



## STEPPA – Sustainable Tourism in Enterprises, Parks and Protected Areas

STEPPA project's main aim is to promote and strengthen the cooperation between the different experiences and certification initiatives for small and micro tourism enterprises working with (Charter) protected areas, through the sharing, levelling and enhancement of their sustainability practices and criteria, and strengthen their competitiveness through the development of working partnerships between these initiatives and specialized research and support centres for tourism sustainability.

The project involves ten partners from seven countries University of Eastern Finland (Finland), Leeds Metropolitan University (UK), EUROPARC Federation (Germany), Consejería de Medio Ambiente (Andalucía, Spain), Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime (Italy), Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta (Italy), State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic (Slovak Republic), Latvian Country Holidays (Latvia), Nationalparkverwaltung Harz (Germany), and CoaST (UK).

Specific objectives are to:

- a) promote and strengthen the cooperation between the different partnership initiatives aimed at small and micro tourism enterprises working with (Charter) protected areas;
- b) benchmark the different sustainability certification schemes and business/park working partnerships against best practices at European level and work on their harmonization;
- c) strengthen businesses' competitiveness through the support of tourism research centres and access to tailored sustainability research and market tools;
- d) demonstrate links between implementation of sustainable management systems, increased competitiveness, growth in conservation awareness and support, and businesses and destination value leading to better customer value;
- e) promote capacity-building of business owners and protected areas' managers on sustainable tourism approaches and evaluation;
- f) disseminate best practices at a European level through the creation of online networking platform for sharing of resources and tools for protected areas, businesses, and other interested parties.

Work description:

The work is divided into six work packages:

Work package (WP) 1 includes networking meetings and seminars. The meetings are platforms for discussions of the project's key themes, progress and presentation of results (e.g. best practices, online platform, pilot actions and research methodologies). The meetings will also be used for capacity building of the project's partners for the implementation of the piloting actions and dissemination of sustainable tourism market and research tools in their destinations and local, regional or national networks.

This STEPPA project is part of the EU's Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP).  
<http://ec.europa.eu/cip/>

WP 2 includes all the knowledge creation and research support activities (including the development of customer and business surveys, discussion and harmonization of sustainability criteria) and development of research methodology aimed at sustainable tourism practices of small and micro businesses operating in protected areas. Research activities are divided in three themes:

1. comparison of different methodologies, and group discussions concerning sustainability standards and practices;
2. customer research;
3. business research.

Activities and methodologies in WP 2 are transferred to ST knowledge support and development tools to be made available on online platform developed in WP 3. The online platform is a tool for communication of partners and will contain all research tools, reports and results of the project.

WP 4 includes pilot actions and training in pilot areas. Aim is to create and enhance partnerships between (Charter) protected areas, local business networks, and research bodies. SMEs and other stakeholders will receive capacity building in the use and implementation of sustainable tourism research and evaluation tools. The tools are implemented in pilot areas to gather information about tourists' values, trends and preferences, and sustainability practices of the local businesses.

WP 5 contains the communication activities and the dissemination of research results. Communication and dissemination outputs include presentations in conferences, seminars and network meetings, newsletters and research reports, and updating of online platform (WP2). Aims of the communication activities are to strengthen the network and promote the project's results and activities.

WP 6 includes the administration work of the project. In summary, the project aims to increase knowledge, competences and expertise of SMEs by direct engagement in the development of information on tourism sustainability, and increase co-operation benefits of project partners and the European Charter network (especially the co-operation between businesses, protected areas and research institutions).

Lead organization: University of Eastern Finland, Centre for Tourism Studies

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For further information please contact:

Henna Konu  
Project manager/Researcher  
University of Eastern Finland  
Centre for Tourism Studies  
Puistokatu 5, P.O. Box 86  
FI-57101 SAVONLINNA  
FINLAND  
[henna.konu@uef.fi](mailto:henna.konu@uef.fi)  
+358 50 439 5377