

# Cross-Re-Tour Sustainability Nudging Workshop: Comprehensive Strategic Report

Transforming European Tourism Through  
Collaborative Innovation and Behavioural Design

Digital Tourism Think Tank Strategic Analysis & Implementation Framework

## SUMMARY

## Executive Summary

The Cross-Re-Tour sustainability nudging workshop, held in Riga on 7 May 2025, marked a pivotal moment for European tourism's sustainable transformation. Designed and facilitated by the Digital Tourism Think Tank (DTTT), this intensive collaborative innovation session brought together 117 tourism professionals from eight European countries. Its primary objective was to effectively encourage sustainable behaviour change on a large scale.

The workshop's achievements significantly surpassed initial expectations, with consortium members commending it as "the strongest kick-off they've ever had to a programme". This was due to the generation of over 1,000 innovative concepts across six critical sustainability themes, the exceptional quality of collaboration, the depth of strategic thinking demonstrated and the immediate implementability of the solutions developed. The DTTT's refined methodology, honed through facilitating over 100 similar innovation sessions, proved instrumental in transforming abstract challenges into concrete, actionable solutions. It powerfully demonstrated the remarkable capacity of tourism Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) for collaborative innovation when provided with appropriate frameworks and expert facilitation.

The workshop's success underscores that structured collaborative innovation, supported by expert facilitation, is key to translating abstract sustainability challenges into concrete, scalable and implementable solutions. The focus on encouraging sustainable behaviour change at scale, and its success in generating immediately implementable solutions, illustrates that behavioural design is a highly effective, practical tool for driving significant, tangible transformation within the tourism sector.

## The Strategic Imperative for Sustainable Tourism

The workshop's strategic context was established by Nick Hall's keynote, "Nudging Sustainability for Tourism Businesses: Framing, Incorporating & Succeeding". This address highlighted the urgent need for sustainability action, the market opportunity presented by growing consumer readiness and the persistent challenge of bridging the intention-action gap in sustainable behaviour.

Nick underscored the urgency by presenting sobering statistics. Research from the World Resources Institute (WRI) revealed that while individual actions could theoretically eliminate a person's carbon footprint, 90% of this potential remains untapped without systemic changes from governments and businesses. This highlighted the pivotal role of tourism businesses as enablers of sustainable choices. Data from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) reinforced this, showing that almost 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions are directly linked to infrastructure decisions, reframing sustainability as a core strategic opportunity.

Despite these challenges, Nick presented encouraging global survey findings indicating widespread climate action support. A WRI global survey showed that 69% of people expressed willingness to contribute 1% of their personal income to environmental causes, while 86% supported pro-climate social norms. Within tourism, 83% of travellers stated that more sustainable travel was important to them and 75% desired to travel more sustainably in the next 12 months.

However, a critical challenge identified was the persistent gap between environmental intentions and actual behaviour. Despite 71% of Europeans considering sustainability important, only 19% were willing to pay a premium for green products. Data from Harvard Business Review (2019) indicated that while 65% of

consumers desired sustainable brands, only 26% actually purchased them. Similarly, 78% of air travellers wanted sustainable options and 73% would pay extra for reforestation, but only 1% actually donated to offset their flight's impact. This "intention-action gap" fundamentally shaped the workshop's focus on nudging techniques designed to bridge this divide through intelligent choice architecture.

## Foundational Nudging Framework

The workshop's activities were guided by a three-pillar theoretical framework, ensuring all outputs addressed psychological, social and economic dimensions of behaviour change simultaneously.

The first pillar, Emotional Nudging, focuses on creating personal resonance through storytelling, fostering a connection to individual values and designing immersive experiences that inspire sustainable behaviour.

The second pillar, Normative Nudging, seeks to establish sustainable practices as widely accepted social norms. This is achieved through harnessing peer influence, designing default choices that are inherently sustainable and implementing community recognition systems.

The third pillar, Gain-Based Nudging, involves implementing tangible rewards, gamification elements and recognition platforms that make sustainable choices immediately beneficial for the individual.

This comprehensive framework ensures that effective interventions integrate elements from all three pillars, creating a reinforcing effect. It directly addresses the "intention-action gap" by offering mechanisms beyond willpower or financial incentives, transforming the experience of sustainability from restriction to inspiration, social encouragement or reward.

# Key Innovation Areas and Promising Solutions

The workshop explored six core sustainability themes, applying the nudging framework to develop innovative and actionable solutions.

## Water Consumption

Water consumption is a significant environmental challenge in European tourism, with tourists consuming up to 200% more water than at home. Tourism accounts for 24.2% of total water consumption in destinations. However, real-time eco-feedback can reduce consumption by over 25%, and guests voluntarily save 10 litres per shower with appropriate feedback.

Two leading concepts emerged:

*"Save & Donate": Community Impact Integration* transforms individual water conservation into tangible community contributions by donating the monetary equivalent of guest water savings to water-scarce communities. This creates an emotional connection between individual actions and global impact, reframing conservation from sacrifice to empowerment.

*"Enough is Enough": Consumption Boundary Activation* establishes emotional and cognitive thresholds for water usage, framed as a collective ethic. Visual data displays show guests their real-time usage benchmarked against peers, activating their ethical framework and shifting mindset from entitlement to responsibility.

## Plastic Reduction

Plastic consumption in tourism is a major environmental crisis, with 8 million tonnes of plastic bottles entering oceans annually. While 45% of respondents feel limited in their ability to act, they show readiness for guidance.

The leading concept is *Alternative Infrastructure: Convenient Substitution Systems*. This involves comprehensively replacing single-use plastic items with attractive, convenient alternatives like reusable bottles and sustainable packaging. Implementation includes universal reusable cup/bottle provision at check-in and strategically located refill stations. This approach eliminates choice complexity by making sustainable options the default, reduces operational costs and creates a distinctive guest experience.

## Resource Management

Resource management encompasses furniture, equipment and consumables, offering significant environmental and operational efficiency opportunities. Guest behaviour often reflects a temporary mindset, but psychological ownership can drive more careful behaviour.

The leading concept is *Personalisation and Temporary Ownership: Psychological Investment Strategies*. This enables guests to feel temporary "ownership" of shared resources through personalisation options, delegated care responsibilities and recognition for stewardship. This leverages psychological principles to encourage sustainable behaviour without restriction, reduces asset replacement costs and creates memorable experiences.

## Mobility & Transport

Transportation accounts for approximately 75% of tourism's carbon emissions. There is substantial consumer willingness to consider sustainable alternatives, with examples like Google Maps achieving 1.2 million metric tons of carbon emission reduction through sustainable routing.

Two leading concepts emerged:

*Comprehensive Reward Systems: Multi-Modal Incentive Integration* involves point-based reward systems providing tangible benefits for sustainable transport choices, such as discounts at local businesses or accommodation upgrades. This integrates economic incentives with environmental objectives, supporting local business development.

*"Share & Save": Local Rewards for Sustainable Transport* reframes shared transport choices as an opportunity to reduce environmental impact and earn tangible local benefits. A digital or physical point system tracks choices, translating into discounts or exclusive offers, aligning sustainability with everyday convenience.

Successful mobility initiatives require extensive partnership development between tourism SMEs, public transport providers and local governments, as individual business action alone is insufficient for systemic modal shift.

## Food Consumption

Food consumption in tourism leads to substantial waste from oversized portions and buffet service. Guests respond positively to information about food origins and waste reduction when presented engagingly.

The leading concept is *"Leftover Recipes": Participatory Waste Reduction*. This transforms food waste reduction into a creative experience by inviting guests to submit and share recipes made from leftovers. These recipes are then made visible in guest apps or on dining tables, reframing sustainability from restriction to inspiration and building social capital.

## Energy Efficiency

Energy consumption in tourist accommodation significantly exceeds domestic usage, by 50-100%. Real-time feedback systems can reduce consumption by up to 20%.

Two leading concepts emerged:

*The Living Light Switch: Emotional Engagement Through Technology* transforms light switches into emotionally engaging interfaces that provide positive feedback for conservation. When turned off, they play soft sounds and display sleeping emoticons, creating joy rather than guilt as the primary motivation. This represents a paradigm shift from restriction-based conservation to joy-driven engagement.

*Universal Reusable Cup Systems: Infrastructure-Based Behaviour Change* involves providing all guests with universal reusable cups for beverages throughout their stay, eliminating single-use cup waste. This exemplifies effective normative nudging by modifying infrastructure to make sustainable choices the default, enhancing the guest experience.

## Cross-Cutting Implementation Insights

A synthesis of the workshop's findings reveals several overarching themes critical for successful sustainable transformation.

Across all themes, smart technology was consistently highlighted as a critical enabler, requiring robust data collection, real-time processing and intuitive user interfaces. Digital platforms are crucial for tracking, feedback and reward systems, with an emphasis on cross-platform compatibility and user experience consistency.

The most popular solutions consistently enhanced rather than restricted the guest experience, providing information, choice and recognition rather than imposing limitations. Innovations were designed to create distinctive guest experiences, memorable interactions and positive emotional associations, framing sustainable choices as experience enhancements or sources of joy.

Beyond environmental impact, participants recognised substantial operational advantages. These included reduced utility costs, decreased waste disposal costs and lower asset replacement costs. Solutions also led to enhanced guest satisfaction through meaningful engagement and strengthened brand positioning in increasingly sustainability-conscious markets.

## Strategic Implications for European Tourism Transformation

The Cross-Re-Tour workshop's findings carry profound strategic implications for European tourism, underscoring sustainability as a fundamental driver of competitive advantage and market evolution.

The innovations demonstrate European tourism SMEs' sophisticated understanding of behaviour change psychology and technology integration. Solutions consistently balance environmental objectives with business viability, guest satisfaction and operational efficiency, positioning sustainability as a core competitive advantage. These innovations position participating organisations as sustainability leaders, creating tangible environmental impact while significantly enhancing their market standing and differentiation.

The emphasis on community contribution, transparent impact measurement, local sourcing and positive engagement aligns directly with evolving consumer expectations for authentic corporate environmental responsibility. Early adopters gain first-mover advantages in sustainability-conscious market segments while simultaneously building operational capabilities for future regulatory compliance.

The workshop highlighted that achieving systemic change, particularly in complex areas like mobility, requires extensive partnership development between tourism SMEs, public transport providers and local governments. This emphasis on collaboration aligns with emerging trends towards collaborative tourism development and local economic support. The consistent emphasis on meaningful engagement, community contribution, cultural exchange and authentic sustainability credentials suggests a fundamental shift in what travellers seek, moving towards purpose-driven travel where environmental and social impact are integral to the value proposition.

## Conclusions

The Cross-Re-Tour Sustainability Nudging Workshop unequivocally demonstrates that the sustainable transformation of European tourism is not only imperative but also highly achievable. Successful transformation hinges on a multi-faceted approach that strategically integrates smart technology, profoundly enhances the guest experience through empowerment and positive engagement and leverages operational benefits to create a distinct competitive advantage.

The workshop's focus on behavioural design, underpinned by the three-pillar nudging framework, has proven exceptionally effective in bridging the persistent intention-action gap in consumer behaviour. By reframing sustainability from a burden to an opportunity for gain, emotional connection and social alignment, the developed solutions foster genuine engagement and drive measurable change. The emphasis on infrastructure-based solutions highlights that systemic environmental challenges are often best addressed by modifying the environment to make sustainable choices the effortless default.

Crucially, the findings reveal that sustainability is a powerful multiplier for business value. Investments in sustainable practices yield not only environmental benefits but also tangible operational cost reductions, enhanced guest satisfaction and strengthened brand positioning. This positions early adopters as leaders in an increasingly environmentally conscious market, providing first-mover advantages and preparing them for evolving regulatory landscapes. The necessity of extensive collaboration underscores that systemic change often requires a coordinated, ecosystem-wide approach. Ultimately, the workshop's outcomes suggest a fundamental evolution in tourism's value proposition, moving towards purpose-driven travel where environmental and social contributions are integral to the guest experience, redefining the industry's competitive landscape for the future.