent and systematic national climate action plans recognised by UN Tourism.
- The program facilitates an informal, voluntary network of signatories who meet online every six weeks to exchange best practices. They use STF's data views to coach businesses locally, providing training that reinforces the unified message and ensures everyone is using the same "toolbox" [23].

Fáilte Ireland's Climate Action Programme model provides direct, personal support to help businesses move from national goals to real-world action.

- The programme provides businesses with a dedicated sustainability advisor for three years. This advisor moves beyond general info to co-create locally action plans.
- By framing carbon reduction as a strategy to cut costs and improve reputation, Fáilte Ireland aligns the national 2050 net-zero target with the immediate financial survival of the tourism sector. o Participation acts as a prerequisite for deeper support. Being part of the programme provides a path to capital grants and green finance.
- Through a formal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), the programme ensures that the partnership between the authority and the business is a long-term commitment rather than a temporary sustainability project [24].

II. Co-creating policy through structured forums with multiple actors

However, experience shows that providing communication tools and toolkits is not always enough to create real change across the whole system. Vertical governance needs more than just a way to share information; it requires a **formal space where everyone works together to achieve results**. Regional governments often find it hard to get businesses to support climate policies if those policies feel like an extra burden. By bringing together top government leaders—like a Business or Trade Minister—directly with industry CEOs, regions can align national climate goals with the practical, day-to-day challenges of running a business.

Scotland's Tourism & Hospitality Industry Leadership Group (ILG) was established in November 2022 as a collaborative partnership between the private, public, and third sectors. The group meets quarterly and provides a collaborative strategic forum that enables leaders from across the industry to engage with each other, government and its agencies.

Members are appointed as individuals and not as representatives of companies or organisations. Separately, nine organisations are also represented on the group, including VisitScotland and Scottish Government.

The purpose and remit of the ILG is:

- To provide strategic direction to drive Scotland's ambition to be the world leader in 21st-century tourism.
- To champion the national tourism strategy, Scotland Outlook 2030, a key component of the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET).
- To provide strategic leadership to help grow the economic value and enhance the benefits of tourism, while delivering the very best for visitors, businesses, and communities.

In addition, the ILG will:

- Advocate the core principles of Scotland Outlook 2030 such as Responsible Tourism and Fair Work practices.
- Engage collaboratively with existing, nationally recognised tourism and hospitality working groups on the delivery of Scotland Outlook 2030 [25].

III. Integrating resident voices to protect the destination's social license

Another key observation across several case studies is the risk of marginalising **civil society and local residents** in these high-level forums. Authentic place-based governance requires the structural inclusion of representatives from civil society and local resident groups in these forums to enhance the destination's "social license". Regional administrations often face resistance to climate or tourism policies when residents perceive them as favouring economic volume over local quality of life. The idea is to transform climate action from a political mandate into a shared community project.

The "**Skåne – Where Tourism Matters**" strategy redefines tourism, moving it from a final objective to a societal tool for regional development. This resident-centric approach utilises recurrent feedback from residents to ensure tourism activities protect the region's quality of life. By closely monitoring resident sentiment—currently 50% positive—the DMO maintains a balance between industry growth and community needs. Through this lens, tourism is framed as a "place-making" activity that contributes to collective well-being. To operationalise this, Skåne empowers decentralised decision-making by establishing a "Knowledge Node" that shares climate data and residents' perceptions with local municipalities. This vertical coherence was further strengthened by a two-year capacity-building program designed to raise climate literacy among local officials and ensure a consistent sustainability message across the entire regional hierarchy [27].

VISITFLANDERS has pioneered a resident-centric governance model through its **Travel to Tomorrow** vision, which shifts the focus toward the positive power of tourism to help a destination flourish. This strategy moves beyond economic volume to prioritise liveability and the flourishing of residents, entrepreneurs, and visitors alike. Flanders has conducted systematic resident surveys for over 10 years to monitor the impact of tourism on local communities. Their sustainability plan is built on six structural pillars, including liveability and inclusiveness, addressing residents' concerns such as overtourism and environmental quality. Furthermore, they maintain a dedicated team for inclusive and social tourism [26].

IV. Reaching local businesses and DMOs through preexisting networks

On the other hand, a high-level government office is often too structurally removed from the day-to-day operations of SMEs and local DMOs to generate meaningful change. Consequently, successful vertical governance relies on the use of **bridging organisations**—such as provincial boards, business associations, and local tourism offices—to create the necessary conditions for sustainability standards to cascade effectively to the individual business level.

VISITFLANDERS utilises a coaching model delivered through local partners rather than centralised management. By "training the trainers" at the provincial level, they ensure sustainability advice for local bed and breakfasts is locally adapted and practical, such as identifying regional suppliers for carbon-free infrastructure.

Diputació de Barcelona (**Catalonia**) establishes a four-year strategic framework with eleven county-level tourism bodies. This innovative model goes beyond simple promotion by integrating coordinated planning and resource allocation around shared objectives. The 2024–2027 cycle specifically focuses on transforming these counties into Smart Tourist Destinations. Using this strategy, the Diputació ensures that even small destinations have the infrastructure to improve their competitiveness [28].

Canary Islands, 2026

V. Establishing a policy mix of regulation, incentives, and technical support

Another lesson from the analysed regions is that vertical governance cannot rely on a single approach; instead, it requires a **diversified and tailored policy mix** to move the entire sector toward climate neutrality. Regional governments should make use of the full range of mechanisms at their disposal: informational tools to build capacity and awareness, financial incentives to lower the economic barrier to entry, and regulatory frameworks to reach scale. By combining these tools, authorities create a framework where businesses and DMOs receive the advice and technical support needed to identify sustainable solutions, the funding required to implement them, and the final push from regulations to make these sustainable practices the new standard for everyone and reach scale.

While voluntary programs are essential for early adopters, large-scale shifts eventually require a regulatory push. The **Canary Islands** are integrating climate action directly into their legal framework via a future compulsory Carbon Footprint Registry. This will make it mandatory for all tourism establishments— including vacation rentals—to measure and register their emissions. However, to ensure the transition remains inclusive, the region links this legal requirement to free technical tools and digital calculators provided by the tourism office.

Catalonia provides a model that combines technical tools with direct support to scale climate action, supported by the **Life TOur4Clima project**. In the context of this project, Tourism of Catalonia aims to mobilise at least 400 tourist accommodations to evaluate their climate preparation through a phased "Engagement Plan" that uses specific messages and incentives to reach different types of businesses. Participants use digital tools like Turismo Resiliente **[29]** and a dedicated CO2-calculator to establish a baseline for vulnerability and carbon footprints. To move beyond data collection, the project provides personalised technical mentorship to a set of establishments, helping them apply specific mitigation solutions as well as energy and water efficiency [30].

3.2 Checklist of vertical governance criteria

Following the lessons learned, here is a checklist of criteria to evaluate and improve vertical governance for climate action in tourism.

Common frameworks and operational toolkits.
This group focuses on the centralised resources, clear pathways, and formal commitments needed to lower the barrier to action for businesses and DMOs and prevent fragmented efforts across the territory.

- ☑ ***One-stop shops***: Is there a central point of reference that provides a consistent set of definitions, measurement tools, and certifications to prevent fragmentation and lower the barrier to action for local destinations and SMEs?
- ☑ ***Free digital toolkits***: Are carbon footprint calculators, vulnerability assessments, and educational modules provided for free to lower the barrier for SMEs?
- ☑ ***Step-by-step pathways***: Does the system provide a clear, systematic pathway (e.g., a 7-step process) from initial commitment to auditing and labelling?
- ☑ ***Dedicated advice***: Is there a mechanism for long-term (e.g., three-year) personal mentorship or coaching to help businesses assess baselines and create action plans?
- ☑ ***Formal partnership agreements***: Are there structured collaboration agreements (such as Memorandums of Agreement) between authorities and businesses to ensure long-term commitment?

Leadership and co-created policy
This section groups the formal co-creation spaces together with strategic alignment outputs, ensuring high-level goals connect directly to industry and local realities.

- ☑ ***Collaborative strategic forums***: Is there a formal space (e.g., an Industry Leadership Group) where top government ministers, public agencies, industry CEOs and relevant civil society organisations engage directly?
- ☑ ***Ambitious climate goals***: Does the forum allow leaders to align tourism goals directly with ambitious climate goals?
- ☑ ***Consensus approach***: Was the framework built through dialogue with the industry and civil society organisations?

Resident-centric destination governance and transparency
This block links structural accountability, openness, and civil society inclusion with the long-term protection of the destination's social license and community quality of life.

- ☑ ***Inclusion of civil society***: Are representatives from resident groups and civil society formally included in high-level tourism and climate forums? Transparent decision-making: Are summaries of strategic discussions in these forums published online to foster public trust and accountability?
- ☑ ***Resident monitoring***: Are systematic resident surveys conducted to monitor the impact of tourism on local quality of life and "social license"?
- ☑ ***Community well-being***: Do the strategic pillars prioritise liveability and community well-being over simple economic or visitor volume?

Network bridging and balanced policy support
This final group addresses how the vertical architecture functions on the ground, utilising intermediate organisations and a balanced blend of public tools to ensure compliance without exclusion.

- ☑ ***Reciprocal responsibility***: Does the governance model create a shared ecosystem of responsibility between the region and local actors in the tourism area?
- ☑ ***Intermediate bridging***: Are local DMOs and other intermediate organisations effectively used and recognised as bridges for implementation of the tourism policy?
- ☑ ***Capacity building***: Are there programs in place to raise climate literacy among local officials to ensure a consistent message across the entire regional hierarchy?
- ☑ ***Diversified mix of policy support***: Does the region use a combination of informational tools, financial incentives and regulations? Are mandatory requirements (e.g., carbon registries) balanced with free technical support to ensure small actors are not left behind by the cost of compliance?

Chapter 4

Enabling governance mechanisms for data sharing, financial access and technical capacity

Effective climate transition requires more than just alignment; it demands a governance model designed to empower and sustain the administrative machinery. If horizontal and vertical governance provide the foundations of the system, specific mechanisms are needed to ensure that vital resources—data, targeted funding, and technical training—reach the destinations and SMEs where they can drive the most impact. Through these **enabling mechanisms**, administrations can overcome the systemic challenges currently hindering progress: the lack of standardised measurement and monitoring, the mismatch between available capital and local needs, and the technical skills deficit. Governance, in this context, is the practical mechanism that ensures, through the right partnerships, that data flows multidirectionally, financial resources are innovatively channelled, and climate literacy is internalised within the administration's day-to-day operational reality.

4.1 Lessons learned

Research and knowledge alliances as catalysts

A primary lesson for DMOs is that **partnering with academic and research institutions** is essential not only for accurate measurement but for generating the institutional trust required to lead a sector-wide transition. By collaborating with local universities, agencies can develop and certify specific methodologies for measuring carbon and water footprints that are adapted to their unique territorial realities. This scientific backing allows DMOs to speak a technical language—using data on efficiency, tonnage, and resource consumption—which resonates with other government departments and helps convince private businesses that sustainability is a competitive economic advantage. Furthermore, these partnerships enable the creation of scientifically grounded future scenarios and vulnerability assessments, ensuring that adaptation strategies are based on evidence.

The experience of **Visit València Foundation** demonstrates how academic and technical alliances can catalyse destination climate governance. The city relies on the Polytechnic University of Valencia to provide scientific evidence on long-term climate trends and to help draft the local climate action plan. This research-backed approach is embedded within an inclusive governance model which integrates the entire value chain—the business sector, local administration, academia, residents, and the third sector. Through this collaborative network, and within the framework of its 2025–2028 sustainability program, the foundation has designed a Tourism Climate Action Plan aligned with both the city's broader climate goals and the Glasgow Declaration, set to be presented shortly. To operationalise this strategy on the ground, Visit València established an alliance with the Valencia Water Foundation to apply verified organisational footprinting methodologies. This initiative made València the first city globally to measure and certify both its carbon and water footprints under ISO standards. To manage this data, the foundation developed FOCUS, a tourism intelligence system. Recently recognised by the UN Tourism International Network of Sustainable Observatories (INSTO) and powered by the Smart City València data platform, FOCUS integrates dynamic indicators and control dashboards across several dimensions of sustainability. Ultimately, this served as the foundation for the Tourism Green Pact, engaging over 150 local companies in voluntary commitments driven by the data from the FOCUS platform. This systemic alignment contributed significantly to València's recognition as European Green Capital 2024 [31, 32].

NECSTouR's Tourism of Tomorrow Lab (ToT Lab) is committed to empowering regional Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to systematically measure tourism's impact and support evidence-based decision-making, embedding sustainability into tourism policies and practices. At the core of this work is the Data Pathway, which provides a set of indicators covering the three dimensions of tourism sustainability. Through this framework, destinations can test and apply a common methodology and shared tools, contributing collectively to the Pathway's objectives. The Data Pathway also includes a dedicated module on destination carbon footprint measurement, bringing together the expertise of NECSTouR's Data, Climate Action and Governance Hubs. More broadly, ToT Lab supports DMOs in advancing key areas such as reducing tourism-related emissions and integrating sustainability into marketing, product development and mobility. As a result, destinations are encouraged to focus on a core set of actionable indicators, primarily linked to mobility and grounded in recognised statistical frameworks. In parallel, ToT Lab places strong emphasis on peer-to-peer exchange, enabling destinations to benchmark methodologies, identify challenges in data collection and interpretation, and co-develop solutions that support both technical implementation and policy decision-making. By promoting the principle of "Measurement as a Means, Not an End," ToT Lab fosters a practical, collaborative and action-oriented approach to tourism impact measurement across NECSTouR destinations [33].

II. Prioritizing pragmatic action in measurement

However, given the absence of globally recognized methodologies to measure destination-level emissions, successful models prioritize pragmatic, actionable data to guide policy and investment. A fundamental barrier remains the complexity of collecting and separating specific data for tourist transport and buildings. In this context, it is essential that technical and political leaders deeply understand the data they work with before requesting or collecting it. This practical approach values experimentation and the capacity to pilot and learn from uncertainty, rather than spending excessive resources on data collection without a clear pathway for its use. A common finding throughout the technical interviews was that successful administrations refuse to wait for complete or perfect data before launching concrete decarbonization initiatives.

III. Internalizing specialized expertise to bridge the climate literacy gap

Climate action is best performed when fully mainstreamed into tourism planning and promotional strategies, ensuring every decision aligns with sustainability goals. This integration is achieved by leveraging specialised agencies—such as those focused on energy, water, or climate change—to act as **internal trainers** for DMOs and tourism administrations/boards. It is increasingly recognised as preferable to use "in-house" experts from environmental and energy agencies to train tourism staff rather than outsourcing to external consultancies. Hiring consultants often leaves a destination without the internal capacity to manage long-term climate transitions. By relying on internal interdepartmental training, governments ensure that climate strategy remains within the administration's permanent logic.

In **Andalusia**, horizontal coherence was catalysed through the creation of a technical Regional Coordination Unit between the Tourism and Sustainability departments, formalised via a cross-departmental Protocol. This model includes "in-house" training programs where sustainability experts transfer technical knowledge on mitigation and adaptation directly to tourism staff. Andalusia has evolved this into the **Andalusian Commitment to Climate Action in Tourism**, which consolidates institutional support and promotes the development of specific climate adaptation indicators [34].

In **Flanders**, the transition toward regenerative tourism under the **Travel to Tomorrow** strategy has emphasised a long-term commitment to internalising expertise. Recognising that technical issues like carbon-free heating or energy mobility require specialised knowledge, Visit Flanders works in direct partnership with Flemish agencies specialised in energy and circularity. Rather than trying to duplicate this expertise, which is too technical, within the DMO, they maintain a "win-win" collaboration where energy experts help design financial calls to subsidise actions in these fields.

IV. Professionalizing tourism administrations through sustainability and environmental expertise

However, integrating specialized **sustainability expertise** into tourism departments is a strategic asset that strengthens administrative capacity. By incorporating profiles with a solid background in climate and environmental management, tourism administrations evolve from traditional promotionbased bodies into technical management organizations. This expertise allows tourism departments to speak the same language as their counterparts in Environment or Energy ministries, ensuring the sector's needs are effectively represented in regional climate strategies.

In line with this shift, most of the analysed regions have already begun incorporating specialised staff with backgrounds in environmental sciences and climate policy into their core teams.

V. Cultivating relational intelligence and soft governance skills

On the other hand, effective governance is deeply rooted in relational intelligence and "soft governance" capabilities. Because tourism departments often operate within larger governmental frameworks where they lack direct control over key domains—such as transport infrastructure, energy regulation, or waste management—their success depends on their **ability to act as influencers and strategic persuaders**. While technical knowledge transfer is vital, it is equally essential that these relational and soft governance capacities are proactively trained and promoted among internal staff. This relational approach requires leaders to identify the specific battles they can win and pivot their focus toward areas where they can exert the most meaningful influence within internal hierarchies. Furthermore, relational governance demands the flexibility of adaptive communication to translate climate action into the language of shifting political priorities. By framing sustainability through the lens of current mandates—such as economic growth, job creation, or competitive advantage—tourism departments remain trusted partners even when political cycles change. In this regard, effective training for internal teams should go beyond climate data to include these “soft governance” skills.

The experience of **Visit Finland** illustrates the power of relational governance. Because they lack the mandate to change national transport policy (which is managed by a separate ministry), they have pivoted toward voluntary strategic networks, generating strong relationships with ferry and train operators. This allows them to influence shifts toward decarbonization in these levers.

VI. Improving access to funding channels or climate incentives

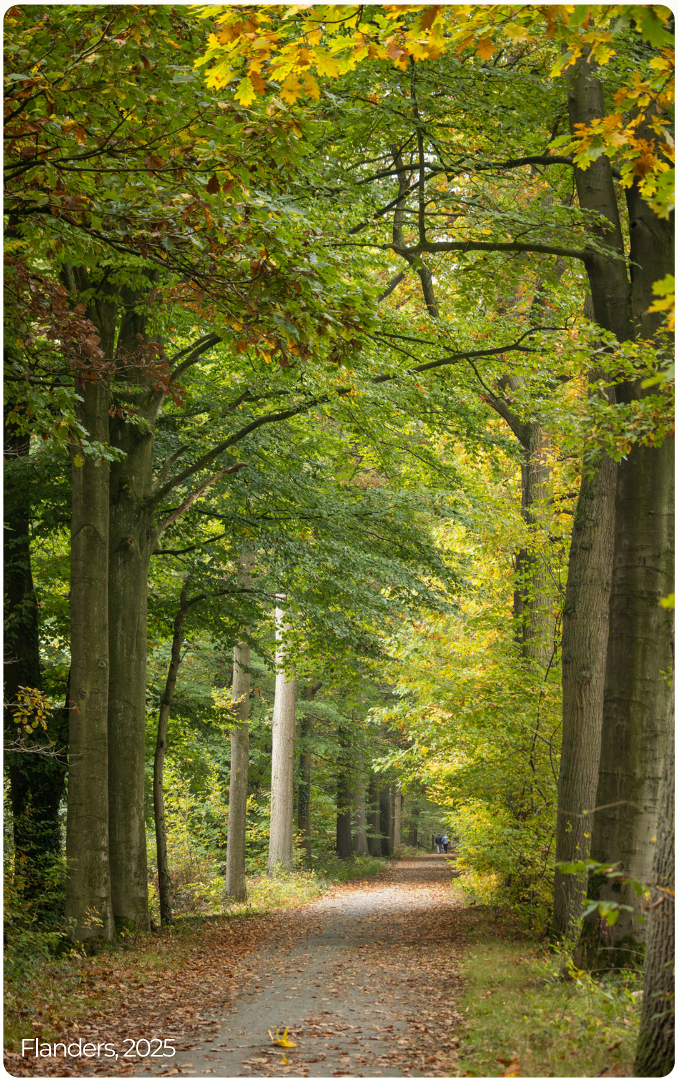
A major governance challenge resides in the disconnect between large-scale regional funding and local implementation. Enabling conditions are created when regional administrations act as a proactive financial bridge, identifying and channelling capital through "one-stop-shop" mechanisms that simplify access for SMEs and DMOs. This requires DMOs and tourism bodies to move beyond managing their own sectoral budgets; they must actively serve as **information hubs that collect and share the diverse incentives** offered by other departments, such as Energy, Environment, or Economy, making them easily available to tourism businesses. Furthermore, innovative financial governance looks for new ways to go beyond standard business subsidies. For instance, it explores how to directly reward tourists for choosing eco-friendly behaviours through the establishment of innovative partnerships.

The **Région Centre-Val de Loire** provides an example of how a common regional framework can facilitate the ecological transition of the private sector. Since 2021, the Region has partnered with the network of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCI) and the national ecological transition agency (ADEME) to offer individual and collective business support to over 150 tourism companies. The Region provides diagnosis and consultations to identify solutions combining economic efficiency with sustainable development, such as water flow regulators or low-GWP refrigeration equipment. The Region also acts as a bridge to funding, helping businesses access ADEME's Sustainable Tourism Fund, European grants, or tax credits [35].

Normandy offers an example of innovative financial governance by shifting the incentive structure directly toward the visitor to reward low-carbon mobility. Launched in March 2024 through a partnership between the **Normandy Tourism Board and transport providers** like SNCF Nomad Train, this initiative targets the 77% of tourism emissions linked to traveller movements:

- More than 150 sites, museums, and activity providers offer a preferential rate—at least a 10% discount—for visitors who present a public transport ticket or proof of arrival by bicycle.
- This mechanism was co-created through long-term collaboration with transport institutions, leading to affordable "Discovery Passes" that offer unlimited weekend trips for €20.
- While participating sites incur a loss of profit from the discounts, the Tourism Board compensates by providing a preferential regional communication plan, resulting in significant media coverage and increased visibility for responsible sites [36].

Beyond standard subsidies, a key lesson for regional governance is the implementation of **dedicated tourism taxes** designed specifically to offset the negative externalities of the industry. To be effective, these funds must be managed through governance structures that ensure the right allocation and use—meaning the tax is strictly used to compensate for the social and environmental impacts of tourism, rather than simply fuelling further promotion. In this regard, regions should focus on compensation activities—such as ecosystem restoration or local community support—to ensure a net-positive impact. Furthermore, the management commission should be broadened to include representatives from Environment and Social Wellbeing departments, ensuring that fund allocation aligns with regional climate goals and the destination's social license. Equally important is the participation of the tourism department or agency in the decision-making bodies of broader regional environmental taxes. By holding a seat on these commissions, the tourism sector can ensure that resources collected through general environmental levies are also channelled back into the tourism ecosystem to support its specific transition and adaptation needs.


Flanders, 2025

4.2 Checklist criteria on enabling governance mechanisms for data, finance, and technical capacity

Based on the analysis of enabling governance mechanisms for data, finance, and technical capacity, the following checklist criteria can be used to evaluate and improve regional operational effectiveness:

Data and knowledge management
This group focuses on establishing the scientific foundations, practical measurement pathways, and information systems needed to turn climate metrics into actionable destination policy.

- ☑ ***Research alliances:*** Has the region established formal partnerships with local universities and research institutions to develop certified or non-certified territory-specific methodologies for carbon and water footprinting?
- ☑ ***Practical data approach***: Is there a clear pathway for how data will be used for policy and investment before it is requested from stakeholders?
- ☑ ***Knowledge nodes***: Has the administration institutionalised an observatory or "Knowledge Node" to ensure multidirectional information flows between regional and local actors?

Institutional capacity and expertise
This section gathers internal operational strategies and structural changes designed to professionalise tourism bodies and permanently embed specialised climate skills within the administration.

- ☑ ***Internal knowledge transfer***. Are specialised agencies (Energy, Water, Environment) used as "in-house" trainers for tourism staff to ensure climate literacy in the DMO/ tourism body?
- ☑ ***Expert recruitment***: Has the tourism body recruited specialised profiles with backgrounds in environmental sciences and climate policy to move beyond purely promotional functions?
- ☑ ***Climate integration***: Is climate action technically integrated into tourism planning and promotional decision-making?

Relational intelligence and strategic partnerships. This block addresses the soft governance capabilities and voluntary networks required by tourism bodies to exert influence and drive climate action in domains where they lack formal authority.

- ☑ ***Capacity building over external consultancies***: Does the administration prioritise internal capacity building over external consultancies to avoid losing expertise once a project ends?
- ☑ ***Persuasion capacity***: Does the DMO actively train staff in "soft governance" skills, including aspects such as strategic persuasion, consensus-building, and relational intelligence?
- ☑ ***Strategic partnerships***: Does the DMO establish voluntary strategic networks and agreements to overcome administrative silos, particularly in areas where it lacks a direct mandate (e.g., national transport policy)?

Financial mechanisms and access: This final group explores innovative funding architectures, dedicated taxes, and cross-departmental hubs that improve capital access for small businesses and support adaptation and mitigation goals.

- ☑ ***One-stop-shop mechanisms***: Has the regional administration established a "financial bridge" or point of reference to help SMEs and local DMOs navigate and access European and National funding opportunities?
- ☑ ***Incentives information***: Does the tourism body act as an information hub that collects and disseminates the diverse sustainability incentives offered by other government departments to the tourism sector?
- ☑ ***Innovative rewarding***: Are there partnerships in place that move beyond standard business subsidies to directly reward tourists for sustainable behaviours (e.g., low-carbon transport discounts)?
- ☑ ***Dedicated tourism taxes***: Has the region established a tourism tax with a legally binding "finalist" mandate to fund climate adaptation and social restoration?
- ☑ ***Transversal fund governance***: Does the fund's management body include representatives from Environment and Social Wellbeing departments, and conversely, does the tourism body participate in broader regional environmental tax commissions to ensure resources are channelled effectively?

CONCLUSIONS

This report addresses the governance challenge as a critical barrier to making climate action work in the tourism sector. **Governance functions as the structural DNA of a territory, shaping how public bodies prioritise resources and make decisions**. For this reason, regional tourism authorities should deliberately reshape their institutional frameworks. By doing so, they can leverage their governance capacity to ensure that climate policy becomes an active part of daily operations rather than a symbolic gesture. To address this, this study outlines **how destinations can navigate away from rigid, top-down bureaucratic control toward networked, multilevel, and restorative management models**. Changing this culture of decision-making relies on taking practical, coordinated action across three fundamental pillars. The first core requirement is to **foster cohesion by moving away from horizontal fragmentation**. Evidence from successful regions has shown that tourism must be integrated into the regional main economic strategy, which should include ambitious climate goals. This integration enables tourism to act as a proactive architect in climate policy alongside key sectors like energy, mobility, and water. The second priority focuses on **strengthening vertical coordination, shifting regional tourism authorities from distant regulators to practical capacity providers**. By establishing central points of reference and **providing standardised toolkits, regional offices can make life easier for the DMOs and SMEs in their transition toward sustainability**. This approach creates a shared ecosystem of responsibility, in which regional mandates are territorially diffused through "bridging organisations" such as provincial boards and business associations.

Furthermore, this vertical connection must include and **internalise the voices of civil society to maintain a "social license"**. Finally, sustained climate transition relies on building the concrete administrative machinery required to **manage specialised data, financial channels, and technical skills**. **Regional administrations should professionalise their internal teams** by bringing environmental and climate policy specialists directly into tourism bodies, moving beyond or at least complementing traditional advertising and marketing roles. On the other hand, as tourism bodies rarely hold direct control over large infrastructure networks such as aviation or rail, staff must also be trained in **soft governance and relational intelligence**. This enables them to act as strategic persuaders within internal hierarchies and voluntary multi-actor networks. While good regional governance provides the structure to manage risks, it does not work in a vacuum. It must respond to larger global forces, such as economic shifts or changing consumer behaviours, that heavily influence the rate at which tourism emissions grow. These drivers happen at an international scale, beyond the direct power of a regional government, yet they continue to have significant impact on local emissions and resilience. However, despite these external pressures, **a strong, collaborative governance model remains the most effective tool for turning large-scale climate plans into real-world action**. Ultimately, the goal is to enable a shift in decision-making processes, ensuring that tourism contributes to the long-term well-being of both the community and the environment.

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