Interreg North-West Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

MONA

MONA Policy paper

(first version)

Document/Deliverable name	D.3.5.1 MONA guidebook (first version)
Author(s)	Marko Stančec (POLIS), Fanny Boccioli (POLIS),
Co-author(s)	Nina Nesterova (BUAS), Bart Neuts (KUL)
Status (Final, Draft)	draft
Comments	An updated version of the detailed document will be developed in parallel with the capacity-building scheme and the pilot actions developed and implemented within the project in period 6. The final version is planned for release in period 9. Before this version is produced, the design of this document will be finalised and enhanced with graphics so that it can be presented together with an NWE project handbook. Main thematical pillars will be presented as separated factsheets in period 6.
Date	16 January 2026

Contents

1. About MONA

From 2023 to 2027, the MONA project aims to promote sustainable tourism in nature areas by encouraging a shift to more sustainable modes of transport in national parks, implementing inclusive route planning and encouraging all park users to adopt more sustainable behaviour.

The growing interest in nature-based tourism has led to a significant increase in the number of visitors to nature reserves, making them important tourist attractions. However, this increase in visitor numbers has also had negative impacts on park resources, such as traffic congestion, air and noise pollution, and parking problems, which affect the perception of visitors and are a nuisance to residents. As a result, effective traffic management in national parks has become crucial to enable sustainable tourism. This is where the MONA (MOdal shift, routing and nudging solutions in NAture areas) project comes in.

Launched in 2023, MONA aims to promote sustainable tourism in and around the protected areas of north-western Europe to benefit nature, the environment, visitors, and the local economy. The project

does so by promoting a modal shift, supporting sustainable transport, implementing inclusive route planning, and encouraging visitors and stakeholders to adopt more sustainable behaviour. Together, these strategies will help to manage visitor flows, reduce negative impacts on the local environment, and promote inclusive access to nature reserves.

The MONA project brings together eight nature reserves and three knowledge and dissemination partners in Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

2. European context of sustainable tourism in nature areas

According to the UN World Travel Organisation, sustainable tourism development "takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities".

2.1 EU Frameworks & Strategic Policy Agendas

- Transition Pathway for Tourism (EU Commission)
- European Agenda for Tourism 2030 (Council Conclusions)
- EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy (upcoming, Q2 2026)
- EDEN – European Destinations of Excellence

- The European Green Deal
- Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy (2020)
- EU Urban Mobility Framework (2021)

3. Target groups

One of the novelties of MONA is its interdisciplinary nature, which introduces a new mindset around sustainable tourism by combining nature conservation, visitor flows, accessibility and mobility to and within nature areas. It is important to share this mindset with the target audiences by involving associated organisations and within the capacity building scheme.

However, the partners also aim to influence the discussion at a policy level. This activity will translate the MONA experience to regional -, national -, Interreg programme area – and EU decision-makers, by issuing two policy papers and organising two policy workshops.

This group will involve decision-makers from:

- Nature areas in Europe (national and regional parks;
- Destination marketing organisations and tourism service providers in NWE;
- Tourism policy makers at local/regional/national public authorities;
- Mobility service providers in and around nature areas;
- Urban (regional) planners;

- Mobility policy makers at different levels;
- Policy makers on the level of nature conservation and preservation.

4. Main challenges at the policy level – MONA experiences

Within the MONA project, challenges were identified through a systematic screening of the main mobility barriers encountered across the pilot sites.

This process combined on-the-ground observations, stakeholder consultations, and assessments of existing transport services and infrastructure in tourism and nature-based destinations. By comparing local conditions across pilots, recurring issues emerged, including governance and coordination gaps, insufficient public transport provision during peak and off-peak tourism periods, weak multimodal integration, and fragmented communication and information systems. The screening highlighted how limited cooperation between transport authorities, tourism actors, and service operators—particularly rail and last-mile providers—constrains the development of seamless, sustainable mobility solutions. Collectively, the pilot-site analysis allowed MONA to distil site-specific findings into a coherent set of shared challenges that reflect structural barriers to achieving a modal shift towards more sustainable mobility in sensitive tourism contexts.

Table 1: Key challenges, barriers and experiences

	Governance, Infrastructure and Financing	Data - monitoring &usage	Communication
Improving facilities to make a modal shift to sustainable transport options possible	Limited cooperation with national rail operators, particularly regarding weekend and seasonal train services, which are critical for leisure and tourism		
	Insufficient integration of tourism stakeholders in mobility planning at local, regional, and national levels		Effective cooperation during the planning phase
	Lack of multimodal hubs at the entrances to nature areas or in nearby settlements, therefore limiting seamless transfers between trains, buses, cycling, and walking		
	Public transport and active mobility are often seen as a low priority in comparison to private car accessibility		
		Route planners and MaaS apps: integration and locality	Effective communication on route planning and MaaS payment is often a low priority
	Insufficient frequency of public transport services, especially buses and trains, during weekends and peak tourist seasons		
	Facilities at multimodal hubs (e.g., resting areas and sheltered stops)		
	Gaps in last-mile solutions, including shuttle buses, bicycle rental, and micromobility options		Limited or unclear information on last-mile connections, including their availability, prices, and operating times
	Parking policies (location, pricing, and capacity) often encourage car use instead of supporting the uptake of public transport		

	Limited integration of shared mobility and micromobility services with public transport systems		
	Safety and security concerns at the entrances to nature areas, including the need for secure parking for bicycles, e-bikes, and e-scooters, as well as safe waiting areas.		

	Governance, Infrastructure and Financing	Data - monitoring &usage	Communication
Adjustments of routing networks and entry points for improved visitor spreading and accessibility		Continuous visitor counting and monitoring are often missing or fragmented	
		Data collection is limited, with restricted access to data for all relevant stakeholders	
		Lack of standardised indicators and frameworks for tourism, accessibility and sustainability (e.g. for monitoring accessibility of nature areas and supporting action plans)	
	Limited dashboards at a regional or national level that combine local data and support coordinated decision-making		Poor communication regarding alternative access options during roadworks or infrastructure maintenance at nature area entrances
	Accessibility for all categories of tourists, including accessibility for people with disabilities/people with children		Lack of accessible and inclusive mobility information, particularly for people with disabilities, families with children, and elderly visitors
	Balancing the spreading of routes and their environmental impact– and transport flows – carrying capacity	Limited evidence-based research on balancing route dispersion with environmental impacts and ecosystem protection	

	Governance, Infrastructure and Financing	Data - monitoring &usage	Communication
Nudging towards sustainable choicesnudging measures to promote sustainable visitor choices and spread visitor flows			Public transport and active mobility options are often not prioritised or visible on official tourism and destination websites.
		Absence of comprehensive accessibility maps that combine transport, infrastructure, and service information	
			Underuse of Storytelling and nudging techniques is underused, such as promoting routes starting from public transport stops rather than from car parks
			Limited communication about the environmental impact of travel choices, particularly in relation to sports events and large-scale competitions

	Involvement of providers/shops and private sector stakeholders in planning		Communication towards tourist/transport providers, as well as private sector (e.g shopkeepers) involvement in decision making
		Further research is needed on data standardisation and frameworks	Overall lack of coordinated communication strategies that align mobility, visitor management, and sustainability goals

5. Key MONA messages and policy recommendations

This chapter will outline the main policies and plans developed throughout the project, as well as the lessons learned through the capacity-building programme.

**Please note that THIS CHAPTER will be updated in period 6 and finalised in project period 9, serving as a guide, with lessons learned and shared through the capacity-building programme. These lessons learned will be produced as short factsheets.*

5.1 . Governance, Infrastructure and Financing

- Strengthen multi-level governance and cooperation
  - Establish formal cooperation agreements between destination authorities, regions and national rail and public transport operators, with specific provisions for weekend and seasonal services.
  - Create permanent mobility–tourism coordination bodies at a regional level, ensuring the involvement of tourism boards, nature area managers, municipalities, and transport providers.
  - Integrate tourism demand explicitly into Sustainable Urban and Regional Mobility Plans (SUMPs) and regional transport strategies.

- Improve multimodal access to nature and tourism areas
  - Develop multimodal mobility hubs at the entrances to nature areas, combining train/bus connections with cycling, micromobility, and pedestrian access.
  - Ensure the hubs include basic facilities such as sheltered stops, resting areas, toilets, secure bike parking and charging points for e-bikes and electric vehicles (EVs).
  - Prioritise last-mile solutions, such as seasonal shuttle buses, on-demand transport, bike-sharing, and e-bike rental, especially where fixed-route services are not viable.
  - Creating a permanent coordination platform involving national rail operators, regional transport authorities, tourism boards, and destination managers to plan leisure- and tourism-oriented services jointly.
  - Using seasonal demand data (tourism statistics, accommodation bookings, event calendars) to co-design flexible timetables, additional weekend services, or temporary capacity increases during peak periods.
  - Piloting seasonal or weekend rail services through co-financing or risk-sharing mechanisms

- Rebalance access policies
  - Introduce integrated parking management strategies, including peripheral parking, dynamic pricing, and park-and-ride systems linked to public transport.
  - Gradually limit private car access to sensitive nature areas, while ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities and essential services.

- Improve safety and inclusiveness
  - Design safe, well-lit, and clearly signposted entrances to nature areas.
  - Provide secure parking for bicycles, e-bikes, and e-scooters.
  - Apply universal design principles to mobility infrastructure to ensure accessibility for all users.

5.2 Data, Monitoring and Usage

- Develop standardised indicators and frameworks
  - Define a common set of indicators for sustainable tourism mobility, such as visitor modal split, accessibility index, emissions per visitor and peak-time pressure.
  - Align the indicators with EU frameworks (SUMP indicators, the Transition Pathway for Tourism, and the Sustainable & Smart Mobility Strategy).
  - Use these indicators to support action plans for nature areas, accessibility strategies, and funding decisions.

- Establish integrated data systems
  - Implement continuous visitor and mobility monitoring (e.g. counters, ticketing data, mobile data, sensors) at key access points and routes.
  - Integrate transport, tourism, and environmental data into shared regional or national dashboards which are accessible to all relevant stakeholders.
  - Ensure that data governance rules allow for data sharing, while respecting privacy and GDPR requirements.

- Use data to manage flows and environmental impact
  - Apply data-driven and AI tools to optimise routes, disperse visitors and manage capacity.
  - Link transport data with environmental carrying capacity assessments to prevent ecosystem degradation.
  - Use real-time data to adjust services (e.g. shuttle frequency, temporary access restrictions) during peak periods.

5.3. Communication and Behavioural Change (Nudging)

- Prioritise sustainable mobility in destination communication
  - Make public transport and active mobility the default option on the official destination and nature area websites.
  - Integrate route planners and MaaS platforms directly into tourism websites, including ticketing, pricing, and multilingual support.
- Improve accessibility and clarity of information
  - Develop comprehensive accessibility maps combining transport routes, last-mile services, facilities, and barrier-free access.
  - Provide clear, up-to-date information on last-mile connections, including operating hours and seasonal availability.
  - Proactively communicate about alternative access options during roadworksor infrastructure maintenance.
- Apply nudging and storytelling techniques
  - Promote storytelling approaches that start the journey from public transport stops.
  - Highlight the environmental benefits of sustainable travel choices using simple visuals and comparisons.
  - Encourage sustainable travel behaviour for events and sports competitions, including the implementation of mandatory mobility plans and incentives for low-carbon travel.
- Engage private sector and local actors
  - Involve accommodation providers, shops, transport operators, and activity providers in mobility planning and communication.
  - Encourage businesses to act as mobility ambassadors by providing information and incentives for sustainable travel.
  - Create public–private partnerships to co-finance last-mile services, shared mobility, and communication campaigns.

4.4 Cross-Cutting Enablers

1. *Use EU and national funding instruments (ERDF, Interreg, LIFE, Recovery and Resilience Facility) to support pilot projects and scale-up solutions.*
2. *Build capacity and skills within destination management organisations and public authorities on sustainable mobility planning and data usage.*
3. *Foster peer learning and knowledge exchange between regions and destinations facing similar challenges.*

6. Conclusion

Mobility and accessibility in tourist and nature areas remain critical challenges for achieving sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism. Current governance systems are often characterised by fragmented governance, insufficient integration of tourism demand into transport planning, infrequent public transport options (particularly in rural and nature areas), particularly on weekends and during peak seasons, and a persistent dominance of private car access.

These challenges are exacerbated by poor last-mile connectivity, safety concerns at entrances to nature areas, and inconsistent parking policies, which undermine the shift towards more sustainable modes of transport. At the same time, the lack of harmonised data, standardised indicators, and shared monitoring tools also restricts evidence-based decision-making and limits the capacity to manage visitor flows in line with environmental carrying capacities.

Addressing these issues requires a coordinated, multi-level approach that aligns governance, infrastructure, data, and communication. Strengthening cooperation between tourism authorities, transport providers, and protected area managers is essential to embed tourism needs into sustainable mobility planning. Investing in multimodal hubs, integrated public transport services, and flexible last-mile solutions could significantly improve accessibility while reducing environmental pressure. Equally important are the development of integrated data systems and common monitoring frameworks to support visitor management, accessibility assessments, and adaptive transport services.

Effective communication and behavioural change measures play a decisive role in ensuring the success of these interventions. By making sustainable travel options the default choice through clear information, integrated route planning, accessibility mapping, and targeted nudging techniques, destinations can actively influence travel behaviour. Engaging with private sector stakeholders and local actors strengthens implementation further and fosters shared ownership. Together, these solutions provide a coherent pathway towards more sustainable, accessible, and balanced mobility systems that support both high-quality visitor experiences and the long-term protection of nature areas.