



REPORT

Sustainability Lab Spain

31 May 2023



Description and objectives of the project

VisitNorway in Spain decided to organize a Sustainability Lab which would integrate in the same arena the most relevant actors for Norway as outgoing destination for the Spanish market: Norwegian sustainable destinations, airlines, travel trade, PR, consultants, etc.

These were the main purposes of the event:

- **To raise awareness of what Norway has to offer as a sustainable destination.**
- Create an arena for exchange of knowledge on sustainability between different actors of the Spanish tourism sector.
- Help participants from the Spanish tourism sector to work better with the concept of "sustainability" (with the support from external experts).
- To transmit to the Norwegian destinations the needs of the sector to better sell and promote the destination.

Agenda. Main sessions and topics

- 1. Presentation about Norway as sustainable destination.** Norway strategy in tourism and our role in VisitNorway to achieve the objectives of Norway. Norwegian Sustainable destinations. What it means for Norwegian sustainable tourism and future of the program. Presentation by Ingunn Sornes from VisitNorway. Presentation enclosed.
- 2. Presentation about Destination Lysefjord.** What it means for a destination to become sustainable destination, challenges and opportunities and the future ahead. Focus on the local communities and on the tourist satisfaction. Presentation by Johannes C. Apon from Lysefjorden Utvikling.
- 3. Round table** about sustainability with concrete proposals for travel agencies and tour operators from experts in sustainable tourism.
- 4. Round table** about challenges and opportunities that face tour operators and travel agencies working actively in the transition to be more sustainable.
- 5. Workshops: The Reality Behind Sustainable Tourism**
 - a. Expectations and perceptions: Does the demand of Spanish travellers match the offer of Norwegian destinations?
 - b. Hits and misses in communicating sustainable behaviours.
 - c. From opinion to action. Attracting customers with a conscience

Pannel 1**Ingunn Sornes VisitNorway****Innovation Norway “Sustainable Destination”****About the project**

The Sustainable Destination scheme is a destination management tool. It provides the framework for sustainability action and monitoring capabilities and provides a recognition for the destinations that achieves the certification. The destinations implement a common strategic framework and a plan of action considering 5 categories of criteria and indicators that need to be measured and documented. The categories are: destination management, destination strategy, nature/culture, social values, economic viability.

The scheme engages a range of local public and private sector stakeholders together with the host community. The scheme has international credibility and reflects Norwegian realities. Early 2023 more than 50 DMOs covering more than 130 municipalities are involved in the scheme.

Why

Sustainability efforts at destination level in Norway was fragmented and inconsistent. Destination managers lacked the tools and information to manage tourism in a sustainable way at the destination level. To guide the way, a common standard, operational tools and analysis, trained advisors, a monitoring digital platform, and an assessment and audit system were developed, combined with funding opportunities for destinations.

Using the tool provides the destination with a framework for sustainability action and a means of monitoring improvement. It raises awareness and know-how of sustainable tourism management and helps increase cross-sector tourism cooperation, especially at the local level. A dedicated project is combined with long term targeted improvement and delivery. It also provides the destination with a communication tool/sustainability branding to increase their competitiveness.

The Ambitions

Norwegian tourism is highly nature-based combined with taking place in areas where people live their daily lives. Un-managed tourism can cause stress on the local communities and natural habitats. The sustainable and regenerative approach is embedded in the “Sustainable destination”-scheme and the intention is to continue assisting destination management strategies and performance in an inclusive way. The scheme is expected to involve all national municipalities with tourism ambitions, and all DMOs to join in long term sustainable development and monitoring.

Pannel 2

Johannes C. Apon

Experience of being a Sustainable destination from the point of view of Lysefjord Utvikling

Johannes C. Apon Works with Tourism development in “*Lysefjorden Utvikling*”. Lysefjord is one of the best known fjords in Norway. They want to be number one in trekking and hiking routes and they count with emblematic world known nature attractions like Preikestolen or Kjerag.

Their main concerns is nature preservation and that tourism contributes to a better and happier life for the local communities. People have been living in the area for centuries and they want that they continue many more centuries.

Their main visions are:

“Innovation. Whole year destination»

“The fjord should be a place where people live, work and enjoy”

Their target groups

Their target is high end tourists with an interest in nature and Adventure travel. Main markets are Germany and the Netherlands and now they are also focusisng in Spain.

The focus on sustainability

Lysefjord received the first label in 2018 and then they got it again in 2021 and they are now in the process of getting it in 2024. This is an ongoing and never ending process.

They use the certification “Sustainable Destination” as a tool which helps them to know what needs to be done to be more sustainable. It is not only words but words into action.

The decisión about becoming a sustainable destination was a strategic decisión. It is useful and it gives Access to a Network. It also differentiates the destination against other, which is an added value towards the travel trade and travelers.

It is also important for the local community who work and live in the fjord and feel proud to be part of this process.

Some examples of practical issues about how the tool is used to improve the destination:

1. Infrastructure:
 - a. Whom do we hire, which materials do they use?
 - b. Easy to get there
 - c. How do people travel to the destination
 - d. Cruises? They prefer to focus on smaller local boats which can navigate with hibryd or electric bateries. They are now working on a 100% electric ferry.
2. Local business development
 - a. Hosts:
 - i. Local Manpower

- ii. Local guides to Preikestolen.
 - iii. Open and welcoming. Need to be “educated” for that.
- 3. Cultural heritage
 - a. Panoramic hikes in Norway
 - b. Construction of paths and trails. This can be a controversial theme for the local population.
 - c. Route "Lysejorden Rundt" around the fjord. 9 routes so that people stay longer in the area.

When creating new routes and paths, there is a lot of research behind. They analyze nature and a sustainable construction of the path, they do surveys to find out about the demand and needs and take into consideration all kind of local conditions.

Round Table 1

Sustainability in relation to destinations and tour operators. Under the view of experts in sustainable Tourism.

Moderator: Juanma Martinez Green & Human

*Participants: Raquel Torres Qalma
Yolanda Bazán Biosphere
Víctor Fernández La Buena Huella
Macarena Rodríguez Etico*

The session started by questioning the word “sustainability”. Juan Manuel Martínez started by saying: **“We are not going to talk about sustainability. We will talk about strategy and management”**.

Sustainability is not only about climate and environment. For instance, a tourist destination highly demanded in summer is not sustainable if its population cannot survive in winter due to lack of jobs. In the session they explored sustainability certifications and the opportunities they offer to the sector.

Certifications. Are all the same? Are some better than others?

Víctor Fernández, La Buena Huella:

All certifications are different and companies need to select the one which better adapts to the actual situation, processes and objectives of the company.

In Spain we still lack certifications adapted to the Tourism sector.

We should find certifications which help us to be more competitive. For instance one aspect which normally people do not relate to sustainability is the development of the employees inside the company and conciliation between work and life. In the tourism sector this is a big challenge. Improving this aspect would improve the sustainability of our Company.

How can a certification Help a Company and how does a certification like Biosphere Help companies?

Yolanda Bazán, Biosphere:

"The Responsible Tourism Institute has been helping companies and destinations for more than 25 years, to align their models with the international principles and objectives in sustainability, emanating from international organizations and Summits, such as the United Nations and the different COP guidelines. Through Biosphere, the RTI provides the unique methodology to connect business plans and DMO's management with the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs, involving all stakeholders.

In this sense, Biosphere certification helps all types of companies and destinations to comply with national and international sustainability criteria, recognizing the efforts they effectively implement along the way, encompassing what, in my opinion, are key factors for a good certification process:

- Provide the necessary tools to help how to make your model more sustainable, according to your resources, objectives and capabilities. What means that the entity is free to choose how it wants to work its sustainability, finding the necessary guidance and help to choose the most appropriate way for its particular case.
- Have an external, impartial and professional third-party verification service to ensure transparency and impartiality of information, instilling confidence in stakeholders.
- And, once your efforts have been implemented and verified, enable the appropriate channels to publicly share them. In this regard, Biosphere takes care are communicating them publicly and internationally, in an understandable and appropriate language to the target audience, to give the necessary value and voice to the entity's good practices; since this is the only way to involve and sensitize the society, avoiding that all the efforts remain hidden behind a diploma."

What can expect the sector when implementing sustainability, costs, efforts, etc.

Raquel Torres, Qalma:

The travel Agency or tour operator must decide where they want to go but before that, they need to know where they are. This means an intensive analysis of the company to find out the situation today and find out what needs to be done for accomplishing their objectives.

The Company needs to be ready for big changes. It needs to be an internal work with consciousness. All departments need to be involved and internal communication is crucial. It is the only way to succeed.

Another issue is tourists. Do they know what sustainability is? Are they willing to make actual changes in their buying patterns?

Communication being crucial, how should we work with communication and the marketing department?

Macarena Rodríguez, Ético:

Quick answer is training.

One cannot work with external communication without handling first internal communication. We need a lot of training, changing the internal culture and incorporating sustainability to all aspects of the organization. A lot of training and internal communication is needed to make a change into the whole organization's minds. Employees need to be motivated thinking that what they do can help improve the world.

But of course, we cannot forget external communication. It is important that tourists get the message and spread the news about our destinations, products or companies.

One important point when dealing with external communication is focusing on actual facts and concrete actions instead of focusing on future objectives which we cannot guarantee at the moment of the communication. Information needs to be based in data and real and concrete facts.

Comments and concerns from the audience:

- The fact that in Spain sustainability is highly politized and this can create important obstacles both in the actions and in the concienciation of the population.
- In many cases sustainability is perceived as something negative. Things we have to do and money we have to spend, instead of seeing the opportunities.

Round Table 2

Challenges and opportunities that present for a tour operator or travel agency including sustainability in all aspects of the company. Changes, challenges, learning points.

Moderator	Luca Bocci	VisitNorway
Participants:	Raquel Torres	Qalma
	Jordi Rivera	Icáron
	Fabrice Marchand	KLM
	Sonja Tejedor	Nanook
	Susana Conde	Turismo Responsable

Luca Bocci started the session by addressing Fabrice Marchand from Air France/KLM and challenging him as representative of the most vulnerable sector of tourism in relation to sustainability, airlines.

What is KLM/Air France doing in terms of sustainability?

Fabrice Marchand *KLM:*

They are conscious about how they affect Climate change but we also need to consider that air traffic only contributes to 2% of total emissions at a global level and in Europe 25%.

They know they need to work with this if they want to attract the new generations but sustainability is not only reducing emissions but it involves many other areas that the airline is working on like inclusion.

Jordi Rivera *ICÁRION*

Thankfully, sustainable tourism in Europe has clear and regulated guidelines. Among others, by 2050 airlines are required to use 60% of their fuel as SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel) and by 2035 this percentage must already be 20%. And 2035 is just around the corner. It is a big and costly transition for airlines that we understand they cannot tackle on their own. It is essential to have the support of governments and the EU to facilitate the change, but also that of part of the tourism sector that needs their services, such as tour operators. This is why Icarion became the first operator worldwide to collaborate with the Air France-KLM group on the development of biofuels.

Susana Conde Turismo Responsable

We have the responsibility of communicating and informing the final consumer. The interest for sustainability has increased in the market but customers still do not know what it means. Travelers still do not know exactly what sustainable travel is or they do not care enough to make the choice.

Jordi Rivera ICÁRION

When confronted with the grandiloquent term "sustainability" I advocate landing and unpacking this concept in tourism and making it more explicit. No customer in Spain walks into a travel agency asking for a "sustainable trip". Tourism intermediaries in this country, in charge of producing and prescribing this type of trips, should facilitate the understanding of the concept by using more terms, if possible more enlightening ones, such as "responsible tourism", because it is not a question of labels. Customers do not ask for it with this terminology, but they do know that they want this type of tourism, when they ask to travel in small groups that generate little impact on the destinations, to places with large natural spaces and to stay in hotels that consume proximity products through local suppliers. In a not too distant future, this will be the highest quality type of travel.

Concrete actions we can do to be more sustainable

Sonja Tejedor Nanook:

Small actions can be important. For instance to do the transfers for a congress in public transportation

Raquel Torres Travel Advisors

The travel Agency can select whom to work with, whom to buy their services and how to sell them. They have the control on the travel supply chain and they need to study how to make this chain more sustainable.

Changes might require an investment but at the end it will be worth it because the trend is that travelers are getting more responsible and are evaluating more and more sustainability in travel.

How can we avoid “green washing”?

Fabrice Marchand KLM:

They try to communicate as much as possible in all kind of communication networks about what they actually do.

Also very important internal communication. All employees can influence the image and the communication of the company in different arenas.

Some concerns and comments from the audience

Travel agencies say that sustainable travel is more expensive and clients do not show much interest. But other participant disagreed: We see a more and more conscious population and the new generations think differently.

We say: “in the best scenario travel agencies have time to adapt. In the worst, faster competitors will occupy their place”

Presently, working with sustainable tourism is voluntary but this will soon change

Is sustainable travel more expensive?

Is the traveler ready to pay more in the cases when it is actually more expensive?

Should legislation “punish” non sustainable travel so that sustainable travel is less expensive?

Sustainability should not be more expensive and it should give added value both to the destination, to the distributor and to the final client.

WORKSHOPS/FOCUS GROUPS

REALITY BEHIND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Demands from tourists, have it actually changed towards a more sustainable tourism?

Which are the trends about searching sustainable accommodation, activities and tourism products?

What can destinations do to adapt to the demand (in this case, Norwegian destinations)

How should we communicate?

How can we contribute to more conscious and responsible clients and/or distribution chain?

GROUPS 1 & 2

About expectations and perceptions. Does demand from Spanish travelers match the offer from Norwegian destinations?

Trends and changes in the demand. Is there actually a demand for sustainable Tourism? Has there been a real change? What are the future trends?

We think that Spanish travelers do not think about sustainability when they travel, but there are some initiatives about sustainability about which people are already aware and which affect the Spanish market. The groups agreed that, in the long run, sustainability will become a more important factor for travelers when they decide about their trips.

Differences between what we think clients want and what they actually want. And between what we think we offer and what they perceive we offer.

We are aware that Spanish tourists are very sensitive towards prices but the travelers to Norway are less sensitive and more ready to pay more. It is a small part of the market but big enough to be important to be taken into consideration. Like a small luxury segment.

If clients realize about the consequences of their travel, like not ethical use of animals during the trip, this affects their decisions. We have seen this in concrete cases where travelers change their choice because of more consciousness.

We need to translate and communicate what is actually a sustainable trip. ***The case is not that the Client does not demand a sustainable trip, it is more that he/she does not know exactly what it is.*** For instance many tourists prefer to travel in small groups, stay longer and enjoy local Food and meet local people. This would be a sustainable trip even if the word is not used.

What actions should take travel agencies and tour operators to contribute to a more sustainable tourism.

On one side, we need to communicate to the clients what sustainability is and that what they actually want is a sustainable trip. Even if they are not aware.

On the other side, they could make some brave choices retiring non sustainable products from their portfolio and demonstrate that the company has taken concrete decisions towards change.

The tourism sector should also join forces to press the local and national governments to facilitate sustainable tourism. The sector cannot carry with this responsibility on their own.

GROUPS 3 & 4

Achievements and errors when communicating sustainable behaviours

- Certifications, labels, “green washing”
- How to communicate our compromise with sustainability to the supply chain and to the final customer.
- Sustainability as a marketing tool. Is it correct?
- How to get a return on investment in sustainability

First step is to work in the internal communication. Train the staff and build a strong internal base. Even before and during the process working to get the certification, you need to work within your own organization.

"Green Washing" is the consequence of the fact that sustainability has become a trend that everybody feels forced to follow. This lead to the communication of small measures with small effect or future plans which are never accomplished. Sustainability is communicated externally without working with it internally.

There is also a “language” around sustainability which is creating a group of exceptic and “haters” towards the concept.

How do we communicate to the final Client how we work with sustainability and how it affects the value chain?

It is much more important to work for getting more ecological in the supply chain and with the product delivered tan working for an external certification. One of the participants showed a practical example. They offered their clients the choice between an old ferry or the electrical one. All their clients chose the electrical despite a slightly higher price. After a while, the electrical became the standard in the agency. This demonstrates that travel agencies can influence the demand and buying decision of the clients.

It is important not to communicate too much sustainability. Not only to avoid “green washing” but also because it does not need to be the most interesting matter. Clients might be interested in these type of trips without taking much care about certifications, emissions or objectives for 2050.

GROUPS 5 & 6

From opinion to action. Attracting compromised clients.

Focus on the client

First we need to push the management and employees from travel agencies to promote sustainability. Only the concept becomes part of the Company DNA is it possible to start with the clients.

It would be important to use a clear and transparent language and messages which show exactly concrete responsible actions taken place.

How can we educate the Client to be more conscious?

The process of persuading the clients will take time and should be done step by step. Consciousness must come from inside and it will take time. From the travel sector we can work in two ways. On one side we can work with our own value chain to give example and be more sustainable. In this way, we can raise awareness in the client giving example without mentioning the word sustainability.

On the other side, the clients must have their own internal motivation and realize that sustainability is an universal matter and not a political issue. We can help the clients realize by informing them but specially showing them examples.

How can we convince the client?

Instead of discussing how to convince the Client, the Group talked about how to conquer the Client, make him/her part of the whole concept. The strategy is to attract clients who are influenced by sustainability. To convince them we need to give example as a company. For instance, less paper. It is also possible to integrate sustainability in the company and give training to the travel agencies to show them the existing possibilities. This can be done for instance with sustainable “Fam trips”, where the travel agents have to travel green or compensate emissions.

When talking and selling, it is important to insist that sustainability is not only environment and climate. It is also about the use of local resources, ethical with wildlife, cooperation and much more.