
Nature-based and cultural tourism

- **Purpose:** enhance natural and cultural assets for sustainable tourism that benefits local communities.
- **Challenges:** Seasonality, infrastructure gaps, and risk of over-tourism in sensitive areas.
- **Relevant EU Policies and Initiatives:** EU Tourism Agenda, European Green Deal, Cultural Heritage Action Plan.¹
- **Opportunities for Rural Actors:** Rural actors can co-design tourism strategies, access EU cultural funds, and advocate for sustainable tourism standards.

MFF Insights²

- Tourism indicators remain somewhat narrowly focused on visitors and jobs, exposing rural regions to risks of overtourism and shallow success metrics.
- While the MFF proposals recognises cultural heritage as an asset, it largely frames it as an economic driver rather than a sustainability lever.
- The gap lies in the absence of resilience and sustainability metrics, for example such as carbon footprint per visitor, carrying capacity of fragile sites, and benefits to local communities. For rural areas, these risks privileging quantity over quality in tourism development.
- An opportunity exists to align EU tourism support with green and social dimensions by adopting place-sensitive indicators on inclusiveness, accessibility, and crisis resilience.

Questions

1. Nature-based and cultural tourism

- 1.1. Rural tourism often sells the “authentic past” — what if EU support focused instead on creating the *authentic future*?
- 1.2. How can EU programmes make tourism a stabiliser against depopulation rather than a seasonal extractive economy?
- 1.3. Could rural tourism become a lab for sustainable lifestyles for Europe as a whole?

EU Budget specific

- a) Rural tourism often focuses on heritage as a static asset. How can EU support reframe tourism to co-create vibrant, resilient local futures that generate social and environmental value, not just economic returns?
- b) Current tourism indicators focus on jobs and visitor counts. What new metrics could make EU tourism funding truly sustainability-driven?

¹ Sinerma, J., & Pazos-Vidal, S. (2025). Analysis of EU policies around rural innovation, RURACTIVE Policy Brief. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15227863>

² AEIDL on behalf of RURACTIVE submission public consultation EU's next long-term budget (MFF) – implementing EU funding with Member States and regions - Feedback from: European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)