



Project co-financed by the European  
Regional Development Fund

## **Building Mediterranean Ecotourism Destination: Experience of conservation experts trapped in tourism development**

**Mosor Prvan, WWF Adria  
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## PROJECT PARTNERS





# The Big Picture of Project DestiMED and MEET Association: Med PAs and Tourism

- The Mediterranean is a **biodiversity hotspot**, Protected Areas support conservation
- **Mass tourism** is not going away, overuse of resources, conflicts
- **Policy interest** in creating a more sustainable tourism sector: policy makers and resources from EU programs





# How Does (or How Should) Tourism Contribute to PAs?

- **Revenues** from tourism concessions or activities taking place in the park
- **Direct contributions** to conservation from government or visitors
- Increased **awareness of visitors** regarding the park's natural values
- Park in the driver seat of **local sustainable development**





# PA Tourism: Many Challenges

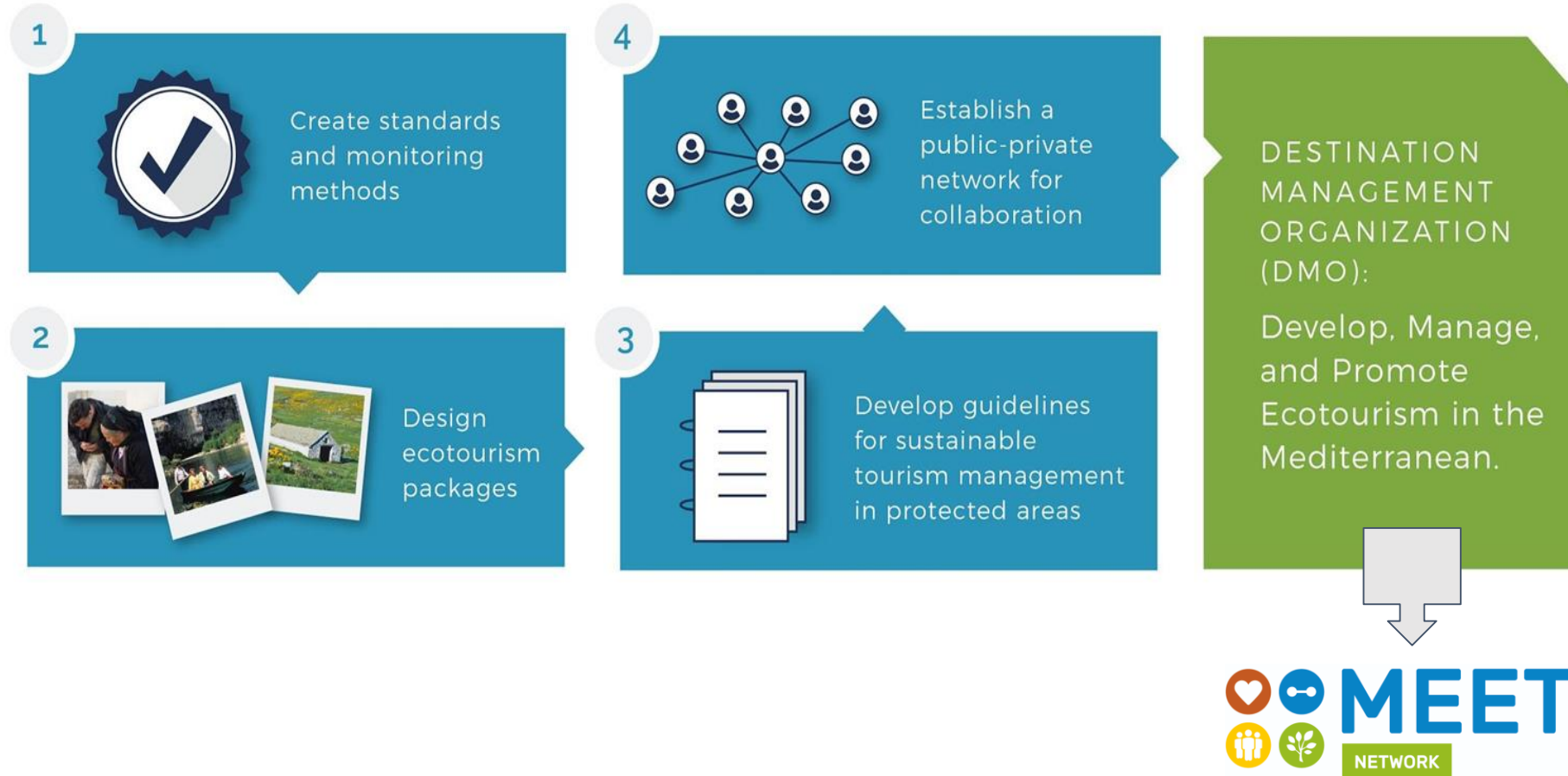
- The Mediterranean is a **mass tourism** destination
- **Lack of resources**, capacity and incentive at PA and local level
- Meeting **quality expectations**
- Difficulty **reaching the market**
- Lack of consistent guidelines and tools for **monitoring and improving** quality, sustainability, and impact







# What Have We Achieved So Far?



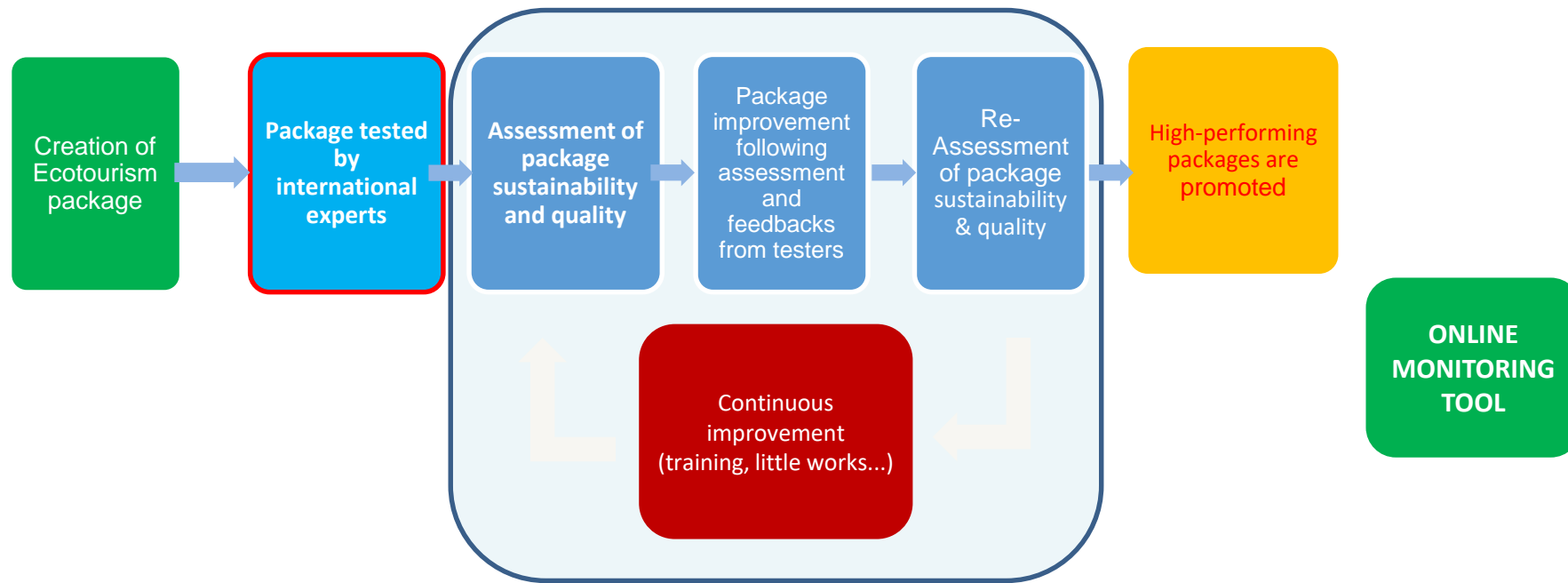
# Network of Med Protected Areas

Working together to conserve the region's natural and cultural mosaic while promoting a new model of ecotourism to the market, through the development of high quality ecotourism products and innovative tools to manage their impacts.





# Managing Quality, Sustainability and Impact



International Institute  
of Tourism Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY





# What Is The Role of Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC) in MEET?

- The LEC facilitates ongoing discussion between the Protected Area, private sector partners and other stakeholders to develop the ecotourism package
- The LEC establishes a transparent process for identifying a tour operator and other service providers
- The LEC identifies a tour operator that has the will and ability to organize and execute the MEET ecotourism package and the related management process (*Formal agreement*)

The MEET LEC is formed of:

- **Representative of Park**
  - **Local ITO**
  - Other local private sector
  - NGO, local communities...
- } At least!



# What Does a LEC Look Like?

- **Involve the right partners (especially ITO)**
  - Be willing to collaborate and invest in sustainable development of the Destination
  - Agree and share the vision of developing an ecotourism product following the principles of MEET
  - Agree to be part of a wider Mediterranean Ecotourism Destination
  - Meet all applicable regulations as concerns labour, health, safety, human rights
- **Local Governance**
  - Identify and invite all stakeholders, also the conflictual ones!
- **Transparency**
  - Define and share criteria of selection as well as processes
- **Monitoring**
  - MEET platform
- **Ensure commitment**
  - Formalize commitments (PA/ITO at least)



# MEET Unique Selling Proposition

- Based in and around protected areas
- Exclusively with local communities and local service providers
- Benefits conservation
- Unique niche-market experience in the Mediterranean





## Core Product Criteria

- Shoulder season, small groups, 3-5 nights
- The package includes agreed and non-invasive cultural immersion activities
- The package tour includes experiential activities that ensure that tourists are active participants in the heritage experience
- The service providers selected for the package are locally owned and operated
- Define a conservation activity for the itinerary or for donations from Conservation Fund



# Target Audience

## **Experiential Traveler: Focused on Soft Adventure and Culture**

Motivations include beauty, cultural exchange, and the opportunity to explore deeper and experience nature

Active, curious and environmentally aware at home and away. They like bucket lists, and they like to discover the next new thing.

Mixed ages, often travel without children/families, tech savvy, higher education level.

- Accustomed to spend US\$150-\$300 per day
- Expect comfort and cleanliness but not luxury
- They prioritize experiences, activities, and meals in their budgets





# Activities

- ★ Locally owned and operated
- ★ High quality
- ★ Include as much active participation as possible





## Meals

- ★ Primarily local and seasonal ingredients, dishes, and cooking methods
- ★ Quantity of food is well managed
- ★ Are carefully planned within the itinerary flow







# Accommodations

- ★ Small-scale lodging
- ★ Integrated with natural environment
- ★ Deeply connected with local culture and community





## The Reality

- ★ Low capacity within LEC for tourism development (including WWF as facilitators)
- ★ Lack of commitment
- ★ Lack of trust towards „good news”
- ★ Lack of understanding for the product from LEC members
- ★ Lack of standards over the board (accommodation, activities, storytelling, guiding,...)
- ★ Not many market ready activities
- ★ Lack of willingness to change (we know better mentality)
- ★ Safety is not a big thing in the Med



# Lessons learned

- ★ Ecotourism is built on existing natural and community values but it takes a lot more to make a working product
- ★ LEC has to have a common understanding on what is expected to be created and what is a role of each member
- ★ ITO is THE KEY to success
- ★ Private interest is not a „sin”, it's a must
- ★ Standards have to be clearly communicated in the beginning as well as the consequences for failing to meet them
- ★ Bring in the incentives!





THANK YOU!