



GreenSET

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GreenSET Service Accelerator and the role of Business Support Organizations in circular transformation of tourism SMEs

An article by GreenSET consortium partners (Sistema Iniziative Locali - Sinloc SpA and Foundation Business Start-Up Center Bar)

Structural Pressures on Tourism SMEs in the Adriatic Region

Tourism SMEs across the Adriatic area are under pressure to do two things at once: they must reduce their environmental impact while remaining competitive in a market shaped by seasonality, price sensitivity, and rapidly changing demand.

The good news is that many solutions already exist. The challenge lies in making those solutions adoptable at scale, especially by micro and small companies with limited time, skills, and investment capacity.

This is where Business Support Organizations (BSOs) become essential. When equipped with a shared methodology such as MEDSSIM (MED Sustainable Service Innovation Methodology), they provide the support infrastructure that turns sustainability from theory into day-to-day business practice.

Structural Barriers to Circular Transition in Mediterranean Tourism

GreenSET was designed to address a well-documented structural challenge in the Mediterranean tourism sector, where the majority of value is generated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses that often lack the internal capacity, technical expertise, and strategic resources to independently design and implement circular and resource-efficient services. Research shows that what constrains SME transformation is not a lack of awareness or isolated best practices, but rather the absence of coordinated support infrastructures, common methodologies, and practical implementation tools that can enable change at scale (Rizos et al., 2016; OECD, 2018). In this context, structured intermediary support mechanisms become critical for translating sustainability principles into operational improvements across SMEs

GreenSET as a process-based Service Accelerator

Rather than positioning itself as a label, GreenSET proposes a process accelerator that strengthens expert capability and safeguards methodological integrity. It is based on the understanding that long-term circular transformation in tourism depends on competent intermediaries—BSOs equipped with robust methods. Peer-to-peer exchange and hands-on project experience are essential to ensuring

that advisors can effectively apply MEDSSIM in real business contexts. Building a network of capable experts across the Mediterranean region enables the framework to become scalable and transferable, allowing the same principles to be adopted by additional BSOs and sectors over time. Such intermediary-based transformation models align with OECD recommendations on strengthening SME support ecosystems (OECD, 2018).

Core principles of the GreenSET system

GreenSET is built on three simple but powerful principles: a clear improvement method, a structured mentoring process, and a strong business focus.

For BSOs, this means having a practical way to support SMEs — not occasionally or informally, but through a consistent and professional approach. The system strengthens the internal capacity of the BSO while improving the quality and reliability of the services delivered to tourism SMEs.

GreenSET is not a label or a certification. It is a working framework that helps organisations move from ideas to structured improvement.

From consultancy to mentoring: redefining the role of BSOs

The core objective is simple: helping SMEs improve in a structured and continuous way.

GreenSET shifts the BSO role from that of trainer or consultant to that of mentor who guides SMEs to reflect on their current position and define how they will improve in the next cycle. The process follows a clear cycle: understanding the starting point, setting priorities, defining actions, and reviewing progress before moving to the next improvement step. This structured approach enables organizations to deliver reliable, comparable, and repeatable support, regardless of which staff member is involved.

Linking sustainability to business value

A further strength of the approach is that sustainability is always connected to business performance. Environmental improvements are translated into:

- cost optimisation,
- smarter use of energy and resources,
- stronger operational resilience,
- improved service quality,
- better positioning in an increasingly sustainability-oriented tourism market.

For tourism SMEs, sustainability becomes a strategic opportunity rather than an abstract objective. It supports competitiveness, strengthens reputation, and contributes to long-term stability in a highly seasonal and competitive sector

Institutional Capacity Building within BSOs

GreenSET does not only benefit SMEs — it also strengthens the BSO itself.

By integrating a structured methodology into their service portfolio, BSOs ensure that the quality of support does not depend on individual styles or experience levels, strengthening their institutional credibility and reinforcing their role as reliable partners for SMEs.

GreenSET as a capacity-building system for circular transition

In essence, GreenSET is not merely a tool for SMEs but a capacity-building system for BSOs. By equipping them with a clear and transferable methodology, it enables circular transformation to move from isolated examples to coordinated sector-wide change. Its real value lies not in recognition, but in delivering consistent, credible, improvement-oriented mentoring to SMEs — cycle after cycle. In doing so, GreenSET strengthens BSOs as institutions and reinforces their role as key partners in advancing SME growth and sustainability.

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