

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK REVIEW FOR THE SHAPE E-SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism
Deliverable DT4.1.2

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Acronyms

SHA Sustainable Heritage Areas

NPA Northern Periphery and Arctic

1. Introduction

The aim of the SHAPE (Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism) project is to transform local tourism strategies into concrete, practical tools about how to manage, develop, organize, support and market assets and activities - and how to integrate these activities into communities in sustainable ways.

The SHAPE project focuses on a transnational set of sustainable heritage areas (SHAs) with diverse experiences of sustainability and regional cooperation involving stakeholders in heritage management, tourism, and governance. In these SHAs, the partners work with local stakeholders, their organizations, and the institutions which support them, and incorporate their activities into regional strategies for sustainable development.

SHAPE -project creates a transnational web-based service to support organisations, communities and businesses in the 'Cool North' in developing, implementing and managing ecotourism initiatives. The SHAPE eService will be an open-access platform for stakeholders to transfer knowledge, share good practices and product/service development tools, and implement these in joint ecotourism projects based on identified natural and cultural assets and opportunities.

This stakeholder feedback review aims to ensure the eService meets the needs and aspirations of the key stakeholder groups. It provides background information on ecotourism competences, support needs and interests among stakeholders. Information is utilised along the eService design and development process.

2. Defining the SHAPE eService

The shape project generates a transnational open access e-service that will include collaboration and capacity building tools, i.e. a virtual joint development forum, pool of ecotourism competences, and support package for service design and a training module. This online service facilitates local, regional and transnational cooperation, partnerships and knowledge exchange.

The eService will build on the transnational Shape partnership and work on creating and maintaining effective stakeholder networks and governance structures; identifying cultural/natural heritage and other assets, and capitalising on these to create sustainable ecotourism products/services; and effectively marketing these.

The project end users across the NPA region will benefit from the knowledge and support (methods, tools and examples) provided, allowing them to improve existing ecotourism products/services and innovate new ones while maintaining cultural and natural heritage.

Shape project has extensive network of end-users including:

- Local public authorities that have established regional parks or biosphere reserves or are considering doing so,
- National public authorities responsible for environment/natural heritage, cultural heritage, rural development, tourism.
- Sectoral agencies responsible for environment/natural heritage, cultural heritage, rural development, tourism.
- Infrastructure and (public) service providers
- Interest groups concerned with environment/natural heritage, cultural heritage, rural development, tourism.
- Education/training centres and schools
- Small and medium-size enterprises concerned with environment/natural heritage, cultural heritage, rural development, tourism
- Business support organisations concerned with IT, rural development, tourism

Shape project consortium and 30 associate partner are also project beneficiaries. They will be actively involved in project stakeholder meetings and activities, and provide feedback for the eService development along the project.

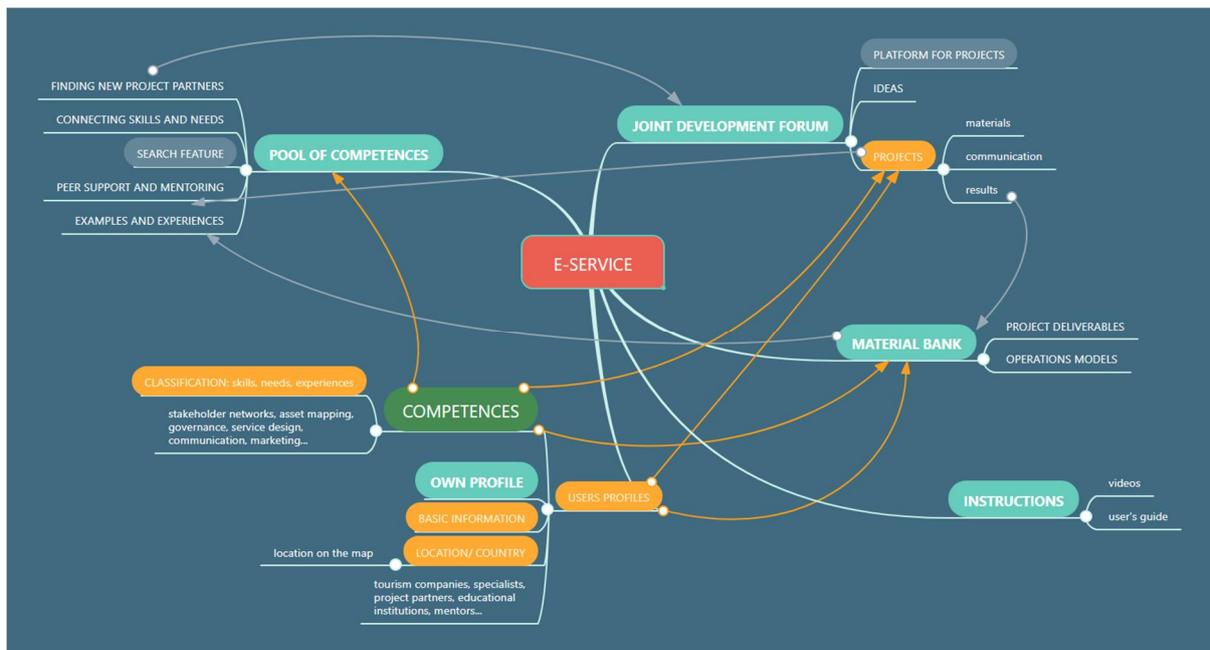


Figure 1. Shape eService mind map for the service definition. The service is based on the ecotourism competences identified at Shape. The competences will link end-users and available service providers to the pool of competences, joint development forum and database of materials and methods.

3. Stakeholder feedback for the eService development

Online questionnaire

Shape project has gathered end-user information and expectations during the spring 2018 by online questionnaire (appendix 1). The questionnaire was distributed in NPA regions through SHAPE

partnership. The questionnaire gathered end-user background information, competences (strengths) in ecotourism, support needs, collaboration ideas and opportunities, and preferences on support materials and guidance.

Respondents

The questionnaire was completed by 38 respondents, representing project partnership regions of Scotland, Finland, Norway and Greenland. As the number of replies is low, it provides descriptive information on the end-users and their expectations, and no country comparisons will be produced. Finland had over 50% of the total respondents, i.e. there is geographical imbalance.

Respondents by country (n 38)

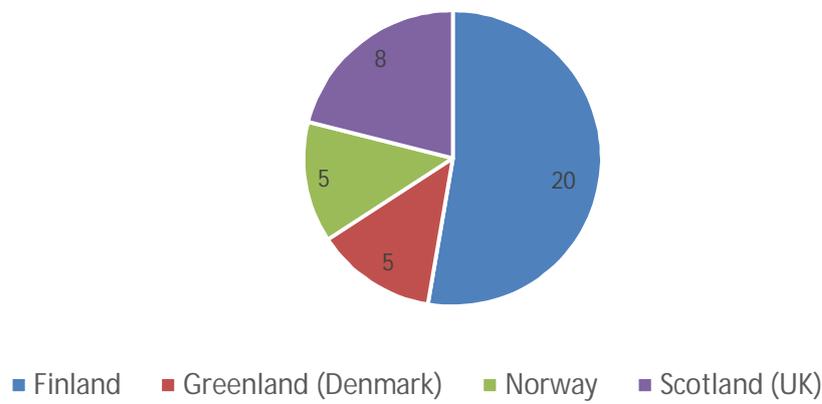


Figure 2. Number of the respondents by country attending the survey.

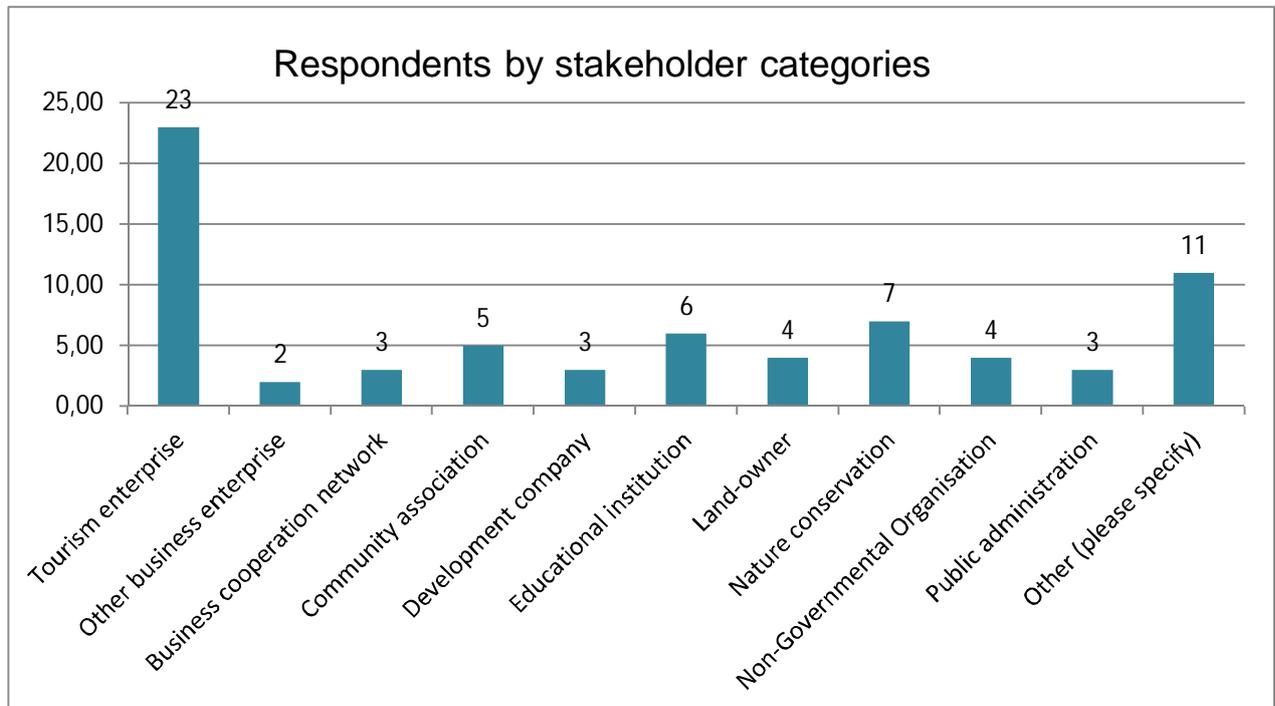


Figure 3. Number of respondents by stakeholder categories.

The respondents included different types of organisations from public to private; most of them were tourism enterprises (Figure 3). In addition, there were representatives of most of the project stakeholder groups. Tourism enterprises have most of the respondents, which is evident as the project aims to develop ecotourism initiatives with new or improved products and services. Some of the respondents represent several stakeholder categories (e.g. tourism enterprise and community association or business cooperation network).

Strengths and preferred types of supports

The respondents provided estimations of their strengths in ecotourism related themes (Figure 4.). Knowledge of local culture and natural heritage had highest scores (n 29), while lowest were in international partnerships and collaboration, and marketing.

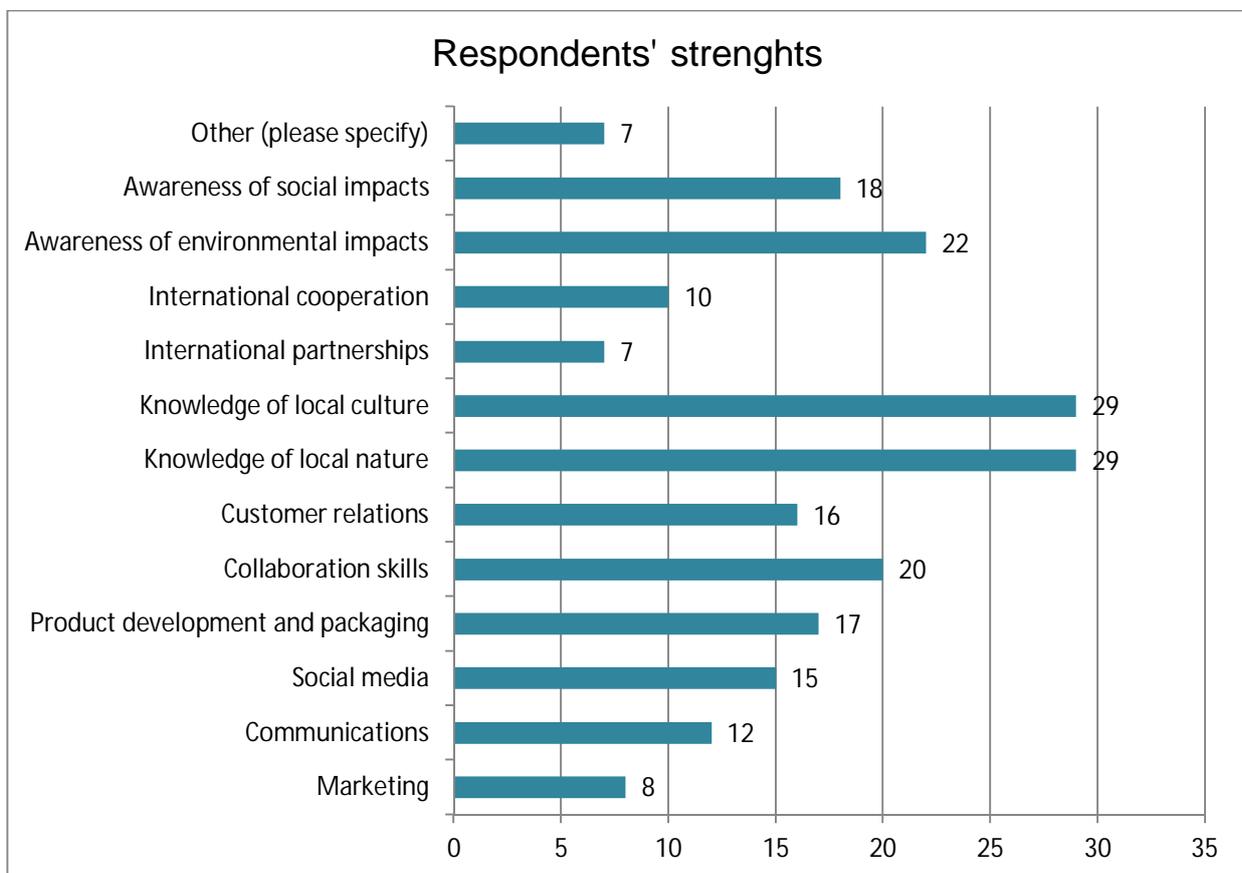


Figure 4. Strengths of the respondents in main themes of ecotourism development.

The respondents identified development needs especially in themes of 1) international collaboration and partnerships, and 2) marketing, communications and social media (Figure 5). The preferred types of supports included topics of increasing the visibility and exposure, finding collaborators and establishing joint development projects (Figure 6.).

Investigating the collaborative activities in more detail indicates that there are high interests and expectations for establishment of new networks, project ideas and generation of new services and improvement of current services (Figure 7.). In addition, business enterprises seem to have need to improve connections to the business development supports.

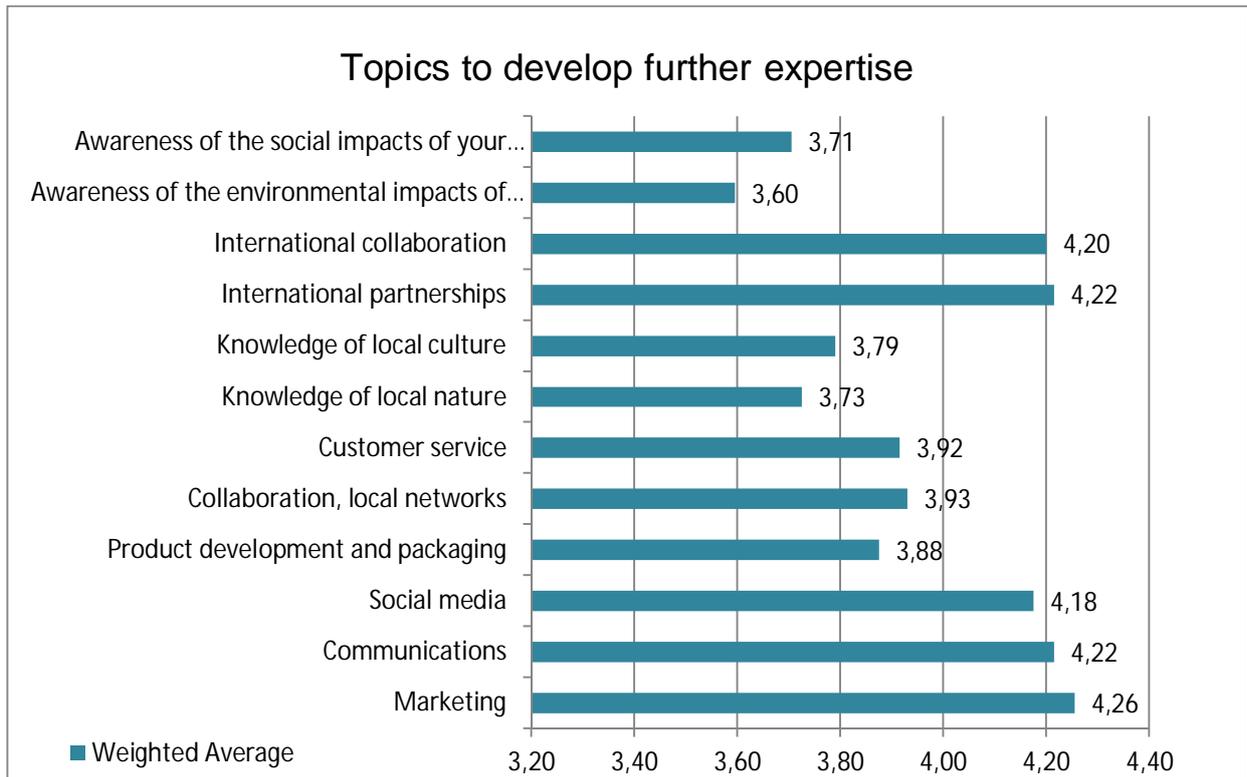


Figure 5. Identification of the topics in which the respondents would like to develop further expertise (weighted averages, scale 1-6).

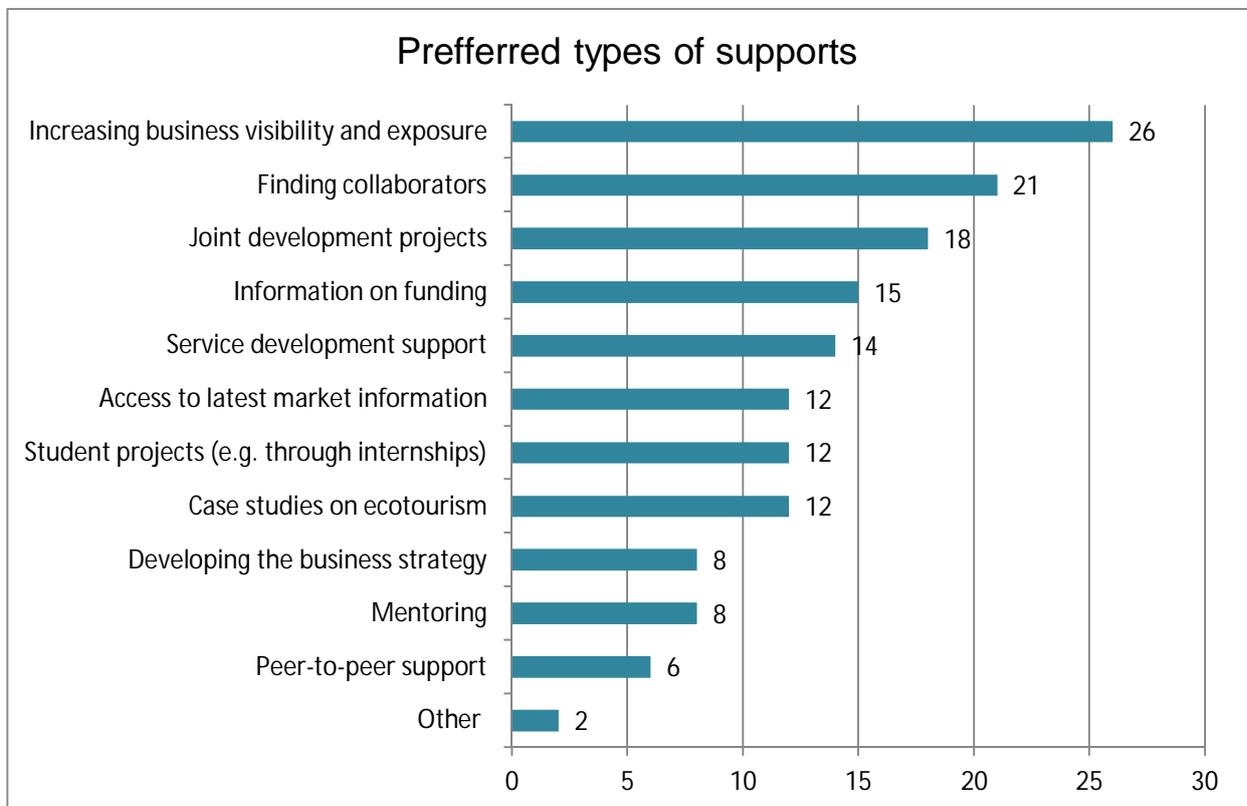


Figure 6. Preferred types of supports.

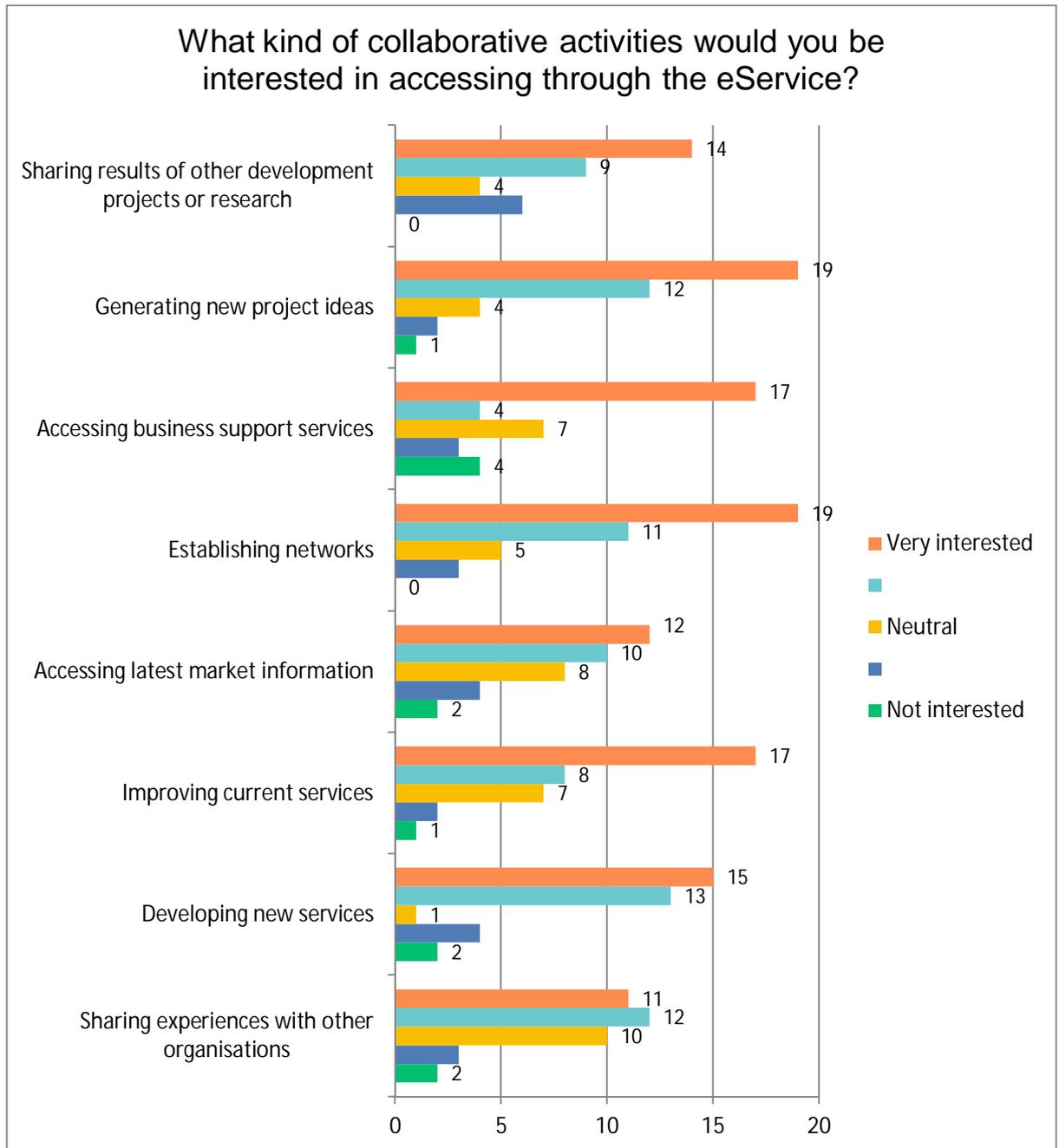


Figure 7. Interest toward collaborative activities.

Development ideas for ecotourism

The respondents provided several concrete development ideas for ecotourism both locally and internationally. There was evident interest to develop communications and use of social media in marketing. Business respondents need to increase their visibility. Improved collaboration was aspired in product and service development, including joint planning the tourism seasons, local cooperation to generate stronger and more attractive service packages in nature and culture based tourism, and establishing international networks and collaboration to attract more customers.

International collaboration was aspired not only to have more international customers, but also jointly develop service packages with international partners. Better accessibility of international groups was mentioned in several answers, indicating there is a common challenge related to peripheral locations.

One respondent aspired for “communication and introducing more sustainable tourism sites and their principles and quality in both national and international levels”. This aligns with Shape project case studies, ecotourism initiatives and forthcoming learning journeys.

The questionnaire requested for ideas for joint development projects. There were several concrete ideas that could have further development potential within Shape:

- Network of logging camps (Finland), forest work culture/heritage
- Development of existing FjordViking concept - 3 day running events in beautiful surroundings. International Running organizations.
- Package of activities or a festival involving the natural asset of darkness (Partners Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park, local communities and businesses, Scotland)
- Showcasing the unique social, cultural, and historical heritage of the Glentroll area through multi media - interviews, old photographs, stories, walking routes etc.
- In Greenland, local tourist actors, students and the museum could collaborate to make villages more attractive for visitors. The actions could be to show / demonstrate parts of the Greenlandic heritage.
- Many respondents mentioned outdoor activities, such as hiking and cycling trails, bike rentals, fishing, farm visits, wildlife safaris and sea related activities.
- In addition, educational courses, sharing of information and applications to increase visitors' opportunities, were mentioned.

Accessing the eService

The respondents preferred to test the forthcoming eService online, and attend a training workshop. Some were interested also about guidance video or printed guidance (Figure 7.). As the eService is on development phase, it was difficult to know actual support type. Current trend and requirement in any online service is that they should work as such guiding the end user and automating most of the functions. Therefore, the eService is aimed to be end-user friendly and require minimum assistance.

The supporting materials, including the video and printed guidance will also be produced. Regular Shape stakeholder workshops also enable eService introductions and support. The high interest among end-users (95 % likely interest in registering) indicates positive take-off as the service is marketed (Figure 8.)

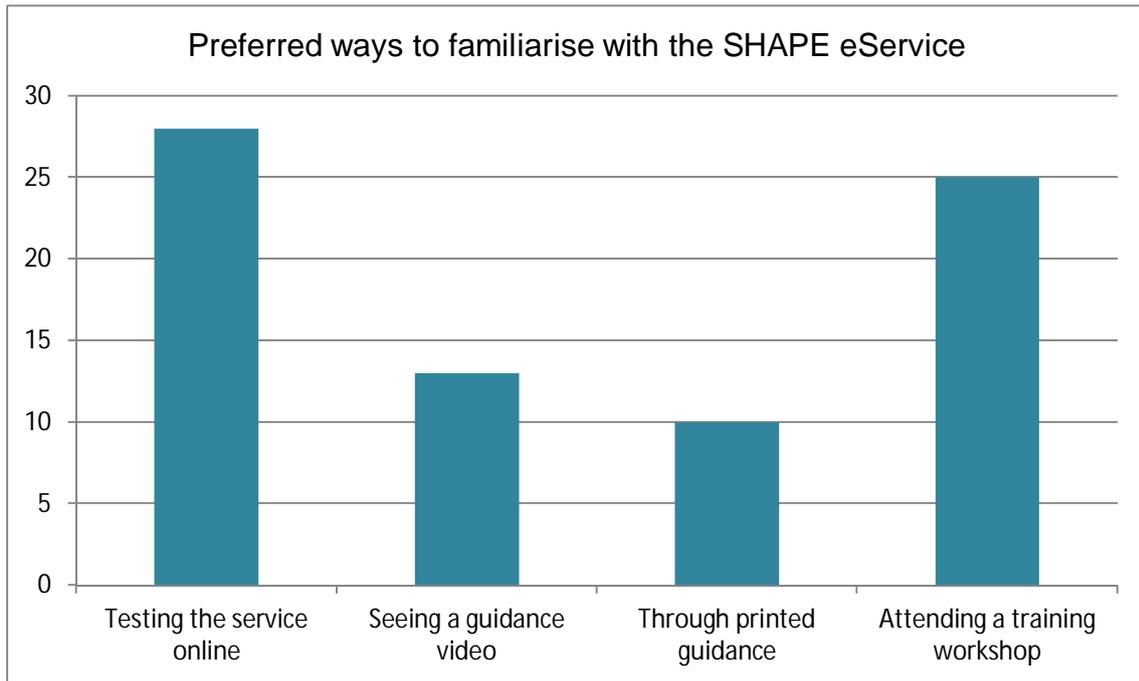


Figure 8. How to familiarize with the eService.

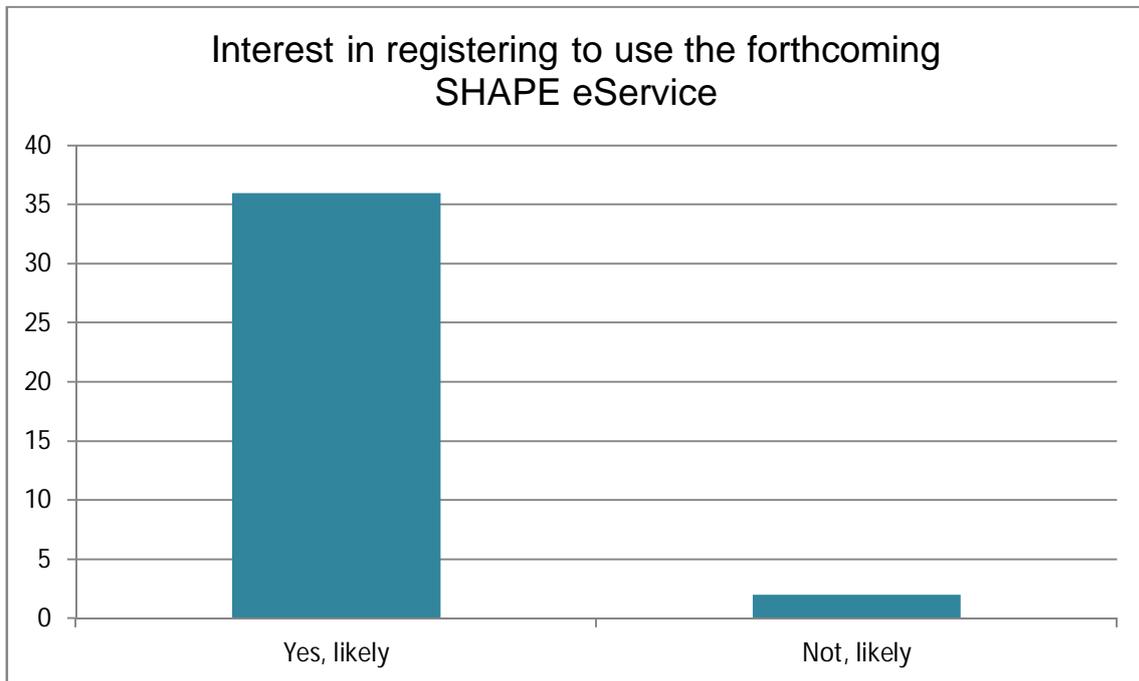


Figure 8. Interest in registering.

4. Conclusions

Basing on the results of the online questionnaire, the stakeholders of Shape expect:

- 1) Support and increased capacity for international collaboration and networking
- 2) Increased visibility and business exposure
- 3) Joint development in product and service development (both current and new services)

These expectations are evident especially in Finland as the stakeholder groups include many business enterprises providing ecotourism services. However, the online questionnaire had limited number of replies in other countries and additional feedback is needed along the service development (e.g. through stakeholder meetings).

The stakeholders have vast knowledge on local and cultural heritage, which has allowed Shape project to map natural, cultural and intangible assets and associated tourism infrastructures. High interest to learn from other regions and collaborate locally and internationally, provides very good starting point for the eService.

Overall, the development of the Shape eService to support collaboration and joint development work in ecotourism was considered as good idea. It was seen important to bring together rurally marginalised and fractured communities, empower communities, and get information and learning out to the people. Some saw the benefit especially in international peer support and examples from the same type of operational environments.

In eService development it is essential to consider the end-user aspect throughout the development and improvement of the service for it to meet its objectives. End-users represent very broad set of actors, from public to private, non-profit community organisations to business enterprises, and cultural to natural heritage. Also the geographical scope is vast. Therefore, eService will not be a direct solution for all the development needs, but more of a solution for networking. It is designed to be an online space where different stakeholders can meet, initiate and carry out joint development projects (ecotourism initiatives), and utilise the information available through databases and publications.

Respondents were interested on experiences and examples at very practical level – therefore communication elements are essential for disseminating these efficiently across the dispersed peripheral northern region.