Supporting Tourism Businesses in their Sustainable Transition - Interregional cooperation between Normandy and Occitanie

Occitanie and Normandie (France), France
AD'OCC
Regional Areas (including counties, regions, provinces)
Visitor Experience & Destination Management

Summary of Good Practice Story
Across France's Normandy and Occitanie regions, destination management organisations had made real progress on their own sustainability governance under the Green Destinations framework, but consistently scored lower on supporting individual tourism businesses through their own sustainable transitions, lacking shared methodology, tools and technical confidence. Regional tourism bodies OTN and AD'OCC launched a 2025 interregional pilot with 13 volunteer DMOs (7 in Normandy, 6 in Occitanie), co-developing a shared toolkit — including a business sustainability-maturity assessment, territorial needs mapping, action-planning frameworks and monitoring dashboards — through a year of collective workshops and individualised support, while identifying the need for a new professional role, the "Sustainable Transition Manager." This produced six training modules delivered to 50 staff across the 13 pilot DMOs between 2025-2026, embedded sustainability as a cross-functional responsibility rather than one person's job within several destinations, and is set to expand into a national training pathway from 2027. The core lesson: no destination can achieve sustainable transition alone — DMOs' greatest value lies not in technical expertise but in their unique position to coordinate and mobilise local businesses, and lasting change requires organisation-wide skill-building, not a single champion.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

Normandy and Occitania are among France's most iconic tourism destinations. Although they differ greatly in terms of landscapes, history and identity, they share a common belief: tourism can only remain sustainable if it preserves the resources that make destinations attractive.

For several years, both regions have made sustainable transition a strategic priority. This ambition has led to a partnership between OTN and AD'OCC, with the aim of supporting DMOs in the evolution of their missions.

This interregional cooperation has been gradually built around a shared vision: pooling experiences, co-developing methods and sharing best practices rather than creating isolated approaches. After jointly developing tools to structure CSR within DMOs, and then supporting destinations in their sustainable transition through the GD framework, the two regions decided to take a further step: enabling DMOs to directly support tourism businesses across their territories.

Today, this collaborative approach represents a true innovation laboratory for sustainable tourism in France. It has been recognised by the GD Foundation for their previous interregional cooperation

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

Through the support provided to destinations engaged in the GD programme, a shared observation emerged across both regions.

DMOs had made significant progress in their own CSR approaches and in establishing sustainable destination governance. However, they faced greater challenges when it came to supporting tourism businesses in adopting more responsible practices.

GD audits confirmed this reality: the criterion relating to support for tourism professionals consistently achieved lower scores than the other certification dimensions.

Yet the challenges facing tourism businesses are constantly increasing: climate change, pressure on water and energy resources, changing visitor expectations, new environmental regulations, rising operating costs and the need to strengthen their economic resilience.

In the face of these transformations, DMOs are ideally positioned to mobilise local stakeholders. They maintain close relationships with businesses, understand local specificities and are able to coordinate the many initiatives led by local authorities, chambers of commerce, ADEME, natural parks and professional networks.

However, they all expressed the same challenges: a lack of methodology, the absence of shared tools, a feeling that they did not have sufficient legitimacy on the technical aspects of sustainable transition, and the need to develop their teams' skills.

This shared observation became the starting point for a new interregional pilot initiative.

The Vision: What you set out to do

The aims was to empower DMOS to become facilitators, able to guide businesses towards the right experts, coordinate existing support schemes, encourage local cooperation and support tourism professionals throughout their transition.This is why we adopted a co-construction

approach by launching an interregional pilot initiative in 2025. It brought 13 volunteer DMOs, 7 in Normandy and 6 in Occitania, representing a wide diversity of destinations. This diversity was essential to developing a flexible methodology that could be adapted and transferred to all French destinations. Together, they set 4 key objectives : Co-develop a shared methodology for supporting tourism businesses; Develop a operational and replicable toolkit; Identify the new skills required for the emergence of the Sustainable Transition Manager role; Prepare the national roll-out of this new approach across all DMOs.This pilot initiative aimed to demonstrate that interregional cooperation can accelerate innovation, pool field experience and build solutions that can be directly transferred at national level. The ambition is to sustainably transform the roles and capabilities of French DMOs, enabling them to become key drivers of tourism destination transition

The Journey: How change happened

To be truly operational, transforming the role of DMOs had to be designed with those who would ultimately use it.

Over the course of a year, OTN, AD'OCC, MLS Conseil and the 13 destinations worked together as a genuine learning community, combining collective workshops with tailored individual support.

From the outset of the project, each destination carried out an initial assessment to identify its level of maturity, the actions already underway, its challenges, internal resources and the expectations of its staff. These first discussions quickly confirmed a shared observation: DMOs had the same ambitions, but faced very different realities depending on their size, human resources and local ecosystems.

Based on these findings, an in-depth assessment was conducted in each of the 13 destinations. The aim was not only to evaluate existing practices, but also to identify the partners already involved, ensuring that future support mechanisms would complement existing initiatives rather than compete with them. This commitment to territorial cooperation became one of the project's founding principles.

Each DMO then developed its own strategy for supporting tourism professionals. Rather than applying a single model, the methodology is based on adapting support to the specific realities of each destination. However, all destinations follow the same methodological approach and share a common language, making it easier to exchange experiences.

One of the project's main innovations was the creation of a comprehensive methodological toolkit, co-developed with DMOs throughout the pilot initiative. Each tool was tested, discussed and collectively improved before being validated.

The toolkit includes in particular:

- a methodology for assessing the sustainability maturity level of tourism businesses
- a territorial assessment of needs and available resources
- a strategic framework for defining each destination's priorities
- an operational action plan, including the HR developments required within DMOs
- a shared process for assessing and qualifying tourism businesses

- a monitoring dashboard for tracking support provided
- a service offer mapping existing support schemes available in each destination
- communication tools to raise awareness among professionals and prevent greenwashing risks
- indicators to measure results achieved and continuously adapt the strategy over time

The approach developed is based on a simple principle: not all businesses are at the same stage of their transition; effective support therefore requires tailored responses.
The project also highlighted a frequently underestimated issue: sustainable transition cannot rely on a single individual within a DMO. Sustainable tourism leads, partnership managers, visitor advisors, quality teams and economic development teams must gradually develop a shared culture, so that supporting tourism professionals becomes a collective responsibility. This organisational dimension was therefore integrated into the methodology and the action plans developed with each destination.
Throughout the workshops, participants also shared the challenges they faced: a lack of legitimacy when engaging with transition experts, difficulties in mobilizing certain businesses, limited time, the absence of shared tools and internal departmental silos. These challenges were not seen as barriers, but as factors to be incorporated into the design of the methodology itself. This ability to continuously adapt is what enabled the creation of tools that can be directly used by DMO staff.
At the same time, the skills need identified throughout the pilot initiative led OTN and AD'OCC to work with AFDAS and ADN Tourisme to develop a national training pathway aimed at establishing a new professional role: the Sustainable Transition Manager. More than a simple support project, this initiative has become a genuine innovation laboratory for the evolution of DMO roles and capabilities

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The pilot initiative introduced a tailored support approach based on business maturity, enabling a more effective sustainability transition.
The project also brought about significant changes within DMOs themselves. In several destinations, sustainable tourism, previously the responsibility of a single individual, has become embedded in a more cross-functional approach involving staff responsible for partnerships, visitor services, communications and destination development. Initial feedback suggests that this cross-functional approach is helping to embed a shared culture of sustainability across organisations.
The skills needs identified during the pilot initiative also led to the development of a dedicated training programme. Between 2025 and 2026, 6 complementary training modules were delivered to staff from the 13 pilot DMOs, enabling 50 members of staff to be trained. These figures confirm that sustainable transition cannot rely on a single role but requires organisation-wide skills development.
Finally, early feedback from the destinations already demonstrates the practical uptake of the methodology. Some have launched their first business assessments, others have restructured

their service offer, strengthened partnerships with chambers of commerce, or developed new workshops dedicated to sustainable transition. All emphasise the highly practical nature of the tools produced and their ability to address needs that had previously remained largely unmet. Although the long-term impact on tourism businesses will need to be assessed over time, the initial results already demonstrate that DMOs now have a shared methodological framework enabling them to fulfil a role that had previously been difficult to structure

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

This pilot initiative confirmed that no destination can successfully achieve its sustainable transition alone.

The first key lesson is that DMOs hold a unique position to mobilise stakeholders across the destination. They know local businesses, maintain trusted relationships with them, and are able to connect partners with complementary expertise. Their added value does not lie in technical expertise, but in their ability to coordinate, guide and facilitate collective action.

Another key lesson concerns the internal organisation of DMOs. Sustainable transition must become a shared responsibility across different roles and be embedded throughout the organisation. This organisational shift is probably one of the most significant changes observed during the project.

Finally, this interregional cooperation demonstrated the value of collective intelligence. Regular exchanges between destinations helped avoid common pitfalls, accelerated the development of practical tools and enabled participants to rapidly build on one another's experience. This collaborative dynamic has gone well beyond the scope of the project and has evolved into a genuine peer-support network connecting destinations.

For destinations wishing to embark on a similar journey, our main recommendation is to co-design solutions with frontline staff, build on the partners already active within the destination, and view sustainable transition as an organisational transformation as much as an environmental one

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

This project was designed to be easily transferable to other DMOs, regardless of size, maturity or territorial context. This initiative builds on the two previous programmes jointly developed by OTN and AD'OCC. Together, these 3 programmes now form a coherent learning pathway, supporting DMOs in the progressive evolution of their roles. The first delivery of the training programme is scheduled in Dec 2026 in Occitania. This third training module is intended to be rolled out nationwide from 2027.The project is contributing to the development of a new professional role: the Sustainable Transition Manager. We aim to formalise the skills associated with this role and secure its recognition within the French national framework of professional qualifications. This represents a major innovation for the institutional tourism sector. The project has opened the way to new collaborations with other French regions which demonstrates how interregional cooperation can accelerate innovation. The project fully reflects the spirit of SDG 17. By bringing together local authorities, professional networks, sustainable transition experts

and tourism destinations, it demonstrates that the challenges of sustainable tourism are best addressed through strong, long-term and open partnerships

Awards or Certifications
The tools developed as part of this project are protected by intellectual property rights. Their distribution is therefore controlled and they cannot be made publicly available.
The two attached infographics provide an overview of the Sustainable Transition Manager training pathway and the methodology developed to support tourism professionals in their sustainable transition

Web Articles

Other Relevant Links

Quotes or Testimonials
Evaluation of the support provided by the 13 DMOs: ENG - Acc des pros_Evaluation quali des 13 OGD.docx