TITLE

EduTourism: A Novel Framework for Lifelong Learning and Nonformal Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces EduTourism as a novel concept within the landscape of lifelong learning and non-formal adult education. Building upon the foundations of educational tourism, the authors propose a distinct model characterized by self-directed, gamified, and community-engaged learning journeys. EduTourism fosters the development of transversal competences such as cultural awareness, sustainability literacy, and civic engagement, while addressing territorial regeneration and inclusive participation. The paper outlines the conceptual framework of EduTourism, examines its alignment with EU Lifelong Learning policies, and explores its recognition through micro-credentialing. By doing so, it positions EduTourism as a strategic response to the need for accessible, place-based, and learner-centered educational pathways beyond formal systems.

KEYWORDS

EduTourism; Lifelong Learning; Non-Formal Education; Micro-Credentials; Adult Learning; Community-Based Learning

INTRODUCTION

Educational tourism has long been recognized as a valuable approach to enriching learning experiences through mobility, cultural immersion, and experiential engagement. Existing literature explores educational tourism in various contexts, including formal academic programs, institutional partnerships, and structured learning activities that integrate travel and education. These models, often linked to accredited curricula or institutional oversight, are examined in the first sections of this paper (Sections 1 to 3.1), providing a comprehensive overview of the current landscape and its role in fostering Lifelong Learning (LLL).

However, there remains a conceptual and operational gap in distinguishing between educational tourism within formal education systems and emerging forms of non-formal, learner-driven travel-based learning. The primary objective of this paper is to introduce and define the novel concept of EduTourism—a form of non-formal, gamified, and community-engaged learning journey designed for adult learners seeking personal growth, skills exploration, and cultural immersion outside formal educational frameworks.

Section 4 offers a precise definition of EduTourism, outlining the core features that differentiate it from traditional educational tourism models. These defining characteristics include:

- Gamified, self-directed learning pathways
- Reciprocal engagement with local communities as co-educators
- Flexible validation mechanisms through digital badges and peer recognition
- Decentralized, sustainable tourism flows that counteract overtourism

Subsequent sections (Sections 4.3 and 5) elaborate on the practical applications, socio-economic impacts, and recognition strategies for EduTourism, with a particular focus on its alignment with EU Lifelong Learning objectives and the potential of micro-credentials as a formal recognition tool.

By conceptualizing EduTourism as a distinctive model of non-formal education, this paper seeks to establish a robust framework for its validation, advocate for its integration into European educational and policy ecosystems, and highlight its strategic relevance for sustainable development and inclusive lifelong learning pathways.

I. LIFE LONG LEARNING

Lifelong Learning (LLL), often described as the continuous and self-directed acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout the lifespan, has evolved into a foundational concept in educational theory and practice. Defined by UNESCO as encompassing "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective," LLL moves beyond traditional education, embracing a holistic, inclusive, and adaptive paradigm (UNESCO, 2015; Coll-Ramis, Sastre-Castillo, & López-Fernández, 2023).

Within European educational policy, LLL is framed as both an individual right and a societal imperative. It fosters equity in access to education while simultaneously responding to macro-level transformations such as demographic shifts, digitization, ecological transitions, and the increasing need for resilient skillsets. As emphasized by Schönherr, Beutling, and Schlaile (2023), lifelong learning is not merely instrumental—it constitutes a structural element of a "mission-oriented innovation system," capable of equipping citizens and institutions to address global challenges collaboratively and adaptively.

One particularly dynamic context for the operationalization of LLL is educational tourism. In travel-based learning settings, individuals encounter unfamiliar cultural and environmental frameworks, prompting cognitive dissonance and reflective processing—key triggers for transformative learning. Gössling (2018) positions tourism as a vehicle for both environmental education and sustainability-oriented values formation, given that learning in these contexts is often experiential, affective, and socially situated.

Moreover, tourist learning has been empirically linked to enhancements in sustainability awareness, empathy, and intercultural literacy (Minnaert, 2012). In the context of transboundary biosphere reserves, Mondino and Beery (2019) have shown that ecotourism can become an instrument of both ecological stewardship and global citizenship education, especially when structured through guided learning experiences that integrate interpretation, participation, and place-based narratives.

Educational tourism also intersects with higher education frameworks, especially through Erasmus+ mobility programs and institutional partnerships designed around blended pedagogical models. These include digital preparatory work, in-situ experiential engagement, and post-visit reflective assignments. As Tomasi, Paviotti, and Cavicchi (2020) illustrate, such multi-stakeholder designs not only democratize access to high-impact learning opportunities but also expand the epistemological boundaries of academic knowledge production.

At the level of policy, LLL is embedded in instruments such as the European Skills Agenda and the Digital Education Action Plan, both of which prioritize reskilling, inclusive digital transformation, and active citizenship. These priorities are echoed in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which explicitly identifies lifelong learning as essential for inclusive growth. In tourism-enhanced LLL, therefore, we find not an ancillary educational model but a transversal and strategic pedagogical form—one that contributes directly to sustainable development, intercultural understanding, and socio-ecological transformation.

II. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF EU EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Educational systems exist to promote formal learning, which follows a syllabus and is intentional in the sense that learning is the goal of all the activities learners engage in. Learning outcomes are measured by tests and other forms of assessment.

Non-formal learning takes place outside formal learning environments but within some kind of organizational framework. It arises from the learner's conscious decision to master a particular activity, skill or area of knowledge and is thus the result of intentional effort. But it does not follow a formal syllabus or be governed by external accreditation and assessment. Non-formal learning typically takes place in community settings: swimming classes for small children, sports clubs of various kinds for all ages, reading groups, debating societies, amateur choirs and orchestras, and so on. Some non-formal learning arrangements become increasingly formal as learners become more proficient; one thinks, for example, graded exams in music and other performing arts.

Informal learning takes place outside schools and colleges and arises from the learner's involvement in activities that are not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind. Informal learning is involuntary and an inescapable part of daily life; for that reason, it

is sometimes called experiential learning. Learning that is formal or non-formal is partly intentional and partly incidental: when we consciously pursue any learning target, we cannot help learning things that are not part of that target. Informal learning, however, is exclusively incidental.

Non-formal education refers to structured, intentional learning that occurs outside of the formal education system yet maintains clearly defined learning objectives and pedagogical strategies. It is distinguished by its adaptability, its learner-centered ethos, and its contextual responsiveness—particularly in community, vocational, and cultural environments. In contrast to informal learning, which is unintentional and unstructured, non-formal education is organized and frequently facilitated by trained educators, though it does not necessarily result in a formal qualification (Coll-Ramis et al., 2023).

In tourism-related educational frameworks, non-formal education emerges as a pivotal modality. It allows for the delivery of learning experiences that are culturally embedded, socially reciprocal, and intrinsically motivated. For instance, Sulaiman, Chusmeru, and Kuncoro (2019) demonstrate how agrotourism and community-based tourism in Southeast Asia have created hybrid educational spaces, where locals and tourists co-construct knowledge through participatory methods grounded in local wisdom. These spaces challenge traditional hierarchies of expertise and offer a radically decentralized model of educational exchange.

Furthermore, non-formal learning within tourism often draws on narrative pedagogy, experiential reflection, and place-based instruction, echoing theories of transformative learning. Hadi, Permata, and Tarmizi (2019) underscore how college students engaging in structured tourism internships reported increased social awareness and civic engagement, particularly when involved in projects that emphasized solidarity, local development, and cultural immersion.

Higher education institutions have gradually begun to recognize the epistemic legitimacy of non-formal education, especially considering the third mission of universities: their societal engagement beyond teaching and research. Tomasi et al. (2020) highlights the increasing tendency of European universities to valorize student participation in tourism-based outreach and learning programs. These initiatives—often classified under 'community-based learning' or 'service learning'—constitute a convergence of civic purpose and pedagogical innovation.

Importantly, non-formal education in tourism contributes to the broader LLL agenda by cultivating transversal competencies such as intercultural communication, adaptability, environmental literacy, and emotional intelligence. These competencies

are essential for navigating the complexities of 21st-century life and align closely with both EU priorities and UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development framework. Through its flexible structures and embodied experiences, non-formal education stands as a vital complement to formal education, bridging gaps in equity, relevance, and lifelong access to meaningful learning.

II.1 GAMIFICATION AND EDUTAINMENT

Gamification and edutainment are two increasingly prominent strategies used to enhance the accessibility, engagement, and cognitive impact of non-formal learning experiences, particularly in the tourism sector. Though related, they differ in their conceptual focus and pedagogical application.

Gamification refers to the integration of game elements—such as points, levels, badges, time constraints, and competition—into non-game environments to foster motivation and behavior change. It is not about turning learning into a game per se, but about leveraging game mechanics to increase user engagement and deepen learning outcomes (Sie, Patterson, & Pegg, 2016). In tourism education, gamification has been applied through mobile apps, augmented reality tours, and participatory quests that transform passive observation into active discovery.

Edutainment, by contrast, is the fusion of educational and entertainment principles to create experiences that are both instructive and emotionally compelling. It is rooted in media theory and has been popularized in museum design, heritage trails, and environmental storytelling. Unlike gamification, which emphasizes structure and reward, edutainment emphasizes narrative, immersion, and affective resonance. It encourages learning not just through doing, but through feeling—generating lasting emotional and cognitive impressions.

Trama et al. (2023) provide compelling examples of scientific tourism projects in South America where gamified modules helped visitors internalize biodiversity knowledge through interactive storytelling and scenario-based problem-solving. Similarly, Halme (2001) documented the use of role-playing techniques and theatrical scripts in heritage tourism as a way of reanimating historical knowledge and making it accessible to wider audiences.

Both strategies align closely with the goals of lifelong and non-formal education: they democratize knowledge, support active learning, and appeal to diverse cognitive styles. Moreover, they introduce aesthetic and playful dimensions into learning, which are

often missing from formal pedagogies but are critical for fostering curiosity, empathy, and personal transformation.

In the context of sustainability education, gamification and edutainment are not merely pedagogical accessories; they are potential catalysts for behavioral change, capable of translating abstract global challenges into relatable and emotionally resonant experiences. Their use in educational tourism thus exemplifies how digital and performative innovations can be ethically and effectively mobilized for lifelong learning.

III. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF EDUTOURISM

Tourism can serve as a transformative vehicle for both lifelong learning and sustainable development, particularly when it is framed within interactive, experiential, and network-based educational paradigms. Recent scholarly literature (Schönherr et al., 2023) suggests that tourism fosters impactful educational outcomes not only through structured, formal learning, but also via informal, self-directed, and collaborative learning experiences. When well-implemented, these learning processes enhance cultural awareness, develop critical skills, and cultivate environmentally and socially responsible behaviors among diverse populations.

Collaborative, two-way educational models are particularly effective in tourism contexts. Unlike unidirectional, teacher-centered approaches, dialogical and participatory forms of learning facilitate the sharing of tacit knowledge and reinforce sustainability principles. In the European context, tourism initiatives that incorporate experiential travel with digital tools—such as executive development programs and e-learning platforms—have been shown to support individual professional growth, institutional innovation, and broader community sustainability (Schönherr, Beutling, & Schlaile, 2023; Zhang, Leung, & Qu, 2020).

The most applied sector for tourism-based education is of course educational fieldtrips organised in the context of formal education, and international mobility programs such as Erasmus+.

The role of higher education institutions emerges as a recurring theme in literature. Universities and research centers act as central nodes connecting international mobility opportunities with community-based experiential learning. By fostering cross-border collaboration, supporting curriculum innovation, and engaging with local stakeholders, these institutions amplify the capacity of tourism to contribute to both personal and collective development outcomes. This integration of academic and practical domains not only enriches the learner’s experience but also promotes sustainability through

educational tourism. Higher education institutions are found to play an instrumental role in structuring and legitimizing educational tourism. Tomasi et al. (2020) highlight how international student mobility, framed as educational tourism, contributes to local development and sustainability, particularly when universities actively design programs that link academic learning with real-world engagement. While Zhang et al. (2020) propose a universal e-learning model applicable to higher education, they stop short of explicitly addressing institutional responsibilities.

On the individual level, gains include enhanced cultural, environmental, and social awareness; critical skill development; and professional growth. At the community level, tourism-based learning fosters stakeholder collaboration, strengthens networks, and contributes to local development. Importantly, sustainable behavior adoption is linked to multiple educational interventions, including place-based education, university engagement, and digital learning strategies.

Tourism-based learning also contributes to various dimensions of sustainability. Environmental sustainability is directly addressed in five of the reviewed studies, with a focus on conservation, biodiversity, and resource optimization. Economic sustainability is often framed in terms of the economic impacts of international students, professional upskilling, or digital efficiencies. Social and cultural sustainability is reflected in efforts to engage marginalized groups, promote cultural exchange, and foster inclusive learning environments.

The scope of the present paper goes beyond the structure of formal education, whose impact on pupils is well monitored and researched. Our focus is instead on tourism as non-formal education means in the framework of lifelong learning among EU population. In this context, we propose the definition of Edutourism to valorize the difference with educational tourism in the context of formal education.

Before developing a definition of Edutourism, a brief review of literature on the topic of educational tourism appears necessary, in order to draft a line between the two concepts.

III.1 LITERATURE REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL TOURISM

Educational tourism is described as a travel-based learning experience that merges structured educational activities with elements of tourism. Hadi et al. (2019) and Pitman et al. (2010, 2014) depict it as a program that organizes learning into distinct stages—such as meditation, exploration, reflection, and publication—to foster personal or academic growth. Several studies note that educational tourism combines formal or informal instruction—often arranged by educational institutions—with experiential,

contextual learning in settings that lie outside the learner's everyday environment. In this view, edutourism may take place locally, nationally, or internationally and appear in diverse forms such as study abroad, community-based cultural programs, agrotourism initiatives, or scientific tours.

Key components emerging across literature include:

1. A structured learning experience that is either explicitly defined or implied.

2. An integration of educational content and tourism elements, with education often serving as the primary focus.

3. Experiential or contextual learning that leverages novel, culturally rich environments.

4. The delivery of learning outside the usual domestic or classroom setting, with durations reported from 24 hours to 12 months.

5. Targeted outcomes ranging from skill development and cultural awareness to personal and professional growth.

These elements, consistently noted across a range of educational contexts—from higher education and lifelong learning to basic education and community programs—offer a comprehensive basis for defining educational tourism.

We analyzed 10 sources from an initial pool of 50, using 8 screening criteria. Each paper was reviewed for 5 key aspects that mattered most to the research question. For easier consultation and comparison, results are listed in 4 summary tables below. The same 4 summary tables are then reproposed in section 4.2 "Towards a definition of EduTourism", to draft a distinction between the two phenomena and their distinctive elements and implications.

Author(s), Year	Type of Study	Target Group	Context	Definition/Description of Educational Tourism
Hadi et al., 2019	Case study at Beruga' Alam Institute	College students of English language education	Local Indonesian institute, community-based programs	Travel program for learning at a destination; structured stages (meditation, exploration, reflection, publication); learning outside home environment for 24h–12 months

Tashenova et al., 2023	Survey of educational tourism in Kazakh HE	University students, educational staff	Higher education, national/international mobility	Integration of educational and tourist components, influenced by motivation; includes study abroad, events, language learning, ecological tours
Pitman et al., 2010	Qualitative study of adult learning	Providers, lifelong-learning clients, academics	Organized recreational tours in Australia	Organized recreational tours with structured learning as key feature; involvement of providers and academics
Pitman et al., 2014	Transformative learning in educational tourism	Humanities scholars, lifelong learners	University teachers engaging with lifelong learners	Tourist experiences explicitly aiming for structured learning; intentional, structured learning experiences
Tomasi et al., 2020	Scoping review on educational tourism/local dev.	International students	Higher education, international mobility	Learning experience organized by educational institutions; education primary, tourism secondary; formal education and tourism activities combined
Sie et al., 2016	Framework for older adult educational tourism	Older adults	Educational/cultural travel for older adults	No explicit definition; involves cultural experiences, meaningful engagement, history, nostalgia, lifelong learning
Susanto and Suyasa, 2016	Conceptual framework for internati	International students	Semester-long program in Bali	No explicit definition; combines cultural tourism and study abroad; focus on social entrepreneurship and cultural enrichment

	onal students			
Trama et al., 2023	Experimental scientific tourism program	Not specified in abstract	Program in Peru's Amazon; systematic review	No explicit definition; mentions proposed academic definition; focus on scientific/technological educational tourism
Sulaiman et al., 2019	Community-based edutourism in rural Indonesia	Farmers, business groups, agrotourism managers, officials	Agrotourism, food security, local wisdom	Area utilizing tourism for educational media based on local wisdom, food security, economic products; location for education, training, work practices
Brito Carrera et al., 2023	Pilot educational tourism for elementary students	Fourth-grade students	Basic education, pilot in Ecuador	No explicit definition; involves learning activities, skill acquisition, cultural knowledge, conservation, and respect

Table 1: Characteristics of Included Studies

Across the studies reviewed, several patterns emerged regarding target populations, educational contexts, and definitional elements of educational tourism. Most studies focused on specific learner groups: five addressed higher education or international students, four targeted lifelong learners, older adults, or academics, and another four focused on community-based or agriculture-related participants such as farmers, business groups, agrotourism managers, and officials. One study considered elementary school students, while another did not specify a target population. In terms of educational settings, three studies centered on higher education or international mobility, while three others explored community-based or agrotourism contexts. Individual cases also addressed basic education (elementary school), scientific or technological programs, educational and cultural travel for older adults, semester-long immersive programs (e.g., in Bali), and organized recreational tours. Several studies fit multiple educational categories simultaneously. Regarding conceptual clarity, four

studies offered an explicit definition of educational tourism, while six conveyed the concept implicitly through descriptions of activities and learning environments. Among these, four highlighted structured or intentional learning, three emphasized cultural or meaningful engagement, two focused on integrating tourism and education with a primary emphasis on learning, and two framed the experience around community-based or local knowledge. Additionally, individual studies introduced themes such as scientific or technological learning, social entrepreneurship, and conservation ethics. Overall, in six out of the ten studies, no formal definition of educational tourism was found in the abstract or full text, though the underlying concept was conveyed through illustrative examples or key learning features.

Author(s), Year	Structured Learning Activities	Educational Objective	Tourism Component	Geographical Scope	Educational Themes
Hadi et al., 2019	Yes: meditation, exploration, reflection, publication	Yes	Yes: nature, culture, social life	N/A	Personal/ academic growth, skills, social solidarity
Tashenova et al., 2023	Implied	Yes	Yes: study abroad, events, ecological tours	National/international	Professional development, language, awareness
Pitman et al., 2010	Yes: structured tours	Yes	Yes: lifelong learning	National	Adult learning, provider/ participant engagement
Pitman et al., 2014	Yes: intentional, structured	Yes	Yes: transformative for teachers/learners	National	Challenging beliefs, improve

					d teaching
Tomasi et al., 2020	Yes: organized by institutions	Yes	Yes: international mobility, civic engagement	International	Local development, economic/social benefits
Sie et al., 2016	Implied: three-phase framework	Yes	Yes: cultural, historical, nostalgic	N/A	Well-being, successful aging
Susanto and Suyasa, 2016	Implied: program objectives	Yes	Yes: social entrepreneurship, cultural enrichment	International	Competence development, cultural awareness
Trama et al., 2023	Implied: experimental design	Yes	Yes: scientific, technological	Local/national	N/A
Sulaiman et al., 2019	Yes: education, training, practice	Yes	Yes: agriculture, food security, local wisdom	Local	Community empowerment, knowledge, character
Brito Carrera et al., 2023	Yes: pre/post testing, in-situ classes	Yes	Yes: cultural, national heritage	Local	Knowledge, cultural pride, interest in tourism

Table 2: Core Components of Educational Tourism

All ten studies reviewed incorporated some form of structured learning, either explicitly described (in six studies) or implicitly embedded within the learning

experience (in four studies). Regardless of the delivery format, experiential or contextual learning emerged as a consistent element across all cases. Regarding geographical scope, four studies were conducted at the local level, another four at the national level, and three included international dimensions; in some cases, studies combined multiple settings (e.g., local and national or national and international), while one study did not report the setting at all. Notably, only one study specified the duration of the learning activity (ranging from 24 hours to 12 months), leaving the majority without clear temporal parameters. In terms of intended outcomes, the studies targeted a wide range of goals, including skills and competence development, social engagement and empowerment, knowledge acquisition, cultural or general awareness, and local economic or social advancement. Additionally, individual studies highlighted outcomes such as personal or academic growth, professional development, language learning, adult education, critical reflection, improved teaching, well-being in aging, character formation, cultural pride, and increased interest in tourism. One study did not specify any learning outcome. While all studies demonstrated a blend of structured and experiential approaches, the specific pedagogical strategies and intended learning goals varied considerably across cases.

Author(s), Year	Educational Context	Learning Approach / Focus	Target Group	Geographical Scope
Hadi et al., 2019	Local institute, community-based	Meditation, reflection, publication	College students	Local (Indonesia)
Tashenova et al., 2023	Higher education, national policy	Academic mobility, expert/consumer surveys	University students, staff	National/international (Kazakhstan)
Pitman et al., 2010	Recreational tours	Provider/participant/academic perspectives	Adults, lifelong learners	National (Australia)
Pitman et al., 2014	University teacher engagement	Transformative for teachers	Humanities scholars, lifelong learners	National (Australia)
Tomasi et al., 2020	International student mobility	Civic engagement, economic impact	International students	International
Sie et al., 2016	Older adult travel	Three-phase framework, successful aging	Older adults	No mention found

Susanto and Suyasa, 2016	Study abroad, cultural immersion	Social entrepreneurship	International students	International (Bali)
Trama et al., 2023	Scientific tourism, technology	Experimental design	N/A	Local/national (Peru)
Sulaiman et al., 2019	Rural agrotourism	Food security, local wisdom, empowerment	Community members	Local (Indonesia)
Brito Carrera et al., 2023	Basic education, pilot program	Educommunication, pre/post testing	Elementary students	Local (Ecuador)

Table 3: Contextual Applications and Variations

The studies examined were situated across diverse application contexts, with six focused on education-related settings such as higher education, teacher engagement, study abroad programs, basic education, and pilot projects. Four studies were primarily oriented around tourism and travel, including recreational tours, older adult travel, scientific tourism, and rural agrotourism. Additional contexts included a community-based initiative, a national policy study, and one focused on technology. Each study featured distinct characteristics —no single unique feature was repeated across cases. These ranged from reflective and transformative learning activities to experimental designs, civic engagement initiatives, food security and empowerment strategies, and educational communication approaches incorporating pre and post-assessments. The diversity also extended to the population focus: six studies targeted students (at various educational levels), three included teachers, staff, or scholars, and four addressed adults, older adults, or lifelong learners. One study centered on community members, while another did not specify a target population. Geographic scope varied as well, with three studies conducted locally (two in Indonesia and one in Ecuador), two nationally (both in Australia), and others spanning international or mixed settings such as Kazakhstan, Peru, and Bali. One study did not mention the location. Overall, the uniqueness of features and populations highlighted the heterogeneity of the field, with no shared defining trait repeated across more than two studies.

Theme	**Description**	**Key References**	**Contexts / Examples**
Educational Institutions as Organizers	Universities, schools, and institutes design and manage programs	Hadi et al., Tomasi et al., Tashenova et al., Brito Carrera et al.	Higher education, basic

			education, community programs
Community Involvement	Local communities as partners, hosts, or beneficiaries	Sulaiman et al., Hadi et al., Tomasi et al.	Rural agrotourism, local institutes
Tourism Industry Collaboration	Travel agencies, tour guides, and tourism boards involved	Tashenova et al., Pitman et al., Sulaiman et al.	National/international mobility, recreational tours
Participant Engagement	Learners as active participants, co-creators of experience	Pitman et al., Sie et al., Susanto and Suyasa	Lifelong learning, older adults, international students
Policy and Curriculum Integration	Inclusion in educational policy or curriculum	Tashenova et al., Brito Carrera et al.	Higher education, basic education

Table 4: Stakeholder Roles and Relationships

Across the studies analyzed, five main thematic areas emerged. Several studies highlighted the role of educational institutions as primary organizers of educational tourism initiatives, with four studies falling into this category. Community involvement was a recurring theme in three studies, as was collaboration with the tourism industry. Participant engagement in shaping or contributing to the learning experience was also emphasized in three cases, while two studies discussed the integration of educational tourism into policy or curriculum frameworks. In terms of thematic overlap, some studies contributed to multiple themes: Tashenova et al. appeared under three thematic categories, while Hadi et al., Tomasi et al., Brito Carrera et al., Sulaiman et al., and Pitman et al. were each associated with two. In contrast, Sie et al. and Susanto and Suyasa were cited in only one thematic area each. Regarding implementation contexts, higher education settings were mentioned three times, as were community-based environments—including community programs, local institutes, and rural agrotourism. Lifelong learning, older adult education, and international student learning also featured prominently, with three references across the corpus. Basic education and tourism-related initiatives were each mentioned in two studies

Theme	Description	Key References	Contexts / Examples
Structured Learning Experience	Intentional, organized learning as a core feature	Hadi et al., Pitman et al., Tomasi et al., Brito Carrera et al.	All contexts
Integration of Education and Tourism	Combination of educational and travel/tourism elements	Tashenova et al., Pitman et al., Tomasi et al., Sulaiman et al.	Higher education, community, basic education
Experiential/Contextual Learning	Learning through direct experience in new environments	Hadi et al., Sie et al., Susanto and Suyasa, Sulaiman et al.	Cultural, scientific, agrotourism
Duration Outside Usual Environment	Learning occurs outside home/school for a defined period	Hadi et al., Tomasi et al.	Local, national, international
Personal/Professional/Cultural Development	Outcomes include skills, knowledge, cultural awareness	All studies	All contexts

Table 5: Synthesis of Definitions

Among the components identified across the studies, the concept of a structured learning experience was explicitly supported in four cases (Hadi et al., Pitman et al., Tomasi et al., Brito Carrera et al.), while the integration of education and tourism emerged as a significant dimension in another four (Tashenova et al., Pitman et al., Tomasi et al., Sulaiman et al.). Experiential or contextual learning was also central, with four studies (Hadi et al., Sie et al., Susanto and Suyasa, Sulaiman et al.) emphasizing immersion in local settings and practical application. A smaller number of studies—specifically two (Hadi et al. and Tomasi et al.)—addressed the importance of learning experiences occurring outside the learners' usual environments, indicating a spatial and temporal dislocation as part of the pedagogical approach. While the exact number was not specified, personal, professional, or cultural development was a consistent goal across all studies. Regarding application contexts, both structured learning experiences and personal/professional/cultural development were relevant across all learning environments analyzed. The integration of education and tourism applied to higher education, community-based, and basic education contexts, whereas

experiential and contextual learning was observed in cultural, scientific, and agrotourism settings. The dimension of learning outside the usual environment was noted across local, national, and international implementations.

In the light of the literature review, educational tourism refers to a structured form of travel that is intentionally designed to complement formal education by supporting specific and collectively defined learning objectives. It involves the integration of academic content with place-based, immersive experiences that are organized by educational institutions and embedded within accredited curricula or institutional frameworks.

This form of tourism serves as a pedagogical extension of classroom-based instruction, offering students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, engage with diverse cultural and environmental settings, and participate in supervised learning activities that are evaluated and recognized within the broader structure of formal education. Learning experiences typically occur outside the student's usual environment—locally, nationally, or internationally—and are time-bound, ranging from short-term field visits to semester-long programs.

Key characteristics of educational tourism within formal education include:

- Curriculum alignment: All learning activities are planned to meet specific learning outcomes defined by the institution, course, or program (Tomasi et al., 2020; Tashenova et al., 2023);
- Institutional oversight: Programs are organized, accredited, or supervised by schools, universities, or recognized training bodies (Hadi et al., 2019; Brito Carrera et al., 2023);
- Structured learning design: The travel experience includes clearly defined phases such as preparation, active engagement, and post-visit reflection or assessment (Pitman et al., 2010, 2014);
- Collective educational goals: Activities are designed not only for individual development, but to contribute to the collective learning of a class, cohort, or academic community (Sulaiman et al., 2019);
- Formal recognition: The learning outcomes may be assessed and contribute to academic credit, certification, or progression within the educational system.

In this scope, educational tourism is not a substitute for formal education but a complementary strategy that enhances it through context-rich, experiential learning aligned with institutional goals and academic standards.

III.2 EDUTOURISM CONCEPT DEFINITION

Edutourism, in the context of non-formal adult education, refers to an intentionally designed travel-based learning experience that enables individuals to explore new skills, knowledge areas, or personal interests through immersive, engaging, and self-directed activities outside of formal educational systems. It operates within an organizational or community-based framework, yet remains independent of prescribed curricula, institutional accreditation, or formal assessment procedures.

Anchored in the principles of non-formal learning, edutourism supports adult learners who consciously choose to engage in educational activities that align with their personal aspirations and intrinsic motivations. These learning experiences are not embedded in structured degree programs but are facilitated in flexible and adaptive formats that accommodate individual learning preferences, often incorporating elements of play and discovery.

A distinctive feature of this approach is its gamified learning environment, where participants interact with cultural, environmental, or social dimensions of a destination through curiosity-driven challenges, quests, or scenario-based engagements. Instead of formal tests and grades, self-validation mechanisms—including digital badges, token systems, peer recognition, or community-ranking tools—are used to acknowledge progress and foster intrinsic motivation.

Another core element of edutourism is **r**eciprocal engagement with local communities, which function not as passive sites of consumption but as active partners in the learning process. Through storytelling, workshops, shared meals, guided explorations, and co-creative exchanges, learners develop cultural empathy, sustainability awareness, and a deeper appreciation of local knowledge and practices. These interactions contribute not only to individual learning outcomes but also to community empowerment and sustainable tourism development, counteracting the extractive tendencies of overtourism.

Edutourism for adults, thus, can be understood as:

"A non-formal, gamified, and community-engaged learning journey undertaken through travel, designed for adult learners who seek personal growth, skill exploration, or cultural enrichment outside formal education systems. It prioritizes intrinsic motivation, learner autonomy, and local interaction, and validates learning through playful, socially recognized tools rather than traditional accreditation".

Learning Activities	Educational Objective	Tourism Component	Geographical Scope	Educational Themes
Flexible, self-paced learning paths structured through gamification (badges, tokens, ranking systems); activities emerge from interaction with local communities	Promote personal development, skills acquisition, cultural empathy, sustainability awareness; learner-driven goals	Local community immersion, co-created experiences, exploratory journeys guided by residents (elders, youth), digital gamified interfaces	Local, national, international (non-seasonal, distributed overtime and space)	Lifelong learning, anti-overtourism behavior, cultural preservation, reflective and experiential learning, environmental awareness

Table 6: Core Components of Educational Tourism

Educational Context	Learning Approach / Focus	Target Group	Geographical Scope
Non-formal, community-based educational environments	Gamified, curiosity-driven learning; flexible, personalized learning experiences validated by tokens, digital badges, and community feedback	Adult learners; lifelong learners; senior residents as co-educators; young local students as knowledge-sharers	Local (villages, urban districts), national networks of under-visited territories, international cultural heritage sites

Table 7: Contextual Application of EduTourism

Theme	Description	Contexts/Examples
Community as Co-Educators	Local residents (elders, artisans, students) design and facilitate educational encounters through storytelling, workshops, and cultural demonstrations	Villages, local hubs, cultural centers, community-run eco-tourism cooperatives
Tourism Industry as Infrastructure Enablers	Tourism agencies and operators provide platforms (physical and digital) for gamified, learner-driven exploration	Local tour guides, small agencies, partnerships with digital content creators
Participant as Autonomous Learner	Tourists assume active roles in designing their own learning journeys, choosing experiences aligned with personal interests	Self-guided thematic trails, discovery challenges, peer feedback mechanisms
Digital Platforms as Validation Tools	Badges, token-based systems, peer-ranking features promote self-validation and public recognition of learning progress	Mobile apps, online community boards, AR-enhanced pathways

Table 8: Stakeholder Roles and Relationships

Theme	Description	Contexts / Examples
Gamified, Self-Directed Learning	Learning is facilitated through gamification (quests, badges, tokens) aligned with personal curiosity and goals, outside formal curriculum structures	Exploratory city scavenger hunts, cultural skill challenges, environmental quests
Community Engagement	Interaction with local residents is integral; mutual learning exchanges foster cultural preservation and social cohesion	Workshops with local artisans, guided

		storytelling with senior residents
Non-Seasonal, Decentralized Tourism	Activities are distributed over time and space, reducing peak-season concentration and fostering sustainable visitor flows	Year-round thematic circuits in rural areas, urban community micro-experiences
Informal Validation Mechanisms	Learning achievements are validated through community feedback, peer recognition, and digital gamified systems, not formal assessments	Digital badge platforms, community leaderboard rankings, feedback-driven tokens

Table 9: Essential elements of EduTourism definition

III.3 APPLICATIONS AND FORESEEN IMPACT

Edutourism fits into the broader category of community-based tourism models—when inclusive of local actors—consistently generate positive socio-economic outcomes. Empirical studies demonstrate that meaningful participation of residents creates employment opportunities, increases household incomes, enhances living standards, and stimulates local micro-enterprises (Sapkota et al., 2024). One systematic review indicates that community members reporting higher involvement perceive greater social cohesion, improved tourist–resident relations, waste management improvements, and conservation efforts (Sapkota et al., 2024).

Through edutourism frameworks where residents guide or co-create learning experiences with and for the visitor, the economic benefits—such as hosting tourists for gamified village tours or workshops—circulate directly within the local ecosystem. This approach avoids leakage to external actors and empowers locals as valued participants rather than passive recipients.

Local residents serving as educators and co-facilitators—particularly elders and youth—enhance tourism's capacity to preserve cultural heritage and transmit traditional knowledge. Lessons on local lore, history, crafts, folklore, or ecological practices become lived experiences, deepening both visitor understanding and

community pride. Community-led cultural education has been shown to foster stronger local identity and heritage protection, counteracting cultural commodification and superficial tourism practices.

Community-based tourism also aligns ecological protection with livelihood creation. In Matura, Trinidad, for example, the Nature Seekers initiative successfully reduced turtle poaching to zero by empowering locals in conservation tourism—resulting in both environmental recovery and local income growth (Naturseeker project, 1990). Similarly, birdwatching tourism in Colombia's Valle del Cauca region shows how community-led wildlife hospitality can incentivize forest preservation and local stewardship of biodiversity (Winton, 2017). These examples parallel edutourism's potential when learning is structured around local ecosystems.

Empowering elderly residents as hosts, storytellers, or gamified challenge partners can reinforce intergenerational bonds and psychological well-being both for seniors and visitors. Programs like Cycling Without Age exemplify how senior involvement in community mobility projects promotes trust, respect, and social cohesion across generations, improving quality of life while creating experiential and reflective learning encounters for younger participants. When seniors engage in edutourism storytelling, skills-sharing, or mentoring tasks, the dual benefit lies in resident well-being and enhanced learning depth for tourists.

By emphasizing gamified learning—badges, tokens, ranking systems—and community interaction, edutourism cultivates curiosity, stewardship, and long-term appreciation of place. Residents become active educators who validate learning outcomes, reinforcing motivation and fostering low-impact tourism. Scholars show that responsibly designed interactive tourism models can balance visitor benefit with environmental protection and socio-cultural respect (Sapkota et al., 2024; MDPI Sustainability, 2025).

Furthermore, participatory models reduce overtourism by distributing visitors across community-owned routes and scheduling, supporting territorial sustainability. With local residents directing activity flow and curating challenges, tourism patterns remain sensitive to ecological thresholds, seasonal rhythms, and community rhythms.

In contrast to mass tourism, which is often concentrated around seasonal peaks and predefined attractions, edutourism operates on more flexible, learner-driven timelines. Because edutourism is not dependent on climatic conditions or major vacation periods, it can be intentionally designed to occur outside of high-demand seasons, helping to balance tourist flows throughout the year. This temporal redistribution contributes to

the sustainability of host communities by alleviating pressure on infrastructure, housing, and local ecosystems during peak periods, while creating year-round income and engagement opportunities for residents. Moreover, Edutourists often have greater schedule flexibility than traditional leisure tourists, allowing programs to be offered during off-season months without compromising attendance. As such, edutourism provides a strategic tool for mitigating seasonality, enhancing the economic resilience of communities, and improving the overall quality of both resident and visitor experiences.

Furthermore, edutourism contributes to the diversification of touristic pathways, shifting focus from overexposed landmarks to lesser-known, culturally significant, and environmentally sensitive areas. By structuring learning experiences around local narratives, artisanal knowledge, ecological practices, and community-based interactions, edutourism creates new entry points into the cultural and territorial fabric of a destination. This diversification reduces the cultural flattening often associated with globalized, homogenized tourism products, and promotes a more nuanced and respectful engagement with local heritage. It also helps decentralize tourist traffic, reducing strain on high-traffic zones while stimulating under-visited regions that may otherwise be excluded from mainstream tourism circuits. From an environmental perspective, this dispersion minimizes concentrated degradation of natural sites, supports regenerative tourism, and empowers communities to manage their territory according to ecological carrying capacities. In this sense, EduTourism serves not only as a pedagogical intervention but also as a territorial governance tool that aligns tourism practices with principles of cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.

IV. RECOGNITION OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The European Commission emphasizes the importance of fostering key competences and foundational skills across the lifespan, beginning in early childhood and extending through adulthood. These competences—comprising a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes—are considered essential for personal development, professional integration, active citizenship, social inclusion, and overall well-being. The strategic approach to promoting key competences includes the provision of high-quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals, the support of educators in adopting competence-based pedagogical methodologies, the encouragement of diverse learning environments and modalities, and the development

of effective methods for the assessment and validation of competences acquired in both formal and non-formal settings.

In line with this vision, the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (ST/9009/2018/INIT), which outlines eight core competences deemed necessary for navigating contemporary societal and labour market challenges. These competences are framed as instrumental not only for individual fulfillment and sustainable lifestyles, but also for enhancing civic participation and promoting inclusive societies:

- Literacy
- Multilingualism
- Numerical, scientific and engineering skills
- Digital and technology-based competences
- Interpersonal skills, and the ability to adopt new competences
- Active citizenship
- Entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression

The Council Recommendation provides a common European reference framework on key competences for policymakers, education and training providers, social partners and learners themselves. It also presents successful ways to promote competence development through innovative learning approaches, assessment methods and support for educational staff.

Key competences are a dynamic combination of the knowledge, skills and attitudes a learner needs to develop throughout life, starting from early age onwards. High quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning provides opportunities for all to develop key competences, therefore competence-oriented approaches can be used in all education, training and learning settings throughout life.

In support of competence-oriented education, training and learning in lifelong learning context, three challenges have been identified: the use of a variety of learning approaches and contexts; support for teachers and other educational staff; and assessment and validation of competence development.

According to the Recommendation, cross-disciplinary learning, along with partnerships that bridge various educational levels and sectors, including actors from the labor market, has the potential to significantly enrich learning environments. Approaches such as whole-school strategies, which emphasize collaborative teaching, active learner participation, and shared decision-making processes, foster a holistic

educational experience. Cross-disciplinary methods not only enhance the coherence and connectivity between different subjects within curricula but also establish meaningful links between educational content and societal change, ensuring the relevance of learning to real-world contexts. In this regard, cross-sectoral collaboration among educational institutions, businesses, arts and sports organizations, youth communities, higher education, and research entities emerge as a critical driver of effective competence development.

The acquisition of foundational skills and broader competencies can be further enhanced by systematically integrating academic learning with social and emotional education, artistic expression, and health-promoting physical activities. Encouraging health-conscious and future-oriented lifestyles, as well as promoting physical well-being, provides learners with a strong basis for the holistic development of personal, social, and cognitive competences from an early age. This multidimensional approach lays the groundwork for the sustained development of basic and transversal skills across educational stages.

Innovative learning methodologies, including inquiry-based, project-based, arts-integrated, blended, and games-based approaches, have been recognized for their capacity to elevate learner motivation and engagement. Additionally, experiential methods such as work-based learning, hands-on scientific inquiry, and experimental approaches in STEM fields cultivate a diverse array of competences essential for navigating contemporary societal and labor market demands. The integration of such methodologies fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities across disciplines.

In the digital age, it is imperative to encourage learners, educators, and institutions to harness digital technologies to enhance learning experiences and foster digital competence. Initiatives like the EU Code Week[1] serve as platforms for active participation, while tools such as SELFIE[2] support self-assessment and continuous improvement of digital capacities within educational settings. The strategic use of digital resources not only modernizes educational environments but also equips learners with essential skills for the digital economy.

Entrepreneurial learning experiences, including practical activities such as creativity challenges, start-up simulations, student-led community projects, and entrepreneurial

[1] https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-code-week
[2] https://education.ec.europa.eu/selfie

project-based learning, offer invaluable opportunities for both young people and adults. Facilitating these experiences through school-community-business partnerships, especially in rural areas, can foster an entrepreneurial mindset and prepare learners for dynamic economic landscapes. Ensuring that every learner has at least one entrepreneurial experience during their schooling is a policy objective that can be achieved through localized cooperation platforms. Furthermore, targeted training and support for teachers and school leaders are essential to embed entrepreneurial education sustainably within institutional cultures.

Language and multilingual competences are best nurtured through mobility initiatives, international cooperation, and participation in platforms like eTwinning and EPALE. These opportunities for cross-border collaboration enrich linguistic skills while also fostering intercultural awareness and global citizenship among learners and educators alike.

Inclusive education demands that all learners, including those facing socio-economic disadvantages or special educational needs, receive adequate and tailored support to achieve their full potential. This support may encompass academic, linguistic, and socio-emotional assistance, peer mentoring, extracurricular engagement, career counseling, and, where necessary, material aid. An inclusive learning environment recognizes the diverse needs of learners and provides the necessary scaffolding to ensure equitable learning opportunities.

Continuity in competence development throughout life is greatly enhanced by fostering collaboration across all levels of education, training, and learning settings. Such cooperation is pivotal in creating seamless educational pathways and developing innovative pedagogical approaches that respond to learners' evolving needs. Additionally, the integration of formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments—combined with strategic partnerships involving local communities and employers—plays a crucial role in supporting skill development, facilitating smoother transitions from education to employment, and enabling lifelong learning trajectories that adapt to changing personal and professional circumstances.

With reference to validation of competences developed under the framework of Life Long Learning and Non-formal education, key competence descriptions can be operationalized into comprehensive frameworks of learning outcomes, which, in turn, can be supported by appropriate diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment tools. These tools would enable a systematic approach to evaluating learners' progress

and validating their achievements across various educational levels. Ensuring alignment between competence frameworks and assessment methodologies is essential for fostering transparency and coherence in competence development pathways.

Digital technologies offer significant potential in capturing the multidimensional aspects of learner progression. Their capacity to document and reflect on various facets of learning, including entrepreneurial competences, provides innovative ways to track and support learner development beyond traditional assessment models. The integration of digital platforms can therefore enhance the personalization and depth of assessment processes, ensuring that learners' skills are adequately recognized and valued.

In non-formal and informal learning contexts, diverse assessment approaches tailored to key competences could be developed to reflect the varied nature of these learning environments. Employers, guidance practitioners, and social partners can play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing such assessment activities, thereby enriching the ecosystem of competence recognition. It is imperative that these assessment opportunities are made universally accessible, with particular emphasis on supporting individuals with lower skill levels. By doing so, these initiatives can serve as vital enablers for learner progression into further learning and development opportunities.

Moreover, the validation of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning could be significantly expanded and strengthened. This would align with the Council Recommendation on the Validation of Prior Non-formal and Informal Learning (2012/C 398/01), which encourages the development of robust and inclusive validation processes. Tools such as Europass and Youthpass provide valuable platforms for documentation and self-assessment, thereby supporting individuals in articulating and evidencing their competences. These tools facilitate greater recognition of diverse learning pathways and contribute to a more holistic and learner-centered validation system.

Moreso, the validation of non-formal and informal learning has been identified as an alternative access route to higher education by a recent study developed by European Commission and European Education and Culture Executive Agency (2024). Alternative access routes to higher education are commonly understood as access routes targeting higher education candidates who do not comply with traditional entry requirements. This is either because they followed a short upper secondary vocational path (i.e. a programme which does not allow access to higher education) or because

they abandoned initial education prior to the completion of the upper secondary level. In the current policy context, promoting the idea that no talent should be left behind, the theme of nontraditional pathways into higher education gains particular attention. This is even more important since students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be over-represented in educational pathways not giving direct access to higher education (OECD, 2021). To increase diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education, the objective is to extend admissions criteria so that all those who have a capacity to follow higher education studies would be provided with the opportunity to do so, regardless of their prior formal learning achievements.

Moreover, it seems important to analyze how a relatively new topic in EU policy discussions – the topic of micro-credentials (2022/C 243/02) – translates into validation policies and practice across Europe, and finally to assess if and how such instrument can be attached to the development of EduTourism to the purpose of recognizing and validating non formal, lifelong learning of participants.

VI.2 MICROCREDENTIALS AS EDUTOURISM VALIDATION MECHANISM

Micro-credentials, basically succinct certifications of short-term learning experiences, hold immense potential in providing individuals with the skills and competencies necessary for navigating today's dynamic labor market landscapes. Previous studies (Querci, 2024) investigated how this flexible learning pathways can enhance transparency and portability of learning outcomes of all sorts and foster a culture of lifelong learning and skill development.

Micro-credentials are emerging as a transformative tool within European lifelong learning strategies, offering flexible, learner-centered certifications that complement traditional qualifications. Designed as short, competency-based recognitions, micro-credentials address the evolving demands of dynamic labor markets and foster personalized learning pathways that transcend formal educational systems.

A central strength of micro-credentials lies in their ability to enhance the transparency, authenticity, and portability of learning outcomes across diverse contexts. With the integration of digital technologies, including blockchain solutions, micro-credentials can offer tamper-proof, decentralized, and easily shareable records of achievement. These features not only build trust among learners, employers, and educational providers but also facilitate the documentation of skills acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments.

EduTourism, conceptualized as a non-formal, gamified, and community-engaged learning experience, aligns with the principles underlying micro-credentials. Adult learners participating in EduTourism engage in self-directed educational journeys that are rich in personal development, cultural interaction, and sustainability awareness. However, these experiences often lack formal recognition mechanisms, making it challenging to certify the competences and skills gained through such immersive educational activities.

Micro-credentials can bridge this recognition gap by providing a sound EU-level mechanism to certify EduTourism learning outcomes. Competencies listed under the Council Recommendation for Lifelong can be developed through EduTourism and validated through micro-credentials designed in line with European standards. This process would empower learners to present verified evidence of their learning achievements to employers, educational institutions, and broader professional networks.

The portability and interoperability of micro-credentials allow for integration with platforms like Europass, enabling learners to build digital portfolios that reflect their EduTourism experiences. These credentials are inherently stackable, allowing multiple EduTourism activities to accumulate into broader certification pathways, while preserving the decentralized, learner-driven ethos of the EduTourism model.

Moreover, EduTourism's inherent self-validation mechanisms—including gamified badges, token systems, and peer recognition—can be aligned with formal micro-credentialing structures. By incorporating these gamified achievements into robust credential frameworks, EduTourism can maintain its flexible, participatory nature while ensuring compliance with EU quality assurance principles. This integration promotes transparency, inclusiveness, and sustainability, positioning EduTourism as a vital component of lifelong learning strategies within Europe.

In this context, micro-credentials not only serve as instruments for certifying and valorizing the learning outcomes of EduTourism but also function as catalysts for enhancing learner mobility, skills portability, and recognition of non-formal learning across sectors. Embedding micro-credentialing within EduTourism initiatives can enrich individual learning journeys, foster territorial development through community-based education, and support broader EU objectives in employability, lifelong learning, and sustainable tourism practices.

V. CONCLUSION

EduTourism represents a valuable form of non-formal learning, where adults engage in travel-based, community-immersive educational experiences outside formal institutional settings. EduTourism, with its strong potential to cultivate critical competences such as cultural awareness, sustainability literacy, social entrepreneurship, and community engagement, is inherently aligned with EU policy priorities on Lifelong Learning.

Micro-credentials provide a flexible, modular solution for certifying learning outcomes achieved through EduTourism. EU-level micro-credential frameworks should be expanded to accommodate non-formal, experiential learning pathways, ensuring that competencies gained through EduTourism—such as intercultural communication, sustainable practices, and local knowledge co-creation—are formally validated and portable across sectors. This would require developing learning outcome descriptors tailored to EduTourism contexts, ensuring alignment with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) while maintaining the learner-centered ethos of EduTourism.

To ensure the credibility and value of EduTourism-related micro-credentials, stakeholders at all levels must encourage collaborative quality assurance mechanisms involving educational institutions, local communities, tourism operators, and digital platforms. Local communities, acting as co-educators in EduTourism, should play an active role in defining competence descriptors and validation criteria, ensuring authenticity and relevance. This participatory approach will strengthen local ownership while aligning with EU-wide recognition standards, thus facilitating mutual trust and interoperability.

EduTourism, when supported by micro-credentials, can serve as a catalyst for inclusive local development. By decentralizing tourism flows, fostering year-round learner engagement, and valorizing community-based knowledge, EduTourism contributes to counteracting overtourism, preserving cultural diversity, and promoting environmentally sustainable tourism models. Integrating EduTourism into regional development programs and digital inclusion strategies offers a valuable opportunity to create accessible micro-credentialed pathways that engage diverse populations, including marginalized groups and low-skilled adults, from both the local community and the tourists one.

Finally, investment in digital ecosystems—such as Europass, ePortfolios, and blockchain-based credentialing platforms— will facilitate the portability of

EduTourism micro-credentials. These platforms should support the stacking of micro-credentials, enabling learners to progressively build a certified learning profile that reflects their diverse experiences in EduTourism contexts. This approach will not only enhance the visibility and value of EduTourism outcomes but also foster lifelong employability and skills recognition across Europe.

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