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D.1.4 — Joint Action Plan (JAP)

Shared Strategies to Enhance Sustainable Tourism in the South Adriatic Area

Partner(s) responsible:	PP4 GAL Molise towards 2000 (coordinating partner)
Partner(s) involved/ revision:	PP1 Municipality of Martina Franca, PP2 Municipality of Gjirokastra, PP3 Tourism Organisation of Kotor, PP4 GAL Molise towards 2000
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Executive Summary

This document constitutes the Joint Action Plan (JAP) of the TOUR project — TOURists Friends of the Environment — developed under Interreg IPA South Adriatic programme (Italy-Albania-Montenegro), Activity 1.4. It synthesises the outputs of all project activities into a comprehensive, structured, and actionable cross-border framework for sustainable ecotourism development in the South Adriatic region.

The JAP is structured according to the four-phase methodology required by the Programme Manual for the Lump Sum Action plan/Model/Methods (ApMM):

1. Phase 1 — Analysis: cross-territorial needs assessment based on 54 structured questionnaires (16 Italy, 16 Albania, 22 Montenegro) and SWOT analysis per territory (D.1.4.1).
2. Phase 2 — Methodology / Model: joint cross-border methodology for sustainable tourism governance, integrating national contributions from all three programme territories (D.1.4.2).
3. Phase 3 — Testing: stakeholder validation of the JAP through the international conference "Responsible Relationship with the Environment" (20 May 2025, Kotor) and three territory-based working groups (D.1.4.3).
4. Phase 4 — Partner Commitment: formalisation of the partners' shared vision and commitment to implementing and disseminating the JAP through the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The JAP was developed jointly by all four TOUR project partners: the Municipality of Martina Franca (Lead Partner, Italy), the Municipality of Gjirokastra (Albania), the Tourism Organisation of Kotor — TOK (Montenegro), and GAL Molise towards 2000 (Italy).

Key findings of the analysis confirm that all three territories share structural weaknesses — financial resource constraints, infrastructure deficits, insufficient inter-operator cooperation — while presenting distinct territorial assets and challenges. The joint methodology identifies six strategic priority areas: eco-certification, green infrastructure, dispersed tourism, community-based tourism, digital innovation, and governance capacity building. The testing phase, conducted through participatory working groups and Mentimeter-based real-time voting, confirmed the relevance and feasibility of the JAP's core strategic pillars. All three working groups converged on community-based tourism, eco-certification, and tourist education as the highest-impact and most feasible interventions.

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PHASE 1 — ANALYSIS

Cross-territorial Needs Assessment — Deliverable D.1.4.1

Phase 1 — Analysis: Territorial Needs Assessment

This phase constitutes the evidence base of the Joint Action Plan. It presents the results of the questionnaire administration campaign conducted across all three programme territories, the SWOT analysis by territory, and the synthesis of cross-border priority needs that informed the design of the joint methodology in Phase 2.

1.1 Methodology of Data Collection

The data collection phase was conducted between spring 2024 and June 2025 using a structured questionnaire administered to tourism operators, local public authorities, NGOs, community organisations, and ecotourism enterprises active in the four partner territories (Molise and Puglia in Italy, Gjirokastra region in Albania, and the Bay of Kotor area in Montenegro). The questionnaire combined a SWOT analysis framework with Likert-scale quantitative assessments measuring:

- The perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development.
- The likelihood of implementing new ecotourism initiatives within the next year.
- The importance of cross-border collaboration in promoting sustainable tourism.

In total, 54 questionnaires were collected: 16 from Italy (12 from Molise and 4 from Puglia), 16 from Albania (Gjirokastra municipality and rural surroundings), and 22 from Montenegro (19 from Crna Gora coastal and inland areas and 3 from the Serbian border area). The questionnaire design and data collection were coordinated by PP4 GAL Molise with the active participation of PP2 Gjirokastra and PP3 TOK, ensuring cross-border coherence and comparability of results.

Each partner conducted field collection through face-to-face interviews and digital forms (Google Forms), ensuring adequate coverage of rural and urban operators. The Montenegro partner (PP3 TOK) additionally developed an evaluation questionnaire for JAP partners, enabling internal cross-border assessment of JAP priorities and orientations (see D.1.4.2 Montenegro National Paper).

1.2 Cross-territorial SWOT Results

Italy — Molise and Puglia (PP4 GAL Molise / PP1 Martina Franca)

Strengths identified by Italian respondents: competent and dedicated staff; good community reputation; authenticity of local places and traditions (medieval villages in Molise, trulli and olive groves in Puglia).

The primary weakness across both Italian sub-territories was limited financial resources, cited by over 85% of respondents, combined with the absence of a unified territorial ecotourism strategy or shared regional brand.

Key opportunities: growing post-pandemic interest in nature-based tourism; expansion of international sustainable tourism markets; emerging agritourism, outdoor sports, and educational farm tourism segments.

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Main threats: intensifying competition from other Italian and Mediterranean destinations; macro-economic instability affecting both demand and supply; in Puglia, extreme seasonal concentration in coastal areas during summer.

Albania — Gjirokastra Region (PP2 Municipality of Gjirokastra)

Albania's primary strengths were strong local collaboration traditions, a growing pool of trained tourism professionals (including 45 eco-guides certified since 2022), and the extraordinary asset base of Gjirokastra's UNESCO World Heritage status combined with the Antigonea Archaeological Park, Drino Valley, and Zagoria Trail.

The dominant weaknesses were limited financial resources for small operators, a large informal sector (up to 40% of accommodation listings unregistered; over 60 informal guides vs. 22 licensed), and extreme seasonal concentration (72% of annual visits in four summer months per INSTAT 2023 data).

Key opportunities: a 30% rise in eco-tourism visitors between 2021 and 2023 (INCA Albania, 2024); significant EU IPA and UNESCO funding availability; 37% of tourism revenue generated by locally-owned businesses as a foundation for community-based tourism expansion.

Main threats: environmental degradation of fragile natural and heritage sites; economic instability; physical vulnerability of stone architecture and archaeological assets to unmanaged visitor pressure.

Montenegro — Bay of Kotor (PP3 Tourism Organisation of Kotor)

Montenegro's primary strengths were the authenticity of inland places and traditions, strong local cooperation in the Bay of Kotor maritime communities, and an existing network of Venetian-era paths and mountain routes providing natural infrastructure for sustainable trail tourism.

Key weaknesses included limited financial resources for small ecotourism operators, severe infrastructure saturation in peak season, and heavy dependence on cruise ship day-tripping (high visitor density, limited local economic benefit).

Key opportunities: growing ecotourism demand aligned with Montenegro's 'Wild Beauty' national brand; increasing environmental awareness; EU accession as a driver for governance and standards improvement; significant inland tourism potential in Lovćen, Komovi, and Lake Skadar areas.

Main threats: environmental degradation from coastal construction and Bay pollution; safety risks for unaccompanied tourists on unmarked mountain trails; rapid and unplanned tourism development threatening landscape authenticity.

1.3 Synthesis of Needs by Territory

Italy

- Infrastructure improvement: eco-trails, visitor facilities, digital connectivity in rural areas.
- Strengthening marketing: digital presence, territorial branding, presence on sustainable tourism platforms.
- Business cooperation: structured mechanisms between operators, government bodies, and agrifood producers.
- Certification access: simplified and credible eco-certification schemes accessible to small operators.
- Seasonal diversification in Puglia: spring and autumn products to reduce summer coastal concentration.

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Albania

- Heritage-sensitive visitor management: dynamic flow monitoring, pre-booking for guided groups, soft quotas for UNESCO sites.
- Formalisation of the tourism sector: licensing framework, digital registry of certified operators and guides.
- Environmental awareness: systematic eco-awareness campaigns; sustainability training for operators.
- Waste management infrastructure: segregated waste, composting, single-use plastics phase-out.
- Seasonal diversification and urban-rural connectivity: off-season marketing, improved rural road access, digital signage.

Montenegro

- Visitor flow management: real-time monitoring, cruise ship management protocols, digital booking for heritage sites.
- Trail infrastructure and safety: systematic waymarking, emergency infrastructure, digital navigation.
- Coastal marine environment protection: boat traffic regulation, wastewater management, marine protected area monitoring.
- Cruise tourism reorientation: quality-focused visitor management, restrictions on mass day-tripping in the Old Town.
- Inland tourism development: product development for Lovćen, adventure tourism, agritourism.
- Capacity building: systematic training for operators, guides, hospitality businesses, and local authority staff.

1.4 Joint Cross-territorial Priority Needs

The comparative analysis of the three territories reveals five cross-cutting priority needs that provide the foundation for the joint methodology developed in Phase 2:

1. Financial resource constraints for small and medium ecotourism operators across all territories.
2. Infrastructure deficits — varying in nature (digital connectivity in Molise; sustainable mobility and waste in Gjirokastra; trail safety and visitor flow management in Kotor) but consistently cited as the primary development need.
3. Fragmentation of tourism offer: absence of shared territorial branding, joint marketing, and coordinated product development.
4. Growing ecotourism market opportunity: convergent market demand for authentic, nature-based, and culturally rich sustainable tourism in all three territories.
5. Certification and quality standards: absence of credible, accessible, and internationally recognised certification frameworks as a barrier to differentiation.

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PHASE 2 — METHODOLOGY

Joint Sustainable Tourism Framework — Deliverable D.1.4.2

Phase 2 — Methodology: Joint Sustainable Tourism Framework

Phase 2 presents the joint cross-border methodology for sustainable ecotourism governance developed by the TOUR partnership. It integrates the national contributions from Italy (D.1.4.2 GAL Molise), Albania (D.1.4.2 Municipality of Gjirokastra), and Montenegro (D.1.4.2 Tourism Organisation of Kotor) into a coherent, adaptable, and inclusive framework.

2.1 Introduction and Conceptual Framework

The Joint Action Plan is built on the principle that sustainable tourism must serve both environmental conservation and the empowerment of local communities. This dual objective — ecological integrity and socio-economic resilience — is the foundation on which all strategic priorities, proposed interventions, and monitoring mechanisms are designed.

The JAP draws on the following conceptual pillars, validated through the analysis phase and cross-referenced with relevant EU policy frameworks:

- Carrying capacity management: tourism development must respect the ecological and cultural carrying capacity of each territory, as demonstrated by the UNESCO guidelines applied in Gjirokastra and the visitor management protocols developed for Kotor.
- Community-based tourism: local communities must be active participants in, and primary beneficiaries of, tourism development, not passive recipients of tourism impacts.
- Cross-border complementarity: the three territories, while distinct, share the South Adriatic identity and together offer a richer and more diversified sustainable tourism experience than each could offer independently.
- Evidence-based governance: interventions must be grounded in empirical data, stakeholder participation, and regular monitoring and evaluation.

The JAP is structured around five operational intervention areas, each applying to all three territories with appropriate territorial adaptation, and three cross-cutting themes that run through all intervention areas.

2.2 Strategic Priority Areas

Priority Area 1 — Eco-Certification and Quality Standards

Develop a cross-border ecotourism certification framework aligned with EU standards (EU Ecolabel, Green Key) and accessible to small and medium operators in all three territories. The scheme addresses environmental performance, heritage stewardship, community benefit-sharing, and visitor experience quality.

Italy: pilot certification programme for rural ecotourism operators in Molise, building on the Trentino-Alto Adige reference model.

Albania: voluntary Eco-Certification Scheme developed with INCA Albania, targeting guesthouses, guides, and agritourism operators in the Gjirokastra region.

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Montenegro: mandatory eco-certification integrated with the Tourism Organisation of Kotor's licensing and inspection framework.

Priority Area 2 — Green Infrastructure

Coordinated investment in sustainable infrastructure addressing the primary infrastructure gaps identified in each territory, with shared standards and approaches. Key intervention types:

- Eco-trail development and maintenance (waymarking, signage, visitor facilities, accessibility, emergency infrastructure).
- Sustainable mobility: electric public transport, e-bike networks, pedestrianisation of historic areas, EV charging stations.
- Waste management systems at tourist-heavy locations, including segregated collection, composting, plastic-free campaigns.
- Digital visitor information infrastructure: real-time capacity monitoring, mobile visitor guides, pre-booking platforms.

Priority Area 3 — Dispersed and Seasonal Tourism

Develop strategies that reduce the concentration of tourist flows — both spatially (over-crowded sites vs. underdeveloped areas) and temporally (summer peak vs. shoulder and off seasons). Key interventions:

- Dispersed tourism packages connecting main heritage sites with lesser-known cultural and natural assets.
- Off-season marketing campaigns: 'Discover Gjirokastra in Autumn', spring hiking packages in Montenegro, Molise autumn harvest tourism.
- Zoning policies to redistribute visitor flows toward less congested areas.
- Incentives for tourists choosing low-season periods or lesser-visited locations.

Priority Area 4 — Community-Based Tourism

Strengthen the capacity and economic inclusion of local communities through tourism-related micro-enterprises, cultural entrepreneurship, and community governance of tourism resources. Key interventions:

- Artisan support hubs and community enterprise development (building on the Gjirokastra Old Bazaar model).
- Agritourism and rural guesthouse network development in Molise and rural Albania.
- Community participatory governance mechanisms: quarterly feedback sessions, community advisory boards.
- Local economic content requirements: tourism packages must include locally-owned accommodation, food, and cultural components.

Priority Area 5 — Digital Innovation and Marketing

Develop cost-effective digital tools and cross-border marketing strategies enabling small operators to access sustainable tourism markets:

- Shared South Adriatic Ecotourism digital platform: operator directory, certified products, itinerary builder, visitor information.

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- Social media and influencer marketing campaign targeting eco-conscious international travellers.
- Capacity-building programme for digital marketing, online booking management, and presence on sustainable tourism platforms.
- Real-time visitor flow monitoring and dynamic capacity management tools for heritage sites.

Cross-cutting Themes

Three cross-cutting themes apply across all priority areas:

- Governance and institutional coordination: clear definition of roles, inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks for each territory.
- Education and awareness: training for operators, guides, and local authority staff; visitor education campaigns; sustainability literacy programmes.
- Monitoring and evaluation: shared KPI framework, regular data collection, adaptive management based on evidence.

2.3 National Contributions and Territorial Adaptation

Each partner territory has contributed a national methodology paper (D.1.4.2) that provides the territorial adaptation of the joint framework. The national contributions are summarised below and should be read in conjunction with this joint document.

Italy — GAL Molise (D.1.4.2)

Italy's national methodology paper focuses on the specific challenges of southern Italian rural and coastal tourism. The Italian contribution emphasises:

- The Trentino-Alto Adige model as a reference for well-established ecotourism governance and certification.
- The Molise-Puglia complementarity: inland rural heritage tourism (Molise) and coastal heritage tourism (Puglia/Martina Franca area) as a naturally integrated cross-regional offer.
- The need for a cross-border certification scheme that is simplified and financially accessible for small operators.
- Eight concrete sustainable tourism development proposals covering certifications, digital platforms, green infrastructure, education, fiscal incentives, dispersed tourism, community participation, and long-term policy frameworks.
- A five-step experimentation framework for testing ecotourism interventions at territorial level (see Phase 3).

Albania — Municipality of Gjirokastra (D.1.4.2)

Albania's contribution reflects the unique UNESCO heritage context of Gjirokastra and the participatory diagnostic process conducted between 2022 and 2024 (3 multi-stakeholder workshops; 2 rounds of field surveys covering over 300 tourists; 65 local business interviews; GIS-based tourism pressure mapping with the Polytechnic University of Tirana). Key contributions include:

- Heritage conservation policy framework: car-free historic centre, visitor quotas for key monuments, green procurement for public events.

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- Sustainable mobility strategy: pedestrianisation scheme in the Old Bazaar (40% traffic reduction); solar-powered e-bike and scooter charging stations; electric shuttle pilot services.
- Waste management: segregated waste infrastructure; Plastic-Free Tourism Campaign ('Refill Gjirokastra'); Municipal by-law on single-use plastics.
- Community-based tourism: Artisan Support Hub (60+ artisans); UNDP-supported women-led guesthouses; 'Taste of Gjirokastra' local product label.
- Formalisation: 'Trusted Tourism Gjirokastra' digital registry of certified accommodations and guides.

Montenegro — Tourism Organisation of Kotor (D.1.4.2)

Montenegro's contribution reflects TOK's institutional expertise in managing a major heritage destination under rapid tourism growth pressure. The Montenegrin national paper also contributed a comprehensive JAP structural outline — the most detailed structural proposal among the national papers — and an inter-partner evaluation questionnaire. Key contributions include:

- Comprehensive JAP structure: Executive Summary; Introduction; Scope; Methodology; Phases; Case Studies; Sustainability Strategies; Implementation Plan; Monitoring and Evaluation; Conclusions; Appendices.
- Governance framework: inter-institutional coordination structure for the Bay of Kotor bringing together municipalities, TOK, national parks, cultural heritage authorities, and the private sector.
- Visitor management: real-time monitoring; cruise ship management protocols; dynamic pricing for heritage site access; online pre-booking.
- Inland tourism development: product development for Lovćen National Park, Komovi mountains, Lake Skadar; adventure tourism packages.
- Technology-driven management: digital trail navigation; mobile visitor information; smart parking.

2.4 Implementation Framework

The JAP is designed as an operational framework, not merely a strategic document. The following implementation structure provides the operational logic for each priority area:

Step 1 — Define Areas of Intervention

Based on the Phase 1 analysis, each territory identifies the specific sub-areas requiring priority intervention. Cross-border coherence is ensured through the shared priority areas framework, while territorial adaptation is managed through national implementation plans. All three working groups during Phase 3 testing confirmed the following as priority intervention areas:

- Integrate mandatory eco-certification schemes aligned with EU standards.
- Strengthen awareness and communication measures targeting both operators and tourists.
- Reinforce policy integration from the outset of implementation, engaging national and regional authorities.

Step 2 — Development and Selection of Pilot Proposals

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Each territory develops and selects pilot initiatives from within the priority area framework, adapted to territorial context. Pilot selection criteria: feasibility, impact, replicability, and cross-border value. All working groups prioritised the following in pilot design:

- Target financial accessibility for small operators (simplified funding mechanisms, reduced co-financing requirements).
- Include education and capacity-building as integral components of every pilot (not add-ons).

Territory-specific pilot priorities:

- Italy: eco-trail network connecting Molise rural heritage sites; digital marketing capacity-building programme for small operators.
- Albania: visitor management pilot for Gjirokastra UNESCO sites; formalisation programme for informal guides and accommodations.
- Montenegro: smart trail navigation and emergency infrastructure for Lovćen approaches; cruise tourism management protocol for Kotor Old Town.

Step 3 — Implementation of the Experimental Phase

Implementation of selected pilots follows a structured approach validated during Phase 3 testing. All three working groups endorsed the following implementation mechanisms:

- Introduce financial incentive mechanisms: public subsidies, tax relief, grant schemes for operators adopting certified sustainable practices.
- Promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) as the primary delivery vehicle for infrastructure investment and service development.

The experimental phase tests solutions in different territorial contexts simultaneously, enabling cross-border learning and rapid adaptation based on real operating conditions.

Step 4 — Monitoring and Data Collection

Monitoring focuses on both process (are activities being implemented as planned?) and impact (are intended changes occurring?). The monitoring framework is designed to be proportionate to the administrative capacity of small operators and local authorities.

Key monitoring mechanisms:

- Clarify governance structures: each partner designates a named coordinator responsible for monitoring implementation in their territory.
- Expand the monitoring framework beyond outputs to include outcome indicators (visitor satisfaction, community income, environmental indicators).
- Use existing data sources where possible (INSTAT Albania, national tourism statistics, municipal waste audits) to reduce additional data collection burden.
- Annual cross-border monitoring report compiling territorial data into a joint assessment.

Step 5 — Evaluation of Results and Scalability Planning

At the end of each implementation cycle, collected data is evaluated to identify which solutions delivered the greatest impact in terms of sustainability, community benefits, and tourism quality. Successful approaches are formalised for replication and scaling.

- Formalise policy integration mechanisms: embed JAP priorities into national and regional tourism strategies.

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- Scale successful practices with structured support: develop replication guides; share tools and templates across territories.
- Disseminate results through the TOUR project website (<https://tour.southadriatic.eu/>), national tourism agencies, and Interreg IPA programme communication channels.

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PHASE 3 — TESTING

Stakeholder Validation — Deliverable D.1.4.3

Phase 3 — Testing: Stakeholder Validation of the Joint Action Plan

Phase 3 presents the results of the concrete application and stakeholder validation of the Joint Action Plan, conducted through the international conference “Responsible Relationship with the Environment” held on 20 May 2025 in Kotor, Montenegro, organised by PP3 Tourism Organisation of Kotor. The conference gathered policymakers, tourism operators, NGOs, and environmental experts from all three programme territories.

During the afternoon session, participants were divided into three territory-based working groups (Italy, Albania, Montenegro), each of which engaged in structured discussion and tested the JAP elements against their territorial context. The working group findings were subsequently validated at regional level through Mentimeter-based interactive quantification. Individual territory reports are available in D.1.4.3 (Chapter Italy, Chapter Albania, Chapter Montenegro).

3.1 Conference Overview

The conference validated the following JAP elements:

- Strategic priorities: eco-certifications, green infrastructure, community involvement.
- Rules of procedure for Action Plan governance and implementation.
- Monitoring and evaluation principles.
- Opportunities for integration with existing national policies.

The conference methodology combined structured JAP presentations, small-group facilitated discussions, and Mentimeter-based real-time quantification of stakeholder preferences on sustainability practices, barriers, governance challenges, and policy integration priorities.

3.2 Working Group Results — Italy (PP4 GAL Molise + PP1 Martina Franca)

Willingness to Adopt Sustainable Practices

The Italy working group ranked tourist adoption likelihood as follows: (1) using public transport, cycling, or walking; (2) carrying reusable water bottles and bags; (3) proper waste disposal and choosing eco-certified accommodations; (4) following ethical wildlife guidelines.

Key Barriers to Sustainable Choices

The Italy working group identified: lack of awareness and information; higher costs and inconvenience; limited access to eco-friendly services; lack of education and user-friendly tools.

High-Impact and Feasible Interventions

Ranked by the Italy working group: (1) green infrastructure investments; (2) dispersed tourism strategies; (3) community-based tourism; (4) eco-certifications for accommodations and operators.

Institutional Readiness Ranking

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Italy: (1) introduce eco-certifications; (2) adopt new technologies; (3) engage local communities; (4) create sustainable policy frameworks; (5) invest in green transport.

Priority Policy Actions

Italy: mandatory eco-certifications for tourism businesses; stronger enforcement of environmental regulations; investments in public transport and green infrastructure.

Strategies to Overcome Implementation Barriers

Italy: (1) more government incentives and funding; (2) increased training and education; (3) stronger collaboration between businesses and policymakers; (4) greater community engagement; (5) stricter regulations.

3.3 Working Group Results — Albania (PP2 Municipality of Gjirokastra)

Willingness to Adopt Sustainable Practices

The Albania working group ranked: (1) using public transport, cycling, or walking; (2) proper waste disposal and choosing eco-certified accommodations; (3) carrying reusable water bottles; (4) following ethical wildlife guidelines.

Key Barriers to Sustainable Choices

Albania: (1) limited access to eco-friendly services; (2) lack of awareness and information; (3) higher costs and inconvenience; (4) lack of education and user-friendly tools.

High-Impact and Feasible Interventions

Albania ranked: (1) green infrastructure investments; (2) community-based tourism; (3) dispersed tourism strategies; (4) eco-certifications.

Institutional Readiness Ranking

Albania: (1) invest in green transport and infrastructure; (2) engage local communities; (3) introduce eco-certifications; (4) adopt new technologies; (5) create sustainable policy frameworks.

Key Governance Challenges Identified

Albania specifically highlighted: lack of sustainability literacy and communication channels with tourism operators; weak institutional coordination and fragmented responsibility; limited administrative capacity; budget limitations and absence of strategic prioritisation.

Priority Policy Actions

Albania: mandatory eco-certifications; stronger enforcement of environmental regulations; investments in public transport and green infrastructure.

3.4 Working Group Results — Montenegro (PP3 TOK)

Willingness to Adopt Sustainable Practices

Montenegro ranked: (1) carrying reusable water bottles and bags; (2) using public transport, cycling, or walking; (3) proper waste disposal and eco-certified accommodations; (4) following ethical wildlife guidelines.

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Key Barriers to Sustainable Choices

Montenegro: (1) lack of awareness and information; (2) higher costs and inconvenience; (3) limited access to eco-friendly services; (4) lack of education and user-friendly tools.

High-Impact and Feasible Interventions

Montenegro ranked: (1) dispersed tourism strategies to reduce overcrowding; (2) green infrastructure investments; (3) community-based tourism; (4) eco-certifications.

Institutional Readiness Ranking

Montenegro: (1) engage local communities; (2) introduce eco-certifications; (3) adopt new technologies; (4) create sustainable policy frameworks; (5) invest in green transport and infrastructure.

Key Governance Challenges Identified

Montenegro specifically highlighted: communication gaps (lack of channels with tourism operators, insufficient public outreach); weak institutional coordination; insufficient awareness of economic and ecological tourism impacts; political will and leadership not yet aligned with JAP goals.

3.5 Cross-territorial Validation Findings

The cross-territorial synthesis of the three working group outputs confirms the following key findings about the JAP's validity and areas for refinement:

Areas of Strong Convergence Across All Three Territories

- Community-based tourism and support for local communities through cultural tourism was rated the most effective strategy for responsible tourism promotion by all three working groups.
- Tourist education and awareness was consistently ranked as a critical enabling intervention across all territories.
- Financial incentives for businesses adopting sustainable practices was the top-ranked strategy for scaling sustainable tourism models in all three territories.
- Regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing was ranked second in scaling strategies by all three working groups.
- Using refillable water bottles instead of single-use plastics was universally selected as the most recognisable responsible travel behaviour — confirming the JAP's waste reduction priority.
- Supporting biodiversity protection and local livelihoods was unanimously identified as the key benefit of ecotourism — validating the JAP's dual environmental-social objective.

Territory-Specific Differentiation

While convergent on the above themes, the three working groups expressed territory-specific priorities reflecting their distinct contexts:

- Italy emphasised institutional eco-certification readiness and the need for government incentives as the top enabler.

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- Albania prioritised green infrastructure investment and formalisation of the informal tourism sector, reflecting the unique governance challenges of a developing heritage tourism context.
- Montenegro prioritised dispersed tourism strategies and community engagement over infrastructure investment, reflecting the different challenge of managing an already high-volume destination.

Most Overlooked Practices

Across all three territories, the most overlooked sustainability practices by tourists were identified as: (1) proper waste disposal and 'leave no trace' behaviour; (2) respecting wildlife; (3) supporting local businesses and eco-certified services. These findings directly reinforce the JAP's priorities in tourist education, certification visibility, and community benefit communication.

3.6 Proposed JAP Modifications Based on Working Group Inputs

The following modifications to the JAP design are proposed based on the collective working group recommendations from all three territories:

Step 1 — Areas of Intervention

1. Integrate mandatory eco-certification schemes from the outset, not as an optional add-on.
2. Strengthen awareness and communication measures across all priority areas.
3. Reinforce policy integration planning at the earliest stage of JAP implementation.

Step 2 — Pilot Proposals

1. Target financial accessibility for small operators as a design criterion for all pilots.
2. Include dedicated education and capacity-building components in every pilot.

Step 3 — Experimental Phase

1. Introduce financial incentive mechanisms (subsidies, tax incentives, grants) as a primary implementation tool.
2. Promote public-private partnerships as the standard delivery model for infrastructure and service pilots.

Step 4 — Monitoring

5. Clarify governance structures: assign named coordinators per territory.
6. Expand monitoring beyond outputs to include outcome and impact indicators.

Step 5 — Scalability

6. Formalise policy integration mechanisms through national and regional strategy embedding.
7. Scale successful practices with structured replication support and shared toolkits.

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PHASE 4 — PARTNER COMMITMENT

Memorandum of Understanding

Phase 4 — Partner Commitment: Memorandum of Understanding

Phase 4 formalises the commitment of all TOUR project partners to implementing, disseminating, and building upon the Joint Action Plan. In accordance with the Programme Manual's requirements for the Lump Sum ApMM, the partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) certifying their willingness to:

- Take up and/or adopt the JAP and its strategic priorities in their respective territories.
- Promote the JAP's methodology and findings with national and regional authorities, tourism stakeholders, and international partners.
- Further develop the JAP beyond the TOUR project duration, seeking additional funding and cooperation opportunities in the framework of Interreg IPA and other EU programmes.
- Share tools, templates, data, and lessons learned developed under this JAP with other territories and programme areas through the South Adriatic programme's knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

The MoU was signed by the legal representatives of all four project partners and constitutes Deliverable 4 of the ApMM output for each signatory partner. The signed MoU is uploaded separately in JEMS as a supporting document to the partner reports.

The MoU also governs:

- The use, dissemination, and further development of the cross-border methodology produced under the TOUR project.
- Intellectual property and attribution arrangements for the joint outputs, ensuring open access for public authorities and non-commercial use.
- The governance of a post-project South Adriatic Sustainable Tourism Network, intended to serve as a long-term mechanism for knowledge exchange and joint advocacy among the TOUR partners.
- A commitment to mutual information on the implementation of the JAP, through annual reporting or equivalent mechanisms, for a minimum of three years following project closure.

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Project Information

Project Partners

- Municipality of Martina Franca (Lead Partner) — Italy
- Municipality of Gjirokastra — Albania
- Tourism Organisation of Kotor (TOK) — Montenegro
- GAL Molise towards 2000 — Italy

Duration: 01/02/2024 – 31/01/2025

Total Budget: 184,937.42 €

EU Funding: 153,062.18 €

About the Project:

TOUR project aims to advance sustainable tourism practices in the South Adriatic area by empowering regional stakeholders and tourism operators to implement effective ecotourism strategies, in compliance with the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Green Deal priorities.

Website:

<https://tour.southadriatic.eu/>

End of Document