



SUSTAIN-T

2017-1-ES01-KA202-038128

Sustainable Tourism through Networking and Collaboration



Module 5:
**Networking and Collaboration Benefits
to Tourism Business**

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Keywords

Local tourism networks; international tourism networks; benefits of networking; benefits of clustering; factors for successful networking

Learning objectives	<p><i>As a result of engaging with the materials in this module, learners are intended to achieve the following learning outcomes:</i></p> <p>Knowledge: <i>learn how tourism MSEs can improve their performance and success by boosting the networking and collaboration initiatives, especially under the sustainability approach.</i></p> <p>Skills: <i>improved ability to identify and implement at the tourism MSE level the main networking and collaboration networks.</i></p> <p>Competencies: <i>encouraging networking and collaboration initiatives at the MSE level in order to promote a more sustainable tourism.</i></p>
Methods	<p><i>Autonomous learning by reading and studying the course materials and the complementary sources and links provided in the materials.</i></p> <p><i>Collaborative group work by means of the space and resources in the platform.</i></p>
Time schedule	<p><i>Time necessary for:</i></p> <p><i>Learning content (self-study): 1.5 hours</i></p> <p><i>Self-test questions: 5 minutes</i></p> <p><i>Additional time (depending on learners) is required to complete the learning activities and review complementary sources and links</i></p>

Introduction

This fifth module of SUSTAIN-T course is divided into three main units, each of them dealing with a specific topic related to the networking and collaboration benefits to tourism businesses.

The tourism MSEs after having dealt with this module, will be able to identify various forms of networking, will know more about the local, European and international tourism networks and will have a clear picture about all the benefits different networks and clusters are able to offer them.

Tourism MSEs will furthermore learn why networking and collaboration is so important in undertaking sustainability initiatives and they will also become familiar with how to become successful networkers and collaborators while carrying out joint sustainability initiatives.

Content

5.1 Local, European and International tourism networks. What to know about networks?

Networking can be defined as those activities in which **MSE** owners build and manage personal relationships with individuals and organisations in their environment. Networks are patterns of relationships between different organisations, enterprises and even their competitors. In general, variety of interactions happen on a daily basis, such as cooperation with the customers, suppliers and competitors.

As one of the largest industries in the world, the tourism industry links various stakeholders, such as tourism enterprises, tourists, national tourism offices, infrastructure providers and other types of supporting organizations who are directly or indirectly involved in tourism. The final tourism product is the result of a wide range of services and products provided by various complementary and competing stakeholders operating in the industry. The tourism industry is a complex environment in which networking among diverse partners seems essential in order to supply integrated tourist products and provide the best service to the end user. The need to form networks of close collaborative relationships appears to be even stronger in tourism as compared to other industries, since tourism enterprises are mostly micro and small-sized organisations, fragmented over a geographic region.

There are various networking forms that may ensue to optimise competitive advantage. Networks involve commitment by network members to a set of common goals and, quite possibly, the sharing of worldviews. They can be temporary or permanent depending on the goals of the partnership. Network formations may vary from existing cluster consortia to loosely coupled business systems, online networks, or emerging grass-roots economic community developments.

Geographically, we can define local tourism networks, European tourism networks and international tourism networks.

Local tourism networks

As globalisation has meant increased pressure on **tourism MSEs** to be competitive, the concentration has to be on a local level in order to achieve competitiveness through small innovative steps, co-operation and collaboration. Over the past decade, several attempts have been made in using networking, clustering and agglomeration theories to explain the role of tourism in influencing local growth and stimulating regional development.

The major partners for sustainable tourism development are the industry, the local authority and the local host environment. In the tourism industry potential partners can be attractions, accommodations, restaurants, tour operators, shops and tourism related associations. Local host environment can be actors such as residents, community groups, local organizations, associations and environment supporters. The authorities group represents all government agencies.



One example of local networks are tourism destinations. Tourism destinations might be seen as networks of connected private and public organizations, which can be considered stakeholders of the destinations. Because the tourist perceives the destination as an integrated entity, managing a tourist destination is a very complex task.

Another example is cluster partnership. Cluster is a geographically concentrated cooperation between enterprises which includes all the companies and institutions that are capable of raising the added value created in the value chain. Considering its actual form the tourism cluster is a voluntary cooperation of enterprises and organisations belonging to a certain production vertical, created in order to achieve common goals.

European tourism networks

The **Enterprise Europe Network** is a key initiative of the European Commission that helps small companies make the most of business opportunities in the EU. The Tourism and Cultural Heritage Sector Group is a sector group who organise brokerage events to help businesses reach technology transfer or cooperation agreements with other companies in their sector.

The **EDEN network** consists of the winners and runners-up of the EDEN European Destinations of Excellence awards. The network is a platform for exchanging good practice in sustainable tourism on a European level and for promoting contact between award-winning destinations. The network aims to encourage other destinations to adopt sustainable tourism development models. With more than 350 EDEN destinations from 27 European countries as members to date, the EDEN network is the world's biggest network in the field of sustainable tourism.

The **European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN)** is a network for Cultural Tourism Development and promotion. ECTN Members are destinations, authorities, NGOs and research institutes. ECTN aims to achieve a high level of collaboration between members in the field of cultural tourism and to establish a close cooperation with the institutions of the European Union and other international organizations, networks and public institutions worldwide.

International tourism networks

The **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)** is the leading international organisation in the field of tourism. UNWTO generates market knowledge, promotes competitive and sustainable tourism policies and instruments, fosters tourism education and training, and works to make tourism an effective tool for development through technical assistance projects in over 100 countries around the world. UNWTO's membership includes 158 countries, 6 Associate Members and over 500 Affiliate Members representing the private sector, educational institutions, tourism associations and local tourism authorities.

The **OECD Tourism Committee** analyses and monitors policies and structural changes affecting the development of domestic and international tourism. The Committee provides policy-makers with concrete analysis of key challenges and policy responses that will shape tourism in the years to come. The Committee actively promotes an integrated, whole-of-government approach linking tourism to policies such as economy, investment, transport, trade, inclusive growth, employment, innovation, green growth, local development MSEs and entrepreneurship.



Learning activity 5.1:

Do you know other tourism networks at local, European or international level, other than those mentioned above?

Does your company participate in or want to participate in any of these networks? Why?

Please justify your answer

5.2 Why network and collaborate in undertaking “sustainable tourism initiatives”

Tourism MSEs are faced with limited internal resources, which forces entrepreneurs to access the external resources that are embedded in their social networks. Networks have been found to present an important source of support for entrepreneurs by providing them with a wide range of opportunities. In order to survive on the market, MSEs are forced to establish networks, since only collaboration enables resource exchange and the MSEs' access to opportunities. As such, organisational networks may represent an essential element of the MSEs' survival strategies.

A group of **tourism MSEs** can compete globally by co-operating locally, networks and clusters in tourism have experienced a dramatic growth, bringing benefits such as flexibility, share of valuable marketing information, innovation, opportunity to enter other networks and clusters on a national level and across borders, resource development and knowledge transfer between stakeholders.

General advantages of networking:

- ✓ Networking is great for sharing ideas and knowledge.
- ✓ You can identify business best practices or industry benchmarks. Learning from what others do is a valuable strategy for all businesses.

- ✓ It's natural that networking will result in opportunities. Using the contacts you make when you meet people can open doors for business opportunities.
- ✓ Being visible and getting noticed is a big benefit of networking. Attending networking events raises your personal profile and can help keep you front and center in the minds of the right people.
- ✓ You can often find solutions to your own business problems or needs by networking.
- ✓ You can keep up with the trends in your industry and the target market conditions which is important in an ever-changing business climate.

The research on organizational networks has thus revealed a positive relationship between the mutual cooperation within organizational networks and the business performance. Appropriately selected and well-managed networks represent a strategic necessity for the firm. Due to resource exchange through inter-organizational relationships, MSEs may be successful despite their size, which may not only enable them to benefit from the advantages resulting from their flexibility but also encourage them to benefit from the advantages resulting from a wide range of resources.

Benefits of tourism destination networks

The numerous benefits attributed to tourism networks in past research are mainly related to the integration of tourism destinations and the performance and quality enhancement of tourism destinations. By fostering innovation, knowledge sharing and competitiveness of the involved interrelated stakeholders, the networked collaboration can help **tourism MSEs** to be more resilient and to function better in a fast-changing, turbulent and competitive world.

There is also evidence that the frequency of contacts among the interrelated tourism firms, at both the formal and informal level, strongly influences the destination's success. In fact, more frequent interactions might lead to more efficient information, knowledge and skills transfer. Thus, by increasing the **tourism MSEs'** social capital, networks can improve the competitive position of tourism firms and enhance the overall tourist experience.

Special benefits of tourist destination networks:

- ✓ You can develop a community brand and attract the travellers to your destination.
- ✓ You can partner with local suppliers in order to create valuable packages that are attractive to travellers who are looking for a great deal.
- ✓ You also can develop cross-promotional campaigns that encourage your customers to book with a complementary travel business in your destination.

When you network with those in the industry in your area, you can form an alliance of sorts. While you may be competing for the same customers, you are all part of a larger destination that is hoping to attract travellers from around the globe.

Benefits of participating in clusters

Cluster members have often common projects in the fields of providing information, communication, training, event organisation, marketing and PR. Clusters utilize the advantages of localisation. It enables:

- ✓ the faster and more accurate flow of information,

- ✓ the spread of technological and organisational experiences,
- ✓ the constant exchange of knowledge,
- ✓ the support of local societies (educational institutions, infrastructural development, etc.),
- ✓ Faster market adaptation.



Learning activity 5.2:

What are / could be the main benefits for your company to be a member of a tourism network? And what are / could be the main difficulties?

5.3. What it takes to be a successful networker and collaborator?

Relationships not only need to be built, but also need to be maintained to be effective. An initial meeting and the starting point of the relationship is far from being its ending (Kay, 2010; Hopkins, 2003). Managing groups and networks is extremely important as it enhances network performance. Sharing beliefs and values within the collaborators and management is necessary for success, and maintaining solidarity within the group is an important basis and an outcome for a successful network strategy and coherence between the members of the **tourism MSEs** network (Oerlemans & Assouline, 2004; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Networking is one technique of collaborative management. The best way to transition from an individual to a collaborative mindset is to equip each team member for active participation in the group dynamic. Collaboration is an interpersonal process that requires the presence of a series of elements in the relationships between the professionals in a team (San Martín-Rodríguez, Beaulieu, D'Amou & Ferrada-Videla, 2005; Agranoff, 2006). Some of these fundamental elements are:

- Willingness to collaborate - clear definitions and agreements on the roles of partners in the collaborative process. Identification of obstacles and addressing problems cooperatively should be done, as they occur. For that, teamwork is essential. Group goals are above personal satisfaction and/or recognition. It's crucial to focus the desired project results—collaboration is not about the individual goals.
- Trust in each other- there should be a general agreement on methods and goals to complete projects or tasks. Don't go onward until all members of the **tourism MSE** network are in agreement.
- Mutual respect - recognition of, and respect for the contribution of all collaborators. It's important to give credit when credit is due. Mutual respect is also the willingness to apologize and the ability to forgive others for mistakes.
- Active communication - open communication within teams to share the necessary information.

Some of the strategic priorities for the successful management of innovative networks are (Oerlemans & Assouline, 2004):

- ✓ A sufficient shared agreement on the vision, goals and methods: an alignment of the objectives and fundamental values among the members of the network facilitates the possibility of renegotiations and the opportunity to reflect, making the network less vulnerable in case of expansion and enrolment of new members to the **tourism MSE** networks;
- ✓ Preserve the coherence of the **tourism MSE** network: the reinforcement of the sense of belonging to the group can be achieved through activities such as social events. Internal coherence of the network reinforces the group's ability to communicate, to manage the network democratically and to share responsibility;
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation: networking is also a dynamic process. A capable leadership, democratically organized, can search and reunite self-evaluation tools and procedures to goals, rules and methods. Internal management of the **tourism MSEs** network is crucial for successful networking, which requires strong leadership for guiding and maintaining this process;
- ✓ Finding balance in the leadership and shared responsibility: shared commitment and leadership are necessary to successfully manage an innovative network;
- ✓ Need for Collective Action: formalisation of the network, through the establishment of a foundation, co-operative, union and corporation.

Often, members of the network are busy managing their own companies. Therefore, the role for facilitators or advisors should be considered, since they can apply their time and effort to contribute to the network and therefore, contribute to sustainable businesses (Oerlemans & Assouline, 2004). In the same line of thought, Hopkins (2003), suggested to find connectors, i.e., to find people who can put one in touch with the right individuals as a component key to ensure the practice of successful networking.

Forret and Dougherty (2001) identified five types of networking behaviors to help individuals increase and maintain the size of their networks, such as increasing internal visibility, which can be achieved for example, by joining organizational task forces from different companies; engaging in professional activities, like collective learning sessions such as, specialized workshops, community leadership development sessions, forums on "what works" (Oerlemans & Assouline, 2004; Agranoff, 2006); participating in joint social gatherings, like dinners or parties with all the individuals composing the network; Becoming involved in community events and lastly, maintaining contact with others, which can be done, for example through e-mail (a simple and effective way to keep in touch).

At a more individual level, there are some characteristics that are often mentioned to in the literature as shown by a good networker. Each one of the characteristics above are linked to the notion of building mutually beneficial relationships, within tourism business networks (Misner & Hillard, 2017; Kay, 2010; Kramer, 2011):

- ✓ Being a good listener is of extreme importance to network. The practice of active listening is one of the keys for the success in networking. The only way we can learn people's needs, concerns and finding opportunities to help them is to hear them.
- ✓ Always follow up: It is advised to follow-up with the contacts of your network, timely and persistently, creating a connection that justifies help being given when necessary (Hopkins,

2003). For example, send a simple follow-up email, containing notes or pieces of information that you remember, including your appreciation for what they had to say and perhaps ask a follow-up question.

- ✓ Be collaborative and help others: A willingness to collaborate and help others is essential as it builds trust and helps establish a strong relationship. A successful networker should ensure that when time and help are given, the gesture should be acknowledged and reciprocated, if possible. Being generous to people you meet helps in finding the motivation to create personal opportunities through a positive mental attitude (Kay, 2010). Even if it is not possible to directly help someone who has previously helped us, there may be an indirect way to do it, for instance, someone you know may be useful to them and you could introduce them.
- ✓ Be sincere and authentic: Those who have developed successful networking skills express their sincerity without exceptions. Getting to know people and making new contacts is an essential part of networking effectively. When in contact with others, the right attitude really matters, since it is the first thing others notice. A positive attitude will attract people and they will want to spend time with you.
- ✓ Be curious about other people. They will find you far more interesting if you show an interest in them. Keep in mind that most people like to talk about themselves. Ask pertinent questions that make the other person realize their efforts and intent in knowing them.
- ✓ Be flexible. Using the same approach in networking will not produce the same results, since every person is unique. Thus, it is necessary to adapt our speech to the person who is in front of us. This flexibility can be achieved through confidence and proficiency in trying new approaches.

Finding and understanding the appropriate way to foment a business relationship-building process is a significant skill. There are quite a few methods to choose and this choice should be changing over time, depending on the context in which the individual belongs to. Once you get accustomed to the network and begin to progress in building relationships, the motivation to continue is bigger (Misner & Hillard, 2017; Kay, 2010; Kramer, 2011; de Janasz & Forret, 2008).



Learning activity 5.3:

Do you consider yourself a good networker? If yes, give two examples that support your opinion (think about both success factors and obstacles). If not, indicate the main challenges you have faced.

Do you consider yourself a good collaborator? If yes, give two examples that support your opinion. (think about both success factors and obstacles). If not, indicate the main challenges you have faced.

What are the most significant differences between being a successful networker and being a successful collaborator?

<p>Useful links</p>	<p>https://destinet.eu/ <i>Tourism2030 is an independent portal which brings together the global community of people and organisations working for making tourism more sustainable. This platform provides information and good practices on sustainable tourism. It contains a global map of stakeholders for sustainable tourism where you can find potential network partners.</i></p>
	<p>https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism_en <i>The page of the European Commission contains useful links on tourism related regulations, organizations, programs and events.</i></p>
	<p>http://www.tourismandmore.com/tidbits/tourism-business-networking/ <i>The article summarizes some key points of being a successful networker in the tourism sector.</i></p>
	<p>https://www.rezdy.com/blog/destination-marketing-networking-tourism-industry-important/ <i>An article summarizing the importance of networking in the tourism industry especially with the tools of destinations marketing.</i></p>
	<p>https://www.strath.ac.uk/professionalservices/careers/skills/peopleskills/teamworkcollaborationskills/ <i>A list of teamwork and collaboration skills, including behavioural indicators to build and maintain relationships, as well as a constructive exercise to understand if you have the previous mentioned skills, constructed by the University of Strathclyde Glasgow.</i></p>
	<p>http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/06/22/improve-team-collaboration-with-these-key-skills/#73e0e3c8329d <i>This website defines collaboration, explains what some of the skills needed to improve team performance as well as the facets to miscommunication. It aims to improve team collaboration using some key skills.</i></p>
	<p>https://www.bidsketch.com/blog/marketing/networking-skills/ <i>This article aims to present a different and most complete approach to network, using a list of 8 networking skills that according to the authors, every professional should have.</i></p>
	<p>https://www.theiet.org/membership/career/career-options/progression/essential-work-skills/networking.cfm <i>The Institute of Engineering and Technology, gives expert advice on networking and how it can significantly aid your career development, including the explanation of why is networking is important, how to build a network and some networking tips.</i></p>
	<p>https://www.eventbrite.com/blog/networking-activities-corporate-icebreakers-ds00/</p>

	<i>This website explains how to organize group icebreakers and networking activities for adults in corporate events.</i>
	http://baab.biz/how-to-follow-up-after-networking-events/ <i>This website offers a simple strategy in how to follow up after networking events such as the information to be included in a follow up email.</i>

Summary of key points

- Networks are patterns of relationships between different organisations, enterprises and even their competitors
- Networking is activities in which MSE owners build and manage personal relationships with individuals and organisations in their environment
- There are touristic networks at different geographical levels
- Local tourism networks are e.g. tourist destinations or cluster partnerships
- International tourism networks include e.g. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), The OECD Tourism Committee, whereas European networks include e.g. the Enterprise Europe Network, the EDEN Network and the European Cultural Tourism Network
- Relationships not only need to be built, but also need to be maintained to be effective.
- The opportunity to network is extremely valuable. Getting to know people and making new contacts is an essential part of working effectively and the right attitude really matters.
- Networking is one technique of collaborative management.
- The most important benefits of networking are: knowledge sharing, identifying best practices/industry benchmarks, bigger opportunities, being more visible and keeping up with the trends.
- Collaboration is an interpersonal process that requires the presence of a series of elements in the relationships between the professionals in a team. These include: willingness to collaborate, trust in each other, mutual respect and active communication.
- Some of the strategic priorities for the successful management of innovative networks are: a sufficient shared agreement on the vision, goals and methods, preserve the coherence of the MSE network; monitoring and evaluation of goals, rules, methods and results; finding balance in the leadership and shared responsibility; need for collective action. The role of facilitators or advisors should be considered.
- Five types of networking behaviours to help individuals increase and maintain the size of their networks are: increasing internal visibility, (which can be achieved for example, by joining organizational task) forces from different MSEs; engaging in professional; participating in joint social gatherings, becoming involved in community events and maintaining contact with others.
- Some characteristics of a good networker are: being a good listener; always follow up; be collaborative and help others; be sincere and authentic; be curious about other people and be flexible.

Integrative learning activity for Module 5: Position Paper



Systematize the reflections you made while engaging with the module materials. Outline the aspects, which need to be considered so that networking and collaboration can bring benefits to your company.

Indicative structure:

1. *General awareness of the networking and collaboration benefits to tourism business;*
2. *Strengths integrating local/European/International tourism networks in order to safeguard heritage;*
3. *Strengths integrating local/European/International tourism networks to achieve sustainable tourism and economic development;*
4. *Weaknesses that your company presents to develop a collaborative management in tourism networks;*
5. *Particular consideration about any existing skills gap in your company to be successful networkers and maintaining effective relationships within the collaborative management.*

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Glossary

<i>Networking</i>	<i>Activities in which MSE owners build and manage personal relationships with individuals and organisations in their environment.</i>
<i>Networks</i>	<i>Patterns of relationships between different organisations, enterprises and even their competitors.</i>
<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>A person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an MSE. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the MSE's actions, objectives. For example: employees, government, suppliers, unions, and the community from which the business draws its resources.</i>
<i>Competitive advantage</i>	<i>A superiority gained by an enterprise when it can provide the same value as its competitors but at a lower price, or can charge higher prices by providing greater value through differentiation.</i>
<i>Cluster</i>	<i>A network of connected businesses, suppliers, and associates in a specific field that are all located in the same geographical area.</i>
<i>Tourism destination</i>	<i>It is a particular geographic region which contains landscape and cultural characteristics and it is in the position to offer a tourism product, which means a broad wave of facilities in transport, accommodation, food and at least one outstanding activity or experience.</i>
<i>Active listening</i>	<i>Communication technique that requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand, respond and remember what is being said. There are nine a Basic active listening skills: (1) empathic responding, (2) self- disclosure, (3) positive feedback, (4) summarizing responses, (5) reflecting feelings, (6) paraphrasing, (7) nonverbal behavior, (8) eye contact, and (9) encouragement.</i>

<i>Collective learning</i>	<i>It is generally conceptualized as a dynamic and cumulative process that results in the production of knowledge. Such knowledge is institutionalized in the form of structures, rules, routines, norms, discourse, and strategies that guide future action. Learning emerges because of interactive mechanisms where individual knowledge is shared, disseminated, diffused, and further developed through relational and belonging synergies.</i>
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2017-1-ES01-KA202-038128

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