



The LifeWatch ERIC Biodiversity
& Ecosystem eScience Conference
PLOVDIV, BULGARIA 7-10 JULY 2026



Catalyst for Sustainable Rural Tourism: The Baltic-to-Balkan Green Corridor

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Bulgaria*

9 July 2026



The Rural Paradox



Rural regions across Europe face a persistent paradox: territories rich in biodiversity, cultural heritage, gastronomy, and nature-based experiences often remain invisible to international visitors and disconnected from mainstream tourism markets.



The Baltic-to-Balkan Green Corridor (B2B Green Corridor) addresses this challenge by connecting rural tourism SMEs across Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Romania, and Sweden into a digitally enabled, sustainability-driven tourism ecosystem.

The Missing Link

FROM DISCONNECTED DESTINATIONS *to* AN INTERCONNECTED TOURISM CORRIDOR



✗ FRAGMENTED. HARD TO FIND.
HARD TO REACH. HARD TO STAY.

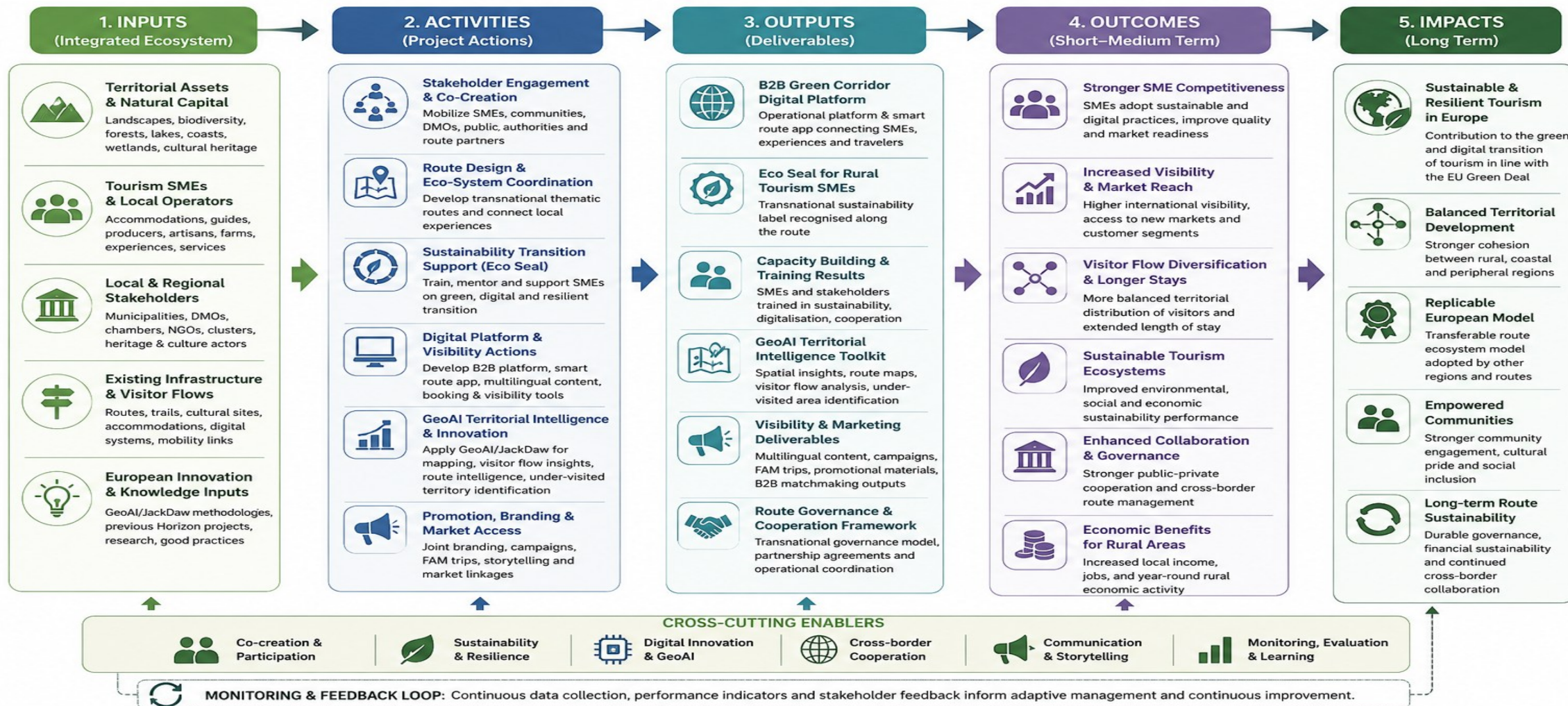
✓ CONNECTED. DISCOVERABLE.
ACCESSIBLE. MEMORABLE. SUSTAINABLE.

Stronger together.

Theory of Change – SMP COSME

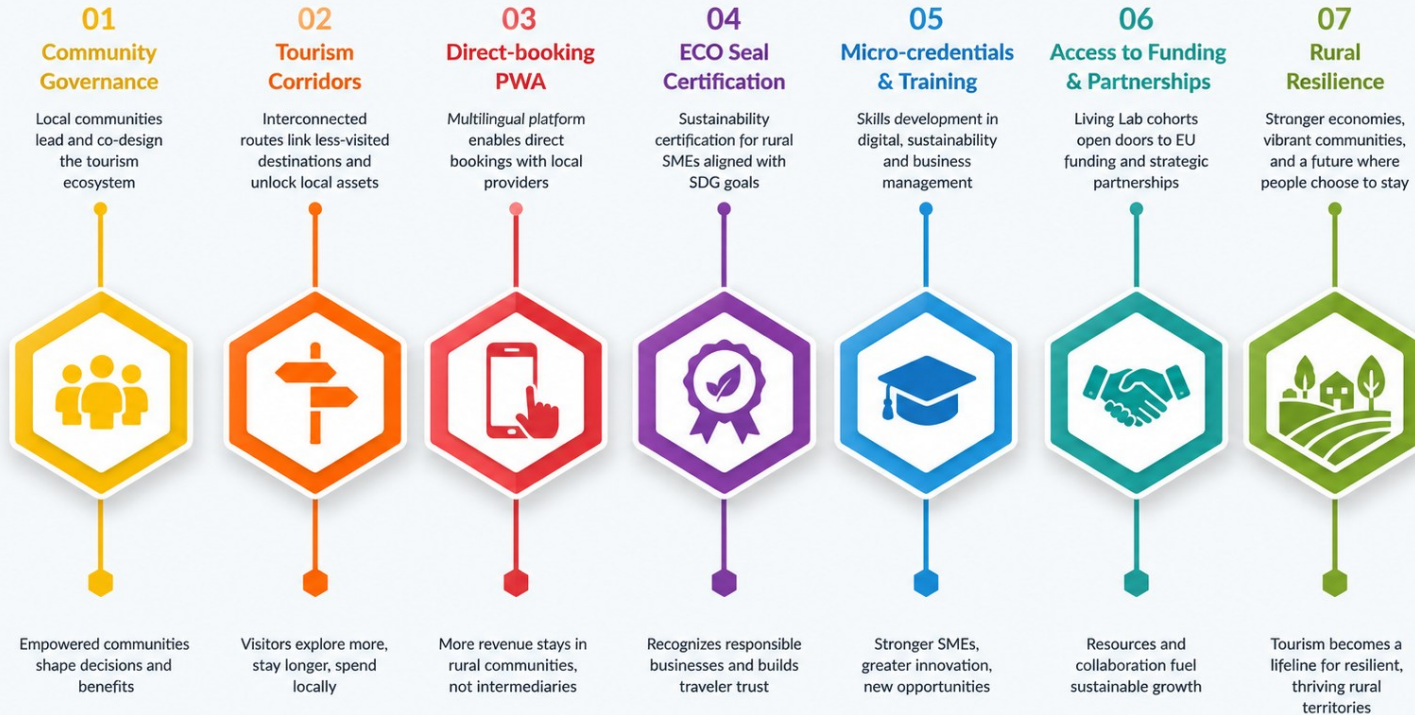
B2B GREEN CORRIDOR – OVERALL INTERVENTION LOGIC

Integrated ecosystem inputs and coordinated project activities generate measurable outputs, territorial outcomes, and long-term impacts aligned with the objectives of the SMP-COSME-2026-TOURSME call.



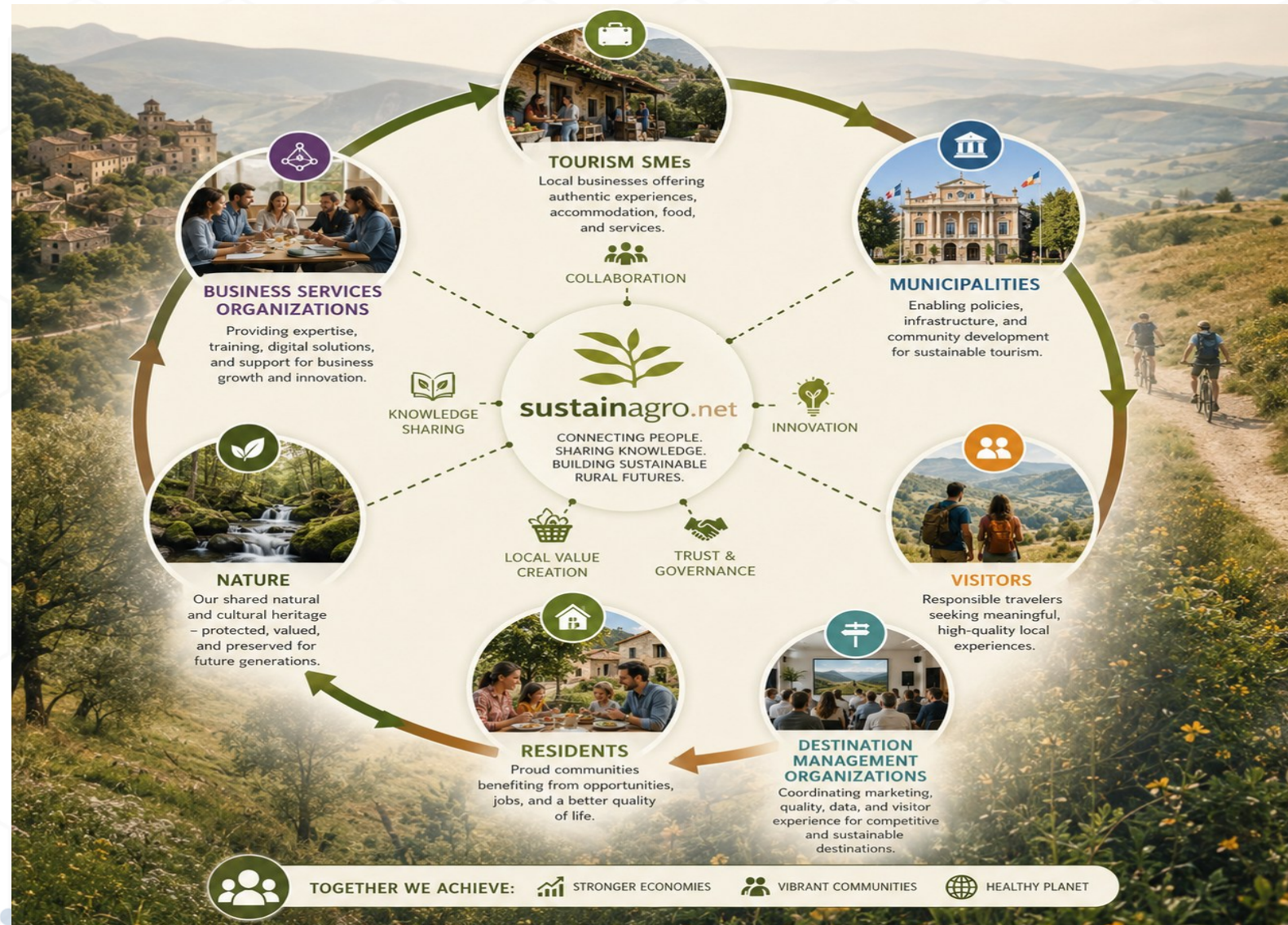
Ruralities Living Lab's Solution

Seven interconnected elements that create lasting social impact



From tourism that becomes the mechanism — not the objective — to rural resilience

Community-Owned Tourism



From Tourism As A Sector to Rural Resilience

Coordinated Local Governance • Community Ownership • Sustainable Futures

BEFORE

Overlooked. Underconnected. Underutilized.

- ⊗ Limited jobs and opportunities
- ⊗ Outmigration and aging population
- ⊗ Underused natural and cultural assets
- ⊗ Low visibility and poor infrastructure
- ⊗ Tourism seen as external and extractive

AFTER

Connected. Empowered. Thriving.

- ✓ New livelihoods and youth opportunities
- ✓ Vibrant community and local pride
- ✓ Protected nature and cultural heritage
- ✓ Improved infrastructure and digital connectivity
- ✓ Tourism that benefits people and place

LOCAL FOOD

HERITAGE TRAIL

NATURE
EXPERIENCES

HANDMADE
CRAFTS

HOME STAYS

Evidence of Structural Change



Community-governed Corridors



ECO Seal



Living Lab Governance

Together these components create permanent community capacity—not simply tourism promotion.



Financial Support for Third Parties



Financial Support for Third Parties



Geo AI



E-Learning / Microcredentials

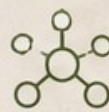
Collaboration - The Key to Success



LOCAL GOVERNANCE
Inclusive decision-making and
community leadership



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
Quality over quantity,
authentic and responsible



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS
Municipalities, SMEs, DMOs,
BSOs working together



LOCAL VALUE CREATION
Keeping value in the community,
strengthening the local economy



NATURE & CULTURE
Assets protected, celebrated
and shared with care

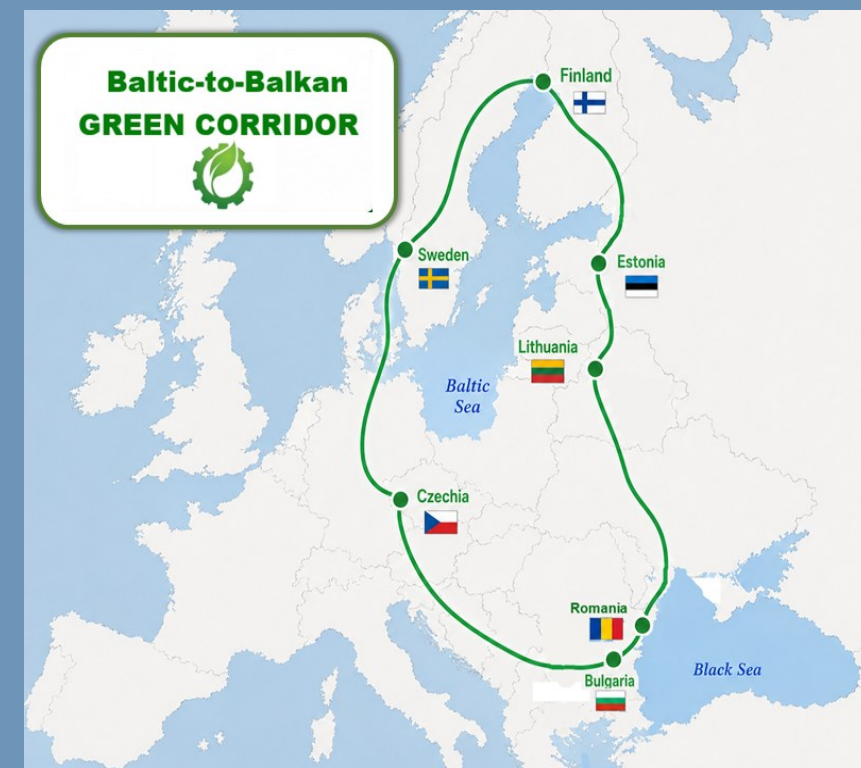


RURALITIES LIVING LAB | Connecting rural assets. Empowering communities. Building resilient futures.

sustainagro.net 

Eight partners in the SMP COSME project:

- BE1 Regional Cluster North-East (Bulgaria) serves as the COO and a DMO
- BE2 Visit Värmland (Värmland – Sweden) serves as a DMO
- BE3 Suceava County Council (Romania) serves as DMO Bucovina
- BE4 Estonian Business School (Estonia) serves as a BSO
- BE5 Baltic Living Lab (Estonia) serves as a capacity-building service provider
- BE6 Lesprojekt (Czechia) serves as a BSO/GeoAI service provider
- BE7 Tietotalo (LikiAI – Finland) serves as a BSO for PWA digital platform
- BE8 Lithuanian Hotels and Restaurants Association (Lithuania) BSO





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THANK YOU!

Questions?

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