Project Report

Innovative Catalysts Boosting Sustainability in the Tourism Sector

Based on cases and initiatives from Germany

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

With the aim to support tourism suppliers in their challenge to mainstream sustainable tourism practices, the project 'Innovative catalysts boosting sustainability in the tourism sector based on examples from Germany' was supported by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) and was carried out between August 2015 and April 2016.

The project focused on identifying and analysing distinct enabling elements of sustainable tourism initiatives in Germany that have visibly accelerated the shift towards more Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) patterns, with the following specific objectives:

- Identifying and providing an overview of catalytic elements that have successfully supported the shift towards more SCP;
- Increasing awareness of different efforts and the diversity of sustainable tourism initiatives in Germany;
- Mainstreaming the use of the catalysts identified in future sustainable tourism projects and initiatives; and
- Supporting international processes with a specific focus on acceleration of sustainability, such as the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) Sustainable Tourism Programme (STP).

Because the aim of the project was not to evaluate the level of "sustainability" or "the degree to which sustainability was implemented", the research focuses on identifying the enabling elements (referred to in the report as "catalysts"' or "areas of catalytic importance") found through an analysis of initiatives relating to sustainable tourism in Germany, in order to highlight the diverse efforts made by all types of stakeholders along the tourism supply chain in mainstreaming sustainable tourism development. The findings provide an overview of these catalytic elements that have successfully supported the shift towards SCP in the German market and offer a case and basis for their replication and integration into current and future initiatives in other markets within the framework of the 10YFP STP and beyond.

1.1 Approach

Although there is no single solution when it comes to integrating SCP into tourism, there are certain elements that can aid in this process that can best be identified through a holistic, integrated and inclusive research approach that involves the participation of stakeholders at all levels, especially at the local level. Including stakeholders and a broad range of initiatives in tourism research methodologies usually results in more meaningful and representative data, reflecting with greater authenticity and objectivity the experiences under analysis in the tourism sector and beyond.

To date, clear, tangible findings on the positive impacts of sustainable tourism initiatives remain limited due to the lack of measurable evidence. As a result, in-depth information on local approaches and solutions for sustainability continue to be relatively scarce. The majority of existing examples are primarily presented through case studies and reports on best practices. However, due to the highly context-specific nature of sustainability in tourism, often these best practice examples are not a sound basis for replicating initiatives in different contexts or environments. Frequently, these cases result in decisions to implement 'me-too'[1] products and services that often lose their attractiveness in the long-term.

In order to identify catalysts for SCP in tourism within Germany that could be used and replicated across different contexts, a comprehensive research approach was chosen for this project. The project research was founded on an intensive desk review of the literature combined with multiple rounds of participatory in-depth interviews via phone and in the field with key stakeholders. This aspect of the research relied on active conversation methods to gather direct experiences and otherwise consult directly with those responsible for the sustainability initiatives in order to shed light on how to spur sustainability. It has been proven that a bottom-up, grassroots approach is the most effective force behind community and stakeholder empowerment and action generally, and therefore it was assumed for the project the that initiatives producing the acceleration of sustainable practices in the tourism sector would fall into this model. As such, the methodology was designed to be inclusive of every level of the initiatives selected.

Overall, the selection of the initiatives presented in this report followed a practical approach, guided by suggestions from experts in the field combined with intensive primary research. Certainly, the initiatives selected are not an exhaustive list and seek only to provide a representation of the numberous other examples of initiatives in Germany that are fostering SCPpatterns. By presenting together a variety of examples from different areas, the report seeks to emphasize the diverse efforts made by all types of stakeholders along the tourism supply chain, such as accommodation services, attractions, products, tourism organizations and destinations, among others.

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[1] 'Me-too' products are often copying elements of a product without fully understanding the underlying success factors as well as their relevance to the context.

1.2 The Concept of 'Acceleration'

Before being able to discuss the catalysts that "accelerate" SCP in the tourism sector, the research sought a functional definition for the term. *'Acceleration'* has origins in physics but it has in recent years gained use in the field of economics and social sciences with widely varying concepts and approaches.

The term "acceleration" is found in the final report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio in 1992, Agenda 21, as the Chapter on the Social and Economic Dimensions refers to "the acceleration of sustainable development in developing countries"[2]. The origins of the 10YFP can also be traced to the Agenda 21, which states that unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are the primary cause of continued deterioration of the global environment. Yet the term of "acceleration" and SCP patterns do not explicitly appear until 2012 in the founding document of 10YFP adopted at Rio+20 that calls for support to "accelerate" the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns in order to promote social and economic development, within the carrying capacity of ecosystems.[3]

Recently, the expressions "accelerating SCP patterns" and "accelerating sustainable tourism development" have become frequently used in the political environment, especially in the field of sustainable tourism; however, the expressions tend to lack detail or definition. As a result of the initial research for this study, the use of the term "acceleration" was found to reflect the pressing need to advance the sustainable development agenda in light of both the clear evidence of increasingly negative environmental impacts derived from modern lifestyles, and the commitments made by governments to engage more actively and assign higher priority than ever to sustainable tourism development.

However, while a variety of tourism development projects clearly state "acceleration" of SCP patterns as one of their main objectives and plenty of online resources talk about this goal, the background research for this project has shown that there are very few tourism-specific academic publications, and even fewer non-academic sources available, that include open discussions, science-based information, theoretical analyses, interpretations or guidelines that might clarify the practical implications of the terminology. This underscores the finding that appeal to "accelerate SCP" patterns (and sustainable tourism development in general) is currently mainly a political call rather than something actionable – namely an evidence-based, practical outline for advancing sustainability.[4]

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[2] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development A/CONF.151/26
http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1.htm
[3] 10YFP Foundation Document A/CONF.216.5 https://rio20.un.org/sites/rio20.un.org/files/a-conf.216-5_english.pdf
[4] This observation was supported by thorough research, examining a variety of different websites from leading institutions in the field of SCP. For further information, please see Chapter 3 and Annex 1.

1.3 Report Structure

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the project and the context in which it was implemented, as well as an overview of sustainable development in general.

Chapter 2 looks at the international and national background and context, presenting some of the relevant developments over the past years.

Chapter 3 summarizes relevant findings from the literature review and links those findings with the practical experiences gathered during the interview phase of the research.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of the initiatives analyzed, followed by a detailed exploration of each and the identification of the "areas of catalytic importance" critical for success as well as a presentation of the outcomes of the Delphi survey, which was conducted to further verify the identified elements.

Chapter 5 concludes the research and offers a summary and a reflection on the most significant results.

2. Background

2.1 International Context

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification, turning it into one of the largest, fastest growing economic sectors in the world. It accounts for 10% of global GDP (direct, indirect and induced), 6% of global exports and one in every 11 jobs worldwide. In 2015, international tourist arrivals (i.e. overnight visitors) reached 1.18 billion, generating US$1.5 trillion in export earnings. Although some of this growth can be attributed to fluctuating exchange rates, a drop in oil prices and natural and manmade crises in many parts of the world, 2015 marks the sixth consecutive year of above-average growth in tourism, with international arrivals increasing by 4% or more since the post-crisis year of 2010. According to UNWTO's long-term forecast "Tourism Towards 2030", international tourism arrivals are expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.[5],[6]

It is critical to view tourism as influential not only in the economic sense. While the robust performance of the sector is contributing to economic growth and job creation in many parts of the world, it also generates inevitable challenges in terms of increased resource use, degradation of natural and cultural heritage, as well as possible negative social impacts. Moreover, as a transversal economic sector, tourism has developed supply chains and inter-linkages with other sectors, which can be used to systematically encourage (or discourage) sustainable operations beyond the sector. Furthermore, tourism, like no other sector, involves direct human interaction often motivated by the searching for authentic experiences and the interest in learning and discovering new things. The personal nature of tourism means the sector can have profound influence even down to the individual level, triggering more sustainable travel behaviour and, in turn, more sustainable lifestyles.

In 2012, the potential of well-designed and managed tourism to contribute positively to the three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) was recognized in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) "The Future We Want"[7]. At Rio+20, heads of state also reaffirmed sustainable consumption and production patterns (SCP[8]) as one of the essential requirements for sustainable development and adopted the 10YFP as an operational framework to enhance international cooperation to shift towards SCP in both developed and developing countries.

In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly further emphasized the contribution of sustainable tourism to poverty eradication, community development and the protection of biodiversity in Resolution A/RES/69/233. Moreover, in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

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[5] World Tourism Organization (2016), *Barometer Volume 14*, Advance Release 2016, UNWTO, Madrid
http://mkt.unwto.org/barometer/january-2016-volume-14-advance-release
[6] World Tourism Organization (2011), *Tourism Towards 2030: Global Overview*, UNWTO, Madrid.
[7] http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/288
[8] Sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns reflect *"the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations"*, Oslo Symposium 1994, http://www.unep.org/10yfp/About/tabid/106242/Default.aspx

Development "Transforming Our World"[9] was adopted as a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. Three of the SDGs – Goals 8, 12 and 14 – explicitly mention tourism in relation to sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.

These recent milestones at the international level highlight both the significant role that tourism can play as a catalyst for sustainable development and the increasing commitment of the international community to accelerate the shift towards SCP patterns in tourism. Building upon this progressive direction, this report seeks to support the efforts of tourism stakeholders at the international, national and local levels with insights and recommendations for more focused and coherent action to accelerate the shift towards SCP in tourism based on examples from the ground.

2.2 National Context

A. Policy

In line with the growing international commitment to sustainability over the past decades and the most recent milestones, which have markedly reinforced tourism's role and responsibilities vis-à-vis sustainable development, specific efforts have been implemented in Germany putting the advancement of sustainable practices at the center of the country's sustainability strategy and making Germany one of the leading countries in this field.[10]

Examples of frameworks and guidelines that aim to support the transition towards more sustainable practices in general and in particular for tourism, include the national sustainability strategy "Perspectives for Germany"[11], which was published in 2002 and underlines the significance of tourism for the country, calling for the promotion of tourism in rural areas in particular and the expansion of accessibility. Moreover, the "National Programme for Sustainable Consumption"[12] that was recently published and developed through a partnership between the BMUB and the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV), includes essential aspects related to "Mobility" and "Leisure and Tourism". In addition to calling for a reduction of CO2 emissions from the tourism sector, the document defines climate-friendly mobility as well as interconnected and intelligent mobility modes as targets for future policy action. The report also presents a need for enhanced transparency and communication with regards to sustainability labels and certificates, the promotion of climate-friendly vacations, mobility and accommodation, as well as the compensation for reduced carbon emissions and the promotion of recreational activities as places of learning. Germany's governmental strategies support essential global processes that seek to increase effective communication and cooperation between different

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[9] Resolution A/RES/70/1 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1

[10] http://www.robecosam.com/images/Country-Sustainability-Paper-en.pdf; https://degroofpetercam.com/news/ranking-oecd?lang=en; http://epi.yale.edu/country/germany

[11] http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/Nachhaltigkeit-wiederhergestellt/perspektiven-fuer-deutschland-langfassung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

[12] http://www.bmub.bund.de/fileadmin/Daten_BMU/Download_PDF/Produkte_und_Umwelt/nat_programm_konsum_bf.pdf

tourism-related sectors in addressing themes such as mobility, carbon neutrality, safety, security, etc., in order to advance a more holistic and collective approach towards sustainability.

B. Practice

Furthermore, when looking in greater detail at private sector initiatives in Germany, a variety of efforts have been implemented to support the transition towards more sustainable practices in tourism in the country. In addition to the practical examples that were analyzed for this study, there are a number of key research initiatives that have helped to further drive and mainstream the topic of sustainability with their findings.

For example, in 2014, the *Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen e.V. (FUR)* published a special edition of its annual national travel analysis '*Reiseanalyse'[13]* commissioned by the BMUB, which highlighted the demand for sustainable holidays at the time, as well as the potential for future growth; an message that has been supported by several other pieces of research[14]. The same year, another study was carried out by *Mascontour*[15] in cooperation with ITB Berlin, focusing more on the destinations with respect to their understanding of sustainable practices and their efforts in implementing them. While this study showed that the majority of destinations were convinced that sustainable tourism would be a crucial part of overall tourism development in the future, it also underlined an ongoing need for more coherent action and support at the destination level in order to a) ensure a more balanced and organized approach to addressing the three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, social/cultural); b) support the generation of reliable evidence that is crucial for well-informed decision-making processes; and c) increase effective communication with local stakeholders.

Other mechanisms, such as certification programmes and competitions, have also played an important role in fostering more sustainable practices in Germany and supporting public awareness of these efforts. An example of this is the federal competition for sustainable tourism regions '*Bundeswettbewerb Nachhaltige Tourismusregionen',* which was first organized in 2012/2013 and supported by the BMUB, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), as well as the German Tourism Association (DTV). Additionally, in an effort to summarize the ongoing efforts within Germany and with the aim to further support destinations in their efforts to better integrate sustainable practices in their daily activities, the consultancy BTE[16], with support from BMUB, recently published a study (2016)[17] that includes an overview of essential theoretical frameworks and existing standards, certification and monitoring systems, combining these with many practical examples. The study provides specific guidelines and checklists that help to clearly assess and improve sustainable practices within destinations and that can be effectively disseminated and explained to all stakeholders in the efforts of transparency and authenticity.

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[13] FUR (2014): Nachfrage für Nachhaltigen Tourismus im Rahmen der Reiseanalyse;
http://www.fur.de/fileadmin/user_upload/externe_Inhalte/Publikationen/20140912_RA14_BMU_Nachhaltige-Nachfrage_Bericht.pdf
[14] Siegrist et al. (2015): Naturnaher Tourismus - Qualitätsstandards für sanftes Reisen in den Alpen
[15] Mascontour (2015): Untersuchung deutscher Tourismusdestinationen zum Nachhaltigen Tourismus,
http://www.mascontour.de/old/befragung/mascontour_Gesamtstudie_Nachhaltiger_Tourismus.pdf
[16] http://www.bte-tourismus.de/
[17] http://www.bte-tourismus.de/_ressources/documents/default/3-181-3-1457637503.pdf

3. Literature Review

3.1. Online Review

In order to put into context the interview phase of the research, a vital part of the project included a thorough review of the relevant literature. As a first step, the literature review sought to explore the term 'acceleration' to understand its use and the practical applications of this terminology. The findings of this review suggested that information regarding practical examples of "acceleration" and SCP in tourism remains limited.

A content analysis performed through online searches, starting with a general review that took place from December 2015 to January 2016, led to the conclusion that practical examples of 'acceleration' are lacking. This initial analysis focused on searches for documents including key words such as 'sustainability', 'catalyst', 'driver', 'enabler', 'SCP', 'tourism', 'acceleration', 'accelerator' and 'accelerate'. In February and March, the review was broadened to include a more extensive examination of the last three key words for three different search engines (Yahoo, Bing and Google). Finally, the first search results (up to 1000) were registered, saved and examined and focussed the efforts of the next phase which was scanning four major domains of relevance:[18]

- www.unep.org
- www.bmub.bund.de (key terms translated into German: *Beschleunigung, Beschleuniger* and *Beschleunigen as well as zunehmend, forcieren*)
- www.un.org/development/desa/en/
- www.scpclearinghouse.org

From the review of the most relevant links and documents found through the online search, the following observations were made:

- UNEP website has the overall greatest amount of search results for relevant key words in all cases, although many of them were repetitions
- UN DESA domain did not show any significant results in regards to tourism and SCP
- The term "accelerate" yielded the most results of all with 7,020 search results on Google mainly through the UNEP website, followed by Bing and Yahoo on the same UNEP website.
- The general UN website yielded no significant results
- The lowest hits for "accelerator" could be found on the SCP Clearinghouse website, and only seven could be found on Google and one on Bing and Yahoo
- From 172 documents found on the four domains that focused on sustainability, almost 50% also mentioned 'tourism'. However, the conjunction of the term 'tourism' with any other of the relevant keywords produced significantly fewer results.
- Furthermore, from those 172 most relevant publications, the combinations 'SCP' and 'acceleration' or 'accelerator', were found in around 20% of the cases.

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[18] A summary and example of the findings from this online review can be found in Annex I.

Based on this review, the assumption that there is not a great deal of practical information on the subject available was confirmed. At the moment, available literature found contains limited information about the terminology 'acceleration', giving only partial information regarding its meaning and practical applications, particularly in connection to tourism or SCP.

3.2. Literature Review

Because of the scarcity of information, the next phase of the literature review was broadened to include documents from sectors other than tourism (social science, marketing, entrepreneurship, etc.) in order to better understand "catalysts" and their functions in these other sectors in order to serve as inspiration for the subsequent multidisciplinary examination of sustainability initiatives in Germany.

For this next phase of literature research, numerous books, articles and reports were reviewed covering more than 100 concepts, and ideas offering insights into crucial components that fostered the successful implementation of sustainability projects and initiatives, including those relating to sustainability.[19]

From the broad range of concepts found in these references, and based on many commonalities and interrelations between the ideas, the following overarching themes could be defined:

A. Context and Core Values

This first theme encompasses concepts and ideas with potential catalytic function that are specifically related to the environment and have been applied as the established underlying values and philosophies guiding behavior.

The literature review suggested that the **overall context in which an initiative is established matters significantly**; however, this is something that is often underestimated. In the documents examined, context is understood in a very broad sense. It includes the location in which a behavior takes place and the characteristics that come with that location. In particular, context encompasses not only place, but also socio-cultural aspects such as traditions, current trends, customs, values, available social capital (in terms of local knowledge and experiences), as well as other location-specific aspects.

In this sense, Gladwell (2000) in his writing about behavior highlights a **human sensitivity to the conditions and circumstances of time and place**. The author suggests that the impetus to engage in a certain kind of behavior comes from a feature of the environment, given the fact that **behavior is a function of social context**. Likewise, Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, and Roche (2007) also note that the environment and overall context of a relationship tend to define what kind of social relations can emerge. The theory outlines different dynamics including mutual entailment, combinatorial entailment, and the relations that provide a basis for transformation to take place. Apart from the individual relationships per se, the authors argue that **the networks that can**

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[19] For a full overview of literature examined for this project, please see Annex II.

result from different types of relations are even more important as they can provide the context for necessary synergies (Hayes et al, 2007).

Culture is another important attribute of the context in which a behavior takes place that was examined in the literature review. On one hand, culture can be understood as the set of customs, traditions and locally embedded values, while on the other, culture defines the behaviors and attitudes that can be observed in certain locations. On this point, Schertler (2012) notes that in situations where a **group of people pursues a shared objective**, the passion that originates from the goal creates its own "culture" and "values". It is particularly worth noting that the research found that even outsiders who wished to join a group expected to feel committed to a shared purpose (Schertler, 2012). Accordingly, **culture becomes a connecting element that creates tight links between actors**, which, as a consequence, enables groups to increase existing knowledge and expertise in a location.

In addition, Chouinard (2006) underlines the **importance of developing and strengthening long-term relations with all relevant stakeholders** in an initiative, such as suppliers, contractors, customers and employees. Particularly employees, if they are inspired and educated, are likely to create greater credibility for a business or initiative than an advertisement. Likewise, Rogers (2010) notes that mass media and other **means of creating and raising awareness are powerful tools for changing attitudes** as well as persuading opinion leaders.

Furthermore, Boons, Montalvo, Quist, and Wagner (2013) emphasize that not only entrepreneurs, but **also governments and policy-makers can and should drive competitiveness** and that this participation is essential for the creation of good framework conditions that foster innovation systems. Competitiveness depends greatly on the ability of governments to design and implement appropriate policies and framework conditions to support entrepreneurs to come up with innovative, sustainable business models with new technologies and services (Boons *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to Chouinard's (2006) argument of **creating business credibility and awareness through the creation of long-term relations with all relevant stakeholders**, Gilmore and Pine (2007) as well as Rogers (2010) highlight the particular importance of **allowing stakeholders**, such as employees and customers, **not only to hear the values, but rather to allow them to experience them directly** in order to build consensus and influence opinion and political leaders. According to the authors, the set of values, usually expressed through mission and vision statements of an organization, have the power to express and communicate internally and to the outside world what the main objectives of an institution are and the motivation behind these goals (Gilmore and Pine, 2007).

B. Support and Communication

This selection of the literature includes concepts and ideas focusing primarily on the collective impact that can be achieved through the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders and the benefits that can be created through effective cooperation and communication.

With regard to the creation of a shared value system as described above, the literature that was reviewed emphasizes that this can only be accomplished through **effective cooperation and communication**. As for effective cooperation, Kania & Kramer (2011) suggest five common areas that all stakeholders must embody: **a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations**. This is especially important to achieve in heterophilous social systems, which encourage people from different backgrounds to interact with one another in a cooperative manner (Rogers, 2010).

In order to foster regular interaction, Gladwell (2000) and Ogilvy (2015) suggest that effective cooperation can take place during regular intervals and through more active forms of contact, such as face-to-face or word-of-mouth. In addition, Collier (2013), Stützel & Grass (1988) underline that **effective cooperation can build trust** and allow stakeholders to provide services and support that may not have otherwise been supplied if mutual regard had not been in place. This type of cooperation can increase the success of an initiative as well as **help change behaviors among those who would not otherwise adopt a previously rare practice** (Gladwell, 2000). Supporting this viewpoint, Kania and Kramer (2011) highlight again that **collective impact can only be reached through regular participation between all relevant stakeholders**. This view is also found in the works of Schertler (2012) and Stützel & Grass (1988).

In order to **strengthen effective communication**, Ogilvy (2015) stresses the need to present a consistent and shared brand image for a product, which can be achieved through collective impact and a common voice. Furthermore, Gladwell (2000) describes in detail a variety of factors that are crucial to **create 'tipping points'**, including the need for key people (also referred as 'translators') to carry and transmit the messages effectively, as well as the importance of **communicating an idea in such manner that it becomes highly memorable** (referred to as 'stickiness factor'). The idea of actively using strategic persons within the social system to translate messages effectively is also shared by Rogers (2010) 5-step process for innovation, which includes using innovators and early adopters.

In relation to effective communication between stakeholders of different backgrounds, literature reviewed points out that **creating multi-disciplinary approaches and knowledge bases can encourage more innovation**. This is echoed in Chiounard's (2006) human resources philosophy and is touched upon in Boon et al.'s (2013) long-term approach on sustainable innovation. When people of different languages, cultures and backgrounds come together to discuss and implement a shared core theme and value to shift towards sustainability, it can be inferred from the research that time should be allowed for common communication to be fostered and, therefore, for **sustainability to be fully and equally understood and examined by all involved** (Hayes et al., 2007; Kania & Kramer, 2011).

C. Replication and Adaptability

Findings from the literature regarding the ability to continuously improve efficiency within a company or initiative point to the importance of better adaptability, which depends on a variety of key factors such as the freedom and flexibility given to stakeholders, the support of creativity for

more innovation and the development of a system that allows the application of ideas even in different environments.

As previously mentioned, literature suggests that effective communication and support are crucial elements for building effective management systems. Hayes et al.'s (2007) underlines that a **"transformation of functions" occurs after mutual and common entailments are met** which can further lead to the discussion of applying a more adaptive, flexible, innovative and reproducible management system and initiative.

Furthermore, Ogilvy (2015) claims that **ideas do not have to be original, only creative**, in order to be easily understood and even replicated. According to the works of Boons et al (2013), **advancements in future competitiveness and sustainable transitions can be made if there is room for radical and systemic innovations** in building concepts and business models for sustainability. In this regard, Chouinard (2006) emphasizes that for the long-term success of a business or initiative, **financial independence is a critical component**, as only financially strong entities are able to take the necessary risks to try out unconventional things that are crucial for innovation processes.

In the works of Enz (2012) new and innovative business models and concepts have **continuous operational improvements and investment such as in in employee performance**, which is deeply rooted in the ability to constantly reformulate the value creation process. The idea of continuous advancements and innovation are further supported by Kania & Kramer (2011), in terms of communication, as well as Boons et al (2013) in terms of sustainable development. **Continuous advancements and communication between stakeholders can create more choices and an atmosphere for creativity**, thereby furthering innovation and the ability to adapt to future circumstances. It can be argued from the literature that **this creativity and adaptability allow, in turn, for future projects to replicate the organizational and operational systems in their own creative and innovative way**.

From among the documents that underwent in-depth analysis during the literature review, several were considered especially relevant with regard to creating potential areas of catalytic importance. Annex II presents example documents which contain therein the most prevalent concepts as presented by the authors. This served as basis for the development of the initial list of 14 potential catalysts as shown in the tables. In order to facilitate the assignment of the identified ideas from the literature into different thematic groups, each concept was coded throughout the process.

While the preliminary definitions of areas of catalytic importance as shown in Annex II show the status of the titles as of January 2016, they were updated, extended and redefined throughout the proceeding readings, interviews and finalized based on all experiences gathered throughout the project.

3.3. Expert Interviews

Following the literature review and the first formulation of potential catalysts, interviews with experts were conducted via phone to further validate, extend and discuss the preliminary assumptions that emerged from the literature and desk research.[20]

Based on these two phases of the research, the following initial list of potential areas of catalytic importance was developed:

- Impetus / Driving-force (person) and its level of influence
- Level of mutual regard (a) / cooperation (b)
- Timing / timeliness / relational frame / timely relevance
- Reach/ Accessibility
- Extent of emotional impact
- Credibility / Authenticity of the message
- Level of expertise during development / implementation of the initiative
- Level of innovativeness / radicalness
- Participation / critical mass
- Political control instruments
- Identification and involvement of lead users / groups
- Stickiness/level of memorability
- Level of difficulty of the implementation
- Value creation
- Engagement / Involvement of "audience" / guests
- Level of support and involvement of the local population
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Space for idea generation
- Incentives to cooperate
- Enabling concept
- Chains of stimuli
- Continuous change management
- Adapted lines of argumentation
- Integration of academic / public institutions
- Creative, self-improving processes
- Resilience
- Stakeholder Know-How / Capacity
- Innovation culture
- Environment for transfer and learning
- Reproducibility
- Awareness of the responsibility
- (Spatial) localization
- Support by experts' expertise
- Support by political system / persons with power
- Long-term commitment

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[20] For an overview of all experts interviewed, please see Annex IV

- Good existing framework conditions
- Level of sustainability in the Corporate Culture
- Level of participation of hosts / employees
- Financial independency
- Social management skills
- Focussing on a niche
- Underlying value structure
- Development and usage of thematic regional clusters
- Confirmation of success (e.g. in competitions)
- Internal and external communication
- Authenticity of location
- Relations between actors
- Competencies of the driving-force
- Potential of the location
- Passion and perseverance of the responsible actors
- Creative outward marketing
- Measurability: support by experts' expertise / science
- Knowledge and understanding of impacts on visitors

In addition to validating, extending and discussing potential catalysts, the first in-depth dialogues with the experts also helped to narrow the initial list of possible initiatives in Germany that could be analyzed more thoroughly and used as practical examples for the research. As a result, eight initiatives that foster sustainable tourism development in Germany were selected for more in-depth analyses which allowed for further evaluation and identification of catalysts based on practical experiences. [21, 22]

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[21] More detailed information on the initiatives can be found in Annex III.
[22] As stated in Chapter 2, there are many different and successful activities that are contributing to the enhancement of sustainable tourism in Germany.
In this regard, the initiatives herewith presented should only be seen as an exemplary collection, representing many more in the country.

4. Catalysts

The following chapter presents an overview of the tourism initiatives in Germany that were selected for the in-depth analysis and the outcomes of the research. By analyzing these initiatives more thoroughly, the aforementioned assumptions could be validated, allowing for a reduced list of potential catalysts that focuses on the most prominent ones that have visibly fostered the successful implementation of the sustainability initiatives.

As a result, a set of 13 underlying areas of catalytic importance were identified as highly important. Their definitions, as well as their observed appearances in the initiatives, are described as follows.

4.1 Overview of Initiatives

The **Klimahaus Bremerhaven 8° Ost** was opened in 2009 and is one of the main anchor attractions in Bremerhaven, Germany, offering valuable insights to visitors about climate change as well as general information about the different climates of the planet. Since its establishment, the *Klimahaus Bremerhaven* has not only become a significant tourist magnet for the region but is now also an important place for interactive, hands-on learning experiences for students and other visitors. The attraction receives around 600,000 visitors per year, and is one of three major science centers in the region.

Futouris is an initiative that was established with the core mission of offering scientific project support by finding the best academic partners for suggested project proposals that are regularly submitted by the organization's members. Futouris bundles a range of tourism service providers who act in Germany, and beyond, for the implementation of innovative sustainability initiatives and thereby benefit from the expertise of the scientific advisory board of Futouris. In addition, the network offers the added value of providing a platform for exchange and the opportunity to generate learning effects through the analysis and evaluation of already completed projects.

Since its establishment in 1963, **Scandic** has become the largest hotel operator in Scandinavia. Since 1993, Scandic made a commitment to put sustainability at the center of the hotel chain's strategy and all of its development activities. While sustainability standards exist and are applicable to all Scandic hotels, individual hotels in Germany thrive further in hotel-specific engagement on sustainability, often triggering new ideas for the entire company or even industry (e.g. 'hang up your towel'). Outside the Nordic countries the hotel chain has, among other hotels, three hotels in Germany.

Biohotel Eggensberger was the first bio-certified hotel in Germany and a pioneer in establishing sustainability in the hotel industry. In its operations, the hotel relies exclusively on the use of organic products and produces most of its electricity from renewable energy sources, making it the first climate-neutral hotel of the Allgäu region. Since it was founded, sustainability has been an integral part of the hotel's corporate culture, which is enhanced through continuous innovation. This process of innovation in its operations relies heavily on the participation and skills of its employees, as well as the hotel's active engagement in a number of key networks.

Since 2009, the city of **Deidesheim**, which is located on the German Wine Route in the Palatinate region, is one of 14 German cities participating in the international network 'Cittaslow'. While the unifying element of deceleration is also consistently implemented in *Deidesheim*, the city promotes better quality of life through nature conservation and the maintenance of regional traditions while

remaining open to innovation-driven progress. As head of the German Cittaslow network, *Deidesheim* is guiding and supporting the activities of other German participants and represents the national affiliates in the global network.

With about 5 million visitors per year, **Europa Park Rust** is the most visited amusement park located in a German speaking country, and ranks as the second-most visited in Europe (behind only Disneyland in Paris). Opened as an exhibition space for the rides and roller coasters of the family-run company Mack Rides in 1975, the park has not only steadily increased in size in recent years, but has also been voted the most popular destination for foreign tourists in Germany in 2015. As a family-run business, the park's focus on sustainability has been an integrated part of its strategy for generations, and the company has demonstrated a continuous innovation policy with a value-based commitment to social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The region **Uckermark**, located in northeastern Germany has, because of its sparse population, an outstanding natural potential, which has been targeted for several years for development of the destination. With large forests and lake areas, the Uckermark has great potential for sustainable, nature tourism as an ideal platform for ecology and sustainability. In 2013, the Uckermark won the federal competition for sustainable tourism regions ('Bundeswettbewerb Nachhaltige Tourismusregionen'), which included awards such as a poster campaign throughout Germany and an image film about the destination.

With the mobility card **KONUS**, the **Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH** (Black Forest Tourism Ltd.) introduced an entirely new mobility concept for tourism destinations in Germany. During their stay in the region, the card allows visitors to use public transportation for free, offering alternative transportations methods for discovering the destination. Today, the cooperation behind this initiative includes about 11,000 accommodation providers in 150 municipalities, 10 local transport associations and is also based on close cooperation with the railway company Deutsche Bahn. The success of this constantly developing initiative is not only reflected in a variety of awards won, but especially in the practiced transferability towards other holiday destinations in Germany.

4.2 Areas of Catalytic Importance

Although the variety of initiatives analyzed were characterized by their differences and unique features, in-depth analysis indicated a number of commonalities between them. These areas of overlap were found to be crucial for their success, and could be linked to the ideas and concepts identified in the literature review. While there are additional elements that are essential for the successful implementation of the initiatives, the herewith presented 13 areas of catalytic importance were the most often mentioned, observed and identified during the research. To better understand the background and their context-specific applications, the next section describes the general features of the clearly identified catalytic elements as well as some broad observations made in their practical application.

Based on the research, the following elements with a clearly observed catalytic function were identified:

- Frame of reference
- Interconnectedness of actors
- Effective prioritization of new ideas
- Value structure
- Expert knowledge
- Assistance from key stakeholders
- Focus on key subject
- Communication
- 'Replicability and Stickiness' of the core message
- Room, to maneuver
- Participatory approach
- Continuous advancements
- Lead actors' characteristics

4.2.1. Frame of Reference

The first area of catalytic importance was defined as **frame of reference**, encompassing all the underlying contextual conditions in which an initiative is established and operated. In all cases analyzed, it could be observed that such indirect or direct factors played a crucial role (especially in the beginning) and influenced the development and outcome of the initiatives in one way or another.

» It was observed that certain global as well as local trends and conditions were among the reasons the initiatives were established, emphasizing the significant power of context. Often, these underlying circumstances formed the specific reference frameworks for the initiatives, and were shown to be highly important for their successful implementation.

» Overall, just three of the selected initiatives started their efforts towards more SCP patterns well before sustainability gained greater international attention in the 1980s, particularly through the release of the Brundtland Report in 1987. All other initiatives included in the analysis started to focus on sustainable practices in the past decade. During this time, influential trends such as digitalization, regionalism, deceleration, demographic change, among others, inspired the beginning of new sustainability initiatives.

» While some initiatives developed due to pressure in the marketplace to find a niche for better differentiation, others were impacted by economic and structural challenges such as local and regional infrastructure development needs, resulting in new, creative, ideas and investment opportunities. Likewise, in some cases, pressure to become more sustainable came from an increasing public concern and engagement related to topics such as climate change, poverty, education, environmental degradation and others.

» Alternative cooperation and business models allowed many of the initiatives to advance independently in their activities without relying on external financial resources. While it was found to be particularly challenging for communities to achieve financial autonomy quickly, finding and forming partnerships and alternative support mechanisms helped in the cases that were analysed with the eventual goal of becoming financially independent, thereby securing crucial long-term viability.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the first area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Frame of reference

The **background environment**, in particular the situation related to: the values and beliefs of people, the presence of global to local issues and progress of technologies, as well as economic support and other contextual conditions, in which the initiative is carried out..

4.2.2. Interconnectedness of Actors

The second area of catalytic importance relates to the links between the relevant stakeholders. Developing and embracing a variety of mechanisms that allow relevant actors of an initiative to be in regular contact while engaging in different activities, presents opportunities to create valuable links with other stakeholders, contributing to the growth of essential networks and offering exposure for the initiatives.

» When analyzing the initiatives, another feature commonly found among the initiatives was the presence of strong and broad connections held by the lead actors to a variety of external individuals and groups. This allowed initiative leadership to reach, in turn, many other stakeholders by then tapping the networks of their networks. The lead actors shared, across the initiatives, the enjoyment of engaging with outsiders in inspiring conversations and exchanges, most often on a structured and regular basis.

» The types of networks project leaders participated in were found to be diverse. Some followed more formal structures focusing on specific thematic topics relevant to their initiative, engaging e.g. with global, regional, national and local stakeholders. Others were more involved in groups that focused on the overall development of the geographical area where the initiatives are located. The research also project leaders linked to networks of relevant industry partners and destinations.

» Examples of the interconnectedness of lead actors include the involvement in certain tourism clusters, the engagement in city councils and other political bodies, as well as regular exchanges with neighboring cities and regions. Due to the tourism structures in Germany, destinations are generally well-connected to public sector entities on different levels above and below them, such as the regional and national tourism boards and relevant DMOs. Participation in fairs, conferences and other events, as well as stakeholder engagement in educational activities such as lecturing and presenting, were found to be important activities in helping to identify and foster relations with relevant contacts.

» The establishing and cultivating of links and networks relevant to the initiative was perceived by all stakeholders as something enjoyable and something they often initiated themselves, indicating their ability to thrive, to connect, and their openness to exchange knowledge through conversation with others. However, due to these interconnections, stakeholders were not only able to gain insights for their own initiatives, they were also able to spread the word about their initiatives, thereby inspiring others in the process.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the second area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Interconnectedness of actors

The **relations of the relevant actors** of the initiative with individuals or entire networks that can provide relevant stimuli in terms of generating ideas and solutions through a regular exchange of ideas, thereby creating additional spill-over effects.

4.2.3. Effective Prioritization of New Ideas

The third identified area of catalytic importance focuses on the effective prioritization of new ideas. This entails both officially or unofficially defined criteria by the lead actors, allowing for the thoughtful prioritization of possible new opportunities for engagement and facilitating the decision-making processes when looking at existing portfolios of ideas.

» When analyzing the initiatives, it became clear that none of the lead actors were faced with a scarcity of new ideas. In all cases, leaders tended to be in tune with their initiatives and collected ideas throughout their daily activities or actively sought them through participation in fairs, congresses and network gatherings. This results in a continuous flow of new thoughts and ideas every week. Usually, this flow of ideas was often complimented by the valuable input of family and staff members.

» As such, the research showed that one of the leading actor's' most vital tasks was to determine which ideas and opportunities could potentially be supported and on what scale. For example, leaders did not only have to evaluate ideas coming from the inside, but also needed to review externally publicized funding opportunities and decide on requests from potential project partners, including the evaluation of the opportunities as much as the risks and challenges related to them.

» With this in mind, some possible new ideas were evaluated based on intuitive visions while others underwent more scrutinized analyses. Most often, the former technique in particular played a vital role in the first round of selections. Certainly, there is no one correct approach that can be applied universally. However, the most common indicators used by stakeholders in order to eliminate options were their own experiences and intuition, as well as the intuition and opinions of trusted third parties, such as their families or close cooperation partners who had made good decisions in the past. Additionally, but less commonly relied upon, was the feedback of trusted networks and professional support systems.

» With regard to assessing the required efforts and chances for success of possible ideas coming from outside, such as project calls and cooperation requests, the research found that interacting with the originators of the ideas and seeking their feedback about the requirements and possible outcomes was another strategy used by project leads. Often, this process also resulted in enhanced relationships between the parties in the long-term featuring open and transparent dialogues and a free exchange of ideas.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the third area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Effective prioritization of new ideas

The importance of personal experiences and intuition, as well as the intuition and opinions of appreciated and relevant peers for the conscious evaluation, prioritization and selection of new ideas.

4.2.4. Value Structure

The fourth element with a catalytic function clearly observed in the research was the presence of a shared underlying value system at all levels of the initiatives. It was found that shared values provided guidance in facing and resolving new challenges and problems in daily operations, they also ensured continuous promotion of collaboration, learning and experimentation.

» A commonality between initiatives that were analyzed was a prevailing culture that put the project's success above the success of each function, indicating a culture of selflessness which encompasses the conviction that efforts contribute to a greater cause in benefiting the local people and environment.

» In the examined cases, it took around two to four years to plan, communicate and implement new strategies effectively. This involved clearly defined and firmly anchored values that were actively promoted, creating pride and identity among the stakeholders involved. In addition, lead actors recognized the value and contribution of their team to success. More specifically, the teams were perceived as the link between theory and practice and were recognized as the crucial bond from which positive behavioural changes from visitors could be achieved.

» Overall, common values that were identified included: (a) the vision for a bigger picture, (b) a holistic, integrated, participatory approach, (c) the conviction that many perspectives are better than one single one, (d) the understanding that sustainability is a process, (e) the belief that even small activities can have major impacts, (f) very high expectations held and shared by the initiative's team, seeking to surpass the guest's expectations.

» In order to strengthen the specific values embodied by the initiatives, leading actors often applied methods that stimulated regular and active reflection about the wider concept of sustainability. Examples of established tools were regular tests, surveys and conversations, as well as more clearly defined guidelines and regulations. In most cases, a combination of these direct and indirect learning methods was used.

» In order to motivate staff in their daily tasks, in the beginning of an initiative, sustainability and the values around it tended to be transferred through inspiring storytelling to inspire employees to unprecedented levels of interest and passion. After a certain amount of time, the topic was followed by a more structured approach, implementing rules and guidelines that aligned activities with the values.

» Eventually, a sustainable corporate culture tended to receive increasingly more attention from potential employees, making the organizations a sought-after future employer. In return, being able to attract employees with common values that strengthened sustainable practices, allowed the initiatives to further advance in their efforts more effectively.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the fifth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Value structure

The **value system** behind the initiative, which is shared, lived, and constantly strengthened by the leading actors as well as other relevant stakeholders and which presents the common ground for all decisions and activities.

4.2.5. Expert Knowledge

The fifth area of catalytic importance is based on the fact that the transition towards more sustainable patterns is an ongoing process that cannot be done alone. In this respect, one essential factor for the success of the initiatives was found to be collaboration with other external partners, such as academic institutions, consultancies, NGOs or individual experts from the field that helped the initiatives in their structural development, strategic orientation and with the implementation of specific activities.

» In the majority of cases analyzed, collaboration with such external partners created additional value through regular input, which strengthened the overall decision-making processes. Usually, such collaboration was established on a permanent basis and was done with trusted and experienced partners. As a result, the partners knew the initiatives and their environments very well and could give more relevant support in the long-term.

» Overall, these partnerships were collaborations between peers, allowing for knowledge exchange and idea generation on both sides. In the cases of collaboration with academic institutions, the initiatives benefitted in particular from increased awareness and familiarity with current research topics and findings relevant to their activities, hence giving them insights they would have otherwise not been able to access. This was particularly crucial in the beginning of the initiatives when stakeholder capacities were limited.

» In practical terms, the external partners usually supported the initiatives with valuable insights into market research, developments and practical experiences from the field, as well as other relevant topics. This enabled new ideas, objectives and activities to be formulated and developed, strategic aspects to be discussed, and training, workshops and other discussion forums to be established. Furthermore, new tools could be tested and benefits derived through the free use of new technology and the accessibility of research results.

» In all cases, both the initiatives and the partners were strengthened by regular cooperation. For example, in destinations, the increased stakeholder capacity and the opportunities for regular discussions that came from collaboration strengthened the culture of open dialogue and values. The experts, in turn, benefited from gathering practical experiences from the field which helped them to further develop their academic curricula.

» It is important to highlight that the support did not usually encompass continuous monitoring of behavioral impacts of the initiatives on the visitors. Usually, impact analysis focused more on aspects such as revenues, visitor numbers, brand image and other economic factors and not on the potential change in day-to-day habits. Due to this lack of research regarding the long-term impacts of an initiative, which often was the result of a restriction of resources, long-term knowledge about these aspects remained limited in most cases.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the sixth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Expert knowledge

Support by specialists such as individual scientists, universities, consultants or entire interdisciplinary teams in the planning and implementation of an initiative, which strengthens the initiative thanks to extensive practical experience from a variety of other environments.

4.2.6. Assistance from Key Stakeholders

In addition to the previously noted element (expert knowledge), another catalyst that was clearly identified as prevailing in all initiatives, and that relates to the importance of supporting systems, was the observed crucial assistance and backup from key stakeholders, especially in the beginning of an initiative.

» In all of the examined initiatives, individual supporters played a crucial role in mobilizing necessary resources and making the progress towards sustainability a collective responsibility. While in some cases such support grew from within the business itself (e.g. family members in family-owned business), in others, like-minded supporters came from outside, but still from within the environment of the initiative, and included players such as community leaders or business owners from the destinations.

» In addition, the research findings suggested that the number of stakeholders that backed the responsible leaders was one of the main factors leading to the success of initiatives. In most initiatives—especially those that relied heavily on external funding—the implementation of the initiatives became much easier after a critical mass of supporting stakeholders was found and mobilized, highlighting the relevance of creating necessary "tipping points".

» Usually, the supporting stakeholders had certain amounts of influence and helped to further develop an initiative's common vision. Although these actors had generally different priorities and agendas in their day-to-day activities, the added value of their participation and influence in the sustainability initiatives generally improved innovativeness and ultimately resulted in greater positive impacts overall.

» In cases where the support from the outside increased over time, clear roles and responsibilities were usually defined. While some actors provided mainly moral support for the leading actors of the initiative, others offered support with practical actions, such as, among others, influencing and backing certain opinions and decisions, supporting the initiative with financial contributions, sharing expertise or connecting to essential counterparts.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the eighth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Assistance from key stakeholders
Crucial **facilitators that are supporting the lead actors especially in the early phases** of the implementation, helping them to successfully manage unforeseen and typical barriers of change.

The seventh element of catalytic importance entails the identification, expansion and strategic positioning of the initiative (its characteristics and values) on one core theme, which allows centering all activities on a common and easily understood framework.

» While the concept of sustainability was found in all of the initiatives analyzed, most of them even focused specifically on at least one niche area within the overall topic 'sustainability'. For example, focus was put on areas such as climate change, slow tourism, organic food or other 'sub-themes'. By doing so, consistent and unique sets of values were formed, defining the overall vision and culture of the initiatives and distinguishing them more clearly.

» At times, the surrounding natural environment played a crucial part in creating the core identity of the initiatives. In these cases, the initiatives built their concept around one or several of the destination-specific features, which were usually carefully considered and actively discussed decisions, indicating that the process of strategic alignment with local attributes benefits greatly from inside knowledge, a passion for the region, and an understanding of tourists' perceptions.

» Both, the focus on at least one niche area within sustainability and the active allocation of resources to the efforts, such as specifically appointed employees, were observed as essential to success. In many cases, employees were actively selected and included in the implementation of activities to form a clear commitment to sustainability. While at times this was done by a single staff member, other initiatives created entire departments and programs.

» One outstanding aspect identified was the fact that the initiatives effected their commitment in a very thorough and strict manner, indicating the value of stringent action on the road to sustainability. Although in some instances this diligence created unforeseen challenges for some stakeholders (such as not being able to provide 100% organic food and drink due to a lack of supply), the situations were overcome and improved in each case.

» While the research showed that implementing sustainable structures was easier on a small scale, larger destinations and companies carry a much higher level of responsibility due to their wider reach and influence. Often, stronger commitment to the core subject was very favourable and increased the attractiveness of the company behind the initiative, motivating them to find adequate personnel with respect to values and skills.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the fourth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Focus on a core theme

The **core topic, which is centered around** the identification, expansion and strategic positioning on one specific concept in order to strengthen the unique features of the initiative and create clear and tangible differentiation.

This area of catalytic importance refers to the strategic internal and external communication about the sustainability efforts of the initiatives. While internally, this strengthened awareness and dialogues with the inner circle of relevant stakeholders, it was observed that it also allowed the initiatives to become better known to the outside world.

» Communication with relevant internal stakeholders (e.g. local transportation providers or other impacted community businesses) played a crucial role especially in the planning and early implementation processes of the initiatives as new ideas needed to be understood and favored by them. One effective way of convincing relevant stakeholders in the early stages of the initiatives was to establish an open approach and dialogue with them in order to understand their related perspectives and interest.

» For effective communication, it was found to be important to approach stakeholders with questions rather than decisions, and an interest in understanding any of their ongoing activities related to the concept of the new initiative as well as their desired involvement and goals. A common approach to communication efforts among the initiatives analyzed was having a dialogue that was tailored to the different stakeholder groups, so that the discussion could focus on the most relevant and appealing aspects of the initiatives to the different entities.

» Typically, the initial dialogue with internal stakeholders lasted at least a couple of years. Therefore, much time was taken for communicating with relevant internal actors and continued to be a significant part of the daily work even after the initiative was established. What resulted in most cases from this open approach of engagement was that not only an increased familiarity with, and an acceptance of the strategic vision evolved, but it also generated pride and ownership among the actors, which resulted in valuable cooperation and involvement.

» With respect to the external communication, the research found different strategic options. While some of the initiatives actively communicated their sustainability efforts to the public, others intentionally decided not to do so for two main reasons. Firstly, as sustainability often continues to be perceived as an end goal and not as a process that requires constant refinements, a number of stakeholders were concerned about becoming unnecessary targets for criticism when presenting their sustainability efforts. In these cases, sustainability was indirectly integrated by focusing the communication strategies on other aspects of the certified components, such as quality, for example. Secondly, some did not openly communicate their efforts because of very high expectations coming from the stakeholders themselves.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the twelfth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Communication

The dialogue-oriented and continuous communication with relevant stakeholder groups which proactively identifies and addresses the different needs of the actors and which transfers the vision and objectives of the initiative in a differentiated manner.

4.2.9. Replicability and Stickiness of the Core Message

Keeping the concept of an initiative as simple and transparent as possible in order to be easily understood and mobilize other destinations in learning about and replicating successful components of the initiative was identified as the ninth essential catalytic element.

» The art of breaking a project's purpose down so that it becomes understandable and tangible for outsiders was found throughout the researched initiatives. In all cases, the aim of the initiatives could be explained with only a few sentences, making it easily comprehensible for outsiders. While the main purpose often included more complex components, the core message and idea behind the initiatives were surprisingly simple, allowing for a clear translation of the core idea.

» One of the positive impacts that derived from this was how it was found to facilitate replication of the sustainability efforts overall, allowing the initiative to be more scalable. In most of the cases observed, the interest in replicating the ideas behind the initiatives was and continues to be actively supported by the initiators due to the overarching belief that good sustainable practices should be supported wherever possible.

» Hence, stakeholders tended to be particularly positive and supportive of the potential replication of their initiatives. Because of this open attitude, many of the key stakeholders from the analyzed initiatives had already supported several rollouts (planned or already implemented) either by themselves or with other external stakeholders. Activities also included sharing ideas through lectures and presentations, inviting interested external stakeholders for visits, approaching other destinations directly with ideas, and supporting the implementation of similar ideas in other destinations directly.

» Nevertheless, simply copying an idea into another setting was not perceived as the most effective strategy, as each new initiative should be tailored to the context of the destination. For this reason, in accordance with the particular context, capabilities of actors, culture and other aspects, the importance of adjusting components such as, the initiative's architecture, idea and storyline, local structures and timing, among others, was highlighted.

» Different from the already mentioned lack of monitoring and scarcity of information regarding the direct behavioral impacts of the initiatives on the visitors, it was observed that more efforts were made to regularly evaluate the attractiveness and effectiveness of the core message and the packaging and promotion around it. While in some instances, this was done with the support of external supporting partners (see also 'expert knowledge') and traditional surveys in the field, others relied on online tools that allowed for analyzing the efficiency of the message.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the twelfth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Replicability and Stickiness of the core message

The quality of **clarity of the core message** behind an initiative which can be easily understood and remembered (stickiness) and which therefore **allows for easy reproduction** and application in new contexts.

The tenth element with a catalytic function is closely related to the previously described 'effective prioritization of new ideas' as it entails the ability of leading actors to actively test potential ideas without being bound to too many restrictions. While certain limits and rules can create guidance, having the freedom to test unconventional ideas, as well as the right to fail, enable innovative idea-processes essential for the continuous improvement of the initiative.

» Although in all of the initiatives, certain instructions and regulations were present that guided decisions, all stakeholders enjoyed certain liberties to execute ideas that they perceived as promising. Due to the often limited resources, it was observed that such flexibility was generally more difficult to achieve in destinations. In contrast, possibilities for experimenting were more likely in family-led businesses where processes and structures were generally simpler and tied to fewer restrictions.

» One commonality observed for all initiatives was the fact that usually higher-level objectives were formulated rather than specific instructions or steps, creating dynamic environments in which solutions and decisions even for unforeseen and new situations could be developed. As a result, the lead actors of the initiative often received enough trust and power that allowed them to experiment and to possibly fail, resulting in the proactive management of risks instead of trying to eliminate them.

» Moreover, another complementary component was an observed courage that stakeholders shared and which motivated them to carefully engage and listen to their environments as well as implement necessary changes that carry certain risks. Instead of fearing uncertainty and potential negative outcomes linked to the initiative, they all enjoyed and embraced the possibility to freely create and fail. In fact, pride was often taken in the lists of unsuccessful ideas and initiatives because those were valuable learning experiences that produced even better subsequent outcomes.

» Because of this, many of the analyzed initiatives were built on a step-by-step approach, based on a management culture and structure that values and encourages a process of constant review by trial and error. This underlines the power of creative disruption which commonly derives from this flexibility and which tends to increase as more stakeholders support such a philosophy.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the eleventh area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Room to maneuver

The trust and flexibility given to the responsible lead actors within the established value system which allows to independently **test new ideas and, if necessary, fail**.

4.2.11. Participatory Approach

The eleventh area of catalytic importance entails the widely-known concept of an inclusive, participatory approach that involves a variety of relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation process of an initiative. As this element is fundamental and closely related to many of the other catalysts, reference has already been made to it in previous sections.

» Cross-functional involvement and a bottom-up, inclusive approach could be identified as crucial elements in all of the initiatives analyzed. Because of involving those who are especially relevant in the development and operationalization of an initiative, such as employees, the local population or the lead businesses within a destination, a diverse exchange of perspectives was usually ensured. This fosters a culture of solidarity and common values that, in return, encourage engagement and strengthen the feeling of shared responsibility.

» In order to internalize the values, mobilize stakeholders and build essential competencies and capacities, leading actors were usually aware of the importance of identifying, approaching and actively encouraging engagement from the most relevant actors and creating opportunities for interaction among them.

» With this in mind, all lead actors put much attention to remaining approachable and support the access to information, informing continuously and openly about ideas, concepts and the value of sustainable practices. This, in all initiatives, allowed building a cohort of stakeholders that understand and support the transition towards more SCP patterns with their actions and passion.

» Specific techniques observed included the creation of regular formal or informal events that offered meeting opportunities, workshops on specific topics, the creation of reflection and feedback mechanisms such as surveys and other tools, as well as the creation of other frameworks that foster dialogue.

» The process of building such supportive groups through active communication and the creation of a culture where perspectives are openly discussed and valued took, in all of the initiatives, at least a few years and required much attention and time from the leading actors. Nevertheless, efforts were rewarded with many positive outcomes such as increased support, a stronger common identity of the involved stakeholders and stronger bonds between them overall.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the tenth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Participatory Approach

The constant inclusion and mobilization of relevant actors at every level in the continuous development processes of the initiative in order to strengthen common values and the identification with the underlying cause, leading to a more resilient initiative overall.

4.2.12. Continuous Advancements

The twelfth catalytic element includes a governance process that encourages stakeholders to constantly assess, validate and refine the path forward, allowing for continuous learning and adaptations that help to increase the overall likelihood for long-term success.

» In all of the analyzed initiatives, environments were found where continuous 'fine-tuning' of ideas and performance parameters was an explicit part of the long-term strategic plans. Overall, regular impulses were perceived as something positive and indispensable, even desirable and did not necessarily aim at reaching a specific end goal but rather to stimulate actions towards a far-reaching vision.

» Approaches on how to stimulate, encourage, support and reward innovative behaviour varied across initiatives, emerging at times through formal as well as informal structures. Examples of formal structures were the strategic and regularly planned review of previously defined decisions and a reflection on their effectiveness. A more informal approach to stimulate free-idea generation was the establishment of official days or hours that were specifically planned for 'unconventional thinking'. In these cases, stakeholders created environments that were unconstrained by the normal working environment, allowing experimentation and reflection as freely as possible.

» As mentioned earlier, lead actors were usually not faced with a scarcity of ideas. In fact, inspiration for improvements was commonly found by the lead actors beyond the initiatives' boundaries and even in private life, indicating the strong identification and link with the initiatives. For instance, ideas were gathered during holidays or while having meals, from movies, or simply from conversations about entirely different topics. Of course, as outlined before, stimulus also originated from systematically scrutinized conversations and experiences from relevant events and networks.

» Looking at the more detailed development of ideas, usually no criteria were defined beforehand. In cases where employees developed possible new opportunities, the sole condition observed was the required estimate of the value that the innovations should generate and the ability to meet stable financial objectives.

» Overall, it appeared to be more challenging for destinations to create a regular and systematic mechanism for generating ideas and implementing regular impulses for the development of the initiative due to structural and financial structures. Usually, it appeared to be easier for companies and organizations with more simple structures and less financial dependencies to engage in systematic reviews, brainstorming and other activities relevant for continuous improvements.

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the thirteenth area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Continuous advancements

The general understanding held and actively lived by relevant actors regarding the **importance of regular stimulus and advancements,** such as new, innovative ideas and activities, for the sustained and increased attractiveness of the initiative as well as further development for the overall long-term success of the initiative.

4.2.13. Lead Actors' Characteristics[23]

The previously described areas of catalytic importance presented a variety of different elements that are observed to be of crucial importance for the success of the analyzed initiatives. Behind all activities and developments, people are the drivers and no initiative would have been implemented without the many essential people involved. Throughout the research for this project, many experiences of these leaders were gathered which were tremendously enriching for the project team. As characters, stories and experiences shared were so plentiful, no short summary of these aspects would give enough credit to what has been achieved over the years by these stakeholders – not just for their own closer environments but for fostering sustainable tourism and SCP patterns as a whole. Therefore, the following aspects present only some snapshots of commonalities that were found throughout the interviews, which, in many cases, underline what has already been presented in this chapter:

- The responsible actors are an essential bridge between the initiative and the outside world; between inside stakeholders and external actors; between friends and opponents; between ideas and reality
- In the best cases, they are surrounded by a variety of supporting actors that are both similar and different, creating valuable grounds for different perspectives that come together for the common cause
- They motivate, inspire and mobilize people to constantly improve
- They have the necessary humour not to take themselves too seriously, understanding that there are others struggling with similar issues and that things at times can go wrong and they are open to feedback and inspiration from the outside
- They have a diverse and multidisciplinary base of experiences and knowledge that allows them to think more holistically, which affects the initiatives in many positive ways
- They embrace risk in order to manage well and are open enough to try out new and, at times, unconventional things
- They have created more sustainable corporate culture over the years by actively engaging within their environment, further aiming for continuous advancements
- They have a very pragmatic perspective on where the initiative stands at the moment and where it could be in the future, without defining future objectives too tightly
- They can operate in an environment that allows them certain flexibility and offer, in return, the necessary room to participate
- They are convinced they cannot do it alone and that development needs to be an inclusive and participatory approach that touches most, if not all, parts of the organization/initiative
- They constantly re-assess and re-evaluate their position and their initiative's position
- They know that at times, their task also includes moving against received wisdom of popular strategies and that there will be voices raised against them
- They know and accept that at times, contextual circumstances cannot be changed, letting them move within certain limits
- They have the ability to connect well with others and enjoy open dialogue that supports transparency and identity creation

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[23] For an overview of all lead actors that allowed insights into their initiatives, please see Annex IV.

- They really own their project and act in a timely manner; they are characters who target a problem rather than looking away
- They value and embrace other approaches and perspectives and invite others to share those experiences to learn and fail together
- They are aware that change takes time; that things need to evolve over time and that it is a multi-year effort, which also underscores that sustainability is a process
- They perceive not just the direct surroundings of the initiative but take part in and know that the overall development of the greater surroundings is also relevant for the initiative
- They have realized the importance of measuring impacts created by the initiatives and have tried - in their individual frames of reference and with the available resources - to make this a vital part of their work

Based on the above-mentioned observations, the last area of catalytic importance is defined as:

Lead actor's characteristics

The combination of specific **character traits and qualities of the responsible lead actors** that enable them to responsibly and successfully guide the initiatives and the actors involved.

4.4. Delphi Survey

In continuation of the literature research, telephone conversations with experts and the personal interviews with the project leads, the aim was to further validate the identified catalytic elements and their importance. Therefore, a Delphi was conducted to obtain feedback from all experts and project leads about the identified elements. In total, two survey rounds were prepared and conducted between June and September 2016. The first round was shared with the panel of 20 interviewees (consisting of the experts and project leads) in July and presented the identified areas of catalytic importance, their subsequent definition (as presented in this report in the end of each catalytic area in Chapter 4) and the inquiry to evaluate the importance of those elements with respect to their particular experiences. Asking participants to evaluate and indirectly prioritize these catalytic elements facilitated the identification of first commonalities, patterns and a potential consensus.[24]

In order to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of the group regarding the identified areas of catalytic importance and their significance for the different initiatives, a second round of the Delphi was conducted in the beginning of September. This second survey offered participants the chance to perceive the judgement of the other participants and to review their own previous responses in the light of this knowledge. In addition, panel members were also given the opportunity to re-evaluate their own responses, asking to confirm or modify their former assessment. By presenting the group's assessment in comparison to the individual tendencies and including this controlled opinion feedback, a clear direction and focus was provided for participants, avoiding emotionally-driven discussions and disagreements.[25]

This approach ensured the valuable participation of all project partners until the last stage of the project, hence ensuring a participatory, inclusive approach. The consensus-forging nature of the Delphi technique allowed the research team to clearly ratify the identified elements of catalytic importance to an extent which otherwise would not have been possible.

The following section presents a summary of the outcomes deriving from the Delphi.

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[24] The first Delphi can be found in Annex VI.
[25] The second Delphi can be found in Annex VII.

A. Delphi Round 1

Table 2: Ranking of the Areas of Catalytic Importance - Overview Delphi Round 1

Areas of Catalytic Importance	Total Score		Amount of 5-Points Evaluation		Standard Deviation	
	Max.80	Ranking	Max.16	Ranking	Smallest possible = 0	Ranking
1. Frame of Reference	65	6	8	3	1,124	12
2. Interconnectedness of Actors	**71**	**1**	**10**	**1**	0,814	7
3. Effective Prioritization of new Ideas	64	7	4	6	0,894	9
4. Value Structure	70	2	7	4	**0,619**	**1**
5. Expert Knowledge	66	5	5	5	0,719	2
6. Assistance from Key Stakeholders	68	3	7	4	0,775	4
7. Focus on a Core Subject	49	10	1	8	0,884	8
8. Communication	**71**	**1**	9	2	0,727	3
9. Replicability and Stickiness of Core Message	70	2	8	3	0,806	6
10. Room to Maneuver	59	9	2	7	0,793	5
11. Participatory Approach	67	4	9	2	1,047	11
12. Continuous Advancements	63	8	5	5	0,929	10

In the first round of the Delphi, participants were asked to evaluate the importance of 12 catalytic elements based on their own experiences. Possible feedback could be given on a 5-point linear numerical scale (Likert Scale), where 1 represents '*no importance at all* ' of the catalyst for the relevant initiative and 5 indicates a ' *very high importance*'. [26],[27]

From a variety of different calculations that were made based on the respondents' feedback, it was the total score, the number of 5 point evaluations for each catalytic element, as well as an analysis of the standard deviation that offered the most interesting results.

As a result, the catalytic elements which received the highest number of points in total (16 respondents x 5 points = 80 maximum) by the respondents were: (rank 1) the '*Interconnectedness of actors*' and '*Communication*'; followed by (rank 2) the '*Value structure*' and the '*Replicability and Stickiness of the core message*'; as well as (rank 3) the '*Assistance from key stakeholders*'.

When looking at the catalytic elements that received the highest number of 5-point evaluations ('*very high importance*'), similar patterns could be observed, with the '*Interconnectedness of actors*' being again the leading catalytic area of importance for the initiatives, followed by '*Communication*' as well as '*Participatory approach*' on second rank (1st and 4th place in total score ranking). This was followed by the element '*Replicability and Stickiness of the core message*' on third place (2nd in the total score analysis). While in total points the element '*Assistance from key stakeholders*' ranked third, in this evaluation it was placed fourth.

In order to see the overall consensus among participants, the standard deviation was calculated (with 0 indicating the smallest deviation between respondents' answers, hence the highest consensus among members). From this analysis it was observed that very similar evaluations were given by

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[26] Although the panel consisted of 20 experts and project leads in total, for the Delphi, some participants filled out the survey together for their respective initiative, which is why 16 surveys have been received as feedback in total.

[27] Participants only evaluated the first 12 out of the 13 areas of catalytic importance due to the nature of the last element.

respondents with respect to the catalytic elements '*Value structure*' (rank 1), '*Expert knowledge*' (rank 2) and '*Communication*' (rank 3). In comparison, 'Value structure' also scored second place in the total score ranking and fourth in the category for highest number of 5-points evaluations received while 'Communication' placed first and second respectively. In addition, while '*Expert knowledge'* ranked second in regard to the standard deviation, the element scored fifth place in both of the other categories.

B. Delphi Round 2

While in the first round of the Delphi, feedback was received from all panel members, a response rate of 80% was achieved in the second round when finalizing the report. From this group, five participants indicated different evaluations for a total of 11 areas of catalytic importance, adjusting feedback closer to the overall group's tendencies. In all cases, modifications were made positively, increasing the perceived importance of the elements (hence giving higher ranking on the Likert Scale).

Table 2: Ranking of the Areas of Catalytic Importance - Overview Delphi Round 2

Areas of Catalytic Importance	Total Score		Amount of 5-Points Evaluation		Standard Deviation	
	Max.80	Ranking	Max.16	Ranking	Smallest possible = 0	Ranking
1. Frame of Reference	66	5	8	4	1,025	11
2. Interconnectedness of Actors	**73**	**1**	**11**	**1**	0,727	5
3. Effective Prioritization of new Ideas	64	7	4	7	0,894	8
4. Value Structure	71	3	7	5	**0,512**	**1**
5. Expert Knowledge	66	5	5	6	0,719	4
6. Assistance from Key Stakeholders	69	4	7	5	0,704	3
7. Focus on a Core Subject	51	9	2	8	0,910	9
8. Communication	72	2	9	3	0,632	2
9. Replicability and Stickiness of the Core Message	72	2	9	3	0,632	2
10. Room to Maneuver	60	8	2	8	0,775	7
11. Participatory Approach	69	4	10	2	1,014	10
12. Continuous Advancements	65	6	5	6	0,772	6

Looking at the impacts of the realized modifications, the most substantial change was a more distinct prioritization in terms of the total scoring. While after the first round of the Delphi, two areas of catalytic importance ranked first ('Interconnectedness of actors' and 'Communication') and two elements ranked second ('Value structure' and 'Replicability and Stickiness of the core message'), the re-evaluation resulted in a clear first place for the 'Interconnectedness of actors', while 'Communication' and the 'Replicability and Stickiness of the core message' placed second. This is followed by 'Value structure on third place. Consequently, the element 'Assistance from key stakeholder' moved down to rank four, together with 'Participatory approach'.

Tendencies deriving from the analysis of the total score were further underlined by the outcomes of the examination of the areas of catalytic importance that received highest number of 5-point evaluations. Here, the element 'Interconnectedness of Actors' remained in first place (no change to the first Delphi round and same ranking in total score), receiving 5 points from 11 of the 16 respondents. Further to this, the element 'Participatory approach' ranked second, followed by 'Communication' as

well as 'Replicability and Stickiness of the core message' in third place (both elements placed second in terms of total score). Fourth place went to the element 'Frame of reference' (receiving 8 5-point scores) and 'Value structure' as well as 'Assistance from key stakeholders' placed fifth (receiving 5-point scores from 7 respondents).

When comparing the rankings of the first and second calculations, the outcomes were found to be quite similar, as among the sets of results, there were was no difference in rank of more than two ranks (up or down). In fact, those two place differences in ranking were only found in two cases ('Value structure' and 'Participatory approach') while all other catalytic elements either matched exactly in each calculation, or fluctuated by one place only.

When looking more in detail at the overall consensus among the panel members, most agreement was observed regarding the element 'Value structure'. In contrast, most differences in opinions were found regarding the elements 'Frame of reference' and 'Participatory approach'. Perhaps unsurprisingly based on the results, there were relatively great differences in evaluations given for these two elements, including a mix of both low and very high evaluations were given by respondents, ranging from two to five points. In this analysis, the elements with particularly high agreement among survey participants were 'Communication' and 'Replicability and Stickiness of the core message', demonstrating their consistent and clear placement within the first three ranks. In third place came the element 'Assistance from key stakeholders', which also placed fourth in terms of total score.

In summary, the second round of the Delphi allowed for a clearer distinction and prioritization of the proposed catalytic elements. Overall, from a total of 80 possible points, none of the proposed elements received a lower score than 48, indicating that all catalysts were perceived at least as important. In fact, ten of the twelve elements received total points higher than 64, designating an overall high importance to them.

When comparing all three calculations, it was especially the elements '**Interconnectedness of actors**' (which received first place in both the total score and the number of 5-points received), '**Communication**', the '**Replicability and Stickiness of the core message**' and the '**Value structure**' that were clearly highlighted to be of catalytic nature for the success of the different sustainability initiatives. In addition, high importance was also assigned to the '**Assistance from key stakeholders**' as well as the '**Participatory approach**'. In terms of consensus-building, most agreement was made regarding the element 'Value structure' while most disagreement occurred with respect to 'the Frame of reference' and the 'Participatory approach' – two areas that, nevertheless, placed fourth and fifth in total ranking.

Further to these outcomes, the Delphi also offered an opportunity for the respondents to name other possible areas of catalytic importance not on the list that they perceived to be relevant for the successful implementation and management of sustainability initiatives. While in the first survey, panel members were asked to state additional elements at the very end of the document, the second round of the Delphi included a possibility to prioritize the indicated catalysts according to the individual experiences.

The additional elements that were stated by the respondents were:

(a) Regular, adequate training
(b) Increasing linkages beyond the central stakeholder group

(c) Joint innovation with relevant partners (e.g. suppliers)

(d) Consideration of the target groups' needs and interests

(e) Strengthening of the multiplier effect: information for and sensitization of extended touch points of the service chain (e.g. gas stations, supermarkets, at attractions, in public transport etc.)

(f) Technical cooperation/ product bundling/ joint communication together with competitors (to strengthen the position regarding budgets, know-how and promotion)

(g) Participation in official competitions as motivator, multiplier, door-opener and possibly financial resources

After having gathered these additional elements through the first round of the Delphi, feedback given on their perceived importance in the second round showed that for the respondents, 'Considering the target groups' needs and interests' was most important in comparison to the other elements (receiving highest points in terms of total score but also most 5-points received). In this regard, respondents also mentioned during the conversations that it is not only important to consider the articulated needs of the customers but also to envision the potential future desired in order to maintain and increase the attractiveness of the initiatives.

In addition to this first element, participants further valued the need to 'Increase linkages beyond the central stakeholder group' as the second most important element in comparison to the other additional potential areas. Although different in its formulation, this catalytic element is closely related to the already defined area 'Interconnectedness of actors', which includes the growth and strengthening of more external, wider relations beyond the inner circle of relevant stakeholders, reinforcing its significance.

The element 'Joint innovation with relevant partners' placed third (for which the highest agreement in opinions could also be observed) and 'Regular and adequate training' placed fourth in the total points ranking of the additional seven catalytic elements. While the discrepancy in opinions showed similar patterns in most cases, respondents did not seem to concur much regarding the last element 'Participation in official competition'. This could be explained by the fact that the panel consisted of a mix of different actors from the private and public sector. Here, the prior interviews indicated that competitions may be more important for public sector stakeholders as it offers more needed financial opportunities and visibility.

Table 3: Additional Catalytic Elements and their Ranking

Areas of Catalytic Importance	Total Score		Amount of 5-Points Evaluation		Standard Deviation	
	Max.80	Ranking	Max.16	Ranking	Smallest possible = 0	Ranking
a. Regular, adequate training	43	4	1	4	0,668	2
b. Increasing linkages beyond the central stakeholder group	49	2	**3**	2	0,668	2
c. Joint innovation with relevant partners	45	3	1	4	**0,621**	1
d. Consideration of the target groups' needs and interests	**53**	1	6	1	0,668	2
e. Strengthening of the multiplier effect	38	6	0	-	0,687	3
f. Technical cooperation with competitors	43	4	0	-	0,668	2
g. Participation in official competitions	40	5	2	3	0,984	4

The collection of these additional elements was decoupled from the other thirteen elements that were carefully developed and defined through the full variety of stages of the research, and they should be seen only as additional elements, that would require more detailed analyses in order to put forth more definitive findings related to their significance in sustainability initiatives.

One area of catalytic importance that could not be evaluated by the project leads themselves was the character and attitude of the leading actors, a factor that was clearly shown to be crucial in the success of the initiatives. This thirteenth area of catalytic importance was therefore not included in the Delphi but was undoubtedly noted and validated by the outcomes of the phone interviews with the other experts, who drew on their extensive experience with the implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives. Without attributes such as those described in the previous section, initiatives included in the analysis would not have been as successful and prosperous as they ultimately were and continue to be. Thus, although not verified through the survey, this element can be added to the list of elements with a very high catalytic character and is considered indispensable in any new or ongoing initiative.

As a result, the final group of clearly verified areas of catalytic importance that have shown to be of very **high importance** for the successful implementation and management of sustainable tourism initiatives due to their catalytic influence are the **following seven elements**:

- ➤ *Interconnectedness of actors*
- ➤ *Communication*
- ➤ *Replicability and 'Stickiness' of the core message*
- ➤ *Value Structure*
- ➤ *Lead actors' characteristics*
- ➤ *Participatory approach*
- ➤ *Assistance from key stakeholders*

5. Conclusions

Given the increasing popularity of the term "acceleration" in the tourism sector and its direct relationship to the objective of the project "Innovative catalysts boosting sustainability in the tourism sector based on examples from Germany", the first phase of the research prioritized efforts to further understand the term's meaning. However, the references discussing the implications of "acceleration", especially in a tourism-specific context, were found to be scarce. This finding supports the underlying assumption that to date, 'acceleration' remains a political message rather than an actual defined, applicable concept to guide practical implementations to advance sustainability with increased urgency and efficacy.

Building on these initial findings, the extended literature review then focused on identifying essential elements with catalytic potential in various fields. The research covered aspects such as theories on cooperation, crucial elements for trend-setting, essential success factors in marketing, underlying philosophies fostering sustainable business practices, and concepts stimulating idea-generation and innovation, to name a few. From these theories and concepts, the preliminary definitions of potential areas of catalytic importance were formed which guided the subsequent phone interviews with experts and the following observations on the ground. This approach allowed for an evaluation as to whether the catalytic elements were present in the initiatives, as well as a validation of their specific roles and levels of importance. After having reviewed, challenged and confirmed the different potential areas of catalytic importance, a final validation of the defined elements was undertaken. This was done through a Delphi, which included two rounds of questioning in total, allowing a first prioritization of the presented catalysts and then a review and verification of the initial evaluations.

As a result of the overall exercise, a total of 13 catalysts, which offered important contributions to the successful implementation and attainment of sustainable practices, were identified. While some of them were found to have specific roles in developing and strengthening the overall sustainability concepts behind the initiatives, others offered insight into the components that are essential for the scalability and replicability of the initiatives.

The greater prevalence of some catalysts throughout all initiatives also suggested that these had a higher degree of importance in making an initiative successful in its efforts to advance sustainable practices more effectively. The catalysts for which this could be concluded are: *'Interconnectedness of actors', 'Communication', 'Replicability and Stickiness of the core message', 'Value structure', 'Lead actors' characteristics', 'Participatory approach'* and *'Assistance from key stakeholders'.* While findings regarding these elements clearly suggested they are highly relevant, additional research is necessary to confirm the level of importance of the remaining catalysts.[28]

Further to this, the following main observations were found to be most significant across all initiatives.

In all of the initiatives analyzed, **sustainability** was an integrated and fundamental part of daily operations that was not seen as an end goal but rather as **a continuous process** undergoing constant improvements. Although the timeframes varied between initiatives, **the integration and strengthening of a sustainable corporate culture took at least a few years** in all cases, requiring a

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[28] For an overview of the concepts and ideas found in literature and the related practical examples, please see Annex V.

long-term view and perseverance. In general, **values of a sustainable culture** were shown in beliefs and actions. Examples of this include the setting of high expectations by leadership, involving relevant stakeholders throughout the process, valuing different perspectives and fostering open and transparent dialogue, offering flexibility when necessary, seeking continuous improvements, and embracing new ideas and the possibility of failure.

It was found in successful initiatives that the actors in general held the belief that even small actions can make large impacts and that things are better done together than alone. This climate demonstrates to all partners and stakeholders involved their value to the initiative. By **engaging directly and regularly with core stakeholders and by listening carefully to their perspectives**, the insight gained allowed lead actors to tailor better their messaging for each stakeholder group, helping them to meet their goals.

Another aspect closely related to the values and philosophies behind the initiatives was the commonly perceived **trust, flexibility and room to maneuver given to the lead actors** when it came to generating ideas and decision-making processes. In all of the cases analyzed, being able to freely act and decide on resources with the certainty that failure was permitted facilitated much stronger innovation processes.

Moreover, it was found that **creating spaces and opportunities for transparent dialogues** with different actors **allowed successful participatory approaches to develop,** which fostered a sense of responsibility and pride among the people involved and created an overall shared value system. With regard to human resource development, shared values and the active engagement of employees usually resulted in greater efforts coming from staff, as well as a company or organization's increased attractiveness overall to potential employees and the public.

One element that was found to be crucial in the successful implementation of inclusive and participatory approaches was the effectiveness of the lead actor. Although different in terms of backgrounds and experiences, the leaders of the initiatives **shared specific traits and characteristics that enabled them to push and strengthen the initiatives, despite the lengthy and often demanding path ahead**. The collective success was always held among the effective leaders as more important than any individual's achievement, demonstrating the importance of a culture based on mutual regard and trust.

In particular, observations showed that **collaboration between the initiatives and specific institutions,** such as universities and consultancies, fostered open dialogues and reflections about the initiatives' strategic directions. In addition, stakeholders benefited from these partnerships through the collection of crucial information about the initiatives' impacts, as **knowledge was often limited to information about the outcomes of operational activities** such as revenues, visitor numbers, brand image and other economic factors. Specifically, **monitoring and measuring impacts over the long term and in relation to behavioral changes was often difficult due to limited resources**.

The research also found that **open and frequent communication with key stakeholders permitted the creation of "tipping points"** in such ways that the developments of the initiatives were usually facilitated through other stakeholders. In this regard, it was observed that a critical mass of individuals assisting the leading actors to face and overcome certain challenges was highly important.

Reaching this self-directed stage of an initiative was shown to be highly dependent on the simplicity of the core message behind the initiatives. An easily understandable and memorable message facilitated not only the spread of the idea to the demand side, but also **allowed for easy replication in new contexts, thus indicating this as a factor in determining the scalability of the core idea**. Surprisingly, all lead actors supported the idea of scaling up sustainability efforts not only for possible financial gains, but more so because of the shared conviction that good sustainable practices should be supported.

Being connected to tourism- as well as non-tourism-related networks played another vital part in the successful implementation of the initiatives analyzed and in turn the strengthening and acceleration of the overall sustainability efforts. Activities of lead actors to foster essential relations included their involvement in thematic local, regional, national and even international networks and expert groups, cooperation with professional institutions, regular exchanges with geographically close or other partner destinations, and their participation in fairs and competitions, etc. **Being interconnected to external stakeholders through networks** not only allowed lead actors to gather inspiration and knowledge for the initiative's own activities, but it offered the possibility to share and spread the stories of the initiatives. Because of the extensive interconnectedness of lead actors in networks, all of them were linked in such ways that they could easily **gain significant external stakeholder support**.

Finally, none of the stakeholders interviewed expected to come up with 'the one' final idea, but they all knew that ideas must be relevant, creative and constant. This commitment to make the difference led all initiatives not only to make a pledge for sustainability but intrinsically linked it to quality and acceleration.

Other important observations

In addition to the main findings which occurred in all initiatives analyzed, the following observations were made and tended to occur in most or the majority of cases:

- Most of the lead actors were so convinced, ambitious and passionate about the greater cause behind their initiatives that they did not perceive their responsibilities as simple jobs but as necessary actions for the common good.
- Because of this, most lead actors were not only involved in activities related to their initiatives but were also engaged in activities that supported the development and improvement of their environment (e.g. regional development projects).
- In most cases, the idea and concept of sustainability was first spread through active communication and then, after a certain amount of time, reinforced through clearly defined guidelines and programmes.
- Because the leading actors had the responsibility for the overall development of the initiatives, they were usually not specialists in only one area but generalists with broad experience and knowledge that enabled them to perceive, value and connect different perspectives, capabilities and actors, creating a stronger collective impact overall.
- In most cases, linking the main characteristic of an initiative to the typically local or specific thematic features helped to create a more differentiated and authentic image.
- In many of the initiatives analyzed, dynamics in the environment (e.g. changes in policies or financial bottlenecks) spurred initially painful changes that turned out to be valuable blessings. These negative situations resulted in a certain level of creativity and risk acceptance, and more innovative ideas were born.

- Initiatives usually focused on specific 'sub-themes' of sustainability in order to differentiate from other initiatives and carve out a unique identity. This tendency to focus logically takes place as well because the concept of sustainability includes a broad spectrum of topics that cannot be covered entirely by a single initiative.
- Many of the lead actors had tried certain activities for which the time was not right before (e.g. the market wasn't mature enough for a new idea or the technology was not sufficiently developed), underlining the importance of overall context in an initiative's success.
- Most of the cooperation established with academic or other professional institutions was based on long-term commitments that supported and ensured growing collective impacts.
- It usually required a minimum of a few years of directed effort at least to reach a more independent process in which many external stakeholders voluntarily shared enthusiasm and responsibilities.
- To avoid becoming easy targets for criticism from those sceptical of initiatives guided by sustainability as a broad concept, in some cases, sustainability was only referred to indirectly, through communication about quality of services and products.
- Communication on impacts usually focused on traditional information such as arrivals, revenues, brand image development, repeat visitors etc., which—in the majority of cases—originated out of a combination of external market research and internal economic results. While this helped to get at least an idea of the 'stickiness' and scalability of the message, it did not allow for more detailed knowledge about potential behavioural changes in the long term.
- Especially for destinations or other initiatives that relied, at least in the beginning, on public funding, evidence to quantify the long-term value of the initial investments was generally not available. This unavailability was due to the fact that project budgets usually did not reserve funding for evaluating long-term impacts, nor were there roles and activities outlined for executing organizations that encompassed such activities.
- In the majority of cases, the crucial role of employees as "translators" was recognized by the responsible leading stakeholders, who supported their roles through a variety of activities such as regular training and opportunities to increase their knowledge about sustainability. In some cases, the employees were also given the possibility of interacting directly with upper management and frequently experiencing the services and products from a guest's point of view.
- As the demand for continuous advancements was found in all initiatives analyzed, all cases were in an ongoing process of constant experimentation with new ideas.
- In most cases, employees played a crucial role in developing new ideas for further improvements.
- As the processes of continuous advancement resulted in large portfolios of new ideas, in general the initiatives all developed mechanisms to prioritize effectively, channelling effort and resources to those ideas most relevant to their objectives.
- Because public sector initiatives relied more often on limited funding, competitions were often seen and used as an instrument to gain more public attention as well as financial independence.
- While considering the elements crucial to the success of the initiatives, respondents clearly underscored the importance of considering their initiatives' target groups as well as their currently known and potential future needs.
- Mentioned by respondents in the second round of the Delphi, but that need further research, were additional elements such as 'Joint innovation with relevant partners', 'Regular and adequate training', 'Strengthening of the multiplier effect' through the sensitization of relevant touch points, as well as 'Technical cooperation with competitors'.

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Generally speaking, the research conducted in the framework of this project highlights the many structures and characteristics of sustainable tourism initiatives that, while instructive in developing new initiatives, also depend heavily on their context of implementation. In this regard, the catalytic components outlined here would require careful context-specific adaptation in addition to creative elements that provide stakeholders with the ability to position their products and initiatives successfully. Through this consideration and tailoring, other initiatives can make full use of and derive benefits from the integration of these catalysts according to their respective situation, needs and capabilities.

In conclusion, although the findings presented in this report are based on experiences from initiatives in Germany, their largely universal character makes the lessons, strategies and approaches transferable to other initiatives beyond Germany's national borders. Through this transfer of information and ideas, these findings could effectively help prioritize criteria and frameworks for interventions and help accelerate sustainable consumption and production patterns.

As a next step, a cluster analysis of the various catalysts would help to statistically validate and further refine the observations and assumptions that derived from this research. This analysis would further facilitate and improve decision-making processes for practitioners and policy-makers, and contribute to the effective prioritization of their support and involvement in those activities with the greatest potential to successfully accelerate sustainable consumption and production patters in the tourism sector.