

dTour - Introducing digitalisation for boosting SMEs in Tourism and Hospitality

IO1 - Initial Approach towards Benchmarking of Currently Used Digital Tools in Tourism and Hospitality



About the dTour project

Europe is the worldwide leader in international Tourism and Hospitality that is a key driving force of the European Union. Today, more than 95% of travelers use digital resources in the course of their travel. According to the World Economic Forum's Digital Transformation Initiative, from 2016 to 2025 digitalisation in aviation, travel, tourism and hospitality is expected to create up to hundreds of billions of euros for the industry through increased profitability, transformation from traditional players to new competitors, and to generate huge benefits for customers and the wider society. The above make clear that digital innovation is the key for competitiveness in the tourism industry.

In this context, European tourism small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seem to lack the ability to use new technologies, as they are trapped in a 'traditional' way of delivering services, according to EASME's report on Digitalisation in Tourism (2018).

The aim of the dTour project is to train and certify people who work in the Tourism & Hospitality sector with innovative digital skills in order to provide high-quality digitalised services to small and medium-sized businesses with more of a focus on hotels and accommodation.

The project aspires to develop an educational programme along with a certification scheme that will contribute to the certification of the skills, knowledge and attitudes of advisers in Tourism Digitalisation (dTour advisers), who will get qualified to support SMEs.



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The objectives

The project is seeking to train and certify professionals in Tourism & Hospitality with up-to-date digital skills, namely the dTour advisers, in order to boost SMEs' performance in Tourism and Hospitality.

The advisers could be people that have been already working in the Tourism and Hospitality sector and would like to enhance their skills and employment opportunities. They could also be owners and operators of SMEs that understand the need for digitalisation and would like to bring their own business to the new digital era, business consultants that already work or are interested in cooperating with SMEs in the sector etc.

Furthermore, the project gives Tourism & Hospitality SMEs the opportunity to navigate through new digital technologies and tools that they could use for their businesses and understand how they can benefit from them.

Target Group

The dTour advisers may be:

- Owners & managers – either current or future staff of SMEs in the Tourism and Hospitality industry that wish to extend their businesses;
- Business & social media consultants that already work or are interested in cooperating with SMEs in the sector and wish to add the specific competences in their portfolio in order to provide consulting services in Digitalisation in Tourism; and
- Graduates in Tourism that need to enhance their skills.

Definition of the *dTour adviser*

The main purpose of the dTour adviser is not only to be able to use the digital tools for the businesses, but rather to develop a plan according to the needs of the company that will help the SMEs exploit the new digital trends and technologies in the sector, in order to be used for operations' management and enhanced guest experience.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH - IO1



This executive summary is based on the transnational report, created from 5 national reports in the countries of Greece, Cyprus, UK, Spain and Sweden. The national reports have been developed in order to evaluate the current state of the tourism industry in each of the above-mentioned countries, when it comes to digitalisation as far as SMEs are concerned. The national reports were developed with the aim to identify the key skills and competencies that are required for someone to become a dTour adviser and what tools are needed by a dTour adviser in order to be successful on undertaking this job. This summary holds the overall conclusions of all the national reports together in an attempt to represent the trends and needs of the European Union when it comes to the levels of digitalisation of tourism SMEs.

The desk research has been conducted in order to examine the current situation of the tourism industry in each country and more specifically regarding existing digital tools that are used in the tourism and hospitality sector (which their characteristics are, whether they can be used by SMEs and how, good practices on the dTour topic etc.).

For the purposes of the field research, the partners designed 2 different questionnaires. The first one addressed the dTour target groups and aimed to identify their level of learning and training in the activities of a dTour adviser. The second questionnaire addressed the SMEs, in order to get a better idea of what they expect of a dTour adviser.

Overall Conclusions

The transnational report holds all the information that have been collected during all the processes which took place in Intellectual Output 1 (IO1) of the dTour project.

The information included derive from a desk research and a field research (survey with the use of questionnaires) that took place simultaneously in the 5 countries of the dTour consortium, namely in Greece, Cyprus, the UK, Spain, and Sweden. Partners from each of the aforementioned countries have prepared a national report whose aim was to identify the current state of the Tourism industry in their country when it comes to digitalisation and more specifically when it comes to the SMEs in the industry (desk research). At the same time, the research has examined the level of knowledge of the people who are active in the industry when it comes to digitalisation alongside their interest and willingness to learn more and develop on this topic (field research). The national reports include the results of both the desk research and the field research in each partner country.

This process helped the dTour consortium to learn a lot about the topic of interest of the project but it also raised some questions to the consortium. Even though the final conclusions were not as clear as expected, the national reports have provided the consortium with valuable information which can be used for the next steps of the project and guide the partners to achieve the aim and objectives of the project.

Common findings among the 5 partner countries

Through the process described above, the dTour consortium has concluded on many common findings in the five partner countries.

One of the main conclusions is about the areas of focus and the techniques that a dTour adviser should use when approaching an SME.

The 5 national reports agree that Tourism SMEs can get benefited from digitalisation in the four categories below:

- Improving the customer experience;
- Finding new customers;
- Internationalisation; and
- Improving internal quality through resource and staff management.

As for the dTour adviser techniques, the national reports have agreed on the following techniques:

1. Diagnostic and action planning;
2. Using digitalisation for improving business networks; and
3. Option appraisal (digitalisation options, models, 'off the shelf' options).

Different findings among the 5 partner countries

The five national reports have also shown some differences among the countries of the consortium.

Based on the collected questionnaires, the respondents in the different countries appear to prefer different methods of training regarding digital skills' improvement. In Greece, most of the respondents prefer to follow a training through an online course, while 'on the job' learning came second in their preferences. Most of the Cypriot respondents prefer 'on the job' learning while self-learning was the second most preferred choice in Cyprus. The two thirds of the UK respondents preferred the 'on the job' learning or self-learning while only one third of the respondents would prefer classroom or online learning. In Spain, respondents would prefer classroom learning, while 'on the job' learning scored also high. Similarly, in Sweden classroom learning was the most preferred choice of the respondents.

A blended learning method will be used for the needs of the project, so the consortium can accommodate the needs of the target group in the different countries and their different preferences. Another point that differs from person to person but also from country to country is the attitude of the people towards the digitalisation.

The Tourism industry is a huge industry that can be categorised in many different fields, such as attractions, hospitality, accommodation, travel agency and so on. Due to this variety of fields, digital tools can also vary from field to field. Despite the fact that the social media and digital marketing share some common characteristics, there are many digital tools that are designed specifically for some kind of organisations and are not applicable to others. **The role of the dTour adviser can be designed in such a way that it gives to the dTour adviser flexibility towards the different areas related to the industry or it focus on a specific point of interest.** This is an area that this transnational report has not helped the consortium to clarify.

Finally, **the most important difference identified among the different respondents is their current level of knowledge when it comes to digitalisation.** While some SMEs use only the social media, others are moving towards more advanced technologies. **A dTour adviser should be in a position to diagnose the level of the SMEs with regards to digitalisation in order to identify their needs.**

The Journey of (towards) Digitalisation describes the different levels at which an SME may be with regards to digitalisation and divides these levels in four categories as follows

This transnational report has made it clear to the consortium that different organisations are on different levels when it comes to digitalisation. It is important for a dTour adviser to be in a position to identify the level of digitalisation of the organisation that s/he has to deal with. The four levels or categories are the following:

- **Traditional operators:** Traditional business practice, low level of digitalisation focused on internal operations and creating value for tourists.
- **E-Business:** Digitalisation that improves internal operations, more effective engagement via digital marketing and online stores.
- **E-Commerce:** Growing interconnectivity, incorporation of diverse intermediaries, innovation across supply chains, B2B, B2C, C2C transactions.
- **Smart tourism:** SMEs that buy into smart destination vision, high level of innovation, real time connections, new innovative products, business models, connection with global value chains.

Questions raised

The transnational report has raised some important questions. These questions will help the consortium to move to the next stages of the project.

1. *What the focus of the dTour adviser should be?*
2. *On which area of digitalisation should this focus be?*
3. *On which field of the Tourism industry should this focus be?*
4. *What the role of the dTour adviser should be?*
5. *Should the dTour adviser focus on people from the industry who hold a specific level of knowledge on digital tools?*
6. *Which level of EQF should the training material that will be developed hold so that it can cover the needs of the industry in all the countries?*

Overall Suggestions for the Occupational Profile



In terms of the **target group**:

- Graduates of Tourism attending universities and vocational education and training institutions;
- Tourism entrepreneurs who have already consolidated their businesses;
- Future Tourism entrepreneurs willing to create their own businesses, who are already included in partner organisations' networks thanks to their ordinary activities;
- Business consultants who wish to add the adviser's competences to their portfolio in order to provide consulting services in Digitalisation in Tourism;
- NEETs (people not in Employment, Education or Training) who are trying to find their new path;
- People who are involved and have experience in the Tourism sector;
- People who value the digital tools and are interested to learn more;
- People who are interested to share the dTour knowledge with other people in their network (inside and outside their organisation);
- People with expertise in the use of current digital tools;
- People who can learn how to use such tools;
- People who can give solutions to business problems;
- People who can identify opportunities;
- People with expertise in digital tools in general;
- People with expertise in the Tourism industry (attractions, accommodation, travel agency etc.);
- Academics (of Tourism studies); and
- People involved in SMEs (in the Tourism sector)

In terms of **demographics**:

- Age: 24-39; and 40-55
- Work experience: actively involved in the Tourism industry; and bearing knowledge or experience in the tourism industry
- Size of organisation that they work for: SMEs

In terms of **interests of the people involved**:

- Tourism;
- Digital tools;
- Innovation;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Exploring new opportunities; and
- Knowledge increase

In terms of **competencies**:

- Communication skills (verbal and written);
- Knowledge on the local Tourism/Hospitality sector;
- Focus on customer experience;
- Perception and knowledge of IoT;
- E-leadership competencies;
- Creativity;
- Flexibility and adaptability;
- Problem solving;
- Team working;
- Responsibility;
- Business spirit;
- Organisational competencies; and
- Passion for learning

In terms of **attitudes**:

- Open-minded;
- Flexible;
- Communicative;
- Positive;
- Clear, concise and goal-orientated; and
- Identifying and prioritising the most urgent requirements of the 'client'.

In terms of **knowledge/skills**:

- Foreign language skills;
- Proven knowledge on digital skills;
- E-tourism marketing skills (plan development, e-marketing and e-branding planning, campaign development);
- Social media marketing skills;
- Search Engine Marketing SEM and Digital Marketing;
- Knowledge about the Tourism/Hospitality sector and working experience in the sector;
- Collection, editing and presentation of Tourism statistics;
- Content Management, Maximization & Updating of Online Digital Presence;
- Big data analysis;
- Proven pedagogical skills;
- Local knowledge about the Tourism/Hospitality sector;
- Understanding of how to deliver information, advice and guidance;
- Flexibility in their approach to deal with different SMEs and different digital competences and goals;
- Good knowledge on existing digital technology and its application across the Tourism and Hospitality sector;
- Expertise in the use of digital solutions across platforms;
- Ability to identify opportunities within business and provide relevant and up-to-date information to support digital solutions;
- Ability to provide information in a clear and concise manner;
- Ability to develop training and provide information to support SMEs; and
- Diagnostic skills

Overall Suggestions for the Curriculum



The Curriculum should include:

- **Basic social media marketing;**
- More specialised **digital tools;**
- **Soft skills;**
- **Spherical knowledge over the digital tools** in the sector;
- **Digital tools available** (related to the Tourism market): What are they? How to access them? How can they be used? What can they offer? Opportunities related to these tools? Costs and potential repayment of the investment in these tools.
- **Good understanding of the most recent digital tools for the potential dTour Advisers:** How to use them? How to access them? How to keep up with the competition? What happens in other most advanced areas? Information about the current digital tools. What are their benefits? When and how can they help an SME? How to deliver it in an organisation? Calculation of the benefits from these tools.

Also, the Curriculum should involve:

- **Techniques** of: coaching; how to react to 'resistance to change'; and understanding of your audience
- **Training** on developing needs analysis tools and training plans in order to ensure that the information is shared with businesses in the most appropriate way to support their needs;
- **Digital tools and resources** for successful management;
- **Provision of upscale customer services;** and
- **Needs analysis and development of tailor-made plans for SMEs**

Overall Suggestions for the Training Course



The Training Course should:

1. Be provided through blended learning. The most preferred methods identified are: Classroom Learning; Online Synchronous Learning; Online Asynchronous Learning; and On-the-Job Training;
2. Be based on the Curriculum;
3. Build on a flexible approach;
4. Last from two to four days;
5. Provide knowledge which will be more practical rather than theoretical

Overall Suggestions for the Navigation Guide



The Navigation Guide should:

- Be **open source**;
- Be **available online**;
- Hold information of the **current digital tools** (What? How? Why? Which are available? etc.);
- Include **good practices** on the application of these tools (examples of use);
- Be **regularly updated**;
- Include information on **how to access the training course** to become a dTour adviser;
- Include information on **how to find a dTour adviser**;
- Include a **'blog section'**, so that active users can share their experiences on using such digital tools;
- Align the new digital tools with **the needs of the tourism SMEs**;
- Present the **skills** of the dTour adviser and the **advantages of working** as a dTour adviser;
- Include the **basic steps for training a dTour adviser**;
- Inform on **whether the SMEs could use the tools based on their scale**; and
- Inform the SMEs on **when they can use the tools**



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