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From Discounts to Destination Governance: Evaluating a Regional Guest Card Model for Sustainable Tourism Management on the Costa Daurada

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Abstract

This thesis examines the potential of a regional guest card model for the Costa Daurada as a multifunctional instrument of sustainable destination management. While guest cards have traditionally been understood as visitor discount products, the study explores how advanced regional systems can also contribute to public transport integration, visitor dispersion, destination intelligence, stakeholder coordination and resident-oriented benefit creation.

The research is based on a qualitative comparative case study design. It analyses selected European guest card and visitor pass systems, including integrated regional models, mobility-centred schemes, attraction-based cards and commercial urban passes. The comparative analysis focuses on access and issuance models, public transport integration, behavioural steering, territorial redistribution, governance structures, data-generation potential, funding arrangements and social legitimacy. These findings are then assessed in relation to the structural conditions of the Costa Daurada, a mature Mediterranean tourism destination characterised by strong seasonality, coastal concentration, fragmented mobility systems and uneven territorial distribution of tourism benefits.

The results suggest that a guest card for the Costa Daurada should not be designed primarily as a promotional or discount product, but as an accommodation-linked and mobility-integrated destination management tool. Its strongest potential lies in reducing friction for public transport use, encouraging movement towards inland and less visited areas, generating more reliable behavioural data and creating visible value for residents and tourism workers. However, the study also shows that such a system would depend on strong institutional coordination, realistic funding mechanisms, sufficient mobility supply, broad stakeholder participation, data governance capacity and long-term political continuity.

The thesis concludes that a regional guest card could support a transition from fragmented tourism promotion towards more integrated destination governance on the Costa Daurada. Its value would not lie in solving congestion, seasonality or resident acceptance challenges alone, but in providing a practical governance platform through which mobility, territorial balance, data use and community benefit can be coordinated more systematically.

Keywords: guest card systems; destination management; sustainable mobility; visitor dispersion; tourism governance; destination intelligence; resident acceptance; Costa Daurada

Resumen

Esta tesis analiza el potencial de una tarjeta turística regional para la Costa Daurada como instrumento multifuncional de gestión sostenible de destinos. Aunque tradicionalmente las tarjetas turísticas se han entendido principalmente como productos de descuento para visitantes, el estudio explora cómo los sistemas regionales más avanzados pueden contribuir también a la integración del transporte público, la dispersión de visitantes, la inteligencia turística, la coordinación entre actores y la creación de beneficios visibles para la población residente.

La investigación se basa en un diseño cualitativo de estudio de casos comparado. Se analizan diversos sistemas europeos de tarjetas turísticas y pases de visitante, incluyendo modelos regionales integrados, esquemas centrados en la movilidad, tarjetas basadas en atracciones y pases urbanos comerciales. El análisis comparativo examina los modelos de acceso y emisión, la integración del transporte público, la capacidad de orientación del comportamiento turístico, la redistribución territorial, las estructuras de gobernanza, el potencial de generación de datos, los mecanismos de financiación y la legitimidad social. Estos resultados se valoran posteriormente en relación con las condiciones estructurales de la Costa Daurada, un destino turístico mediterráneo maduro caracterizado por una fuerte estacionalidad, concentración litoral, fragmentación de la movilidad y distribución territorial desigual de los beneficios turísticos.

Los resultados sugieren que una tarjeta turística para la Costa Daurada no debería diseñarse principalmente como un producto promocional o de descuento, sino como una herramienta de gestión del destino vinculada al alojamiento e integrada con la movilidad. Su mayor potencial reside en reducir las barreras de uso del transporte público, fomentar los desplazamientos hacia zonas interiores y menos visitadas, generar datos de comportamiento más fiables y crear valor visible para residentes y trabajadores del sector turístico. No obstante, el estudio también muestra que un sistema de este tipo dependería de una sólida coordinación institucional, mecanismos de financiación realistas, una oferta de movilidad suficiente, amplia participación de los actores implicados, capacidad de gobernanza de datos y continuidad política a largo plazo.

La tesis concluye que una tarjeta turística regional podría apoyar la transición desde una promoción turística fragmentada hacia una gobernanza más integrada del destino en la Costa Daurada. Su valor no residiría en resolver por sí sola los desafíos de congestión, estacionalidad o aceptación social, sino en ofrecer una plataforma práctica de gobernanza mediante la cual la movilidad, el equilibrio territorial, el uso de datos y el beneficio comunitario puedan coordinarse de forma más sistemática.

Palabras clave: tarjetas turísticas; gestión de destinos; movilidad sostenible; dispersión de visitantes; gobernanza turística; inteligencia turística; aceptación residente; Costa Daurada

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1. Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most significant economic sectors in many destinations, generating employment, investment and regional development opportunities. At the same time, sustained tourism growth has intensified challenges related to congestion, pressure on infrastructure and the uneven spatial distribution of visitors (UNWTO, 2018; OECD, 2020). In coastal and urban destinations in particular, tourism demand is often concentrated during peak seasons and in a limited number of highly visited areas. This can result in overcrowding, traffic congestion and pressure on public services, while other parts of the same destination capture comparatively fewer benefits.

Increasingly, such challenges are understood not simply as a consequence of visitor volume, but as a function of how tourism is spatially and behaviourally organised within destinations. Research on tourist movement patterns shows that visitor flows are structured by accessibility, attraction clustering, convenience and information availability, producing predictable concentrations of demand (Lew & McKercher, 2006; McKercher & Lau, 2008; Shoval & Isaacson, 2010). This shifts attention from tourism growth alone towards the governance of mobility, distribution and visitor behaviour.

At the same time, many destinations face limitations in relation to tourism intelligence and evidence-based management. Traditional indicators such as arrivals and overnight stays provide only partial insight into how visitors move, where pressure emerges and how infrastructure is used. Fragmented data sources, weak coordination between stakeholders and incomplete accommodation registration can further constrain adaptive destination management (Gretzel et al., 2015; Xiang et al., 2015). These limitations become especially visible in strongly seasonal destinations, where short periods of concentrated demand place substantial temporary pressure on transport systems, public space and local services.

Against this backdrop, the role of destination management organisations (DMOs) has evolved significantly over recent decades. Earlier models focused primarily on destination promotion, branding and visitor growth. More recent approaches emphasise coordination, stakeholder management, visitor flow management and the integration of tourism into wider systems such as mobility planning, spatial development and quality of life (Buhalis, 2000; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Stettler & Müller, 2024). Concepts such as destination stewardship reflect this broader transition from tourism marketing towards place-based governance.

However, implementation often lags behind strategic ambition. While sustainability, territorial balance, tourism intelligence and resident well-being are widely referenced in tourism strategies, many destinations still lack practical instruments capable of influencing visitor behaviour, coordinating fragmented stakeholders and generating actionable operational data. As a result, policy objectives frequently remain difficult to translate into day-to-day destination management practice.

One instrument that has gained increasing relevance in this context is the guest card. Traditionally, guest cards were primarily understood as visitor products offering discounts, bundled access or added convenience. More recent research suggests that advanced guest card systems can perform broader destination-management functions, particularly when they integrate public transport, attraction access, digital usability and data capture within a single framework (Sedláková et al., 2014; Mandić & Garbin Praničević, 2018; Fuchs et al., 2021). When embedded into overnight stays and automatically issued to visitors, such systems reduce barriers to use, expand participation and may influence behavioural choices more effectively than voluntary purchasable card models.

From this perspective, guest cards can be understood not merely as marketing products, but as operational governance instruments. They may encourage more sustainable mobility choices, support visitor dispersion, strengthen cooperation between transport and tourism actors, and generate valuable behavioural data for destination management. Rather than relying solely on restrictive regulation or costly infrastructure expansion, they offer the possibility of steering visitor behaviour through incentives, convenience and integrated access.

These questions are particularly relevant for the Costa Daurada, one of the principal tourism regions of Catalonia and the wider Mediterranean coast. The destination is characterised by strong seasonality, high visitor concentrations in coastal municipalities and recurring summer pressure on transport systems, parking capacity and public space, while inland municipalities capture a smaller share of tourism demand despite considerable heritage, wine, nature and cultural tourism potential (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025). In this sense, the Costa Daurada reflects a broader challenge common to mature tourism regions: the coexistence of high overall visitor volume with strongly uneven territorial distribution.

Such pressures are not merely theoretical. Over the past decade, local reporting has repeatedly highlighted seasonal congestion, parking shortages and saturation in coastal municipalities including Salou, Cambrils and Tarragona, suggesting structural rather than exceptional peak-season challenges (La Vanguardia, 2016; Diari Més, 2021; Diari de Tarragona, 2024). Municipal responses have included the expansion of regulated parking zones, new peripheral parking solutions and park-and-ride initiatives, while in parallel some seafront areas have seen parking removal and public-space recovery measures. This dual approach illustrates the tension between accommodating visitor demand and improving liveability in high-pressure tourism zones.

Mobility systems across the Costa Daurada also reveal broader fragmentation. While regional transport infrastructure exists, tourist mobility is not always supported through sufficiently integrated, intuitive or low-friction systems. Local examples include separate tourist shuttle initiatives, parallel transport solutions and historically inconsistent payment systems on bus services, where modern ticketing and contactless options have only gradually expanded (Diari de Tarragona, 2022; Diari Més, 2024; Diari de Tarragona, 2024). Such barriers can reinforce private car dependency and reduce the capacity of public transport to function as an effective visitor-management tool.

Additional complexities arise in relation to tourism intelligence and accommodation governance. Although tourism demand has recovered strongly, local reporting has also raised concerns regarding discrepancies between visitor activity and tourism tax revenues, suggesting possible underreporting and incomplete accommodation control in some segments. At the same time, enforcement actions against illegal tourist rentals have become increasingly prominent in public debate (Diari de Tarragona, 2024; Diari Més, 2025; La Ciutat, 2025). Such issues constrain evidence-based intervention in mobility planning, infrastructure management and territorial tourism strategy.

Public concerns related to overcrowding, neighbourhood change, housing pressure and the perceived imbalance between tourism benefits and local costs have also received growing attention. In Tarragona, debates around the expansion of tourist accommodation and the transformation of the historic Part Alta into an increasingly visitor-oriented environment illustrate how tourism pressure can affect residential identity and local acceptance. These debates mirror broader patterns observed across mature Mediterranean destinations, where tourism legitimacy increasingly depends on fairness, inclusion and quality of life for residents (El País, 2022; Diari de Tarragona, 2024; Diari Més, 2025).

Initial responses indicate growing recognition of this issue. Local initiatives such as the Passi Tarragoni, which extends access to cultural attractions for residents, and wider discussions around citizen-card models in municipalities such as Reus suggest increasing interest in systems that connect tourism infrastructure with local benefit creation (Diari Més, 2023; Diari de Tarragona, 2022). These developments are relevant because they point towards more inclusive models in which tourism-related assets can also generate visible value for local communities.

Recent strategic frameworks at municipal, regional and national level reinforce these priorities. The tourism strategy of Tarragona highlights the need for stronger governance, improved tourism intelligence and better alignment between tourism and resident quality of life (Ajuntament de Tarragona, 2026). At regional level, Costa Daurada strategy documents emphasise territorial balance, seasonality reduction, diversification and sustainable mobility (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025). At Catalan level, recent reforms to the tax on tourist stays broaden the intended use of tourism-generated revenues towards sustainability, deseasonalisation, infrastructure improvement, digitalisation, tourism intelligence and inspection capacity, indicating a wider policy shift from purely promotional funding models towards destination-management functions (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026). At Catalan and Spanish level, broader strategies likewise prioritise digitalisation, sustainability and data-driven tourism management (Agència Catalana de Turisme, 2025; Gobierno de España, 2025).

Taken together, these developments suggest that the central challenge for the Costa Daurada lies less in identifying strategic objectives than in identifying practical instruments capable of translating them into operational and measurable forms of destination management.

Against this background, this thesis examines the potential of a regional guest card model for the Costa Daurada as a destination-management instrument. Rather than conceptualising the guest card primarily as a marketing product, the study explores under which conditions such a system could contribute to more sustainable mobility, improved visitor dispersion, stronger tourism intelligence and greater social sustainability through resident-oriented benefit structures.

Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine the potential of a regional guest card model for the Costa Daurada as a multifunctional destination-management instrument, and to assess under which conditions such a system could address challenges related to mobility, visitor dispersion, tourism intelligence and social sustainability.

Based on this objective, the study is guided by the following main research question:

Under what conditions, and through which mechanisms, could the introduction of a regional guest card on the Costa Daurada contribute to more sustainable mobility, improved visitor dispersion, stronger tourism data availability and greater resident acceptance?

To address this overarching question, the analysis is structured around the following sub-questions:

Sustainable mobility and congestion

How could the inclusion of public transport within a regional guest card influence tourists' mobility behaviour and contribute to reducing traffic and parking pressure in coastal destinations?

Visitor dispersion

In what ways could a guest card be designed as a behavioural steering instrument to encourage spatial and temporal visitor dispersion beyond established tourist hotspots?

Tourism intelligence and destination management

How could a regional guest card improve tourism intelligence through more reliable accommodation-linked registration and better behavioural data on visitor movements and service use?

Resident-focused benefits and tourism acceptance

What potential effects could resident-focused tourism benefit structures have on local participation, perceived benefit distribution and tourism acceptance?

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 develops the literature review and conceptual framework underpinning the study. Chapter 3 explains the methodological design and comparative case-study approach. Chapter 4 develops a typology of guest card systems as the basis for empirical comparison. Chapter 5 analyses selected European cases and identifies key mechanisms, strengths and limitations. Chapter 6 evaluates the transferability of these findings to the Costa Daurada and outlines practical policy implications.

The final chapter summarises the principal findings, limitations and recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review / Conceptual Framework

2.1 Evolution of destination management

Destination management organisations (DMOs) have undergone significant transformation over recent decades. Traditionally focused on tourism promotion and demand generation, their remit has progressively expanded towards broader management, coordination and sustainability functions. This evolution reflects growing recognition that destinations are complex systems whose competitiveness depends not only on marketing success, but also on governance capacity, stakeholder alignment and the management of tourism impacts (Buhalis, 2000; Pike & Page, 2014).

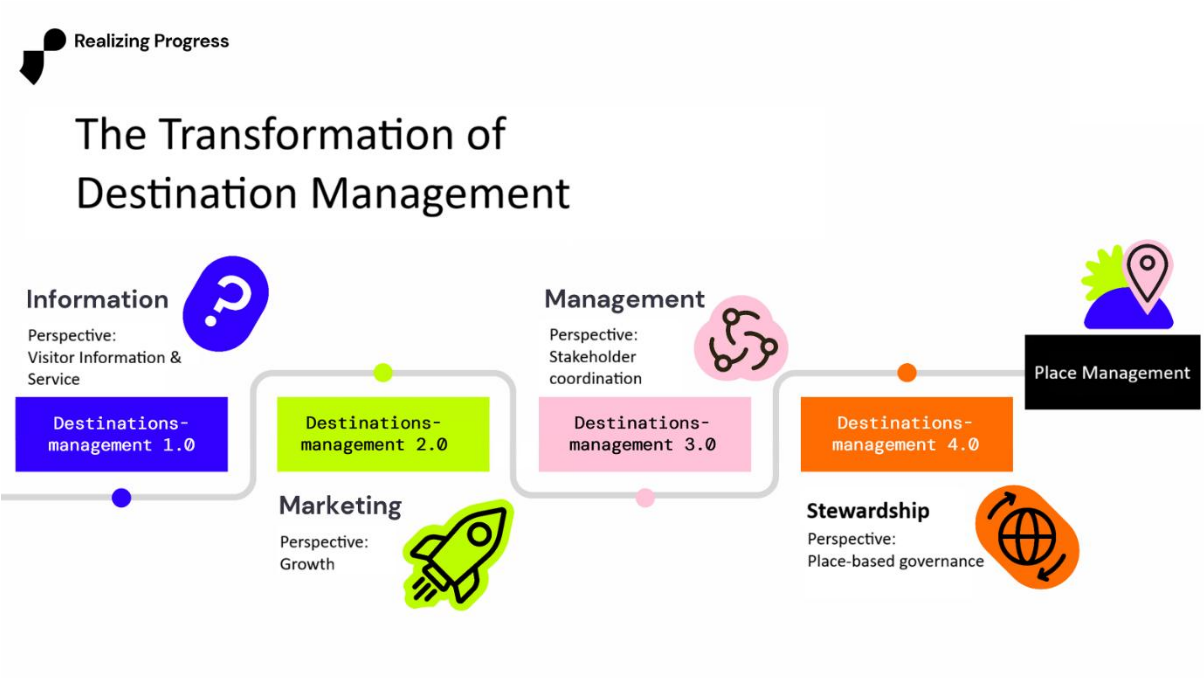

Figure 1 Evolution of destination management from information provision to place-based governance

Source: adapted from Realizing Progress (2025)

Early destination management models, often described retrospectively as Destination Management 1.0, were primarily promotion-oriented. DMOs concentrated on branding, visitor attraction and market visibility, with success largely measured through arrivals, overnight stays and tourism revenues. This reflected a period in which growth was widely assumed to generate positive outcomes for destinations and local communities.

As destinations matured and competition intensified, a second phase emerged in which DMOs increasingly adopted professional management functions beyond promotion. Often associated with Destination Management 2.0, this stage placed greater emphasis on product development, quality management, partnership building and visitor experience. While marketing remained central, destinations were increasingly understood as coordinated service systems requiring cooperation across public and private actors (Pagliara et al., 2022).

A third phase, frequently linked to Destination Management 3.0, reflected the growing influence of digitalisation, network governance and experience-based tourism. DMOs began to incorporate data analytics, stakeholder networks, co-creation and smarter service integration into their activities. Competitive advantage was increasingly associated with innovation, responsiveness and the ability to manage more fragmented visitor expectations (Höpken et al., 2015; Gretzel et al., 2015).

More recent debates point towards a fourth stage, often referred to as Destination Management 4.0, in which sustainability, resilience and place stewardship become central priorities. In this model, DMOs are expected to act less as promotional agencies and more as orchestrators of destination systems, balancing visitor demand with environmental limits, resident well-being and long-term territorial development (Stettler & Müller, 2024; Crabolu et al., 2026; Katemliadis et al., 2025). This reflects wider shifts in tourism policy towards governance models that prioritise quality of life, liveability and regenerative outcomes rather than growth alone.

Recent research also increasingly frames these organisations as Destination Development, Management and Marketing Organisations (DDMMOs), reflecting expanded responsibilities beyond promotion alone and a broader understanding of destination performance (Katemliadis et al., 2025). The terminology underlines that destination competitiveness is increasingly linked to long-term place development, coordinated management and community value creation, rather than marketing activity in isolation.

Accordingly, success for contemporary destination organisations can no longer be assessed solely through traditional volume indicators such as arrivals or overnight stays. Increasingly relevant measures include visitor dispersion, modal split, seasonality reduction, resident satisfaction, environmental performance, stakeholder cooperation and resilience capacity (OECD, 2020; UNWTO, 2018; Katemliadis et al., 2025). This indicates a broader redefinition of what effective destination management means in practice.

This shift also reflects broader debates around how tourism success itself is defined. Hartman (2022) distinguishes between growth-oriented "boosterist" definitions of success, impact-limiting approaches concerned with avoiding inequitable outcomes, and community-oriented perspectives in which tourism is considered successful when it creates socio-economic and cultural value for and by local communities. This distinction is important because the indicators used to define success shape what destination organisations prioritise, measure and govern.

However, recent literature also highlights a persistent implementation gap between strategic ambition and operational reality. While many organisations now adopt sustainability language and publish advanced strategies, day-to-day practices often remain strongly centred on promotion, growth targets and legacy KPI systems. Crabolu et al. (2026) argue that many destination organisations still struggle to translate regenerative or stewardship narratives into operating models, governance routines and measurable action. Similar observations appear in earlier research, suggesting that this tension is not new but structural in nature (Lai et al., 2006; Scuttari et al., 2025).

Several factors help explain this gap. Established funding models often depend on visitor growth, institutional mandates may remain promotion-oriented, and organisational capabilities do not always match expanded responsibilities. In addition, staff incentives and performance systems are frequently still tied to marketing outputs rather than broader sustainability outcomes. Fragmented stakeholder environments and weak cross-sector coordination can further slow implementation, particularly in mature destinations with multiple municipalities and competing interests (Scuttari et al., 2025).

The importance of implementation capacity is also reflected in recent work on sustainable destination development. d'Angella et al. (2025) identify a progression from awareness and agenda setting to action and monitoring, arguing that sustainability strategies mature only when DMOs develop the organisational capacity to operationalise and evaluate them. This is particularly relevant for guest card systems, which can help move destination sustainability from strategic intent towards measurable operational practice.

Closing this gap requires an institutional rethinking of what destination success looks like, how it is measured and how responsibilities are organised. Recent research increasingly argues that if destination organisations are expected to manage mobility, spatial balance, resident well-being and sustainability transitions, then governance structures, budgets and staff KPIs must be aligned with these wider objectives rather than legacy growth metrics (Katemliadis et al., 2025; Scuttari et al., 2025).

Within this context, practical instruments capable of converting strategic goals into everyday management tools become increasingly important. The Realizing Progress handbook conceptualises the evolution of destination management as a movement from guest information and marketing towards stakeholder orientation, common-good responsibility and ultimately what German-language practice refers to as

Lebensraummanagement, understood here as destination management focused on the destination as a lived space. This is useful for the present thesis as it confirms, from a practice-oriented perspective, that the DMO role is increasingly shifting from promotion towards coordination, moderation and place-based responsibility.

Rather than relying solely on policy statements, destinations require operational mechanisms that influence behaviour, support coordination and generate evidence for decision-making. Regional guest card systems can be understood as one such instrument, linking strategic objectives with practical implementation in ways explored throughout this thesis.

2.2 Visitor management and the central role of mobility

Visitor management has become an increasingly important component of contemporary destination governance. Rather than interpreting tourism pressure solely through aggregate visitor numbers, recent literature emphasises the spatial and temporal distribution of tourism flows and the ways in which visitor behaviour produces uneven impacts within destinations. This shifts analytical attention from tourism growth alone towards the management of when visitors arrive, where they concentrate, how long they stay and how they move through destination space (McKercher & Lau, 2008; Lew & McKercher, 2006; Shoval & Isaacson, 2010).

Empirical research consistently shows that tourist movement patterns are structured rather than random. Visitor flows are shaped by accessibility, attraction clustering, transport connectivity, time constraints and information availability, resulting in predictable concentrations in specific zones and routes (McKercher & Lau, 2008; Lew & McKercher, 2006). This helps explain why tourism pressure often emerges in localised hotspots rather than being evenly distributed across destinations.

This perspective is reinforced by the overtourism literature. Bauer et al. (2020) describe overtourism as a context-dependent phenomenon shaped not only by visitor volumes, but also by capacity limits, local sensitivities and social perceptions. Kagermeier and Erdmenger (2023) similarly emphasise that tourism pressure is spatially selective and often experienced most intensely by residents in highly affected neighbourhoods or sites. Together, these studies underline that the core issue is frequently not tourism quantity in itself, but how tourism is concentrated, experienced and managed.

Mobility plays a central role in shaping these outcomes. As Buhalis (2000) and Prideaux (2000) argue, transport systems are not merely supportive elements of tourism, but structural determinants of destination development. They influence accessibility, determine relative travel frictions between places and strongly affect which attractions, municipalities or landscapes become highly frequented while others remain peripheral. Mobility should therefore be understood not as a secondary operational issue, but as a key mechanism through which tourism pressure is produced and distributed.

This becomes particularly relevant in destinations characterised by strong private car dependency. Car-based tourism mobility offers flexibility and direct access, but often reinforces congestion, parking pressure, emissions, land consumption and seasonal infrastructure overload, especially in mature coastal and leisure destinations (Gronau, 2017). At the same time, modal choice is not determined solely by environmental attitudes. Research indicates that tourists' transport behaviour is strongly influenced by convenience, reliability, simplicity and perceived ease of use, often more than by price or sustainability concerns (Bursa et al., 2022; Zientara et al., 2024).

These dynamics are also visible in Mediterranean destinations relevant to this study. Research in the Costa Daurada using smart card data demonstrates that tourist mobility patterns are highly structured and concentrated along major corridors, coastal nodes and key attractions (Gutiérrez et al., 2020). Similarly, evidence from Mallorca shows that tourism intensity significantly affects resident mobility patterns and contributes to wider car dependency and congestion (Ruiz-Pérez & Seguí-Pons, 2020).

Taken together, these findings suggest that mobility should be understood not solely as a technical or infrastructural issue, but as a behavioural and systemic driver of tourism impacts. Quack et al. (2019) argue that tourism and transport are deeply interdependent systems whose planning and governance should not be treated separately. Visitor management therefore cannot be reduced to destination marketing or attraction management alone, but requires coordinated approaches linking mobility provision, spatial planning and tourism strategy.

From a destination management perspective, mobility becomes one of the most important operational levers available. Destinations may not be able to control why visitors travel, but they can influence how visitors move once they arrive and, to some extent, how they access the destination in the first place. Measures such as integrated ticketing, simplified public transport access, bundled service offers, real-time information and improved intermodality can therefore function as soft governance instruments that steer behaviour without relying exclusively on restriction or regulation (DTV, 2021; Ecoplan & CRED-T, 2025).

Consequently, effective visitor management must address mobility as a central field of intervention. Strategies aimed at reducing congestion, supporting more sustainable mobility and encouraging a wider territorial distribution of visitors depend not only on infrastructure itself, but also on its usability, accessibility and integration into the broader tourism system. This creates the conditions under which mobility-linked instruments such as integrated regional guest card systems become especially relevant for contemporary destination management.

2.3 Data-driven destination management

The increasing complexity of tourism systems has led to growing interest in data-driven approaches to destination management. Traditional tourism statistics, such as arrivals, overnight stays, occupancy rates and aggregate expenditure, remain useful for macro-level monitoring, but provide only limited insight into intra-destination behaviour and are often insufficient for managing spatial and temporal dynamics. They reveal how many visitors a destination receives, yet say far less about where visitors concentrate, how they move, which services they use or when pressure emerges within the destination. Conventional indicators therefore offer only a partial understanding of how tourism impacts are distributed across space and time (Gretzel et al., 2015; Del Chiappa & Baggio, 2015).

Advances in digital technologies have significantly expanded the possibilities for more granular tourism intelligence. Gretzel et al. (2015) describe this development as part of the broader shift towards smart tourism, characterised by interconnected systems and data-informed decision-making. Xiang et al. (2015) likewise highlight the growing importance of digital traces and user-generated data in capturing visitor behaviour and preferences. Together, these developments indicate a transition from static tourism measurement towards more dynamic and behavioural forms of destination intelligence.

Recent work on smart tourism similarly emphasises that technological capacity should be linked to sustainability-oriented management rather than treated as an end in itself. Akbaba (2024) argues that smart tourism destinations increasingly need to interpret and monitor evolving visitor preferences within a sustainability framework, while d'Angella et al. (2025) identify monitoring as a distinct maturity stage in sustainable destination development. This reinforces the importance of moving from data collection towards organisational learning and adaptive governance.

However, data-driven destination management also requires a critical perspective on technology. Digital tools can support monitoring, communication and visitor-flow management, but they can also amplify tourism pressure when platforms, reviews and social media accelerate the visibility of already crowded places. Research on Barcelona highlights this ambivalence: digital technologies may contribute to overtourism by rapidly spreading attention towards fashionable attractions and venues, yet similar technologies may also be used to monitor, manage and mitigate visitor pressure when embedded within coordinated destination governance (Bourliataux-Lajoinie et al., 2019). Technology should therefore not be treated as an automatic solution, but as a governance tool whose effects depend on planning, coordination and alignment with community needs. This also underlines the importance of data governance, including transparency, proportionality, privacy protection and clear public-interest purposes when visitor data are used for destination management.

Initial applications of data-driven approaches have frequently focused on mobility analysis. Studies using transport smart card systems demonstrate how usage data can be employed to identify movement patterns, peak flows, route concentrations and pressure points within destinations (Gutiérrez et al., 2020). Evidence from the Costa Daurada further illustrates the relevance of such approaches, showing that transaction-based mobility data can generate valuable insight into visitor flows and transport behaviour in a mature coastal destination (Gutiérrez et al., 2020).

At the same time, mobility data captures only one dimension of visitor behaviour. Knowing how visitors travel does not necessarily explain which attractions they use, how long they stay, how spending is distributed or how activities are sequenced across the stay. More recent research therefore points to the growing value of richer behavioural datasets that allow a more comprehensive understanding of visitor activity patterns and destination use (Confente et al., 2024; Guerrero & Dias, 2024; Hardy & Shoval, 2025; Padrón-Ávila & Hernández-Martín, 2020).

However, many data-driven tourism solutions face practical limitations in real-world destination contexts. Stand-alone monitoring applications that depend on active user participation, continuous location sharing or sustained engagement may suffer from low adoption rates, opt-out behaviour, battery consumption concerns or privacy sensitivities (Hardy et al., 2017). More technically complex systems may also exceed the financial or institutional capacities of many regional destinations. This suggests that the effectiveness of digital tourism tools often depends less on technological sophistication than on whether data collection is embedded within services users already perceive as valuable and convenient.

In this context, destination card systems, whether physical, digital or hybrid, offer a more practical and less intrusive model. Rather than relying primarily on explicit tracking, they generate data through actual transactions and service use when visitors access transport, attractions or participating services. Because information emerges through normal system usage, these models often require lower behavioural effort from users while producing data directly linked to destination management objectives.

For destination cards to function as robust data infrastructures, specific design conditions must be met. Dalle Nogare and Scuderi (2024) emphasise that effective systems should provide broad coverage across attractions and services, apply coherent pricing structures, remain stable over time and minimise self-selection bias. In particular, low pricing or integration into accommodation-linked funding mechanisms, such as tourist tax models, can improve uptake and help ensure that collected data better reflects the wider visitor population rather than only highly active subgroups.

Within this context, guest card systems are increasingly recognised as valuable tourism data infrastructures. They capture not only mobility patterns but also interactions with attractions, services and other consumption points. Fuchs et al. (2021) identify their growing relevance for destination intelligence, while Höpken et al. (2015) argue that integrating multiple tourism data sources enables more comprehensive knowledge generation than isolated datasets alone. Such systems can therefore support richer visitor profiles, including movement trajectories, activity sequences, service uptake and temporal demand patterns.

This is particularly valuable because it allows destinations to move from isolated data points towards longitudinal understandings of visitor behaviour across the entire stay. Rather than analysing single touchpoints, destinations can observe trajectories of concentration, dispersion and temporal variation. As Mandić and Garbin Praničević (2018) note, such insights create opportunities for more targeted and effective management interventions, especially in destinations facing seasonal peaks or uneven territorial demand.

Nevertheless, the availability of data alone does not guarantee effective management. As Del Chiappa and Baggio (2015) argue, the key challenge lies in translating data into actionable knowledge and embedding it within governance processes. This requires analytical capability as well as institutional structures able to integrate evidence into planning, stakeholder coordination and operational decision-making. Research on sustainable tourism governance has likewise identified recurring gaps between monitoring systems, policy ambitions and practical implementation (Scuttari et al., 2025).

Guest card systems are particularly significant in this regard as they combine behavioural influence with data generation. The same system that encourages public transport use, attraction dispersal or bundled destination consumption can simultaneously generate the evidence needed to evaluate and refine those strategies. They therefore create a feedback loop between intervention and learning.

As such, guest cards should be understood not merely as visitor products or marketing devices, but as data infrastructures for adaptive and evidence-based destination governance. This makes them especially relevant for destinations seeking practical tools that connect visitor management, behavioural steering and continuous organisational learning.

2.4 Guest cards as destination management instruments

Building on the role of data-driven systems, guest cards represent a particularly relevant instrument because they combine behavioural influence, system integration and data generation within a single platform. Traditionally, guest cards were conceptualised primarily as commercial instruments designed to enhance destination attractiveness by bundling discounts and services into a unified product (Mandić & Praničević, 2019). Within this perspective, their principal function lay in increasing visitor spending, length of stay and perceived value.

More recent research, however, highlights that advanced guest card models extend far beyond this marketing function and can be understood as integrated destination management tools. In particular, regional systems automatically issued to overnight guests represent a shift from optional consumption products towards embedded destination infrastructures. Sedláková et al. (2014) describe such systems as multi-functional instruments that combine access, coordination and information generation, thereby integrating multiple destination management functions within a single platform.

A defining characteristic of these systems is their capacity to connect key components of the destination, including public transport, attractions and local services. This creates a unified access system that simultaneously shapes visitor behaviour and facilitates coordination among stakeholders. In this context, guest cards can also contribute to value co-creation processes by influencing how visitors interact with services and providers, thereby shaping both the visitor experience and the perception of the destination as an integrated system (Stojanovic & Andreu Simó, 2015).

From a governance perspective, this integrative function is particularly significant in addressing coordination challenges inherent in fragmented tourism systems. Destinations typically consist of numerous independent actors, including accommodation providers, transport operators and attractions, whose individual decision-making may lead to suboptimal system outcomes. Alvarez-Albelo and Martínez-González (2024) argue that such fragmentation can result in coordination failures comparable to "anti-commons" situations, where underutilisation arises due to a lack of cooperation. Guest card systems can therefore act as coordination mechanisms that align incentives across stakeholders and support more efficient use of destination resources.

At the same time, the implementation of such systems introduces economic and governance complexities. Guest cards function as price-coordination mechanisms by bundling complementary and substitute services. Recent microeconomic modelling suggests that while such bundling can increase overall welfare and supplier revenues through demand stimulation, it may also influence pricing behaviour within the system. Reduced transport costs, for example, may alter demand elasticity and affect attraction pricing strategies (Messori et al., 2025). This underlines the importance of carefully designed revenue-sharing arrangements and governance structures.

From a behavioural perspective, guest cards operate as instruments of soft governance. Rather than restricting visitor choices, they influence behaviour by shaping incentives, accessibility and convenience. As Kähler (2023) argues, their effectiveness lies in steering behaviour indirectly through bundled offers and simplified access, closely aligning with the concept of nudging. Behavioural change is therefore achieved by modifying the choice architecture rather than imposing direct constraints.

A key mechanism underlying this effect is the provision of low-barrier access to mobility and services. Empirical research shows that tourists prioritise convenience and travel time over cost considerations (Bursa et al., 2022). Guest cards respond to this by eliminating the need for separate ticket purchases, simplifying access to public transport and integrating multiple services into a single system. In doing so, they make more sustainable options not only available, but often the most convenient choice.

This behavioural effect is supported by empirical evidence. A quantitative study in South Tyrol demonstrates that the availability of a guest card including free public transport significantly increases tourists' use of public transport during their stay. The presence of a guest card emerged as the most influential factor in explaining modal choice, exceeding the impact of socio-demographic characteristics, environmental attitudes and prior mobility behaviour (Bausch et al., 2024). Further evidence shows that integrated ticketing approaches combining accommodation and public transport can significantly reduce car dependency by lowering financial and psychological barriers (Gronau, 2017; Kuster & Laesser, 2024).

Beyond behavioural and coordination functions, guest cards can also support destination intelligence. Digital systems generate information on visitor movements, service usage and spatial distribution patterns, allowing destinations to better understand demand and refine management strategies. In this sense, guest cards can create a feedback loop in which behavioural interventions simultaneously generate the evidence needed to evaluate their effectiveness.

Finally, guest cards are increasingly discussed in the context of sustainability transitions. By encouraging more efficient use of infrastructure, reducing environmental impacts and supporting a more balanced spatial distribution of visitors, they can contribute to broader sustainability objectives (Myrovali et al., 2023).

In combination, these findings suggest that guest cards should be understood not merely as commercial tourism products, but as multi-functional governance instruments that integrate behavioural influence, stakeholder coordination and data generation within a single system. Their significance lies in their ability to operationalise key destination management objectives, including mobility transformation, visitor dispersion and evidence-based governance, through a coherent and scalable mechanism. This integrated role forms the basis for their conceptualisation as place-based governance infrastructure developed in the following framework.

For this reason, guest cards can be understood as one of the relatively rare tourism instruments capable of simultaneously influencing visitor behaviour, coordinating actors, generating management intelligence and, where resident-oriented layers are included, contributing to more visible local benefit-sharing.

2.5 Destination stewardship and place-based governance

Sustainable tourism governance increasingly requires a shift from visitor-centred management towards a broader understanding of destinations as living places in which tourism interacts with everyday life. This perspective is reflected in the concept of destination stewardship, which reframes tourism as part of wider place-based governance rather than as an isolated economic sector. International policy frameworks similarly emphasise the need to integrate tourism into broader territorial, environmental and community development strategies (OECD, 2020; UNWTO, 2018).

Destination stewardship focuses on long-term responsibility for the development of places, balancing economic benefits with environmental sustainability and social well-being. It aligns with wider tourism governance debates that call for more integrated, collaborative and adaptive management approaches (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Gretzel et al., 2015). The WTTC, Travel Foundation and European Tourism Futures Institute define destination stewardship as an approach that balances the needs of the destination and its communities, operates with legitimacy and consent, and depends on participatory governance, clear mandates, knowledge, data and the identification of mutual interests across public, private and community actors (WTTC et al., 2021). In this sense, stewardship is not simply a normative aspiration, but a governance model requiring institutional capacity, shared information and collaborative decision-making.

This resident-centred understanding of stewardship also responds to a persistent weakness in tourism planning. Moscardo (2011) argues that formal tourism planning models have often assigned residents only a minor role, with external public and private actors and their assumptions about tourist needs dominating decision-making. From a governance perspective, this is problematic because it treats residents as passive recipients of tourism impacts rather than as knowledge holders and co-producers of destination development. Place-based governance therefore requires not only stakeholder coordination in general, but mechanisms through which residents can influence how tourism is defined, planned and evaluated.

From this perspective, tourism cannot be managed in isolation. Destinations are shaped by the interaction of tourism with transport systems, land use, housing markets, labour dynamics and public space. Binder (2021) argues that destinations should therefore be understood as integrated systems in which tourism, mobility and urban or regional development are closely interconnected. Similarly, the OECD (2020) highlights that tourism policy should be embedded within wider domains such as transport, regional planning and sustainability policy. Decisions in one field inevitably affect outcomes in others, reinforcing the need for cross-sectoral governance.

This argument is strongly echoed in the Realizing Progress handbook (2026), which states that tourism affects housing markets, land use, mobility systems, natural spaces and cultural spaces, and therefore forms part of wider social negotiation processes rather than a separate visitor economy. This supports the conceptual position taken in this thesis: a guest card for the Costa Daurada should not be treated as a tourism product alone, but as a potential interface between tourism, mobility, infrastructure, public space and community benefit.

A key implication of this perspective is that tourism impacts are rarely distributed evenly. Research shows that tourism-related pressures are often concentrated in specific areas such as historic centres, beach zones or high-profile attractions rather than affecting entire destinations uniformly (Zeiss & Mallwitz, 2024). This highlights the importance of place-sensitive and context-specific interventions, including visitor dispersion, mobility management and differentiated public space strategies, rather than relying solely on aggregate growth controls.

The concept of sense of place remains relevant within this framework. It refers to the identity, meaning and emotional significance associated with a location, shaped by both physical characteristics and social practices. Maintaining this distinctiveness matters because destinations derive much of their attractiveness from qualities rooted in local culture, landscape and community life. If tourism development erodes these attributes, it may weaken both resident well-being and the long-term visitor appeal of the destination (Destination Stewardship Center, n.d.).

Closely related to this is place attachment, which describes the emotional bond individuals develop with specific places. Recent research suggests that stronger place attachment can encourage more responsible and pro-environmental behaviour among visitors, including greater support for conservation and more respectful engagement with local environments (Rezapouraghdam et al., 2025). For residents, place attachment can also shape attitudes towards tourism development, strengthening support when tourism is perceived to enhance local quality of life and generating resistance when it is seen to threaten valued place characteristics.

This broader perspective also challenges traditional definitions of tourism success. Indicators such as visitor numbers, overnight stays or aggregate expenditure remain relevant, but are increasingly seen as insufficient on their own. Empirical research demonstrates that tourism development is closely linked to residents' life satisfaction and subjective well-being, highlighting the need to evaluate tourism beyond purely economic outputs. Nawijn and Mitas (2012), in their study of Palma de Mallorca, show that resident attitudes towards tourism are associated with subjective well-being in a mature Mediterranean destination, underlining that tourism legitimacy depends not only on economic performance, but also on how tourism affects everyday quality of life in highly tourism-dependent places. Similar conclusions are reflected in broader research linking tourism development with resident well-being (Schubert et al., 2024). This is also reflected in international frameworks that emphasise inclusive growth, community well-being and destination resilience as core objectives of sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2018).

Within this framework, tourism governance is increasingly concerned with balancing competing uses of space and resources, ensuring that destinations remain functional and liveable for residents while accommodating visitor demand. This requires moving beyond reactive management towards proactive strategies that integrate tourism into wider planning systems, including mobility, housing, public space and regional development (Quack et al., 2019).

Consequently, destination stewardship provides an important conceptual foundation for understanding tourism not as an isolated sector, but as part of a wider system of place-based governance. It links governance structures, spatial development and community well-being with behavioural dimensions such as sense of place and place attachment. This perspective underlines the need for integrated management instruments capable of aligning tourism development with broader societal objectives and operationalising sustainability within complex destination systems.

2.6 Resident acceptance, fairness and benefit systems

Building on the perspective of destination stewardship, sustainable tourism governance requires not only the integration of tourism into place-based systems, but also the maintenance of resident acceptance as a core condition for long-term viability. Tourism takes place within lived environments, and its legitimacy ultimately depends on the continued support of local communities. Resident acceptance should therefore be understood not as a secondary social outcome, but as a central governance condition underpinning the sustainability of tourism systems. This is especially relevant in mature Mediterranean destinations where tourism legitimacy is increasingly contested.

Social exchange theory provides a foundational framework for understanding this relationship. It suggests that residents support tourism when perceived benefits outweigh associated costs and withdraw support when negative impacts dominate (Ap, 1992; Nunkoo & So, 2016). However, more recent research shows that resident support cannot be explained by a simple economic benefit-cost calculation alone. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) demonstrate that community support is influenced by perceived benefits, perceived costs and community satisfaction, while perceived benefits are themselves shaped by institutional trust, residents' perceived power to influence tourism, neighbourhood conditions and community satisfaction. Resident acceptance is therefore also a question of trust, participation and governance credibility.

This relational dimension is reinforced by Su and Swanson (2020), who show that residents' personal benefits from tourism influence support for tourism development through community satisfaction, community identification and quality of life. This suggests that resident acceptance is strengthened not only when tourism produces benefits, but when those benefits reinforce residents' relationship with the community itself.

This broader interpretation is important because tourism-related impacts are rarely experienced uniformly across destinations. Residents in high-intensity areas, such as historic centres, coastal zones or major attraction nodes, are more likely to experience congestion, noise, rising living costs, pressure on infrastructure and reduced access to public space (Zeiss & Mallwitz, 2024). Recent research on resident quality of life further shows that these effects are both spatially and temporally differentiated. Su, Yang and Swanson (2022) argue that residents' material, non-material and overall quality of life vary across the tourism area life cycle and differ between core and peripheral areas. This supports the view that tourism acceptance depends not only on aggregate destination performance, but on how tourism benefits and pressures are distributed across places and over time.

Recent evidence from Spain reinforces the relevance of this perspective in urban heritage destinations. Caro-Carretero and Monroy-Rodríguez (2025), in their study of Cáceres, show that residents recognise tourism's economic and cultural benefits but also express concerns about socio-economic and cultural impacts, gentrification and the need to balance tourism growth with residents' needs. This supports the argument that resident perceptions should be incorporated proactively into sustainable tourism management before tensions become entrenched.

Quality of life provides a particularly relevant lens for understanding these dynamics. Rather than treating resident attitudes as isolated opinions, quality-of-life research examines how tourism affects concrete life domains such as material well-being, community well-being, emotional well-being, health and safety, recreation opportunities and everyday liveability. Earlier work by Andereck and Nyaupane (2011) helped shift resident-attitude research towards the explicit examination of tourism's perceived effects on quality of life, while Kim, Uysal and Sirgy (2013) show that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts influence satisfaction with specific life domains, which in turn affects overall life satisfaction.

Similarly, Woo, Kim and Uysal (2015) demonstrate that the perceived value of tourism development influences material and non-material life-domain satisfaction, contributes to overall quality of life and predicts support for further tourism development. In this sense, resident support is not simply an attitude towards tourism as an industry, but a reflection of how tourism is perceived to affect everyday life.

A central determinant of this perception is fairness. Residents are more likely to support tourism when they believe that benefits are shared, decision-making processes are transparent and they are not disproportionately burdened by negative externalities. Conversely, perceived exclusion, limited influence over tourism decisions or unequal access to tourism-generated benefits can undermine support even in economically successful destinations. Su, Huang and Nejati (2019) provide a useful justice-based perspective, distinguishing between procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice. Procedural justice concerns whether residents perceive decision-making processes as fair and participatory. Distributive justice concerns whether resources, costs and benefits are allocated fairly. Interactional justice concerns whether residents are treated respectfully and receive open and timely communication. These dimensions are particularly relevant for destination governance as they link fairness perceptions with community support, place identification and resident quality of life.

This also links resident acceptance to destination social responsibility. While corporate social responsibility is usually associated with individual firms, destination social responsibility extends the idea to the collective conduct of destination stakeholders. Su, Swanson and He (2020) argue that destination social responsibility can be assessed from the resident perspective and can help destination managers understand how residents evaluate the destination's wider social, environmental and community-oriented responsibilities. This is important because destinations are not single organisations, but networks of municipalities, accommodation providers, transport operators, attractions, residents and visitors. Social responsibility therefore depends on whether the destination system as a whole is perceived to generate shared value and address its externalities.

Where such responsibilities are neglected, tensions may become visible in overtourism contexts, especially where tourism pressure is perceived to exceed local tolerance thresholds. Overtourism research further illustrates the consequences of weak resident acceptance. Where tourism pressure is perceived to exceed local tolerance thresholds, destinations may experience irritation, antagonism or active rejection. Bauer et al. (2020) frame overtourism as a phenomenon situated between acceptance and aversion, shaped by perceptions of crowding, carrying capacity and socio-economic conflict. Kuščer and Mihalič (2019) similarly show that resident attitudes towards overtourism are influenced not only by perceived impacts, but also by stakeholder cooperation. This suggests that cooperation, communication and visible management responses can mitigate negative perceptions, while unmanaged growth and weak participation may accelerate rejection dynamics.

In this context, the provision of tangible and visible resident benefits plays a crucial role. Improvements in public infrastructure, enhanced mobility options and access to cultural, leisure and recreational services can contribute to a more positive perception of tourism by demonstrating that it contributes to the broader public good rather than serving visitors alone. Access is particularly important, as it determines whether residents experience tourism infrastructure as a shared resource or as a system primarily designed for outsiders.

Resident-oriented instruments represent one approach to strengthening this sense of inclusion. Concepts such as resident cards extend access to tourism-related services, including public transport, attractions and recreational facilities, to local populations. Although still relatively under-researched, these instruments reflect a broader shift towards integrating residents more directly into tourism systems and benefit structures. They can also be interpreted as practical expressions of distributive justice and destination social responsibility, especially when they convert tourism-generated revenue, infrastructure and partnerships into visible local value.

This perspective is especially relevant in the context of integrated guest card systems. While traditionally designed for visitors, such systems can be adapted to include resident access, thereby extending the logic of bundled services and integrated mobility to local communities. Evidence from instruments such as the Leisure Card Tyrol indicates that opening integrated systems to residents can generate measurable benefits, including improved quality of life, increased participation in leisure activities and higher levels of tourism acceptance (Schnitzer et al., 2018; Seidl & Schnitzer, 2020). Such models suggest that guest cards can contribute not only to visitor management, but also to resident well-being and social legitimacy.

At the same time, the implementation of such models raises important considerations related to equity, governance and regulation. Differentiated access or pricing structures must be carefully designed to avoid perceptions of unfairness and to comply with legal frameworks, particularly within the European context. The challenge is therefore not simply to give residents discounts, but to design benefit systems that are transparent, inclusive, financially viable and aligned with wider destination objectives.

Overall, resident acceptance emerges as a central outcome of tourism governance rather than a peripheral consideration. Ensuring that tourism generates shared benefits, is perceived as fair and provides accessible infrastructure is essential for maintaining the social licence on which tourism ultimately depends. This reinforces the need for integrated management approaches that combine spatial, behavioural and social dimensions within a coherent governance system, while highlighting how guest and resident card models can support more inclusive and balanced destination development.

2.7 Conceptual framework

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that sustainable destination management cannot be effectively addressed through isolated interventions, but requires an integrated understanding of tourism as a behavioural, spatial and governance-driven system. Rather than focusing solely on visitor numbers, contemporary research increasingly emphasises mobility patterns, stakeholder coordination, data-informed management and resident perceptions as the factors through which tourism impacts are produced and negotiated. This broader perspective is synthesised in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2.

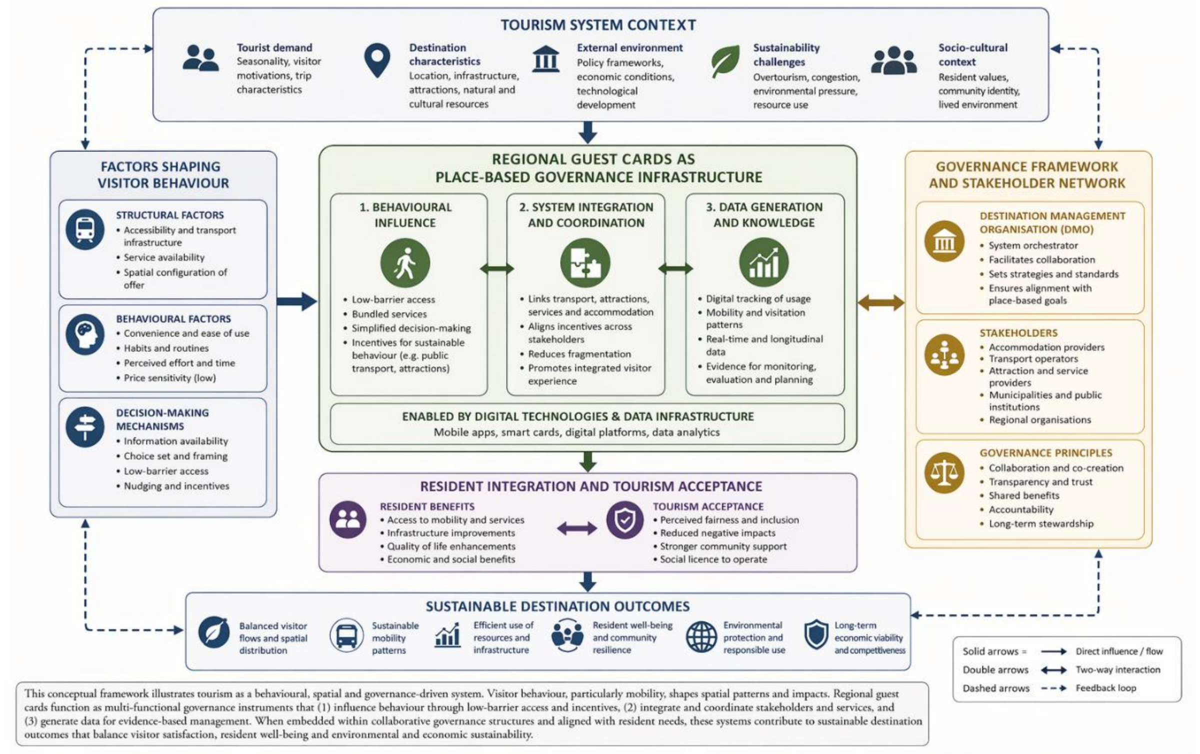

Figure 2 Conceptual framework – Regional guest cards as place-based governance infrastructure

Source: own elaboration

At the highest level, the framework situates tourism within a wider system context shaped by tourist demand, destination characteristics, external policy and economic conditions, sustainability challenges and socio-cultural dynamics. Visitor seasonality, travel motivations and market segments interact with destination assets such as infrastructure, attractions and natural or cultural resources. Tourism systems are further influenced by regulation, technological change and macroeconomic conditions, while pressures such as congestion, environmental stress and resource use shape management priorities. Resident values, community identity and the lived character of places form an equally important socio-cultural context.

A central proposition of the framework is that tourism pressure is not determined primarily by visitor volume alone, but by the behavioural and spatial distribution of visitors within destinations. Mobility behaviour therefore emerges as a key mechanism through which tourism impacts are generated and distributed. Patterns of movement influence where visitors concentrate, when congestion occurs, which areas remain peripheral and how infrastructure is used. Prior research has shown that tourism pressures are often highly localised and shaped by accessibility, movement routines and attraction clustering rather than by aggregate demand alone (Bauer et al., 2020; Zeiss & Mallwitz, 2024).

For this reason, the framework identifies three groups of factors shaping visitor behaviour. The first are structural factors, including transport infrastructure, accessibility, service availability and the spatial configuration of tourism supply. The second are behavioural factors such as convenience, habits, perceived effort, travel time sensitivity and limited price responsiveness. Studies indicate that tourists frequently prioritise ease of use and convenience over purely financial considerations when making mobility decisions (Bursa et al., 2022; Zientara et al., 2024). The third group concerns decision-making mechanisms, including information availability, framing effects, low-barrier access and nudging. Together, these factors influence how visitors move through destinations and therefore how tourism impacts are spatially expressed.

Within this wider system, regional guest cards are conceptualised as place-based governance infrastructure rather than simply visitor products. Their significance lies in the fact that they combine multiple destination management functions within one operational mechanism. The framework identifies three core functional dimensions.

The first dimension is behavioural influence. Guest cards can reduce friction in decision-making by offering low-barrier access, bundled services and simplified mobility options. By lowering transaction costs and making sustainable choices more convenient, they can encourage behavioural shifts without restricting visitor freedom. This reflects soft governance approaches in which behaviour is influenced through incentives and choice architecture rather than direct regulation. Evidence from South Tyrol shows that guest cards including free public transport significantly increase tourist public transport use (Bausch et al., 2024).

The second dimension is system integration and coordination. Guest card systems can link transport providers, attractions, accommodation businesses, municipalities and tourism organisations within a shared operational platform. In fragmented tourism systems, where many actors pursue individual objectives, such integration can reduce coordination failures, create more coherent visitor experiences and strengthen cross-sector collaboration.

The third dimension is data generation and knowledge creation. Digital guest card systems can generate valuable information on transport use, attraction visits, service uptake and spatial distribution patterns. Fuchs et al. (2021) describe such systems as "big data generators", underlining their potential to function not only as service delivery systems, but also as management intelligence infrastructures that support monitoring, evaluation and adaptive destination governance.

These three functional dimensions are mutually reinforcing rather than separate. Behavioural interventions generate usage data; better data supports system optimisation;

stronger coordination enables more effective behavioural design. The framework therefore conceptualises guest cards as operating through iterative feedback loops rather than linear cause-effect relationships.

These conceptual dimensions are operationalised in Chapter 3 through a more detailed analytical framework covering access and reach, mobility influence, spatial effects, governance and funding, data potential, social legitimacy and economic viability.

A further central component of the model is resident integration and tourism acceptance. Sustainable tourism governance depends not only on efficient visitor management, but also on maintaining legitimacy within host communities. Resident acceptance is shaped by perceived benefits and costs, but also by quality of life, fairness, trust, participation and the spatial distribution of tourism pressures. Resident benefits such as improved mobility, better infrastructure, enhanced quality of life or wider access to leisure and cultural services can strengthen support for tourism, while perceptions of unfairness, exclusion or weak participation may weaken acceptance (Ap, 1992; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Woo et al., 2015; Su, Huang, & Nejati, 2019).

The framework therefore treats resident benefits and tourism acceptance as a connected domain. Where tourism systems visibly generate shared value, improve access and distribute benefits fairly, stronger community support and social licence to operate become more likely. This is particularly relevant in mature destinations where residents experience congestion, pressure on public space or seasonal disruption. In this sense, resident-oriented guest card or benefit systems can be interpreted not only as promotional tools, but as practical mechanisms for destination social responsibility and place-based legitimacy.

Such outcomes also imply a different understanding of destination success, one that moves beyond volume growth towards monitored, shared and community-sensitive value creation (Hartman, 2022; WTTC et al., 2021; d'Angella et al., 2025). These include more balanced visitor flows and spatial distribution, more sustainable mobility patterns, more efficient use of infrastructure and resources, stronger resident well-being and community resilience, improved environmental performance and long-term economic viability. These outcomes are interdependent: improved mobility may support visitor dispersion, resident support may enable further policy innovation, and better data may strengthen environmental management.

Overall, the conceptual framework positions sustainable destination management as a dynamic governance process in which visitor behaviour, institutional coordination, resident legitimacy and data-informed learning interact continuously. Within this system, regional guest cards are understood as practical governance infrastructures capable of translating strategic objectives into operational mechanisms.

This framework provides the analytical foundation for the empirical chapters of the thesis. The subsequent case analysis evaluates selected guest card systems according to their capacity to influence behaviour, integrate stakeholders, generate usable data and contribute to socially balanced and sustainable destination development. In doing so, the study assesses the relevance and transferability of such models to the Costa Daurada as a mature Mediterranean destination facing challenges of seasonality, car dependency, spatial concentration and fragmented governance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design in order to examine the potential of a regional guest card model as a destination management instrument for the Costa Daurada. The central objective is not to test isolated causal relationships statistically, but to analyse how different tourism card systems are designed, governed and operationalised across varying destination contexts, and which mechanisms, constraints and transferable lessons may be relevant for the Costa Daurada.

A comparative case study approach is particularly appropriate for analysing complex tourism-policy instruments whose outcomes depend on institutional settings, stakeholder relations, territorial structures and behavioural responses rather than on single variables alone (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018; Thomas, 2021). Guest card systems are not merely promotional products or discount tools. Depending on their design, they may function simultaneously as mobility instruments, visitor-dispersion mechanisms, governance platforms, data infrastructures, financing models, commercial products or tools for strengthening territorial legitimacy and shared value.

The research therefore treats guest cards as embedded governance arrangements situated within broader destination systems. Their relevance cannot be understood solely through pricing or uptake figures, but through the interaction between transport networks, accommodation structures, local taxation systems, political support, stakeholder coordination and destination strategy.

The study is theory-informed and builds directly on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2. There, guest cards were interpreted as potential place-based governance infrastructures operating across several dimensions: mobility behaviour, spatial distribution of visitors, stakeholder coordination, destination intelligence, economic functionality and social legitimacy. Chapter 3 translates that conceptual discussion into an empirical research strategy.

The applied orientation of the thesis further justifies the chosen design. The Costa Daurada does not currently operate a regional guest card system of the type analysed in this study. Direct local programme evaluation is therefore not possible. Insight must instead be generated through structured comparison of external cases whose experiences may inform a context-sensitive implementation discussion.

Accordingly, the research combines within-case analysis and cross-case synthesis. Individual systems are first examined in their own territorial and institutional context.

Findings are then compared across the wider portfolio in order to identify recurring patterns, key contrasts and realistic transferability conditions for the Costa Daurada.

3.2 Case selection

The empirical analysis is based on purposive case selection. Cases were not chosen to achieve statistical representativeness, but to capture meaningful variation across guest card and visitor-pass systems and to compare contrasting governance, funding and functional logics. This follows established comparative case study practice, in which cases are selected for their analytical relevance, diversity and capacity to illuminate broader patterns rather than to represent a wider population statistically.

The selection process built on the broader mapping and typology exercise presented in Chapter 4. Cases were subsequently refined during the research process according to six criteria:

- degree of integration between mobility, attractions and tourism services
- relevance for sustainable mobility and visitor dispersion
- governance complexity and stakeholder coordination requirements
- behavioural steering potential
- inclusion of resident-facing or broader public-value elements
- availability of sufficiently reliable public information

The final portfolio consists of a set of principal comparative case studies examined in substantial depth, complemented by shorter additional examples used selectively to widen the comparative perspective.

The principal case studies are:

- Südtirol Guest Pass
- Trentino Guest Card
- Bodensee region (centred on the Echt Bodensee Card)
- Ticino Ticket
- South-Western German cluster schemes: KONUS Gästekarte, DreiWelten Card, SchwarzwaldCard, with Schwarzwald Plus / Heimatkarte as an additional hybrid host-based comparator
- Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz / Gästekarte mobil
- Thüringer Wald Card

- MeineCardPlus and AuszeitCardPlus (GrimmHeimat NordHessen)
- Urban commercial card models: Barcelona Card and Granada Card

In addition, a second layer of shorter comparative examples was incorporated where useful for illustrating specific strategic variants, niche approaches or emerging patterns. These include:

- Chiemgau Karte
- Salzburg Guest Mobility Ticket
- Kärnten Card & Austrian Sommerkarten (for example Schladming-Dachstein, Zell am See-Kaprun and related models)
- Oskar Gästekarte
- Appenzeller Ferienkarte
- Côte d'Azur Pass
- Dubrovnik Pass
- Tarjeta Turística Amigos de Segovia

This breadth is intentional. The thesis does not assume that tourism card systems can be cleanly divided into a few rigid categories. In practice, many combine elements of mobility entitlement, attraction bundling, accommodation-linked benefits, commercial retail products, seasonality management, resident inclusion or labour-market support. Some also evolve over time in response to changing policy priorities, funding pressures or governance reforms.

The purpose of the sample is therefore not to force each case into an artificial typology, but to compare a diverse portfolio of real-world systems in order to identify recurring mechanisms, major contrasts and realistic transferability conditions for the Costa Daurada.

Not all cases are examined with identical depth. The principal cases provide the core analytical evidence base, while the shorter additional examples are used selectively to reinforce, challenge or nuance broader comparative findings. This differentiated treatment reflects analytical relevance and source availability rather than any implied ranking of success.

3.3 Data collection

The study is based exclusively on secondary data. Sources include official destination management organisation websites, programme documentation, transport authority publications, tourism strategies, municipal and regional policy documents, academic literature, industry reports and, where relevant, reputable media coverage concerning implementation debates, governance conflicts or operational challenges.

The use of secondary data is appropriate for several reasons. First, the research focuses primarily on institutional design, governance structures, financing models and documented functions rather than on individual-level tourist attitudes requiring original survey research. Second, the multi-case international scope of the thesis would make primary fieldwork across numerous destinations disproportionate within the limits of a Master's dissertation. Third, many of the most relevant attributes of guest card systems, such as eligibility rules, transport inclusion, partner structures, public pricing and tourist-tax linkages, are publicly documented.

Where available, peer-reviewed academic and official policy sources were prioritised over promotional materials. In several cases, publicly accessible operational evidence such as annual reports, pricing schedules, partner information, parliamentary records, procurement documents or stakeholder interviews published in reputable media provided an important supplementary evidence base. Media sources were used selectively, particularly where they offered insight into political tensions, pricing debates, implementation barriers or stakeholder reactions not visible in official communication.

Because information quality varies across destinations, triangulation was applied wherever possible. Claims relating to governance arrangements, operational scope, financial structures or reported outcomes were cross-checked across multiple source types. Rather than seeking identical quantitative indicators for every case, the study focuses on comparable structural dimensions that can be assessed consistently despite uneven data availability.

The resulting evidence base can be understood as consisting of four broad tiers:

- peer-reviewed academic literature
- official policy, transport and public-sector documentation
- institutional programme material and destination communication
- reputable media reporting used mainly for contextualisation

Where claims rely primarily on institutional or media sources, they should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive.

3.4 Analytical framework

The empirical analysis is structured through a theory-informed framework derived from the literature review and conceptual model developed in Chapter 2. While Chapter 4 classifies broad model types, the present framework evaluates how selected systems function in practice as destination management instruments.

Because guest card systems are multi-dimensional arrangements rather than single products, the case analysis applies seven interrelated analytical dimensions.

1. Access model and user reach

This dimension examines how the card is distributed and who can realistically use it. Relevant aspects include automatic issuance through accommodation providers, purchasable retail models, host-funded participation, minimum-stay requirements and resident access options. These factors strongly influence uptake and behavioural reach.

2. Mobility and behavioural influence

This dimension assesses whether and how the system affects tourist mobility choices. Relevant aspects include public transport integration, reduction of ticketing friction, modal-shift incentives, ease of use and potential reduction of private car dependency.

3. Visitor dispersion and spatial effects

This dimension evaluates whether the system encourages movement beyond established hotspots, supports peripheral attractions, broadens territorial use or helps mitigate concentrated visitor pressure.

4. Governance, funding and stakeholder coordination

This dimension analyses institutional leadership, partnership structures, financing logic, reimbursement mechanisms and cooperation between municipalities, transport providers, attractions, accommodation businesses and destination organisations.

5. Data generation and digital destination intelligence

This dimension assesses whether the system generates usable information regarding visitor behaviour, transport use or attraction uptake, and whether digital infrastructures support evidence-based management, CRM or adaptive planning.

6. Social legitimacy and shared value

This dimension examines whether tourism-generated benefits are shared directly or indirectly with residents, employees, volunteers or local businesses, whether fairness concerns are addressed, and whether the system may strengthen local acceptance of tourism activity.

7. Economic and organisational viability

This dimension considers pricing logic, commercial attractiveness, administrative complexity, long-term financial sustainability and the feasibility of maintaining or scaling the model.

These dimensions ensure continuity between the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 and the empirical analysis in Chapter 5. They also allow structurally different systems to be assessed through a common lens without assuming identical institutional contexts.

3.5 Method of analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis combined with structured cross-case comparison.

In a first stage, the principal case studies were analysed individually. For each case, relevant material was systematically reviewed in order to establish institutional context, governance model, operational design and strategic purpose. This within-case stage reduces the risk of comparing superficially similar systems that in practice operate under very different territorial or political conditions.

In a second stage, findings were coded according to the seven analytical dimensions outlined above. This enabled consistent comparison across heterogeneous source materials and across cases with varying data depth.

In a third stage, cross-case synthesis was conducted in order to identify recurring mechanisms, meaningful contrasts and broader design patterns. Particular attention was paid to relationships between access logic, funding model, governance complexity and destination-management functionality. This included questions such as:

- whether accommodation-linked automatic issuance appears more effective than optional purchase models in achieving broad uptake
- whether transport integration is associated with stronger behavioural steering potential
- whether resident-facing or shared-value elements appear linked to stronger legitimacy outcomes
- whether layered governance systems create strategic flexibility or operational complexity
- whether commercial retail models generate value but remain weaker as public-policy tools
- whether digital infrastructures appear to strengthen coordination and management capacity

In a fourth stage, the shorter supplementary examples were used selectively as contrast cases or reinforcing references. Their role was not to carry the same analytical weight as the principal cases, but to test whether identified patterns also appeared in smaller, more niche or more specialised models.

Finally, findings from the comparative analysis were assessed against the structural context of the Costa Daurada. This transferability stage considers which mechanisms appear realistically adaptable, which would require institutional preconditions not currently present, and which models seem less suitable for a mature Mediterranean destination characterised by seasonality, fragmented governance, mixed accommodation structures and significant car dependency.

This multi-stage approach allows the study to move beyond descriptive benchmarking. Rather than identifying simplistic best practices, it evaluates how and why different systems function, under which conditions they appear effective, and which principles may be relevant for the Costa Daurada.

3.6 Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted within several methodological boundaries inherent to comparative research based primarily on secondary evidence.

A first limitation concerns the evidence base. The thesis relies on publicly accessible sources rather than original interviews, surveys or internal operational datasets. This means that some aspects of governance practice, stakeholder conflict, financial performance or actual user behaviour remain only partially visible. In several cases, published information is likely to reflect institutional communication priorities rather than full organisational transparency.

A second limitation relates to comparability across destinations. The analysed systems operate in highly diverse contexts, including alpine provinces, rural leisure regions, metropolitan cities, coastal areas and heritage destinations. These places differ substantially in transport infrastructure, administrative structures, tourism intensity, market composition and political culture. Direct one-to-one comparison is therefore neither possible nor intended. The value of the analysis lies instead in identifying transferable mechanisms under differing conditions.

A further constraint is the uneven availability and quality of data. Some destinations publish extensive figures on overnight stays, user volumes, contribution levels or transport usage, while others provide only partial or fragmented information. As a result, the study prioritises structural comparison over strict metric benchmarking. Quantitative figures cited throughout the thesis should therefore be understood as indicative evidence rather than fully standardised performance measures. In addition, several systems evolve rapidly, meaning that prices, partner numbers or operational scope may change over time.

The study is also interpretive rather than causal in design. Comparative qualitative research is well suited to identifying patterns, governance logics and plausible relationships, but it cannot demonstrate with certainty that any single card feature alone caused a particular behavioural or economic outcome. Outcomes are usually shaped by wider contextual factors such as destination attractiveness, service quality, transport supply, seasonality or broader tourism policy.

Finally, transferability to the Costa Daurada remains conditional. Even where external models appear promising, successful implementation would depend on local political willingness, inter-municipal cooperation, stakeholder alignment, financing choices, digital capacity and the practical integration of transport and tourism systems. Lessons from other destinations therefore cannot be imported mechanically, but require adaptation to local realities.

These limitations do not weaken the relevance of the study. Rather, they define the appropriate scope of interpretation. The thesis does not claim universal best practice, but offers a structured comparative assessment of how tourism card systems function across different settings and what this may realistically imply for the Costa Daurada.

4. Typology of guest card systems

4.1 Purpose and Structure of the Typology

Guest card systems have developed in a wide variety of forms across European destinations and should not be treated as a uniform category. Although often grouped under labels such as tourist cards, destination cards, city cards or guest cards, these systems differ substantially in pricing logic, service scope, governance structure, territorial scale, technological sophistication and strategic purpose (Bochert, 2006; Leung, 2020; Sedláková et al., 2014).

At a general level, such schemes bundle access to attractions, transport or tourism-related services within a single product or platform. Their traditional purpose has been to simplify visitor consumption, improve convenience and increase perceived value. More recent developments, however, suggest that some systems may also perform wider destination management functions, including stakeholder coordination, demand distribution, behavioural steering and data generation (Dalle Nogare & Scuderi, 2024; Zoltan & McKercher, 2015).

For this reason, analytical differentiation is necessary. Without a typology, there is a risk of conflating fundamentally different systems, such as accommodation-linked regional guest cards, transport-led mobility schemes, attraction-based discount models or purchasable urban sightseeing cards. While these formats may share certain operational features, they differ significantly in their capacity to influence mobility behaviour, support visitor dispersion, generate destination intelligence, coordinate stakeholders and incorporate resident-oriented benefits.

Building on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2 and the methodological logic outlined in Chapter 3, this chapter identifies four principal model logics: integrated regional systems, mobility-centred systems, attraction-based or limited-integration systems, and commercial urban card models. These categories should be understood as ideal types rather than rigid classifications. In practice, destinations may combine several schemes simultaneously or adapt their systems over time in response to changing strategic priorities, financing pressures or governance conditions.

The purpose of this typology is therefore not merely descriptive. It provides the conceptual bridge between theory and empirical analysis by clarifying the different strategic logics through which guest card systems operate. This creates a more precise basis for evaluating which approaches may be relevant for the Costa Daurada.

4.2 Integrated regional systems

Integrated regional systems represent the most comprehensive model type. Their defining feature is the combination of multiple destination functions within a coordinated regional framework. Typically, these systems include public transport, attraction access, tourism services and a shared administrative or digital platform linking multiple stakeholders across a destination.

Their relevance lies not only in visitor convenience, but in their potential to function as destination management instruments. By bundling transport, attractions and services, they reduce transaction costs for visitors while encouraging wider participation across the destination. Rather than offering isolated benefits, they create an integrated access system capable of influencing how visitors move and consume destination services (Drozdowska et al., 2018; Leung, 2020).

A second defining characteristic is low-barrier distribution. Where cards are automatically issued through accommodation providers and linked to overnight stays, barriers to use are substantially reduced. This matters because systems requiring active purchase decisions often generate stronger self-selection effects, whereas embedded models reach a broader share of visitors and therefore offer greater potential as behavioural steering tools and more representative data infrastructures (Dalle Nogare & Scuderi, 2024).

Governance requirements are correspondingly high. Integrated regional systems depend on cooperation between destination management organisations, municipalities, accommodation providers, transport operators and attractions. Their effectiveness therefore relies not only on visitor demand, but on stable stakeholder coordination, cost-sharing arrangements and institutional trust.

These systems also offer the strongest potential for destination intelligence. Because usage occurs across multiple service categories, transaction data can reveal movement patterns, attraction preferences, temporal peaks and broader consumption trajectories. This creates opportunities for adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making.

Finally, integrated regional systems are structurally best positioned to incorporate resident-oriented components, whether through parallel resident cards, shared mobility benefits or wider public value creation. This can be particularly relevant in destinations where tourism legitimacy depends increasingly on fairness and visible local benefits.

For these reasons, integrated regional systems represent the most relevant benchmark category for this thesis. Representative examples include the Echt Bodensee Card, the

Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz, the Trentino Guest Card and comparable multi-stakeholder regional models.

4.3 Mobility-centred systems

Mobility-centred systems are distinguished by the central role of transport access within the product logic. Their primary purpose is to influence how visitors move within, or travel through, a destination by reducing financial and cognitive barriers to public transport use. Some remain embedded within broader guest card structures, while others focus almost exclusively on mobility access.

This category is especially relevant in destinations where congestion, parking pressure and private car dependency are among the most pressing tourism management challenges. Research increasingly suggests that low-barrier public transport access can meaningfully influence visitor behaviour. Evidence from Swiss destinations indicates that fare-free transport for overnight guests can produce measurable shifts from car use towards public transport, including in arrival mode choice (Blättler et al., 2024).

Their management strength lies in simplicity. By removing ticketing friction, reducing perceived complexity and lowering direct transport costs, mobility-centred systems make sustainable choices easier and often more attractive. Because tourists frequently prioritise convenience and clarity over purely environmental motives, such systems can operate as effective soft governance instruments.

Compared with fully integrated regional systems, however, their broader multifunctionality is more limited. While improved transport access may indirectly support visitor dispersion, these systems usually provide fewer direct incentives to visit peripheral attractions or diversify activity patterns. Their data profiles may also be narrower, focusing primarily on transport use rather than wider tourism behaviour.

Institutional geography remains important. Large or fragmented destinations may face difficulties integrating multiple operators, tariff zones or administrative boundaries. In such contexts, the practical reach of mobility-centred systems may be constrained even when the concept itself is strong.

Resident benefits may occur indirectly through stronger public transport provision, but explicit social inclusion features are less common unless intentionally added.

Mobility-centred systems are therefore best understood as specialised but strategically powerful tools. They may not offer the multifunctionality of integrated regional systems, but they can be highly effective where transport management is the dominant destination priority. Representative examples include the Südtirol Guest Pass, the Ticino Ticket, the KONUS Guest Card and the Salzburg Guest Mobility Ticket.

4.4 Attraction-based and limited-integration systems

Attraction-based and limited-integration systems focus primarily on admission benefits, discounts or bundled access to selected attractions. Mobility integration is absent or secondary, governance coordination is narrower, and the overall strategic ambition is lower than in more comprehensive regional systems.

This model type has long been widespread. Earlier classifications distinguish discount cards, all-inclusive attraction passes and mixed models centred on leisure consumption rather than broader management functions (Bochert, 2006; Sedláková et al., 2014). Their principal purpose is usually to enhance visitor value and increase participation in selected tourism offers.

One advantage of such systems is their relative ease of implementation. Because they involve fewer actors and less technical integration, coordination requirements are lower. For destinations with limited governance capacity, they may provide a pragmatic entry point into card-based systems. They can also support lesser-known attractions by bundling them with more established sites, creating visibility and some indirect demand effects.

However, their limitations are significant. Without integrated mobility components, they do little to address congestion, car dependency or access inequalities. Their ability to shape spatial visitor behaviour is therefore comparatively weak. Where cards require active purchase, self-selection effects are also likely, as users tend to be visitors already motivated to consume intensively.

Data generation is correspondingly narrower. Although attraction visits may be recorded, the absence of transport integration, wider territorial coverage or stable population reach limits their value as destination intelligence tools.

Resident inclusion is generally marginal unless separate local benefit schemes are intentionally added. Such systems should therefore not be assumed to generate wider social sustainability effects automatically.

Within this thesis, attraction-based and limited-integration systems are best understood as partial instruments. They may improve visitor experience and support selected attractions, but they are only weakly equipped to function as comprehensive destination management tools. Representative examples include the DreiWelten Card, the Chiemgau Karte and the Tarjeta Turística Amigos de Segovia.

4.5 Commercial purchasable card models

Commercial purchasable card models differ fundamentally from accommodation-linked regional systems in both economic logic and management purpose. They are typically sold directly to visitors as standalone products and are designed to bundle sightseeing benefits, attraction admission and selected convenience features.

Their appeal is especially strong in city destinations characterised by short stays, concentrated landmark tourism and first-time visitors. For these users, a purchasable card offers a clear value proposition: simplified access to major attractions within a limited timeframe (Leung, 2020; Drozdowska et al., 2018).

From a destination management perspective, however, their role is more limited. Because use depends on active purchase decisions, their user base is inherently selective. They therefore capture a subset of tourists who intend to engage intensively with the urban attraction offer rather than the wider visitor population. This reduces their suitability as universal behavioural steering or data infrastructure tools.

Even where transport is included, it is usually embedded within a sightseeing logic rather than used as a targeted instrument for managing congestion, reducing car dependency or encouraging territorial redistribution. The dominant focus remains efficient consumption of the city’s key highlights.

Governance structures are also different from those of integrated regional systems. Commercial urban cards are often organised through city marketing organisations or commercially oriented private intermediaries, with a stronger emphasis on product sales, visitor convenience and revenue generation than on broad territorial coordination.

Resident inclusion is generally absent. These systems are designed for temporary users and rarely attempt to link tourism infrastructure with local benefit structures.

Commercial purchasable card models remain useful comparator models because they illustrate what card systems can achieve as market-facing visitor products. However, they are only partially relevant as templates for governance-oriented regional systems. Representative examples include the Barcelona Card, the Granada Card, the SchwarzwaldCard and comparable purchasable visitor cards such as the Copenhagen Card or Oslo Pass.

4.6 Synthesis and implications for the case analysis

The typology developed in this chapter demonstrates that guest card systems differ not only in format, but in strategic depth. Some function mainly as visitor products, others as mobility tools, others as partial attraction bundles, and a smaller number as genuinely multi-dimensional destination management instruments. While the typology identifies dominant model logics, some cases combine features of more than one type and are therefore classified according to their primary functional orientation.

Three broader conclusions emerge.

First, governance potential generally increases with the degree of integration. Systems that combine transport, attractions, stakeholder coordination and digital infrastructure are best positioned to influence visitor behaviour, support dispersion, generate usable data and incorporate social sustainability elements.

Second, functionality depends not only on design, but also on governance conditions. Territorial fragmentation, weak stakeholder cooperation, unclear funding logic or institutional misalignment can significantly constrain what any card system can achieve.

Third, guest card systems should not be viewed as static categories. Destinations may recalibrate schemes over time, for example by shifting from attraction-led offers towards mobility-centred models where congestion management, climate objectives or financing pressures become more pressing priorities. Likewise, some regions may combine multiple schemes simultaneously, creating layered ecosystems rather than relying on a single model.

These conclusions provide the analytical basis for the following case study chapter. The selected examples are therefore not treated as interchangeable best practices, but as representatives of different strategic logics with distinct strengths, limitations and transferability conditions. This allows the subsequent empirical analysis to assess more precisely which features may be relevant for the Costa Daurada and under what circumstances.

5. Comparative case study analysis of guest card systems

5.1 Comparative Logic of the Case Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical comparative analysis of selected European guest card, visitor pass and regional leisure card systems. Its purpose is to evaluate how these instruments function in practice and to what extent they can operate as destination-management tools rather than merely as promotional visitor products. Building on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 3 and the typology presented in Chapter 4, the analysis examines how different card systems influence mobility behaviour, visitor dispersion, stakeholder coordination, destination intelligence, economic viability and resident-oriented value creation.

The chapter reflects the diversity of contemporary card systems across Europe. Some models are automatically issued through accommodation providers and embedded in local tourist-tax or visitor-contribution systems. Others are financed through voluntary accommodation participation, sold directly to visitors as commercial leisure products or designed as hybrid platforms combining visitor, resident, employee and civic benefit layers. The selected cases therefore do not represent one uniform product category. Instead, they illustrate how card-based systems can be adapted to different territorial structures, governance arrangements, funding logics and strategic objectives.

The analysis is structured around the seven analytical dimensions established in Section 3.4: access model and user reach; mobility and behavioural influence; visitor dispersion and spatial effects; governance, funding and stakeholder coordination; data generation and digital destination intelligence; social legitimacy and shared value; and economic and organisational viability. These dimensions ensure continuity between the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 and the empirical case analysis. They also make it possible to compare systems that differ substantially in scale, purpose and institutional setting without assuming that all cards should perform the same function.

A comprehensive overview of identified European guest card and visitor pass systems is provided in Appendix A. From this broader mapping, a set of principal case studies was selected for detailed analysis because of their relevance to sustainable mobility, territorial redistribution, governance innovation, data generation, resident inclusion or transferability to the Costa Daurada. These principal cases are complemented by shorter comparative examples that illustrate additional variants, emerging models or cautionary contrasts.

The chapter is structured in three main parts. Section 5.2 begins with a comparative overview of the selected guest card systems. This is followed by detailed analyses of individual cases (Section 5.3), and finally Section 5.4 synthesizes across cases to draw general lessons. Together, these parts move the discussion from description to analysis of patterns in guest card design and impact.

Through this approach, the chapter moves beyond descriptive benchmarking. It does not seek to identify a single "best practice" model, but to understand how different systems work, under which conditions they generate destination-management value, and which lessons may be relevant for the subsequent assessment of a potential regional guest card model for the Costa Daurada.

5.2 Comparative overview of selected guest card systems

To establish an initial basis for comparison, this section summarises the principal guest card systems analysed in depth in Section 5.3. The cases were selected from the broader European mapping presented in Appendix A and reflect different access models, funding structures, territorial scales, mobility logics, governance arrangements and degrees of resident integration.

The overview distinguishes between principal analytical cases and supplementary examples. The principal cases provide the core evidence base for the cross-case analysis, while the supplementary examples are used selectively to illustrate additional system variants such as mobility-only schemes, seasonal leisure cards, inter-cantonal hybrid models, urban commercial cards or weaker promotional card formats.

Table 1 Comparative overview of selected guest card systems. Source: own elaboration

Case	**Dominant model logic**	**Issuance / access model**	**Public transport integration**	**Spatial scope**	**Governance and coordination**	**Data potential**	**Resident / community integration**
Südtirol Guest Pass	Mobility-focused regional guest pass	Automatic through accommodation providers	Full provincial network	Province-wide	Strong provincial coordination involving tourism and mobility actors	High	Indirect; resident transport offer separate from guest pass
Trentino Guest Card	Integrated regional platform	Accommodation-linked, digitally activated	Full provincial network	Province-wide with local variants	Strong provincial coordination with local destination flexibility	High	Limited direct resident integration
Echt Bodensee Card	Integrated regional guest card	Automatic through participating municipalities/accommodation providers	Full within bodo network	German Bodensee sub-region	Strong municipal-regional coordination; linked to tourist tax	Medium–high	Partial, through EBC HOME resident layer
Ticino Ticket	Mobility-focused cantonal guest ticket	Automatic through eligible accommodation	Full cantonal network, with selected discounted premium services	Canton-wide	Strong cantonal coordination	Medium–high	Indirect, through public transport and territorial benefits
South-western German cluster: KONUS, DreiWelten Card, SchwarzwaldCard, Schwarzwald Plus / Hochschwarzwald Card	Layered regional card ecosystem	Mixed: automatic municipal issuance, host-financed inclusion, commercial purchase and host-linked models	Strong in KONUS; weaker or indirect in attraction-led schemes	Regional and cross-border sub-regional	Mixed governance involving tourism bodies, municipalities, hosts, attractions and technology partners	Medium	Stronger in selected models, including resident, employee and volunteer layers

Case	Dominant model logic	Issuance / access model	Public transport integration	Spatial scope	Governance and coordination	Data potential	Resident / community integration
Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz / Gästekarte mobil	Traditional guest card upgraded with mobility layer	Automatic in participating municipalities	Broad regional integration	Regional	Strong staged municipal-regional coordination	High, especially through digital registration and external evaluation	Limited direct resident integration
Thüringer Wald Card	Layered regional platform	Mixed: municipal guest cards, purchasable annual card and voluntary all-inclusive host model	Partial and locally differentiated	Regional	Evolving regional coordination from fragmented local systems	Medium and increasing	Stronger than average through annual local-user card and open-access logic
MeineCardPlus / AuszeitCardPlus	Host-funded guest card and regional quality-of-life platform	Host-funded guest card; purchasable resident/annual variants	Full NVV network	Regional	Strong regional management with voluntary accommodation participation	Medium–high	Strong, through AuszeitCardPlus and employer-oriented card logic
Urban commercial cards: Barcelona Card and Granada Card	Commercial city-card models	Purchasable visitor products	Strong in Barcelona; limited in Granada	Urban	Centralised city-level tourism management	Medium	None or very limited

The table shows that the analysed systems differ substantially in strategic purpose. Some are primarily mobility-led, such as the Südtirol Guest Pass, Ticino Ticket and KONUS. Others, such as the Trentino Guest Card, Echt Bodensee Card, MeineCardPlus and Sächsische Schweiz model, combine public transport with wider attraction and service benefits. A further group, represented by the DreiWelten Card, SchwarzwaldCard, Schwarzwald Plus, Hochschwarzwald Card and Austrian leisure-card models, is more strongly attraction-led or experience-led. Urban cards such as Barcelona and Granada follow a separate commercial logic, while systems such as Thüringer Wald and Oskar demonstrate increasingly hybrid forms of card-based destination cooperation.

A first major distinction concerns access design. The strongest destination-management potential is generally found in systems that are automatically or near-automatically linked to accommodation stays. This includes South Tyrol, Trentino, Ticino, the Echt Bodensee Card and Sächsische Schweiz. Because these systems are embedded in the visitor journey, they achieve broader reach than voluntary purchase products and are better positioned to influence mobility behaviour, service use and data generation. By contrast, purchasable commercial cards such as the Barcelona Card, Granada Card, SchwarzwaldCard, Kärnten Card, Côte d'Azur Pass, Dubrovnik Pass and Oskar Gästekarte rely on active consumer choice. These models can offer strong perceived value but tend to reach a more selective user group.

A second distinction relates to public transport integration. Mobility-focused systems have the clearest behavioural steering potential where they provide simple, region-wide access to public transport. South Tyrol, Trentino, Ticino, Salzburg, Sächsische Schweiz, KONUS, MeineCardPlus and Oskar all demonstrate variants of this logic. Where transport integration is absent or only secondary, the card may still support experience consumption or regional packaging, but its capacity to reduce car dependency or influence visitor flows is more limited.

Governance arrangements further differentiate the cases. Stronger systems are typically supported by regional or provincial coordination structures, clear agreements with transport providers, accommodation-based distribution channels and stable financing mechanisms. The South Tyrol, Trentino, Ticino and Bodensee cases illustrate relatively institutionalised models, while Thüringer Wald and the south-western German cluster show more evolutionary and layered governance pathways. In contrast, weak or fragmented systems demonstrate that tourism cards have limited strategic impact where they are not embedded in robust institutional frameworks.

The cases also differ in data potential. Digital, accommodation-linked and usage-based systems are better positioned to generate meaningful destination intelligence, especially where card issuance is connected to registration systems, transport validations and attraction usage. Trentino, South Tyrol, Sächsische Schweiz, Ticino and MeineCardPlus show particularly relevant data potential, although the public visibility of actual data use varies considerably. This distinction is important because data generation alone does not automatically create destination intelligence unless it is supported by analytical capacity and governance structures capable of acting on the information.

Resident and community integration remains uneven across the sample. Many systems still focus almost entirely on overnight guests, while resident benefits are indirect, arising through improved transport services, wider territorial distribution of visitor spending or enhanced infrastructure viability. However, several cases demonstrate more explicit inclusion logics. EBC HOME, DreiWelten BürgerCard, JobCard and EhrenCard, Thüringer Wald Card, AuszeitCardPlus, Appenzeller Mitarbeiterkarte and selected Austrian social-access models show that card systems can extend beyond the tourist market and contribute to shared local value, workforce support or civic recognition.

Overall, the comparative overview indicates that the effectiveness of guest card systems as destination-management instruments depends on the alignment of several factors: low-friction access, meaningful mobility integration, broad territorial relevance, credible governance structures, transparent funding, data capability and visible value for local communities. No single case fulfils all these functions perfectly. Instead, the sample demonstrates a spectrum of possible design choices. This provides the basis for the individual case analyses in Section 5.3 and the cross-case synthesis in Section 5.4.

5.3 Individual case analyses

Although the individual case narratives are presented as thematic analytical profiles rather than rigid dimension-by-dimension templates, each case was coded against the seven analytical dimensions introduced in Section 3.4

5.3.1 Südtirol Guest Pass

Overview

The Südtirol Guest Pass represents an advanced mobility-oriented guest card system and a clear example of a tourism card evolving into strategic regional transport infrastructure. Since May 2024, more than 90% of overnight guests in South Tyrol have reportedly been covered by the scheme following the consolidation of a previously fragmented landscape of local and destination-specific guest card solutions. Earlier reporting had identified 19 different guest cards across the province, illustrating the fragmented starting point from which the province-wide model later emerged. The new system was formalised through Provincial Government Resolution No. 732 of 11 October 2022 with the objective of standardising guest mobility across South Tyrol and embedding public transport as a core component of the tourism offer (Rai News, 2022; Landtag Südtirol, 2023; Südtirol News, 2024).

The card is automatically issued through participating accommodation providers and grants free use of the südtirolmobil public transport network during the stay, including regional buses, trains and selected complementary mobility services. This marked a strategic shift away from the earlier fragmented landscape of local card products toward a simplified mobility-first model designed for universal scale, easier communication and lower access barriers. Public discussion around the new system also highlighted the changing relationship between mobility access and complementary visitor benefits such as museum inclusion (Landtag Südtirol, 2023; Rai News, 2024c).

The digital infrastructure underpinning the system was developed in cooperation with feratel, enabling a fully digital and personalised guest card linked to accommodation registration and transport usage monitoring. This positions the Südtirol Guest Pass not merely as a tourist benefit, but as a component of the destination's broader digital management architecture (Tourist Austria International, 2024; Rai News, 2024b).

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

The defining strength of the Südtirol Guest Pass lies in the low-barrier integration of public transport into the accommodation stay. By embedding mobility directly into the tourism product, both financial and cognitive barriers associated with ticket purchase, fare structures and route planning are significantly reduced. Public transport becomes the default option rather than an additional purchase decision.

This behavioural logic is supported by South Tyrol-specific research. Bausch et al. (2024) found that guest cards including public transport access can be among the strongest determinants of sustainable tourist mobility behaviour in the destination, in some cases exceeding the explanatory power of socio-demographic characteristics or environmental attitudes. Public communication around the scheme has likewise framed it as an instrument to reduce private car dependence and encourage modal shift, although local debate also reveals resistance where visitor benefits are perceived to affect residents or transport capacity (Südtirol News, 2024; Rai News, 2024a).

The territorial scale of the system is equally significant. Because the card is valid across the provincial network, visitors can access both core tourism zones such as Bozen/Bolzano, Meran/Merano and the Dolomite gateways, as well as peripheral valleys, without separate ticketing barriers. This creates the structural conditions for broader visitor dispersion, even if actual flows continue to depend on destination attractiveness, frequency of services and information quality.

The system may also improve transport efficiency. Tourists often travel at different times of day than commuters, helping smooth demand peaks and support more balanced network utilisation. This temporal complementarity has been highlighted in South Tyrolean transport discussions and suggests that tourism demand can strengthen off-peak viability rather than solely creating additional pressure (ANSA, 2026; Rai News, 2025).

Strengths and limitations

A major strength of the system is its governance framework. The Südtirol Guest Pass is embedded in a coordinated multi-actor structure involving the Mobilitätskonsortium, the tourism umbrella association LTS, IDM Südtirol, STA – Südtiroler Transportstrukturen AG, destination organisations and accommodation providers. This coordination has enabled implementation at province-wide scale in a destination with more than 30 million annual overnight stays. Publicly, the scheme was also defended by Tourism Councillor Luis Walcher, indicating clear institutional commitment despite emerging criticism (Südtirol News, 2024; Rai News, 2024d).

Its financial significance is substantial. Data for January to September 2025 reportedly indicate around 4.5 million guest passes issued, generating approximately 5.5 million transport usages and contributing roughly €23 million to the provincial public transport budget. Earlier estimates had already placed annual contributions in the range of €20 million, equivalent to roughly one third of total ticket revenues in the regional transport system (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus, 2025; Südtirol News, 2024).

The system has also influenced transport supply. Public reporting noted that expanded bus services to the Ahrntal during peak tourism periods were directly linked to demand associated with the guest pass. This is analytically significant because it suggests the instrument can shape not only visitor behaviour, but also infrastructure provision and timetable decisions (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Energie und Tourismus, 2025; Rai News, 2026a).

The digitalisation of the card is another notable strength. As an accommodation-linked and usage-based platform, the system generates potentially valuable mobility data on routes, frequency and temporal behaviour that may support more informed planning and service optimisation over time.

However, the financing model remains politically contested. Parliamentary sources indicate historical contribution levels of only around €0.55–€0.70 per overnight stay, which critics argue is disproportionately low relative to the mobility value received, especially when compared with former retail mobility cards priced substantially higher (Landtag Südtirol, 2023, 2025). Media debate has therefore included proposals to increase the contribution toward €2.00 per overnight stay in order to improve cost recovery and fairness (Watson, 2025; Rai News, 2024e; Rai News, 2026b).

The narrowing of the scheme toward a mobility-first model may also be interpreted ambivalently. While operationally clearer and more scalable, it reduced the broader attraction-based benefit scope previously associated with earlier mixed card products. The pass therefore gained systemic clarity but lost some experiential breadth. At the same time, continued debate around museum and cultural inclusions shows that the exact boundary between a mobility pass and a wider guest-card product remains politically and operationally relevant (Rai News, 2024c).

Resident integration also remains partial. A separate resident public transport offer of approximately €39 per month or €250 annually has been introduced, which partially responds to fairness concerns, but residents are not directly integrated into the guest-card logic itself. Public debate continues to raise tensions regarding visitor benefits, crowding during peak periods and comparative costs borne by local populations. The fact that the Südtirol Guest Pass was simultaneously recognised at European level while remaining contested locally illustrates this tension between external innovation recognition and internal political legitimacy (Watson, 2025; Rai News, 2026a; Rai News, 2026b).

These tensions are analytically important. The Südtirol Guest Pass is not only a mobility product, but also a redistribution mechanism between tourists, accommodation businesses and the public sector. Its long-term success therefore depends as much on political legitimacy as on operational efficiency.

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For the Costa Daurada, the Südtirol Guest Pass provides one of the clearest reference models for a tax-funded regional mobility entitlement linked to accommodation stays. It demonstrates how large tourism volumes can generate meaningful recurring revenue for public transport while simultaneously improving visitor mobility and potentially reducing seasonal car dependence.

The case is especially relevant because Costa Daurada also combines strong visitor demand with spatially dispersed attractions across coastal resorts, Tarragona city, PortAventura, Reus Airport, Camp de Tarragona high-speed rail station, inland heritage towns and natural landscapes. A mobility-inclusive guest card could therefore function not only as a tourism benefit, but as a territorial connector.

At the same time, South Tyrol offers two clear warnings. First, contribution levels must be financially credible from the outset in order to avoid later disputes over hidden subsidisation. Second, resident perception matters greatly. If visitors receive visible benefits while locals perceive congestion, unequal treatment or weak reciprocal gains, political resistance may grow.

Overall, the case shows that large-scale integrated guest mobility systems can be highly effective, but only when operational success is matched by financial sustainability, stakeholder coordination and social legitimacy.

5.3.2 Trentino Guest Card

Overview

The Trentino Guest Card is a mature province-wide guest card model combining mobility, attractions and digital services within a shared governance framework. Operating across the Autonomous Province of Trento, the scheme grants visitors access to public transport, cultural sites, leisure attractions and selected destination services through one integrated platform. Rather than focusing narrowly on a single function, the Trentino model combines visitor convenience with broader territorial coordination and digital destination management (Trentino Marketing, 2024-a; Visit Trentino, 2026-a).

The card is distributed through participating accommodation providers and is generally included within the overnight stay. Guests receive a digital activation code, usually via email or SMS, and can use the card through the Mio Trentino application. Official sources state that the card includes public transport throughout the province, more than 60 museums, 20 castles, over 40 attractions, and additional discounts or bookable services (Visit Trentino, 2026-a).

Trentino is a particularly useful comparator because it operates at a tourism scale broadly similar to Costa Daurada. Provincial sources report 19.6 million overnight stays in 2024, placing Trentino among the larger destinations in the comparative sample (Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2025).

A further distinctive feature is the layered architecture of the system. Trentino Marketing notes that the provincial base card is complemented by destination-specific enhanced variants in several local tourism areas, combining common regional standards with territorial customisation (Trentino Marketing, 2024-a; 2024b).

Particularly instructive is the contrast with neighbouring South Tyrol. While South Tyrol has increasingly prioritised a predominantly mobility-focused province-wide model, Trentino has retained a broader multifunctional architecture combining transport, attractions and digital ecosystem functions. This illustrates how adjacent destinations facing similar structural conditions may nonetheless pursue different strategic pathways.

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

Mobility is a core pillar of the Trentino Guest Card. Public transport access is integrated directly into the accommodation stay, covering buses and eligible rail services within the province (Visit Trentino, 2026b). This removes both direct travel costs and practical barriers such as ticket purchase, fare uncertainty and route complexity.

In behavioural terms, this is significant. By embedding mobility into the tourism product itself, Trentino uses the guest card as a soft steering instrument that makes public transport the easier option during the stay. This is particularly relevant in a mountainous destination where road congestion, parking pressure and seasonal peaks create recurring governance challenges.

Usage figures suggest meaningful uptake of the mobility component. Earlier reporting indicates that Guest Card users generated more than 400,000 public transport trips in 2017, while later reporting refers to more than 500,000 public transport users in 2024, suggesting continued relevance of the mobility element over time (Il Dolomiti, 2018; Trentino Marketing, 2025).

A corridor-level example emerged in the Fiemme–Fassa area, where increased seasonal public transport demand linked to the card was estimated as equivalent to approximately 700 to 800 fewer cars per day on local roads. While not a province-wide figure, it provides tangible evidence of the traffic-management potential of the scheme when paired with adequate service provision (Il Dolomiti, 2018).

The card also has strong potential to support territorial dispersion. Benefits are distributed across a wide provincial network of museums, castles, attractions and transport routes rather than concentrated in a single urban centre. This lowers the cost and effort of exploring secondary destinations and peripheral municipalities.

For a territorially fragmented region consisting of alpine valleys, lakes, historic towns and rural communities, this is strategically important. The combination of mobility and attraction access increases the practical feasibility of multi-stop travel behaviour and can help spread visitor expenditure more broadly across the province.

The layered territorial model may reinforce this effect. Local enhanced cards allow destinations to foreground area-specific products, experiences or services while remaining connected to the provincial platform. This creates a mechanism through which regional coordination and local place-branding can coexist.

Strengths and limitations

From a governance perspective, Trentino is a strong example of balancing coordination and local flexibility. The system requires cooperation between provincial institutions, Trentino Marketing, local tourism boards (APT organisations), accommodation providers, transport operators, museums and attraction partners.

The model is especially noteworthy because it avoids the binary choice between complete centralisation and fragmented localism. A province-wide common platform provides strategic coherence, while destinations retain flexibility through enhanced territorial variants. Trentino Marketing notes that in 2024 only part of the territory retained the standard base card unchanged, while several local areas had developed customised extensions of the model (Trentino Marketing, 2024b).

The exact financial architecture is not fully transparent in public sources. However, available documentation indicates that the standard Trentino Guest Card is supported through the provincial tourism system, while some enhanced local variants may involve additional destination-level arrangements or partner contributions (Trentino Marketing, 2024c).

A further strength lies in digital integration and data capability. The card is embedded within the broader Mio Trentino ecosystem, which includes customer communication tools, booking functions, dashboards, automated messaging, widgets for accommodation websites and shared digital services for operators across the province. Trentino Marketing explicitly frames these tools under a "fare sistema" logic, emphasising coordinated data use and common digital infrastructure across the tourism system. This suggests the Guest Card is not a standalone benefit product, but part of a wider territorial data architecture supporting collaboration and shared intelligence.

Available evidence suggests substantial digital uptake. Public reporting states that around 70% of Guest Cards were activated digitally through the Mio Trentino App, while the app itself had reached 500,000 downloads (Trentino Sviluppo, 2023). This indicates unusually high practical adoption compared with many destination apps that struggle to achieve sustained usage.

Public documentation also highlights the role of feratel as a key technology partner within the Trentino tourism ecosystem. This suggests that advanced guest card systems often depend on specialised tourism technology providers for accommodation databases, booking connectivity, content management and data flows rather than relying solely on internal public-sector capacity (Trentino Marketing, 2024c).

Potential management uses include monitoring attraction demand, understanding movement patterns, identifying temporal peaks, measuring uptake by geography or segment, improving CRM communication, and refining product development. At the same time, Trentino also illustrates a transparency limitation. Public reporting often combines multiple indicators, including operators, guests, cumulative beneficiaries, transport volumes and attraction use, which makes precise external reconstruction difficult. Internal dashboards may therefore be more sophisticated than the KPI summaries visible to external observers.

The system is primarily visitor-oriented and does not appear to include a dedicated resident equivalent comparable to some German models. Direct resident inclusion is therefore limited. Indirect benefits may nevertheless include stronger transport viability, reduced parking pressure and broader territorial distribution of tourism expenditure.

Despite its sophisticated platform model, Trentino continues to face tourism pressure in certain sub-regions, including congestion, housing tensions and wider quality-of-life concerns, as regional media have reported. This suggests that guest card systems can support management objectives but cannot substitute for wider tourism governance measures (L'Adige, 2024; La Busa, 2025).

Overall, Trentino should be understood less as a simple card product and more as an advanced governance infrastructure whose complexity also requires considerable coordination capacity.

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, the principal lesson lies less in the specific package of benefits and more in the governance architecture. Trentino demonstrates that a common regional platform can coexist with destination-level flexibility, allowing local tourism areas to retain identity and tailor benefits while still operating within one recognisable system.

This is particularly relevant in a destination where coastal municipalities, Tarragona city, theme park zones, transport gateways and inland areas may not share identical priorities. A modular card model with common standards and optional local enhancements may therefore be more realistic than a rigid one-size-fits-all system.

A second major lesson concerns data governance. The Trentino model suggests how a guest card can become a shared data collection and integration mechanism linking accommodation providers, attractions, mobility services and destination organisations. For Costa Daurada, where tourism data is often fragmented across municipalities, private operators and transport actors, a common card platform could help create stronger evidence for demand management, visitor dispersion strategies, marketing efficiency and inter-institutional coordination.

At the same time, the case shows that more sophisticated systems require stronger coordination capacity, digital governance, partner trust and clear rules around data sharing. Without these foundations, complexity can become a weakness rather than a strength.

Overall, Trentino offers a useful reference for Costa Daurada if the long-term ambition extends beyond a discount pass toward a federated destination-management platform.

5.3.3 Echt Bodensee Card

Overview

The Echt Bodensee Card (EBC) is an integrated regional guest card system covering the German northern shore of Lake Constance and parts of the Bodensee-Oberschwaben area. Introduced in 2017 with an initial group of five municipalities, the system has expanded to 17 participating municipalities, indicating gradual territorial scaling and institutional consolidation over time (Deutsche Bodensee Tourismus GmbH [DBT], n.d.-a).

The card is automatically issued to overnight guests staying in participating municipalities and is financed through the local tourist tax. It combines two core components: free use of regional public transport within the bodo transport network and a broad range of tourism-related benefits. Official destination information refers to more than 200 partner offers, making it one of the most extensive bundled guest card systems in Germany (DBT, n.d.-a; DBT, n.d.-b).

Since 2023, the system has been progressively digitised. The technological backbone has been developed in cooperation with feratel, enabling digital guest card issuance, integration into accommodation systems and more efficient data exchange. The card is also linked to wider regional tourism content and service platforms, including solutions associated with AVS GmbH, which support partner management and digital information provision (AVS GmbH, 2022; AVS GmbH, 2023-a).

The system is geographically limited to the German part of the wider Bodensee destination and is not fully integrated into transport or governance structures in the Austrian, Swiss or Liechtenstein parts of the lake region. This makes it particularly interesting as a case of strong regional coordination within one national subspace of an otherwise international destination.

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

Public transport integration forms the functional core of the EBC. Cardholders benefit from free and unrestricted use of buses and regional trains within the bodo network, including arrival and departure days (DBT, n.d.-c). This design significantly reduces barriers to public transport use by embedding mobility directly into the accommodation stay and removing the need for separate ticket purchases.

The EBC differs from purely mobility-led systems by linking transport access to a much broader set of destination services. Public transport is therefore not only a means of movement, but also a facilitator of tourism consumption, connecting visitors to a distributed network of attractions, leisure sites and municipalities across the region.

A defining strength of the card is the breadth of non-mobility benefits. The system includes more than 200 partner offers across the region. These benefits include museums, exhibitions, guided tours, leisure facilities, thermal baths, active tourism services, bike rental and selected lake-navigation discounts or bundled experiences (DBT, n.d.-a).

This combination of mobility plus diversified benefits gives the EBC strong potential to support visitor dispersion. By reducing both access and cost barriers, the card enables visitors to explore a wider geographical area beyond the best-known lakeside hotspots. This is particularly relevant in the Bodensee context, where tourism demand has traditionally concentrated along the shoreline.

The EBC is further complemented by the separately purchasable Bodensee Card PLUS, a premium all-inclusive product available to visitors and residents. Unlike the tax-funded EBC baseline model, Bodensee Card PLUS offers access to a large network of attractions across the wider four-country Bodensee region and is typically sold in flexible 3-day or 7-day formats. This creates a layered product architecture in which the EBC functions as a low-threshold stay-based instrument, while Bodensee Card PLUS serves as a premium upgrade for more intensive and explicitly cross-border destination use (Internationale Bodensee Tourismus GmbH, 2025).

Layered regional card landscape

The Bodensee case is particularly instructive because the EBC does not operate in isolation. On the western side of the German Bodensee region, the BODENSEECARD WEST performs a closely related function for Landkreis Konstanz and neighbouring destinations. It is likewise automatically issued to overnight guests, includes free public transport within the local network and combines this with discounts and selected free admissions. Public information states that the scheme is available across multiple participating locations and offers a broad package of additional visitor benefits (Bodensee West, n.d.).

Combined, EBC, BODENSEECARD WEST and Bodensee Card PLUS illustrate a differentiated regional card landscape rather than one uniform system. The stay-based guest cards on the German side provide low-barrier local and sub-regional mobility plus destination benefits, while the purchasable Bodensee Card PLUS functions as a premium, cross-border all-inclusive product for more intensive users. This layered structure is analytically important because it shows how one destination space can accommodate parallel card logics serving different user groups and territorial scales (Bodensee West, n.d.; Internationale Bodensee Tourismus GmbH, 2025).

Digital convergence and territorial limits

A further relevant development is the increasing digital convergence between the German Bodensee guest card systems. AVS reported that BODENSEECARD WEST and ECHT BODENSEE CARD were being digitised jointly, integrated into a shared digital travel-guide environment and personalised through registration-system interfaces. According to this material, the longer-term ambition of the participating organisations is a more unified guest-card solution across the German side of Lake Constance (AVS GmbH, 2022).

At the same time, these developments also highlight the continuing territorial limits of integration. Although technical interoperability has advanced, the two cards remain linked to different public transport associations, and fare-free travel is still tied primarily to the respective validity area of each scheme. The Bodensee therefore offers a particularly clear example of the gap between destination perception and institutional reality. For visitors, the lake region increasingly functions as one connected tourism space, while governance and transport responsibilities remain territorially segmented (AVS GmbH, 2022; AVS GmbH, 2023-a).

The wider regional environment also continues to evolve beyond the German side. Recent developments in the St. Gallen-Bodensee area on the Swiss side suggest that card-based tourism infrastructures around the lake are becoming more sophisticated even if they are not yet institutionally unified across borders (AVS GmbH, 2025c; St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, 2026a).

Strengths and limitations

From a governance perspective, the EBC is based on municipal participation combined with regional coordination. Municipalities join collectively, and once participation is agreed, accommodation providers within the municipality are generally required to issue the card to guests. This increases coverage and reduces fragmentation (DBT, n.d.-b).

Institutionally, the system is coordinated by Deutsche Bodensee Tourismus GmbH in cooperation with the bodo transport association and local authorities. The financial structure is directly linked to the tourist tax. In participating municipalities, tourist tax levels often range between approximately €3.50 and €4.50 per person per night depending on location and season. Within this structure, a defined share is allocated to the EBC.

Recent adjustments indicate that the EBC-specific contribution amounts to approximately €1.49 per guest per night, following an increase of around €0.22. This revised level was reportedly agreed to remain stable for four years (Südkurier, 2024-a). This is a valuable benchmark because it provides a concrete example of the contribution level required to fund a combined mobility-and-benefits model.

The scale of the system is confirmed by public reporting. According to the Beteiligungsbericht 2024 of Landkreis Lindau (Bodensee), revenues generated in connection with the EBC amounted to approximately €5.14 million, representing growth of 4.5% compared with the previous year. Of this amount, approximately €3.94 million was allocated to the bodo transport association as compensation for guest public transport use (Landkreis Lindau (Bodensee), 2024).

The remaining share supports destination management functions such as system operation, marketing, administration and continuing digitalisation. These figures demonstrate that the EBC functions as a structured mid-scale financing mechanism linking tourism demand directly to both destination management and public transport provision.

Another strength is resident integration. The system includes Echt Bodensee Card HOME, a resident-oriented extension offering selected benefits and public transport discounts. Rather than full transport inclusion, residents receive up to 30% reductions on fares together with access to a broad network of partner offers. At around €7 per year, the model is comparatively low-cost and widely accessible (Echt Bodensee, n.d.). This is a notable example of attempting to share tourism-generated benefits with local populations.

However, the EBC also has limitations. Its territorial scope remains nationally bounded despite the wider Bodensee destination functioning economically and perceptually across Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. As a result, cross-border visitor mobility and governance synergies are only partially captured by the EBC itself, even though overlapping products such as Bodensee Card PLUS address parts of the wider tourism space (Internationale Bodensee Tourismus GmbH, 2025).

Compared with more explicitly data-led systems, public communication around the EBC places less emphasis on advanced analytics. While the digital infrastructure exists, visible external evidence of strategic use of behavioural data remains more limited.

Conflicts and pricing dynamics

Although the EBC has not generated the same level of systemic controversy as some larger guest-card models, local dynamics illustrate the sensitivity of pricing, administrative requirements and municipal participation.

Initial discussions in municipalities such as Friedrichshafen revealed scepticism among some stakeholders, including concerns about tourist tax increases and the administrative burden associated with structured guest registration systems (Schwäbische Zeitung, 2023).

Further tensions emerged in Meersburg, which joined the EBC in 2023 and raised its tourist tax accordingly (Südkurier, 2023). Following planned increases in the EBC contribution, the municipality temporarily withdrew from the system due to competitiveness and cost concerns before later rejoining (SWR, 2024; Südkurier, 2024b).

These developments are analytically significant because they show that even successful regional systems remain dependent on local political acceptance. Expansion is therefore gradual and negotiated rather than automatic.

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, the Echt Bodensee Card offers several useful lessons. First, it demonstrates how a guest card can directly connect overnight tourism demand with recurring funding for public transport and destination management through a defined tourist-tax contribution.

Second, the case shows the value of combining mobility with a broad partner network rather than limiting the product to transport alone. For Costa Daurada, where beaches, heritage sites, family attractions, wine tourism, inland towns and active tourism are spatially dispersed, a mixed-value model may create stronger visitor appeal than a narrow single-purpose card.

Third, the Bodensee case is especially relevant because it shows that one destination space may sustain several overlapping but complementary card logics at once: a low-threshold tax-funded guest card, neighbouring equivalent systems in adjacent districts and a premium cross-border purchasable product. For Costa Daurada, this is a useful reminder that future card development does not necessarily have to follow one single monolithic model from the outset.

Fourth, the EBC illustrates how resident legitimacy can be strengthened through a parallel local-benefit product such as EBC HOME. This may be particularly relevant in destinations where residents perceive tourism costs more clearly than tourism benefits.

Finally, the Bodensee case also highlights an important governance warning: regional success still depends on municipal buy-in, transport-association coordination and the ability to bridge administrative boundaries that visitors themselves barely perceive. For Costa Daurada, any future card would likely require sustained cooperation between municipalities, transport actors and tourism stakeholders rather than a purely top-down launch.

Overall, the EBC provides a practical reference for a medium-scale, tax-funded and partnership-based guest card that combines mobility, local value distribution and politically negotiated regional governance, while the wider Bodensee ecosystem illustrates both the opportunities and the institutional difficulty of moving from sub-regional coordination toward broader destination-wide integration.

5.3.4 Ticino Ticket

Overview

The Ticino Ticket is a canton-wide, mobility-led guest card system operating across the Swiss canton of Ticino. Introduced in 2017 following earlier products such as the Ticino Discovery Card, it was explicitly designed to simplify visitor mobility while strengthening territorial cohesion and competitiveness across the destination. Ticino Turismo presents it as the first initiative in Switzerland to offer free public transport to tourists at the scale of an entire canton rather than limiting such benefits to individual cities or sub-regions. The system also received national recognition through the Swiss Milestone tourism innovation award, underlining its strategic visibility within the Swiss tourism landscape (Agenzia Turistica Ticinese [ATT], n.d.-a).

Operationally, the ticket is automatically issued to eligible overnight guests staying in participating accommodation and is valid from check-in until the end of the departure day. It cannot be purchased independently by day visitors or non-eligible users. More than 500 accommodation providers are integrated into the system, including hotels, hostels and campsites, indicating a high level of territorial coverage (ATT, n.d.-a).

A defining structural feature is its integration into the cantonal tourism tax system. The Ticino Ticket is not a voluntary add-on but a bundled entitlement linked to regulated overnight stays. This positions the ticket as a policy-based instrument rather than a market-driven product and ensures broad automatic distribution across the destination through a system based on the cariboo platform (ATT, n.d.-b).

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

Mobility constitutes the core functional and strategic element of the Ticino Ticket. The ticket provides free access to public transport throughout the canton, covering a network of more than 1,500 kilometres operated by 12 transport companies within the Arcobaleno fare system. This includes regional trains, buses and selected navigation services, connecting urban centres such as Lugano and Locarno with peripheral valleys and alpine areas (ATT, n.d.-c).

The territorial reach of the system is unusually extensive for a guest card. It spans the entire canton from Chiasso in the south to Airolo in the north and integrates both high-demand corridors and more remote regions. This makes the Ticino Ticket one of the clearest examples of a fully integrated regional mobility entitlement within a tourism context.

At the same time, the system is not entirely uniform. Certain tourism-specific or high-cost routes are not fully included but instead offered at reduced rates. Official FAQ material notes, for example, that navigation on the Swiss basin of Lake Lugano and parts of Lake Maggiore is available at a 20% discount rather than through full inclusion (ATT, n.d.-d).

This creates a differentiated access structure in which core mobility is universally available, while certain premium or high-cost services remain partially priced.

From a behavioural perspective, the Ticino Ticket has strong steering potential. Because mobility is fully embedded in the accommodation stay and does not require a separate purchase decision, the system removes both financial and cognitive barriers. Visitors are effectively defaulted into public transport use, which gives the instrument strong potential to influence modal behaviour during the stay (ATT, n.d.-a).

The ticket also includes a secondary layer of benefits beyond transport. These are primarily structured as discounts rather than full inclusions and cover categories such as culture, mountain railways, leisure facilities, sport, gastronomy and events (ATT, n.d.-e). A particularly notable element is the CHF 10 voucher for purchases of at least CHF 70 at Migros Ticino stores and VOI partners, showing that the ticket is not only designed to facilitate mobility, but also to stimulate local economic activity and connect tourism flows with regional spending (ATT, n.d.-a; ATT, n.d.-e).

An especially useful indicator is provided by the official partner material, which states that the estimated economic value of the bundled benefits exceeds CHF 100 per ticket. This is analytically significant because it suggests that the perceived value of the system is substantially higher than the underlying tax contribution that finances it (ATT, n.d.-b).

Strengths and limitations

The governance structure of the Ticino Ticket reflects a relatively centralised and institutionalised model. The system is coordinated by the Agenzia Turistica Ticinese, which functions as the cantonal tourism organisation. ATT itself is structured as a multi-stakeholder entity bringing together public authorities, regional tourism organisations and private sector associations such as HotellerieSuisse Ticino, GastroTicino and the camping association (ATT, n.d.-f).

The ticket is fully embedded within the cantonal tourism tax framework and is not structured as a voluntary opt-in product. Accommodation providers that fall under the regulated tourism tax system are required to apply the relevant tax, within which the ticket is included as a bundled benefit. While hotels, campsites and formally registered providers are fully integrated, private accommodation may participate only if they apply the relevant surcharge and administrative procedures. Coverage therefore depends on the extent to which accommodation providers are formally embedded within the cantonal system through systems based on the cariboo platform (ATT, n.d.-b).

From a financial perspective, the system is funded through accommodation taxation rather than direct purchase. As of 2025, published tax levels were approximately CHF 4.50 for higher-category hotels, CHF 4.20 for lower-category hotels and apartments, and CHF 3.10

for campsites and youth hostels. Private accommodation could apply a surcharge of around CHF 2.00 to CHF 2.20 per night (ATT, n.d.-b). Unlike the Südtirol Guest Pass or the Echt Bodensee Card, the Ticino Ticket is not presented as a separate financial entity with transparent revenue and expenditure lines. This reduces financial visibility, but likely strengthens institutional continuity because the ticket is embedded within the broader cantonal tourism framework.

The continuation of the system until 2030, confirmed by the cantonal government, underlines this stability and suggests a high degree of stakeholder alignment (ATT, n.d.-b). In terms of scale, regional reporting indicates that the system reached approximately 4 million users in its first seven years, confirming its widespread adoption and operational relevance (Corriere del Ticino, 2024).

A further strength lies in the ticket's data potential. Accommodation providers use a centralised digital platform to issue tickets and manage guest data, while the ticket itself is integrated into broader destination-management systems. The combination of accommodation-based registration, digital issuance and partner integration makes the Ticino Ticket a potentially valuable data infrastructure within the destination. In addition, Ticino's 2030 tourism strategy explicitly emphasises the centralisation of tourism data, the automation of administrative processes and the creation of a cantonal data platform, which places the ticket within a wider digital governance agenda (Repubblica e Cantone Ticino, n.d.; ATT, n.d.-a).

At the same time, the public visibility of actual data use remains more limited than in some other benchmark cases. The technical foundations for data collection appear strong, and dedicated statistical datasets exist, but there is comparatively little public evidence of advanced analytics, real-time monitoring or systematic deployment of these data for dynamic visitor management (Tourism Data Switzerland, 2023).

The system also has limitations in social sustainability. Unlike some German models, the Ticino Ticket does not include a resident-oriented equivalent. The ticket is explicitly reserved for overnight visitors and cannot be purchased independently by local residents or day visitors (ATT, n.d.-d). Resident integration therefore remains indirect, through stronger public transport viability and visitor spending effects rather than through shared entitlement.

Finally, the ticket's spatial effect remains territorially bounded. Although Ticino lies on a major border with Italy, the system does not extend into neighbouring Italian regions. Its dispersion effect therefore remains confined to the cantonal territory, even if within that territory it enables a high degree of mobility integration.

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, the Ticino Ticket offers a particularly useful reference for a tax-based, automatically issued regional mobility entitlement with broad territorial coverage and relatively simple system logic. It shows that a guest card does not need hundreds of attraction partners or a highly layered product structure to generate strong practical value. A focused mobility core, combined with selected additional incentives, can already create a powerful low-friction management tool.

The case is also highly relevant from a data perspective. Since the ticket is embedded in accommodation registration and linked to digital issuance, it creates a structured and potentially reliable layer of visitor data that goes beyond conventional overnight statistics. For Costa Daurada, where fragmented tourism intelligence and incomplete accommodation visibility remain recurring concerns, this is a particularly important lesson. A regional guest card could help strengthen data integration across accommodation, mobility and destination management, even if more advanced analytics were only developed gradually over time.

Ticino also illustrates the limits of a focused mobility model. Its strength lies in simplicity, scale and behavioural influence, but its broader governance role is more constrained in areas such as resident inclusion, financial transparency and explicit redistribution. For Costa Daurada, this suggests that a mobility-led card could form a strong foundation, but may need complementary layers if the long-term objective extends beyond transport to include broader social legitimacy, stakeholder coordination and resident benefit sharing.

5.3.5 South-Western German Cluster Schemes

The following schemes are examined together because they form a particularly instructive regional cluster in south-western Germany. While geographically connected through the wider Black Forest and adjacent borderland tourism space, they represent four distinct but partly complementary model logics: KONUS as a long-established tax-based mobility scheme, the DreiWelten Card as a host-financed attraction-led and partly cross-border cooperative platform, the SchwarzwaldCard as a fully commercial purchasable regional leisure card, and host-linked experience card models such as Schwarzwald Plus and Hochschwarzwald Card.

KONUS functions as the broad legacy mobility layer across much of the wider Black Forest region. The DreiWelten Card, SchwarzwaldCard and Schwarzwald Plus, by contrast, represent different attraction-led, benefit-oriented or market-based systems operating in neighbouring but distinct territorial contexts. While each intersects to varying degrees with the broader Black Forest tourism geography, they differ significantly in access logic, financing structure, governance model and strategic purpose.

In summary, these cases demonstrate that destination card development within one regional landscape does not follow a single linear path. Instead, legacy mobility systems, wider territorial benefit platforms, host-based inclusion models and commercial leisure products may coexist simultaneously, sometimes overlapping, sometimes complementing one another, and each responding to different stakeholder priorities. This makes the southwest German cluster particularly valuable for comparative analysis, as it illustrates how multiple guest card logics can emerge within a shared tourism ecosystem rather than through one uniform regional model.

5.3.5.1 KONUS Gästekarte

Overview

The KONUS Gästekarte (Kostenlose Nutzung des ÖPNV für Schwarzwaldurlauber) is one of the oldest and most established mobility-based guest card systems in Germany and remains a benchmark example of tourism-related public transport integration. Introduced in 2005, the scheme grants overnight guests free use of local and regional public transport across large parts of the Black Forest and has become a central pillar of the region's tourism offer (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-a; Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, 2024-a).

According to official regional sources, the card is available in around 150 Black Forest holiday resorts through approximately 9,000 accommodation providers. It is valid across nine participating transport associations and covers a broad territory stretching from Pforzheim to Basel and from Karlsruhe to Waldshut, excluding long-distance rail services and mountain railways (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-a; Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-b).

Participation is decided at municipal level. Once a municipality joins, accommodation providers subject to the tourist tax regime generally issue the card automatically to eligible guests. The scheme is therefore neither a retail product nor a purely optional host-level add-on, but a municipally embedded tourism-mobility instrument.

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

Mobility is the undisputed core of KONUS. The card functions as a valid second-class ticket for buses and regional trains during the stay, including the departure day. This creates a low-friction behavioural mechanism: guests do not need to purchase separate tickets, understand fare systems or repeatedly consider transport costs (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-a; n.d.-b).

The strength of KONUS lies in this simplicity. Public transport becomes part of the accommodation stay by default, reducing both financial and cognitive barriers. Particularly in a dispersed rural tourism region, this can materially improve visitor mobility choices.

The scheme remains deliberately narrow in scope. Unlike newer multifunctional models, KONUS focuses overwhelmingly on mobility rather than attraction bundling or extensive discounts. This clarity has likely contributed to its recognisability and longevity.

At local level, municipalities may complement KONUS with their own benefits. Grenzach-Wyhlen, for example, linked the introduction of tourist tax and KONUS participation with additional leisure benefits such as reduced swimming pool access, illustrating how the mobility core can be supplemented locally (Dischinger, 2024).

Strengths and limitations

The governance structure is one of KONUS's most important analytical features. It is co-ordinated regionally by Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH but depends on municipalities, accommodation providers and multiple transport associations. It therefore links destination management, municipal finance and public transport provision in one durable framework.

Annual reporting confirms the scale of the scheme. In 2023, KONUS covered 148 participating localities, around 9,000 hosts and approximately 11.5 million KONUS overnight stays, while equalisation payments to transport associations totalled €5,218,506. In 2024, the network expanded to 149 localities, with around 11.3 million overnight stays and €5,173,457 in equalisation payments (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, 2023; 2024-a).

These figures indicate that KONUS is not only a guest benefit, but a structural tourism-financed mobility mechanism supporting regional transport viability. The 2024 annual report also noted that average usage rose from 3.90 trips per card in 2023 to 4.58 in 2024, suggesting active use rather than passive issuance (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, 2024-a).

Digitalisation has accelerated in recent years. Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH formally launched the digital transformation of KONUS in 2024 with pilot partners such as Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH and DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH. The rollout has relied on integration with electronic registration and card systems provided by partners such as AVS GmbH, Alturos and feratel (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, 2024b; 2025; AVS GmbH, 2026).

Because the scheme is almost entirely mobility-focused, its limitations are equally visible, as it has weaker leverage over attraction choice, spending distribution or broader visitor management. Participation also remains politically sensitive. The introduction of tourist tax in Herbolzheim was closely linked to KONUS and became a local policy issue, demonstrating that joining the system can be debated not only as a tourism decision but also as a taxation question (Stadt Herbolzheim, n.d.; Staatsanzeiger Baden-Württemberg, 2024).

Similarly, Schömberg discontinued its guest card including free bus and rail travel because costs were considered too high, while Baden-Baden remained outside the scheme because joining was judged financially unattractive (Schwarzwälder Bote, 2025; Pforzheimer Zeitung, 2025; Badische Neueste Nachrichten, 2021).

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, KONUS is especially relevant as a comparatively simple and scalable mobility-led model. Its central lesson is that broad automatic inclusion of public transport can already create meaningful behavioural and financing effects without requiring a highly complex product architecture.

At the same time, it demonstrates the limits of a first-generation mobility scheme. If policy objectives extend toward visitor dispersion, resident inclusion or wider governance coordination, additional layers would likely be necessary.

5.3.5.2 DreiWelten Card

Overview

The DreiWelten Card is one of the most analytically interesting systems in the sample because it combines an attraction-led all-inclusive logic with a cross-border territorial structure and an unusually rich governance architecture. Introduced in July 2021, it is valid in the region marketed as Schwarzwald, Rheinfall und Bodensee, spanning parts of southern Germany and the Swiss canton of Schaffhausen.

Unlike municipal guest cards, the system is coordinated by DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, which functions as the contractual, technical and organisational hub for accommodation providers, attraction partners and product development. Official communication describes the standard card as automatically available to guests staying at participating accommodation for at least two nights and valid for the duration of the stay. Depending on source date, references range from more than 70 or 80 hosts and more than 120 to 150 included attractions, indicating continued expansion (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-a; 2022; Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-c; Schwarzwald-Donau, n.d.).

The system has evolved beyond a pure guest card into a broader territorial benefit platform with differentiated user groups:

- DreiWelten Card: included guest card for overnight visitors
- BürgerCard: annual leisure card for residents
- JobCard: employer-sponsored employee benefit product
- EhrenCard: recognition card for volunteers, typically purchased or distributed by municipalities, associations, NGOs or public bodies

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

Unlike KONUS, the DreiWelten Card is fundamentally attraction-led rather than mobility-led. Its core promise is free access to a wide network of tourism experiences rather than region-wide public transport entitlement.

Included attractions highlighted in official communication include Solemar thermal baths, the Triberger Waterfalls, the Sauschwänzlebahn heritage railway, Smilestones in Schaffhausen, Rheinfall boat trips and Rothaus GenussWelt (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-a; n.d.-b).

This creates a different behavioural logic. Rather than lowering the cost of movement, the system lowers the marginal cost of attraction use. Because experiences can often be used once per day, guests are encouraged to explore actively and structure stays around repeated discovery.

First-year monitoring reported 43,257 issued cards, around 50,000 attraction uses and host feedback suggesting approximately 90% of guests used the card (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, 2022). While such self-reported figures should be interpreted cautiously, they indicate strong activation.

Because attractions are geographically distributed across Germany and Switzerland, the system also has notable territorial-dispersion potential.

Strengths and limitations

The governance model differs sharply from tax-based systems. Hosts join voluntarily and contribute through an overnight-based Umlage, while attraction partners receive reimbursement through the system in exchange for inclusion, visibility and increased volume. This creates a managed redistribution model between accommodation providers, the operating company and service partners (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-d).

The cross-border dimension is especially significant because actors in Germany and Switzerland are integrated without one common sovereign tourism authority, transport system or taxation framework.

Public pricing illustrates clear segmentation. The BürgerCard is positioned as a full annual regional leisure pass at approximately €99 / CHF109 for adults and €59 / CHF65 for children (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-c).

The JobCard follows a business-to-business model, with versions ranging from a basic annual access model to enhanced formats allowing repeated use. It is offered through employers as a non-cash staff benefit and received the Baden-Württemberg Tourism Innovation Award in 2024 (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, 2024).

The EhrenCard is especially notable from a governance perspective. It is not primarily a retail product but a recognition instrument acquired by municipalities, associations or institutions for volunteers and civic contributors. In this sense, the destination card logic is directly linked to community recognition and civic participation.

One of the greatest strengths of the DreiWelten model is therefore its extension beyond tourism. It links visitors, residents, employees and volunteers within one coordinated territorial system.

Mobility integration is much weaker than in transport-led systems and a clear limiting factor. Participation depends on continued stakeholder confidence since the model is voluntary rather than structurally guaranteed. Public financial transparency is lower than in tax-based schemes, and some early feedback pointed to territorial gaps in the attraction offer in certain sub-regions, especially around parts of Waldshut and Hochrhein (DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, 2022).

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, the DreiWelten Card is especially relevant because it demonstrates how a destination card can evolve beyond visitor management into a wider territorial benefit platform.

Rather than serving tourists alone, the model links visitors, residents, employees and volunteer recognition within one coordinated framework. This could be particularly relevant if Costa Daurada seeks stronger resident acceptance, workforce attraction, civic engagement and broader destination stewardship.

At the same time, the case also shows the limits of an attraction-first model where sustainable mobility is a central policy goal. Its strongest transferable lesson therefore lies in stakeholder integration rather than transport governance.

5.3.5.3 SchwarzwaldCard

Overview

The SchwarzwaldCard represents a fundamentally different logic from both KONUS and the DreiWelten Card. Whereas KONUS is a tax-based mobility scheme and the DreiWelten Card is a host-financed inclusion model, the SchwarzwaldCard is a fully commercial, purchasable regional leisure card.

It is available to both visitors and residents and explicitly marketed as a product for Urlauber und Einheimische, making it one of the clearest examples in the sample of a retail-style destination card rather than a stay-based entitlement (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-d).

The product family includes:

- Classic SchwarzwaldCard: free admission to more than 200 attractions on three freely selectable days within one year
- SchwarzwaldCard 365: one annual visit to participating attractions across a full year
- Premium variants of both products including one day at Europa-Park

The later launch of the 365 version in 2019 broadened the concept toward year-round and resident-friendly use (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, 2019; Tourismusnetzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2023).

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

Unlike KONUS, mobility is not the core of the SchwarzwaldCard. The product does not provide a region-wide public transport entitlement. Its behavioural effect instead comes from lowering the marginal cost of attraction use and encouraging users to structure leisure behaviour around a broad menu of included experiences.

The thematic scope includes baths and spas, mountain railways, museums, mines, culinary offers, outdoor attractions and leisure facilities. This gives the card broad family, wellness and repeat-user appeal (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-e; n.d.-f).

The Europa-Park variants are especially significant. A flagship attraction can serve as the anchor purchase motive, while the wider attraction network broadens perceived value and encourages additional regional exploration.

Strengths and limitations

The pricing architecture underlines deliberate market segmentation. Public pricing for the 2025/26 season indicates approximately:

- Classic card: €51 adults / €35 children
- Classic + Europa-Park: €112 adults / €94 children
- 365 card: €123 adults / €70 children
- 365 + Europa-Park: €197 adults / €140 children

(Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-e; n.d.-f)

The governance model is a centrally managed commercial clearing system. Revenues are pooled and redistributed to participating attractions according to accepted visits, with technical administration supported through AVS systems. Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH describes deductions for administration, marketing, commissions and production costs, with remaining revenues redistributed according to actual use (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-d).

Annual reporting confirms real economic significance. In 2024, 2,704 cards were sold, generating 5,476 users, 12,031 accepted visits, total revenue of €419,696 and partner payouts of approximately €308,200. In 2023, revenue amounted to €698,998 with partner payouts of approximately €514,000 (Schwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.-g; 2023; 2024-a).

These figures also show the sensitivity of commercial models to changing demand conditions. Unlike tax-funded or automatically issued cards, performance depends directly on willingness to purchase and perceived value. Regional reporting notes that the product had benefited from strong domestic tourism during the COVID period, while later years reflected market normalisation (Tourismusnetzwerk Baden-Württemberg, 2023).

Resident inclusion is stronger than in many other systems. Residents are not included by entitlement, but fully included as potential customers, especially through the 365 annual version.

Since it is fully commercial, uptake can never be assumed across the overnight market and is hence limited. It also lacks an integrated mobility component, limiting its usefulness as a direct sustainable transport tool.

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, the SchwarzwaldCard is particularly relevant as it demonstrates how a regional destination card can integrate a major flagship attraction without becoming a pure single-site ticket.

The Europa-Park option offers a useful comparator for any future PortAventura-linked regional card model. It also shows how tiered pricing can target multiple segments simultaneously: short-stay tourists, families, repeat domestic users and residents.

At the same time, the case highlights the limits of a purely commercial model. Without automatic inclusion or a mobility component, reach and policy relevance depend much more heavily on consumer demand and the continued strength of the value proposition.

5.3.5.4 Host-Linked Black Forest Experience Card Models: Schwarzwald Plus and Hochschwarzwald Card

A further relevant model logic within this south-western German cluster is represented by host-linked inclusion schemes such as Schwarzwald Plus in the Nationalparkregion around Baiersbronn and Freudenstadt and the Hochschwarzwald Card. While these systems do not require the same depth of treatment as KONUS, the DreiWelten Card or the SchwarzwaldCard, they add an important additional layer to the comparative cluster. In both cases, access is tied to participating accommodation providers and a minimum stay of two nights rather than to open retail purchase or a municipally embedded tourist tax entitlement. Public host information for Schwarzwald Plus further indicates that participating businesses contribute financially to the operation and marketing of the scheme, underlining that funding is organised primarily through accommodation partners rather than through a tax-based framework (Schwarzwald Plus GmbH, n.d.-a; Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.).

The core proposition of these schemes is not region-wide transport entitlement in their own right, but complimentary access to a broad portfolio of included tourism and leisure experiences during the stay. Schwarzwald Plus offers more than 80 experiences in the Nationalparkregion, while the Hochschwarzwald Card gives access to around 100 attractions in its own destination area. In both cases, the behavioural logic is attraction-led and stay-based: the cards are designed to increase perceived holiday value, encourage active use of regional offers and lower the marginal cost of leisure participation once guests are in destination (Schwarzwald Plus GmbH, n.d.-c; Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.).

At the same time, both models are linked to the wider KONUS framework for public transport rather than building a separate autonomous mobility architecture. This is analytically significant because it shows how attraction-led guest benefits in the Black Forest can be layered onto an existing tourism-mobility backbone instead of duplicating it. Schwarzwald Plus is especially explicit in this respect, as the card is valid only in conjunction with the card cover and sticker, and for each overnight stay booked guests receive one full day of free admissions and free rides. The result is a hybrid logic in which experience activation is combined with mobility support through an already established regional framework (Schwarzwald Plus GmbH, n.d.-c; Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.).

Schwarzwald Plus communication on the 2025 season also suggests positive market performance. A February 2026 press release reported growing participation among hosts, increasing active use by guests and above-average overnight development among participating accommodation businesses relative to the wider regional trend. Hosts additionally reported higher guest satisfaction, longer average stays and stronger use of regional offers. While such statements should be interpreted cautiously as operator-issued communication, they nonetheless indicate that the scheme may generate perceived commercial value for participating businesses while simultaneously supporting wider regional consumption patterns (Schwarzwald Plus GmbH, 2026).

Particularly noteworthy in the case of Schwarzwald Plus is the parallel Heimatkarte, which extends the destination card logic beyond overnight guests to eligible residents and second-home owners within the surrounding region. Public information presents the product as an annual card valid on a calendar-year basis from 1 January to 31 December. During this period, each included Schwarzwald experience can be used once free of charge on a chosen day. This creates a resident-oriented leisure and regional-benefit model rather than a tourism stay entitlement. Public pricing indicates €86 for adults, reduced to €76 when renewed for the following year, and €66 for children. No equivalent resident layer is apparent in the public presentation of the Hochschwarzwald Card, which appears more clearly focused on the overnight visitor segment alone (Schwarzwald Plus GmbH, n.d.-b; Hochschwarzwald Tourismus GmbH, n.d.).

From a comparative perspective, these schemes are especially relevant because they illustrate a distinct Black Forest model family in which host-based stay incentives, attraction-led regional discovery and a shared mobility backbone can be combined without relying on a fully retail or purely tax-funded architecture. Schwarzwald Plus further shows how such a model can evolve beyond a purely visitor-facing offer through the addition of a resident and second-home-owner layer. For the Costa Daurada, this is particularly useful as an example of how guest card systems can be embedded in accommodation partnerships, connected to an existing regional mobility framework and, where strategically desired, extended into wider territorial benefit structures.

5.3.6 Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz / Gästekarte mobil

Overview

The Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz is a regional guest card system operating in the Sächsische Schweiz destination in eastern Germany, located south-east of Dresden along the Elbe Valley and centred on the Saxon Switzerland National Park, one of Germany's best-known nature and hiking destinations. The scheme combines a traditional benefits-based guest card with a later mobility extension and is therefore a particularly relevant example of how an established local card can evolve into a broader destination-management instrument (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., n.d.-a; Sächsische Schweiz Tourismus, n.d.).

The model has two layers. The first is the standard Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz, issued to overnight guests in participating municipalities and providing discounts at leisure, cultural and tourism businesses. The second is the Gästekarte mobil, which extends the existing card by adding fare-free use of most regional public transport services. Rather than replacing the traditional guest card, the destination progressively upgraded it through the addition of integrated mobility (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., n.d.-a).

This development path is analytically important. In municipalities participating in Gästekarte mobil, the mobility component is not an optional supplement but automatically included and issued through accommodation providers in the same way as the standard card. According to the Tourism Association and related presentation material, the destination comprises 23 municipalities in total, of which 14 currently issue the Gästekarte, while 13 of those 14 now participate in Gästekarte mobil. The mobility-enhanced version has therefore become the dominant operational model across almost the entire scheme area (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025b; Richter, 2026).

The development trajectory further increases the case's relevance. The AVS case study reports that digital registration systems and guest-card infrastructure were being expanded before the mobility roll-out, while negotiations with transport partners began in 2019. After an initial delay during the pandemic, Pirna became the first municipality to introduce Gästekarte mobil, followed by staged regional expansion. The dwif evaluation further noted that Lohmen and Stadt Wehlen joined in April 2023, underlining the continued rollout momentum, while presentation material by Richter documents the progression toward near-comprehensive regional coverage by 2024/2025 (AVS GmbH, 2023; dwif, 2023; Richter, 2026).

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

The defining strategic added value of the scheme lies in Gästekarte mobil. Guests in participating municipalities can use buses, regional rail and most ferries in the destination area without buying an extra ticket, alongside selected additional services such as the Kirnitzschtalbahn and cross-border links. Not every single service is fully included, but the mobility layer is broad enough to make public transport a realistic and low-friction option for many typical tourist journeys (Sächsische Schweiz Tourismus, n.d.).

This is strategically significant because the model combines ticket entitlement with an explicit communication and orientation strategy. The Destination Strategy 2025 reports that Gästekarte mobil has been available since 2020, is now offered in thirteen municipalities, enables around 89% of overnight guests to use public transport without an extra ticket, and has been associated with clearly higher uptake of public transport than before. The same strategy states that roughly half of guests use the offer regularly or often, whereas before the mobility extension public transport use had been far lower. It also reports increased rail arrival shares in places using Gästekarte mobil (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025-a).

At the same time, the external evaluation also highlights the continued structural limits of modal shift. According to dwif, 34% of guests leave the car fully parked during the stay or do not have one with them, including 18% who arrive by long-distance rail and a further 2% by public transport from the surrounding region. However, the private car remains relevant for roughly two thirds of guests, particularly for poorly connected localities and late-evening mobility. This makes clear that the Gästekarte mobil can significantly strengthen sustainable mobility, but cannot on its own overcome all accessibility gaps within a dispersed rural destination (dwif, 2023).

The Richter presentation makes the strategic logic even clearer. The scheme is not presented only as a transport entitlement, but as part of an "ÖPNV first" approach. Public transport arrival and movement are communicated first, route maps are redesigned for visitors rather than for technical network logic, and suggested excursions are increasingly developed from stop to stop rather than from car park to car park. This indicates that the success of the scheme depends not only on removing ticket barriers, but also on translating mobility into a legible and attractive visitor experience (Richter, 2026).

The standard guest card remains important alongside the mobility layer. According to the Tourism Association, more than 50 leisure businesses provide more than 60 discount offers. The non-mobility benefits therefore continue to cover leisure, culture, gastronomy and wellness services rather than disappearing once transport was added. This is one of the model's strongest features: the region did not build a mobility card from nothing, but transformed an established benefit card into a more strategic instrument (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., n.d.-a).

Strengths and limitations

One of the strongest features of the case is its evidence-based development. The AVS case study states that the Tourism Association commissioned a consortium consisting of dwif, PTV Transport Consult and IRS Consult to evaluate the project. This included on-site and online guest surveys, transport and accessibility analysis, benchmarking and assessment of financial implications for transport operators. The Destination Strategy confirms that the scheme was initially established as a pilot in order to build a robust evidence base and determine actual transport use (AVS GmbH, 2023; dwif, 2023; Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025-a).

The dwif material also points to the practical refinement of the system beyond ticket entitlement itself. It highlights the importance of timetable densification, longer operating hours, improved waiting environments at stops and stations, bike carriage, integration of call taxis, accessibility improvements and stronger communication, especially for first-time and second-time visitors who are often less familiar with the offer. This is analytically significant because it shows that the effectiveness of Gästekarte mobil depends not only on fare-free access, but on the wider usability of the regional mobility system (dwif, 2023).

The governance structure is also comparatively sophisticated. The standard Gästekarte is linked to the guest-tax systems of participating municipalities, while Gästekarte mobil adds another inter-organisational layer involving the Tourism Association, transport operators and the municipalities that decide to participate in the mobility extension. This makes the scheme neither a purely centralised regional product nor a purely commercial card. It is better understood as a staged municipal-regional governance model in which local fiscal decisions and regional strategic coordination interact closely (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., n.d.-b; Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., n.d.-c).

The guest-tax material gives important insight into the political economy of the scheme. Pirna introduced a guest tax in 2020 partly in order to co-finance Gästekarte mobil from the outset, while Rathmannsdorf introduced a guest tax in 2022 specifically to enable participation in the mobility extension. This is a crucial governance point: in the Sächsische Schweiz, mobility integration was not merely added onto an existing structure, but in some cases acted as a driver of fiscal adaptation at municipal level (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025b).

The scale of the scheme is substantial. The Destination Strategy reports around 1.5 million covered overnight stays and roughly €1.5 million annual turnover connected to Gästekarte mobil, while the broader destination profile of the Sächsische Schweiz reported around 1.69 million overnight stays in 2023 and almost half a million arrivals. This indicates that the card is structurally significant rather than marginal (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025-a; Landestourismusverband Sachsen e.V., 2024).

The same material also suggests that guest-tax levels in the region remain comparatively moderate, generally in the range of roughly €1.00 to €3.00 per night depending on location, which strengthens the case's relevance for destinations concerned with political feasibility (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025b).

The model also has a stronger data and learning dimension than many traditional guest-card systems. The combination of digital registration, card issuance, transport integration and formal external evaluation makes the Sächsische Schweiz one of the strongest cases in the sample for evidence-based iterative development. It may not yet represent a full smart-destination dashboard model, but it clearly goes beyond a classic analogue discount card (AVS GmbH, 2023; Richter, 2026).

More broadly, dwif's interpretation that destinations without guest-card systems may increasingly face a competitive disadvantage suggests that such instruments are becoming part of the expected baseline of destination quality rather than a purely optional add-on (dwif, 2023).

Its limitations are also clear. Rollout is extensive but not fully universal. Not all transport services are included. The scheme does not appear to include a dedicated resident version. And although it is strong on evaluation, communication and behavioural steering, it does not on its own resolve the broader challenge of comprehensive visitor-flow management in a hotspot-heavy protected landscape (Sächsische Schweiz Tourismus, n.d.; Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025-a).

Relevance for Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, the Sächsische Schweiz case is especially relevant for three reasons.

First, it shows that a destination does not need to build a fully integrated mobility card from scratch. An existing traditional guest-card scheme can be gradually upgraded by adding a mobility layer later. That may be particularly useful in a destination where introducing a fully comprehensive card immediately would be politically or institutionally difficult (Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., n.d.-a; AVS GmbH, 2023).

Second, the case demonstrates that the effectiveness of a mobility-integrated guest card depends not only on free ticketing, but also on communication, visualisation and visitor guidance. Tourist-friendly network maps, stop-to-stop excursion logic, public-transport-first information and host communication all matter. For Costa Daurada, where transport fragmentation and visitor usability are recurring issues, this is an especially valuable lesson (Richter, 2026; Tourismusverband Sächsische Schweiz e.V., 2025-a).

Third, the Saxon case highlights the importance of institutional support frameworks. The mobility-enhanced guest card was not just a product innovation, but part of a wider environment of municipal coordination, advisory support, guest-tax guidance and phased implementation. For Costa Daurada, where municipal fragmentation is a structural challenge, this suggests that successful rollout may depend not only on the design of the card itself, but also on whether there is a shared advisory and governance framework capable of supporting adoption across municipalities (Landestourismusverband Sachsen e.V., 2024; Landestourismusverband Sachsen e.V., n.d.).

5.3.7 Thüringer Wald Card

Overview

The Thüringer Wald Card is a layered regional card system operating across the Thüringer Wald, the largest tourism region in the federal state of Thüringen in central Germany. Rather than functioning as one uniform guest card, the model combines several benefit layers under a common regional umbrella: a basic guest-card model linked to municipal visitor contributions and partner benefits, an annually purchasable card aimed especially at local residents and other frequent regional users, and, since 2024, an optional all-inclusive premium variant for participating accommodation providers. This makes the case particularly relevant as an example of how fragmented local card systems can evolve incrementally into a more coordinated regional platform.

The destination itself is of moderate but significant scale. According to the OSV Tourismusbarometer, accommodation establishments with at least ten beds, including camping, recorded approximately 1.2 million arrivals and 3.8 million overnight stays in 2024, with an average stay of 3.2 nights and a foreign-market share of 4.1% (Ostdeutscher

Sparkassenverband [OSV], 2025). As these figures exclude smaller accommodation providers, total tourism demand is likely somewhat higher.

The current regional model appears to have emerged from a previously fragmented landscape of municipal guest-card arrangements. Project leadership stated that many localities still operated their own separate cards only a few years earlier, before the Covid period was used to streamline and consolidate the system under one broader Thüringer Wald framework (Zeit Online, 2026). In that sense, the case is best understood not as a fully standardised card model, but as a transition from local fragmentation towards more coordinated destination governance.

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

The defining feature of the Thüringer Wald Card is not one single benefit, but its hybrid architecture. The region combines a basic guest-card layer, a resident-oriented annual card and a voluntary all-inclusive premium variant within one shared brand. This makes it one of the more institutionally flexible models in the sample.

Mobility integration exists, but remains territorially differentiated rather than universally standardised across the whole destination. Public transport inclusion is available in several participating municipalities and sub-regions, but depends on the holiday location and the relevant local agreements rather than applying seamlessly throughout the entire Thüringer Wald (Thüringer Wald Card, 2025). The model therefore does not yet function as a destination-wide mobility pass. Nevertheless, it remains strategically relevant because it illustrates a pragmatic incremental approach: rather than waiting for full transport harmonisation, the region has built a common tourism card framework while allowing mobility integration to expand progressively.

This is especially important in light of wider transport developments in Thüringen. The ongoing expansion of the Verkehrsverbund Mittelthüringen and closer tariff coordination between bus and rail operators may lower the institutional barriers for broader mobility inclusion in future years (MDR, 2026). Resident survey data in the OSV Tourismusbarometer further underline the significance of this issue, with 50.6% of respondents identifying improved public transport as an appropriate measure for reducing negative tourism effects (OSV, 2025, p. 109).

The card also supports visitor dispersion by bundling a broad range of leisure facilities, attractions, museums, wellness providers and tourism businesses across a geographically dispersed mountain region. The all-inclusive premium variant allows free use of around 150 leisure facilities, while the standard annual card grants discounts at more than 170 partner offers (Thüringer Wald Card, 2026; Thüringer Wald Shop, 2025). Project leader Holger Jakob described the concept by stating that the whole Thüringer Wald could, in principle, be used “like one large leisure park” through the card system (Zeit Online, 2026, author’s translation). This formulation is analytically revealing because it captures the card’s central logic: not reliance on one flagship attraction, but bundling a dispersed network of museums, thermal baths, cable railways, outdoor facilities and smaller attractions into one coherent territorial experience.

Strengths and limitations

From a governance perspective, the Thüringer Wald Card is one of the most interesting transformation cases in the comparative sample. Rather than creating a destination card entirely from scratch, regional actors appear to have built a common umbrella system on top of previously separate municipal arrangements. Operational responsibility lies with Thüringer Wald Service GmbH, linked to the Naturpark Thüringer Wald and the Landschaftspflegeverband Thüringer Wald, which is notable because governance is embedded in a broader territorial cooperation structure rather than solely in a classic tourism-marketing body (Zeit Online, 2025; Naturpark Thüringer Wald, 2024).

The system demonstrates multilayer stakeholder integration. Municipalities are linked through guest-card and local tourist-tax arrangements, accommodation providers issue benefits to guests, leisure facilities receive reimbursement through validated usage, residents and repeat users are included through the annual card, and regional institutions coordinate the common platform. Information published through the IHK Südthüringen tourism updates page further indicates active business-network mobilisation, partner recruitment and cross-sector communication surrounding the rollout, underlining the importance of intermediary business institutions in scaling destination-wide cooperation (IHK Südthüringen, 2024c).

One of the strongest features of the case is the relative transparency of its premium-layer business model. The Thüringer Wald Card All Inclusive, launched in June 2024, is voluntary for accommodation providers. Early-entry participation pricing was set at €3.60 net per adult overnight stay and €1.80 net per child, later rising to €4.00 and €2.00 respectively for later entrants (IHK Südthüringen, 2024-a). According to project documentation, the system is fully self-financed within Thüringer Wald Service GmbH. Revenues are used primarily to reimburse participating leisure facilities according to validated use, while only around 3% is retained for system fees, marketing and staffing (Tourismusnetzwerk Thüringen, 2024-a). Partner information further states that reimbursement was targeted at approximately 52% to 62% of the regular admission price per validated use, depending on the relationship between card issuance and redemption volumes (IHK Südthüringen, 2024b). This degree of public visibility into reimbursement mechanics is unusual compared with many other card systems.

Stakeholder feedback in public reporting is especially valuable because such evidence is rarely available in comparable cases. Kathleen Bergert-Höhn, operator of the Waldhotel Rennsteighöhe and the Bunkermuseum Frauenwald, reported that participation had led to more museum visitors, longer stays, stronger guest satisfaction and additional winter overnight demand despite poorer snow conditions (Tourismusnetzwerk Thüringen, 2025). Christoph Gösel, Managing Director of the Thüringer Tourismusgesellschaft, described the all-inclusive variant as an asset for tourism in Thüringen because it connects strong accommodation providers with popular leisure facilities and creates tangible added value associated with longer stays, higher expenditure and stronger guest satisfaction (AVS GmbH, 2025-a, author's translation). These statements suggest that the card is perceived not merely as a marketing label, but as a commercially relevant regional instrument.

The basic guest-card layer, by contrast, remains linked to municipal tourist taxes or visitor contributions, which vary locally rather than following one unified destination-wide tariff. The Thüringer Wald therefore combines a public local-contribution base layer with a voluntary market-financed premium layer.

A further strength lies in local-user integration. Unlike most guest-card systems focused solely on overnight visitors, the Thüringer Wald Card can also be purchased annually for €15, granting access to regional discounts and standard partner benefits (Thüringer Wald Shop, 2025). Although clearly marketed towards local residents, the product appears accessible beyond strict formal residency boundaries and may therefore also appeal to neighbouring populations, repeat excursionists, second-home users and other frequent regional users. Additional access through subscriber partnerships, including the Funke media group ecosystem, further broadens this inclusion logic (IHK Südthüringen, 2024-a). This open-access structure may help avoid controversies associated with strictly residency-restricted or geographically discriminatory pricing models, while still strongly favouring local and repeat users through its value proposition.

The card also appears to be moving gradually toward stronger digitalisation and destination-intelligence capacity. Regional reporting identified the rollout of an electronic guest-registration system as a key prerequisite for the expansion of digital guest-card infrastructure (Tourismusnetzwerk Thüringen, 2023). Partner materials explicitly mention the value of statistical evaluations and visitor-movement patterns generated through card-usage data (IHK Südthüringen, 2024b). Public reporting further noted that a smartphone-based version of the all-inclusive card was planned from October 2025, especially to simplify issuance for holiday apartments and contactless accommodation formats (Zeit Online, 2025). AVS is also highlighted as a core technology partner, which is relevant because scalable guest-card systems typically depend on specialised providers for registration, host interfaces, administration and settlement (AVS GmbH, 2025a; AVS GmbH, 2025b).

At the same time, several limitations remain. Public transport inclusion is still uneven and dependent on local arrangements. Overall reporting remains less centralised than in some more mature benchmark cases. The multilayer structure may create complexity for visitors if entitlements differ by municipality or accommodation type. And while the system appears to be evolving positively, it is still less digitally mature than some of the more fully integrated platform-based models.

Relevance for Costa Daurada

The Thüringer Wald Card offers several particularly useful lessons for the Costa Daurada. Most importantly, it demonstrates that regional card systems do not need to begin as fully centralised master models. Instead, they can emerge step by step through the harmonisation of previously fragmented local arrangements, the introduction of digital registration infrastructure, municipal funding instruments and progressively deeper stakeholder cooperation.

A second important lesson lies in the card's hybrid social logic. The Thüringer Wald model shows how a destination can combine guest benefits with local-user inclusion, while also leaving room for premium accommodation-based participation and business-network involvement. This may be especially relevant for Costa Daurada if long-term objectives include not only visitor management, but also stronger local benefit-sharing and broader stakeholder legitimacy.

Particularly instructive is the openness of the annual resident-style card beyond strict residency criteria. Unlike models dependent on formal municipal registration, the Thüringer Wald approach appears accessible to second-home owners, neighbouring populations, repeat excursionists and regular regional users. This is highly relevant for Costa Daurada, where a large second-home market, frequent visitors from neighbouring provinces, and people with family or work ties to the destination form an important user group. In this respect, the case offers a useful contrast to more restrictive models such as Passi Tarragoní based on empadronamiento logic.

The case is also valuable in relation to mobility governance. Thüringer Wald shows how a shared destination card framework can be created first, with transport integration expanding gradually over time. For Costa Daurada, the starting conditions may actually be more favourable, as the ATM Camp de Tarragona already provides a unified tariff structure and an existing regional coordination body. This means that integrating a mobility component could be institutionally easier than in Thüringen, where transport arrangements remain more territorially fragmented.

5.3.8 MeineCardPlus and AuszeitCardPlus

Overview

MeineCardPlus and AuszeitCardPlus in GrimmHeimat NordHessen represent one of the most distinctive non-tax-funded destination card ecosystems identified in this study. Operating across North Hesse, a polycentric inland tourism region centred around Kassel, the Edersee, spa towns, nature areas and dispersed rural attractions, the model combines tourism, leisure mobility and regional quality-of-life functions within one coordinated framework. Unlike classic resort destinations built around a single flagship centre, North Hesse depends on connecting multiple places and experiences across a wider territorial landscape.

The core tourism product is MeineCardPlus, issued exclusively through participating accommodation providers and currently available via around 140 hosts. It is valid from arrival day until the end of departure day, regardless of stay length, and includes free use of more than 160 leisure attractions as well as free travel by bus and rail across the Nordhessischer VerkehrsVerbund (NVV) network (GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026a; GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026b; Visit Kassel, 2026). Official communication explicitly frames the card as a gift from hosts to their guests, underlining its role as both visitor benefit and booking incentive.

The wider ecosystem has since expanded through AuszeitCardPlus, a purchasable annual card for residents and regular users, as well as an employer-oriented JobCard model. This progression is analytically significant because it shows how a guest card can evolve into a broader territorial participation platform rather than remaining limited to overnight tourists (GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026c; GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026d; GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026e).

A further milestone was digitalisation through a Progressive Web App (PWA). Hosts can send the personalised card to guests before arrival by email, allowing immediate use for public transport, attraction access, route planning, destination information and travel tips without the need to download an app (Nordhessen Rundschau, 2022; HNA, 2022).

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

The defining logic of MeineCardPlus is that it sits between public policy infrastructure and private market product. It is neither a universal entitlement funded through compulsory tourist taxes nor a sightseeing pass purchased directly by visitors. Instead, accommodation providers finance participation because the card strengthens the attractiveness of their own offer.

Public reporting suggested host contributions of around €4 per guest per night in earlier years and around €5 per guest more recently, typically embedded indirectly in room pricing

(HNA, 2018; HNA, 2022). This creates a cooperative incentive model: hotels, holiday apartments and other hosts invest in the card because it can generate bookings, longer stays and stronger guest satisfaction. One operator publicly described the savings potential as a decisive factor when guests compare accommodation options (HNA, 2022).

The benefit structure is unusually ambitious for a voluntary host-funded system. Beyond free attraction entry, the inclusion of the full NVV network, including regional trains, RegioTram, buses and on-demand transport services, transforms the card into a territorial connector rather than a simple discount product (GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026b). In a destination where attractions are spread across multiple districts, this mobility layer is central to making the overall proposition usable.

Industry commentary has reinforced this point. Tourism consultant Bernhard Harrer (dwif) reportedly argued that transport accounts for around three quarters of tourism-related CO2 emissions and that free onward mobility significantly increases the attractiveness of rail and bus arrival. He further suggested that extending the card concept to include arrival and departure journeys could be worth considering (HNA, 2023).

Digitalisation adds a further layer of system intelligence. The PWA allows guests to explore nearby attractions, check benefits, plan routes via the NVV network and access destination content in one interface. Kai Georg Bachmann, Managing Director of Regionalmanagement Nordhessen GmbH, described this as an important milestone creating “real added value” for hosts and guests, while noting that the included public transport component also makes a visible contribution to sustainability (Nordhessen Rundschau, 2022).

The later AuszeitCardPlus and JobCard extensions broaden the same logic. Instead of limiting value creation to overnight guests, the system monetises and redistributes access benefits across residents, commuters, repeat users and employees. This moves the card from a tourism product toward a wider regional welfare and labour-market instrument.

Strengths and limitations

The strongest feature of the North Hessian model is the depth of offer achieved without compulsory levy funding. A voluntary accommodation-funded card with more than 160 included attractions and full regional public transport is comparatively rare. It creates high perceived guest value and can directly influence booking decisions.

The resident and workforce extensions significantly strengthen legitimacy. AuszeitCardPlus costs €79 annually for adults aged 15+ and €59 for children aged 4–14, includes more than 100 leisure offers, and allows one annual use per participating attraction. A physical version is available for a small surcharge (GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026c; GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026d). Regional reporting highlighted a notional total value of more than €800 if fully used (seknews, 2024).

The employer version is similarly innovative. GrimmHeimat states that companies can provide the card as a tax-free non-cash benefit for €8.90 monthly or €79 annually (GrimmHeimat NordHessen, 2026e). Stakeholders linked this explicitly to workforce attraction and retention, arguing that applicants increasingly assess not only the employer itself but also leisure opportunities, quality of life and regional attractiveness (seknews, 2024).

The model has also received formal recognition. AuszeitCardPlus won first place in the Hessischer Tourismuspreis 2025 and third place in the Hessischer Demografie-Preis 2025, demonstrating relevance beyond tourism marketing alone (Wirtschaft Hessen, 2025; Region Nordhessen, 2025; Tourismusnetzwerk Hessen, 2025).

Its reputation also appears transferable. Reporting from an industry meeting in Willingen stated that neighbouring Sauerland-Tourismus identified MeineCardPlus as the strongest guest-card benchmark and explored compatible approaches to reduce border-region tourism fragmentation (HNA, 2023).

At the same time, the system illustrates typical weaknesses of voluntary network models. Participation is stronger in some districts than others, while weaker take-up elsewhere was described as a classic "chicken-and-egg problem": the system becomes most attractive only when enough hosts and attractions are already involved (HNA, 2023). Stakeholders also noted inconsistent host communication, booking-platform underpromotion and the need for stronger public transport frequencies.

Compared with levy-funded universal systems, the model is therefore more entrepreneurial and flexible, but also more exposed to uneven participation and market dynamics.

Relevance for the Costa Daurada

The North Hessian experience is highly relevant for Costa Daurada because it demonstrates that strong destination-card value does not depend exclusively on compulsory tourist-tax models. If hotels, campsites, apartments and resorts perceive clear commercial benefit, a voluntary accommodation-funded system can also achieve scale and visibility.

It also reinforces the importance of linking attractions with mobility in a territorially diverse destination. Costa Daurada combines beaches, PortAventura, Tarragona, Reus, wine landscapes, monasteries and inland nature areas. Through the already existing ATM Camp de Tarragona tariff framework and coordinating body, the region arguably starts from a more advanced institutional base for transport integration than many German comparators.

Another particularly relevant lesson is the extension beyond tourists alone. A Costa Daurada version of AuszeitCardPlus could include residents, second-home owners, long-stay seasonal users and frequent visitors from neighbouring provinces who maintain family, leisure or work ties to the destination, without relying strictly on formal empadronamiento rules.

Finally, the JobCard dimension is especially transferable. In a tourism-intensive labour market often affected by recruitment and retention pressures, an employer-supported regional leisure and mobility card could strengthen staff satisfaction, destination knowledge and service quality while simultaneously supporting the wider visitor economy.

5.3.9 Urban Commercial Card Models: Barcelona and Granada

Overview

Alongside accommodation-linked and territorially embedded guest card systems, a separate category of tourism card products is especially visible in urban destinations: commercial destination cards sold directly to visitors. These schemes are generally designed to simplify sightseeing, bundle attraction access, integrate selected mobility services, generate perceived savings and stimulate visitor spending. They are particularly well suited to short-stay city-break markets, heritage cities and metropolitan destinations where travellers prioritise convenience, time efficiency and pre-packaged experiences.

Barcelona and Granada provide two useful Spanish examples of how destination-managed commercial cards can reflect very different tourism structures. Barcelona illustrates a diversified metropolitan model centred on mobility and broad cultural consumption. Granada, by contrast, reflects a heritage-city model built around controlled access to a globally recognised flagship attraction. Together, they demonstrate that urban tourism cards are not one uniform category, but can be adapted to very different local needs and demand patterns.

Distinctive mechanism and system logic

The Barcelona Card, managed by Turisme de Barcelona, is one of Spain's most established city-card products. It is operated through the city's tourism promotion consortium involving Barcelona City Council, the Chamber of Commerce and other institutional actors. The card is sold in time-based formats such as 72-hour, 96-hour and 120-hour versions, with recent official prices broadly around €57, €67 and €79 respectively (Turisme de Barcelona, 2024-a). This pricing structure clearly targets short-break visitors seeking convenience and bundled value rather than low-cost universal accessibility.

Its strongest functional pillar is transport integration. The card includes unlimited use of metro, city buses, tram, selected suburban rail services, Montjuïc funicular and airport metro/train links during the validity period. This significantly reduces friction for visitors unfamiliar with local ticketing systems, enables immediate public transport use on arrival and lowers the practical need for taxis or private cars. It also makes it easier to explore districts beyond the traditional tourism core, thereby offering some potential for intra-urban visitor dispersal (Turisme de Barcelona, 2024b).

Beyond mobility, the Barcelona Card includes free admission to selected museums and municipal cultural institutions, together with discounts for attractions, guided tours, leisure providers and retail partners. Importantly, several of the city's highest-demand icons are discounted rather than fully included. This indicates that the card is not designed simply as an all-inclusive monument pass, but rather as a diversified urban visitor product encouraging broader spending across Barcelona's cultural and leisure economy (Turisme de Barcelona, 2024-a).

Institutionally, however, the Barcelona Card appears more significant as a tourism product than as a core governance instrument. Turisme de Barcelona's Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2023–2025 emphasises sustainability, balanced tourism development and lower-impact visitor behaviour, yet the card itself is not presented as a central policy lever. The existence of related products such as Barcelona Card Modernista and Barcelona Card Sea further suggests a strategy of thematic segmentation and commercial diversification rather than one integrated destination-management platform (Turisme de Barcelona, 2023; Turisme de Barcelona, 2024c).

The Granada Card follows a distinctly different logic shaped by the city's tourism economy. Whereas Barcelona is a multi-motivational metropolitan destination, Granada's visitor demand is strongly anchored by one globally recognised flagship attraction: the Alhambra. As a result, the Granada Card functions less as a mobility pass and more as a heritage-access, capacity-management and itinerary-structuring product.

The card is sold in several formats, including 24-hour, 48-hour, 72-hour and Jardines versions, with recent prices broadly between €50 and €60 depending on included access rights (Ayuntamiento de Granada, 2025). Its most important component is admission to the Alhambra, with some versions including full monument access and others more limited garden-focused experiences. At the time of purchase, visitors are generally required to choose a specific date and time slot for the Alhambra visit. This means the card actively structures the wider stay around Granada's principal scarce-capacity tourism asset.

This gives the Granada Card a stronger management role than many commercial city cards. In destinations where tourism pressure concentrates around one highly constrained heritage site, scheduling access can be more strategically important than unlimited mobility. The card therefore acts partly as an allocation mechanism, partly as a visitor-flow sequencing tool and partly as a packaged cultural product.

The card also includes complementary monuments such as the Cathedral, Royal Chapel and other heritage assets depending on the selected version, encouraging visitors to consume a broader urban heritage portfolio rather than focusing exclusively on the Alhambra (Ayuntamiento de Granada, 2025). Its transport component is comparatively modest, usually involving a limited number of city bus journeys and tourist-train access in some variants rather than unlimited city-wide transport.

A particularly relevant innovation is Granada Card Pernocta. This modality was developed specifically for visitors staying at least two consecutive nights in registered accommodation establishments within Granada city. It was not an automatically included guest card in the classic regional sense, but rather a preferential purchase/access channel reserved for overnight visitors. Municipal communication indicated that 83 Alhambra tickets per day, more than 30,000 annually, would be ringfenced for this scheme. Conceptually, this is highly significant: Granada linked access to its most scarce and desirable tourism asset with incentives for longer stays, formal accommodation use and higher local economic retention. In practice, the model uses controlled attraction access to reward overnight demand rather than day-trip consumption.

Granada also appears more institutionally embedded than Barcelona in municipal tourism management. Official records reported 103,242 Granada Card sales in 2018, representing year-on-year growth of more than 64%, while budgetary and procurement documentation indicates that the product is treated as a formal operational activity within local tourism structures rather than merely an ancillary retail product (Ayuntamiento de Granada, 2019; Ayuntamiento de Granada, 2026).

Strengths and limitations

These two cases demonstrate how commercial tourism cards can fulfil very different strategic roles depending on destination structure.

Barcelona represents the metropolitan mobility model: a transport-rich city card combining unlimited public transport with broad museum and leisure access. It is especially suitable for high-volume, diversified urban destinations where simplifying movement and packaging multiple experiences are central priorities.

Granada represents the heritage-anchor model: a tourism card centred on timed access to a globally significant flagship attraction, combined with complementary monument entry and selective mobility support. It is particularly relevant where one iconic site dominates demand patterns and requires active capacity management.

Both schemes nonetheless share a clearly commercial orientation. Unlike guest cards financed indirectly through overnight stays or tourist taxes, they are sold at relatively high retail price points to visitors seeking convenience, packaged access and time savings. Their principal logic is to monetise tourist demand, stimulate attraction uptake and increase visitor expenditure.

At the same time, both are more limited as territorially embedded governance tools. Neither contains a meaningful resident-benefit layer, neither supports multi-municipal coordination, and neither functions as a broad mechanism for social legitimacy building or regional redistribution.

Similar schemes and patterns can be observed elsewhere in Spain, including Valencia's mobility-rich city card, Málaga's museum-oriented compact-city model and Madrid's mixed ecosystem of official and private-sector pass products

This wider commercial logic is increasingly visible internationally. Private-sector operators such as Go City market standardised multi-attraction passes across numerous cities, often distinguishing between unlimited time-based passes and attraction-count "Explorer" formats. (Go City, 2026).

Relevance for the Costa Daurada

For Costa Daurada, these urban examples are useful less as governance blueprints and more as product-design references. They demonstrate the importance of strong digital usability, simple booking processes, multilingual communication, attractive packaging and clear customer value propositions.

Barcelona is especially relevant for the Tarragona–Reus–Salou corridor, where a denser metropolitan visitor space could benefit from stronger transport integration and bundled access to museums, heritage assets and leisure offers. Granada, by contrast, offers a valuable lesson in how scarce or high-demand attractions can be packaged strategically to support wider tourism objectives. In the Costa Daurada context, comparable lessons could apply to PortAventura, major Roman heritage sites, high-demand festivals or seasonal flagship attractions.

The Granada Card Pernocta logic is particularly transferable. It shows how access to a highly desirable attraction can be linked to minimum overnight stays or registered accommodation use, thereby rewarding visitors who generate greater local economic value. For a destination with strong excursionist and second-home dynamics, such mechanisms could help rebalance demand toward higher-value overnight tourism.

However, if the strategic objective is broader territorial coordination across municipalities, inland visitor dispersal, resident legitimacy or integration with tourist-tax policy, these city-card models remain less suitable than the regional guest-card systems analysed elsewhere in this thesis.

5.3.10 Other Notable Schemes and Emerging Variants

Beyond the principal case studies analysed in this chapter, a number of additional tourism card systems merit consideration because they illustrate further variations in governance logic, funding structure, mobility integration and strategic purpose. While these schemes are not examined in equivalent depth to the core cases, they are highly useful in demonstrating that guest-card and visitor-pass systems have diversified considerably across Europe. Some function primarily as mobility tools, others as attraction bundles, seasonality-management instruments, stay-length incentives or scalable commercial products. Some are embedded within public-policy frameworks, while others are essentially retail tourism products sold on the open market. Together, they reinforce the argument that tourism cards should be evaluated according to their specific destination context, financing model and intended strategic role rather than treated as a uniform category.

5.3.10.1 Chiemgau Karte

The Chiemgau Karte in southern Bavaria represents a traditional integrated regional guest-card model based on voluntary accommodation participation. Hotels, guesthouses and holiday apartments decide individually whether to participate and, where enrolled, issue the card to their guests as part of the stay. This clearly differentiates the scheme from compulsory tax-based systems in which all accommodation providers are automatically included.

The Chiemgau region is a medium-sized Alpine–foothill tourism area centred around the Chiemsee lake and surrounding destinations such as Ruhpolding, Inzell, Grassau and neighbouring municipalities. It forms part of the wider Upper Bavarian tourism economy, benefits from strong proximity to Munich and also lies close to the Salzburg border region. In territorial terms, it therefore represents a compact but economically relevant regional destination rather than a single resort or urban centre.

Official scheme information indicates that the card includes public transport access together with a network of 49 experience partners. Benefits typically combine mobility with a broad portfolio of leisure inclusions and selected discounts. Importantly, many inclusions are structured around one free use per full week of stay, which helps distribute value across longer stays while limiting uncontrolled overuse. Examples include one day of bicycle rental, museum admission, guided brewery tours, a round of mini golf, one hour of tennis court hire, access to public swimming pools or sauna facilities, or a return trip on selected chairlifts and mountain attractions (Chiemgau Karte, 2026).

This makes the Chiemgau Karte substantially more than a simple discount card. It functions simultaneously as a visitor benefit, an accommodation differentiation tool and a destination-marketing instrument that encourages circulation across multiple dispersed attractions rather than concentration in one single node.

The case is particularly useful because it also reveals the tensions that can arise in attraction-rich partnership systems. Public reporting has pointed to debates around partner participation, cost burdens and the withdrawal of high-profile attractions such as the Jennerbahn. This suggests that voluntary integrated card systems are not static products, but negotiated ecosystems whose perceived value depends on the continued willingness of partners to remain within the network. Chiemgau therefore illustrates both the strengths and fragilities of voluntary regional cooperation models (Merkur, 2018; Traunsteiner Tagblatt, 2022; BGLand24, 2024a, 2024b).

5.3.10.2 Salzburg Guest Mobility Ticket

Neighbouring Salzburg illustrates a markedly different philosophy. The Salzburg Guest Mobility Ticket is explicitly mobility-led and designed as a universal entitlement for overnight guests rather than a voluntary host-led benefit. Official information states that all overnight visitors in SalzburgerLand receive free, unlimited access to public transport for the duration of their stay, including city transport, regional buses, S-Bahn services, regional trains, long-distance rail services and Salzburg Verkehr shuttle services (Guest Mobility Ticket, 2026).

Its funding logic is especially relevant for comparative purposes. Official Salzburg tourism information states that the mobility component currently added to the overnight tax is €0.50 per person per night for guests aged 15 and over, increasing to €1.10 from May 2027 in order to secure long-term financing (Salzburg Info, 2026). This provides a concrete benchmark for destinations considering tax-funded visitor mobility schemes.

The contrast with neighbouring Chiemgau is instructive. Whereas Chiemgau is voluntary, attraction-rich and accommodation-partner based, Salzburg is compulsory, levy-funded and mobility-centred. The scheme therefore demonstrates how tourism benefits can be directly aligned with environmental policy, congestion reduction and wider public transport objectives. For destinations such as Costa Daurada, where seasonal road pressure and fragmented public transport remain important issues, this model offers particularly valuable funding and governance lessons.

5.3.10.3 Kärnten Card and Austrian Summer Card Models

The Kärnten Card in Austria represents one of the country’s best-known regional leisure card models and provides a useful entry point into a broader family of Austrian seasonal card systems. It is structured primarily around attraction bundling rather than accommodation entitlement and functions as a purchasable regional value product rather than an automatically issued guest benefit.

Official information indicates that the card provides access to approximately 130 experience partners across Carinthia. These include mountain lifts, panoramic roads, boat services, museums, wildlife parks, pools, family attractions and a wide range of leisure infrastructure distributed across the province. In territorial terms, this is significant because it packages a dispersed lakes-and-mountains destination into one recognisable tourism product and encourages movement across multiple municipalities rather than concentrating demand in a single hotspot (Kärnten Card, 2026a).

Its pricing structure reflects the commercial logic of the model. Summer 2026 prices range from approximately €64–€69 for a one-week card, €78–€86 for two weeks, and around €96–€99 for a full summer season, with reduced prices for children and seniors (Kärnten Card, 2026b). Visitors therefore self-select into the product based on expected usage, similar to other commercial leisure cards.

Beyond core inclusions, the card also contains an additional regional business-support layer through the Bonusclub. Official information shows that cardholders receive 10 per cent discounts with selected partner businesses and services. Examples include sports retailers, vehicle garages, thermal spa facilities and other regional commercial partners. This is analytically relevant because it extends the economic reach of the card beyond classic tourism attractions into broader local commerce and service networks, thereby linking visitor expenditure more directly with the regional economy (Kärnten Card, 2026c).

Importantly, the Kärnten Card is not purely a tourism product. Through instruments such as the Kärntner Familienkarte, the State of Carinthia provides subsidised access for lower-income households, families, students receiving grants and other eligible groups. In some cases, reductions approach 50 per cent of the standard price (SPÖ St. Kanzian, 2025). This introduces a social-policy dimension, enabling broader participation in regional leisure infrastructure that might otherwise be financially inaccessible.

The Kärnten Card also sits within a wider Austrian tradition of seasonal leisure-card systems, including models such as the Schladming-Dachstein Sommercard and the Zell am See-Kaprun Summer Card. These schemes often bundle cable cars, hiking transport, pools, attractions, lake facilities, museums and family activities into accommodation-linked or regionally marketed visitor benefits (Schladming-Dachstein, 2026; Zell am See-Kaprun Tourismus, 2026). Their importance lies not simply in visitor convenience, but in their role as temporal demand-management instruments. In destinations historically dependent on winter ski tourism, summer cards help activate mountain railways, accommodation capacity and leisure infrastructure during warmer months.

This logic is highly relevant for destinations such as Costa Daurada, even if the seasonal pattern is reversed. In Austrian mountain destinations, the strategic objective is often to reduce dependence on winter. In Costa Daurada, the challenge is to strengthen shoulder and off-season demand beyond the dominant summer peak. In both cases, however, the underlying mechanism is similar: bundled visitor benefits are used to redistribute tourism demand across the annual cycle and improve the year-round use of existing infrastructure.

All in all, the Kärnten Card and related Austrian summer-card models demonstrate a mature seasonal leisure-card logic combining attraction access, regional business participation, demand smoothing and, in some cases, social inclusion measures. They therefore sit at the intersection of tourism product development, regional economic policy and temporal visitor-flow management.

5.3.10.4 Oskar Gästekarte

The Oskar Gästekarte in eastern Switzerland represents a particularly interesting hybrid model because it combines accommodation-based distribution, purchasable access, public transport integration and inter-cantonal cooperation. Unlike automatically issued tax-funded guest cards, Oskar is not simply included with every stay. Instead, guests can purchase the card from one overnight stay onwards through participating accommodation providers. This makes it a useful example of a model positioned between a classic guest card and a commercial regional leisure pass (Oskar Ferien, 2026; St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, 2026b).

The card operates across the wider eastern Swiss region and is explicitly described as an inter-cantonal guest card for Ostschweiz. Its territorial coverage extends from Schaffhausen to the Säntis and Appenzellerland, covering a broad visitor geography that crosses cantonal boundaries. This is analytically significant because it demonstrates how a guest-card system can be organised across administrative borders in a region where tourism flows do not necessarily correspond neatly to political jurisdictions (St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, 2026c).

A major strength of Oskar is its mobility integration. Cardholders benefit from free use of public transport across the full OSTWIND network, including travel from the day of arrival. In practical terms, this gives the card a strong territorial connector function, allowing visitors to move across multiple cantons and tourism areas without navigating separate ticketing systems. This mobility layer makes Oskar more strategically relevant than a simple attraction pass, because it reduces the friction of regional exploration and supports movement across a dispersed destination landscape (Oskar Ferien, 2026).

The benefit portfolio also includes a broad range of experiences, such as cable cars, boats, museums, mini golf, city tours and other regional leisure offers. The card is sold in consecutive-day formats, with recent public prices ranging from CHF 65 for two days to CHF 130 for seven days, while children aged 6–16 pay half price (Oskar Ferien, 2026). As a purchasable product, Oskar therefore still requires an active user decision and does not achieve the automatic reach of tax-funded systems. However, the accommodation-based sales channel lowers the access barrier compared with purely external retail products and allows accommodation businesses to use the card as a booking-enhancing value proposition.

The partner model is unusually transparent. Accommodation providers can become members of the scheme through annual contributions differentiated by type and size of establishment. Published partner information lists membership fees ranging from CHF 350 for small accommodation providers up to CHF 4,500 for larger hotels or special forms such as campsites. Accommodation providers receive a 10 per cent sales commission on cards sold to guests (St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, 2026b). For leisure partners, the reimbursement logic is also clearly stated: when cardholders use included leisure offers, 40 per cent of the price is reimbursed through Oskar, while 60 per cent is effectively borne by the leisure provider (St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, 2026b).

This transparency makes the Oskar model valuable from a governance perspective. It shows how a regional card system can combine accommodation-sector participation, attraction reimbursement, mobility integration and clear partner incentives without relying solely on compulsory tourist-tax funding. The dedicated B2B partner platform of St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus further strengthens this interpretation, as it provides structured information on cooperation opportunities, partner participation and digital guest-management services (St.Gallen-Bodensee Tourismus, 2026c).

For the Costa Daurada, Oskar is relevant because it demonstrates that multi-territorial guest-card cooperation does not necessarily require one single administrative authority or uniform taxation framework. It also shows that accommodation providers can act not only as issuers of a public entitlement, but as active sales partners in a regional value system. At the same time, its purchasable logic means that behavioural reach is likely more selective than in automatic stay-linked systems. Oskar is therefore best understood as a sophisticated hybrid model: stronger in governance transparency and interregional packaging than many commercial cards, but weaker than automatic guest cards in universal uptake and system-wide behavioural steering.

5.3.10.5 Appenzeller Ferienkarte

The Appenzeller Ferienkarte illustrates continuing innovation in Swiss guest-card design within a relatively small but highly coordinated tourism region. Appenzellerland is a compact Alpine destination in eastern Switzerland characterised by dispersed villages, landscape-based tourism and strong regional identity. Its scale is considerably smaller than cantonal systems such as Ticino, making the coordination of tourism instruments more manageable and visible.

Although the Oskar Gästekarte also covers parts of Appenzellerland within its wider intercantonal geography, the Appenzeller Ferienkarte remains analytically distinct because it is rooted in the more compact Appenzellerland destination structure and operates as a localised guest-card instrument rather than a broader East Swiss regional pass.

While the card itself is not entirely new, its relevance has increased through the enlarged and more unified marketing of Appenzellerland following the merger of tourism structures. This gives the card added significance as a destination-wide instrument within a more integrated territorial framework (Leader Digital, 2025).

A particularly notable feature is that eligibility is linked to minimum-night stay requirements rather than universal issuance from the first overnight stay. This means the card functions not only as a visitor benefit, but also as a length-of-stay instrument encouraging longer stays and greater local economic capture per guest (Appenzellerland Tourismus, 2026-a).

The region also extends the card logic beyond tourists alone through the Appenzeller Mitarbeiterkarte, which offers benefits to hospitality employees. This introduces a labour-market dimension rarely seen in guest-card systems and suggests that destination-card infrastructures may also support staff retention, sector attractiveness and local value creation. In tourism-dependent destinations facing labour shortages, this represents a particularly innovative governance angle (Appenzellerland Tourismus, 2026b; HTR, 2025).

5.3.10.6 Côte d’Azur Pass

The Côte d’Azur Pass, also marketed as the French Riviera Pass, is particularly relevant because it operates across a broader Mediterranean coastal territory rather than a single city. Official tourism pages describe it as a pass valid for more than 60 sites and activities with 24-hour, 48-hour and 72-hour formats priced at approximately €30, €45 and €65 respectively (Nice Côte d’Azur Tourist Office, 2026).

The offer includes museums, leisure sites, boat trips, cultural attractions and experiences spread across the wider Riviera territory. This demonstrates how a fragmented coastal destination with multiple municipalities can be packaged as one connected visitor space. In territorial terms, this is significant because many Mediterranean destinations struggle with fragmented governance, competing resort identities and dispersed visitor assets.

However, given the price point and optional purchase model, the Côte d’Azur Pass is better understood primarily as a commercial tourism convenience product rather than a destination-management entitlement. Visitors must actively assess whether the expected return justifies the purchase, similar to many urban sightseeing cards or purchasable regional leisure products such as the SchwarzwaldCard.

Its relevance for Costa Daurada therefore lies less in financing or governance design and more in the potential for cross-municipal packaging of beaches, heritage sites, leisure attractions and inland excursions under one recognisable destination product.

5.3.10.7 Dubrovnik Pass

The Dubrovnik Pass is a strong official example from a high-pressure heritage destination. Official information states that it includes entry to the city walls, museums, galleries and public transport, and is sold in 1-day, 3-day and 7-day formats (Dubrovnik Pass, 2026).

Recent public pricing information places these products at approximately €40 for one day, €50 for three days and €60 for seven days, subject to seasonal adjustment. This clearly indicates that the pass is not a low-cost universal entitlement, but a premium purchasable tourism product linked to one of Europe’s most iconic heritage attractions.

In this respect, Dubrovnik shares structural similarities with Granada. Just as the Granada Card is strongly anchored around the Alhambra, the Dubrovnik Pass is substantially driven by demand for the city walls. The flagship attraction acts as the principal purchase driver, while museums, galleries and transport are bundled around it as additional value layers.

The pass should therefore be understood as a hybrid commercial and management instrument. It is a purchasable convenience product, yet in a destination shaped by overtourism pressures and cruise demand it also helps monetise scarce heritage access, capture visitor willingness to pay and broaden consumption beyond a single iconic site.

5.3.10.8 Tarjeta Turística Amigos de Segovia

The Tarjeta Turística Amigos de Segovia is useful precisely because it appears to represent a weak and limited model within a smaller urban destination context. Segovia is a historic inland city of roughly 50,000 inhabitants with a strong UNESCO heritage profile centred on the Roman aqueduct, cathedral and Alcázar. Despite this internationally recognised heritage base, the tourism card system appears relatively underdeveloped.

Public information suggests a simple discount-oriented scheme with basic presentation, low strategic visibility and little evidence of strong distribution or governance significance. Importantly, the product is offered free of charge, meaning it does not generate direct revenue and may also suffer from low perceived value (Tarjeta Turística de Segovia, 2026).

Unlike stronger systems, the Segovia model does not appear to offer substantial bundled access, integrated transport, digital innovation or a clearly visible role within wider destination strategy. It appears closer to a promotional leaflet in card form than to a genuine destination-management instrument.

As such, Segovia serves as a cautionary example. Tourism cards do not automatically become influential simply by existing. Their broader effect depends on product design, marketing strength, stakeholder alignment, distribution channels and integration with destination strategy. In the absence of these features, a card may remain a modest promotional mechanism with limited practical relevance.

5.3.10.9 Comparative Reflection

Taken together, these additional examples demonstrate that tourism card systems now perform a wide variety of functions. They may support sustainable mobility, encourage longer stays, combat seasonality, monetise scarce heritage assets, strengthen fragmented regional identities, enable cross-boundary cooperation or remain weak symbolic products with limited broader effect.

The set of examples underlines that the boundary between guest card, leisure card and commercial pass is increasingly fluid. Chiemgau and Appenzell illustrate accommodation-linked regional benefit models, Salzburg demonstrates a universal mobility entitlement, Kärnten and related Austrian summer-card systems show how seasonal leisure products can support temporal demand management, while Oskar represents a hybrid inter-cantonal model combining accommodation-based sales, public transport integration and transparent partner economics. Côte d'Azur, Dubrovnik and Segovia then illustrate different forms of purchasable or weakly embedded urban and regional pass logic.

Recent practitioner and policy examples further confirm this diversification, but they should be interpreted differently from the main comparative cases. MÜRITZ rundum and Rostock are not included here as additional full case studies; rather, they serve as implementation-maturity references. Their analytical value lies in showing how guest-card systems are evaluated, politically legitimised and connected to wider public-value arguments after introduction. The MÜRITZ rundum evaluation demonstrates that mobility-integrated guest cards can be assessed not only through visitor benefits, but also through effects on public transport use, municipal value and resident accessibility (IGES Institut, 2020). Rostock illustrates a related urban-coastal logic, where the planned digital guest card was explicitly linked to public transport access, free public toilets, tourism infrastructure, resident quality of life and wider city attractiveness (Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023). The BrandenburgCard concept for the Uckermark, meanwhile, shows that consultancy-led destination development increasingly recommends phased models starting with a visitor-contribution-funded public transport entitlement and later expanding into attractions, discounts, local add-ons, additional target groups and purchasable card variants (Kohl & Partner, 2022). Switzerland's broad landscape of guest cards and tickets further indicates that such systems have become a mainstream feature of mature destination management rather than isolated special cases (Schweiz Tourismus, n.d.).

Commercial platform operators such as Go City further underline this trend by showing how tourism pass concepts can be standardised and scaled across multiple destinations through unlimited time-based products and attraction-count "Explorer" variants. This demonstrates that the card model has expanded beyond destination-specific policy tools into globally replicable commercial products.

Overall, the diversity of these schemes reinforces the need to evaluate tourism cards not as a single category, but according to their governance setting, funding model, territorial scale and strategic purpose. For the Costa Daurada, the most relevant insight is not that one model should be copied, but that different design elements can be selectively combined: mobility integration from Salzburg or Oskar, seasonal activation from Austrian leisure-card systems, resident and workforce logic from Appenzell and other regional schemes, and cross-municipal packaging from Mediterranean commercial passes.

5.4 Cross-Case Comparative Analysis

While the individual case studies presented in Section 5.3 demonstrate the diversity of contemporary card-based tourism systems, their broader analytical value lies in identifying recurring design principles, structural constraints and transferable governance mechanisms. The analysed cases differ considerably in territorial scale, institutional setting, transport integration, funding logic, user reach and strategic ambition. They also illustrate that the boundary between guest card, visitor pass, leisure card and wider territorial benefit platform is increasingly fluid.

Nevertheless, clear patterns emerge across the comparative portfolio. Using the seven analytical dimensions established in Chapter 3, this section synthesises the findings in order to assess which features appear most relevant for destinations seeking to reposition card systems from promotional visitor products toward practical destination-management instruments.

The objective is not to identify a single best-practice model. Rather, the comparison highlights how different design choices shape behavioural influence, territorial redistribution, stakeholder coordination, data capability, economic viability and social legitimacy under differing destination conditions. These insights are especially relevant for the subsequent assessment of the Costa Daurada, where strong tourism demand, transport fragmentation and emerging metropolitan cooperation create both significant opportunities and implementation challenges.

5.4.1 Accessibility, Issuance Models and Uptake

Accessibility is one of the clearest differentiators across the analysed systems because it determines how easily visitors enter the card ecosystem and, consequently, how far a scheme can influence behaviour at destination scale. Across the comparative sample, four broad access logics can be identified: destination-wide stay-linked systems, selective partner-network stay-linked systems, direct-purchase models, and more limited open-registration or weakly embedded schemes. As several cards combine elements of more than one category, these should be understood as dominant operational types rather than rigid classifications.

The strongest destination-management potential is generally associated with broad stay-linked systems. Where cards are issued automatically, or with minimal friction, through accommodation providers covering a substantial share of the visitor market, they become integrated into the normal travel journey rather than requiring a separate consumer decision. This significantly reduces behavioural barriers, increases visibility and creates much wider market penetration. As a result, such systems are better positioned to influence mobility choices, attraction use, regional exploration and digital engagement across the destination as a whole. They also provide a stronger basis for data generation because user coverage is structurally broader than in voluntary opt-in models.

Many of the most strategically significant cases follow this logic. The Südtirol Guest Pass, Trentino Guest Card, Ticino Ticket, Echt Bodensee Card and Gästekarte mobil in the Sächsische Schweiz all illustrate how accommodation-linked issuance can transform a card from an optional benefit into operational visitor infrastructure. Where linked to tourist-tax systems, visitor contributions or embedded accommodation financing models, these schemes may also enjoy greater institutional stability than products dependent solely on annual retail demand.

Selective partner-network stay-linked systems represent a second model. Here, access is still tied to overnight stays, but only through participating accommodation providers rather than through universal destination coverage. Examples include MeineCardPlus, Schwarzwald Plus, Hochschwarzwald Card and parts of the Chiemgau Karte model. These systems can generate very strong perceived value for participating guests and may function as powerful booking incentives for hosts. However, their territorial reach is structurally more uneven. Effectiveness depends heavily on the density, quality and geographic spread of participating accommodation businesses. Where network participation is patchy, the card is less able to operate as destination-wide infrastructure and may instead remain a strong commercial sub-system within a broader tourism region.

Direct-purchase models follow a different logic. Urban cards such as the Barcelona Card or Granada Card, regional leisure cards such as the SchwarzwaldCard or Kärnten Card, and hybrid products such as Oskar rely on visitors actively assessing value and deciding to buy. These schemes can perform well where attractions are concentrated, transport costs are high, or visitors can quickly recognise potential savings. Their commercial relevance may therefore be considerable. Nevertheless, uptake is inherently narrower because participation depends on awareness, willingness to pay, price sensitivity and trip style. Even highly successful retail products usually reach only a segment of the total visitor market and therefore have more limited capacity to shape destination-wide behaviour than broadly distributed stay-linked systems.

At the weaker end of the spectrum are open-registration, lightly promoted or poorly embedded schemes. Where cards require additional effort to obtain, lack clear value communication, or are only loosely integrated into accommodation, transport or destination systems, they are more likely to remain marginal promotional tools. In such cases, the existence of a card does not automatically translate into strategic relevance.

The comparative evidence also suggests that simplicity matters as much as generosity. Visitors frequently respond more strongly to easy and clearly communicated entitlements than to complex bundles requiring effort to understand. A straightforward mobility pass issued automatically at check-in may therefore achieve greater practical impact than a richer but confusing product with low visibility or cumbersome activation steps. Digital usability reinforces this principle. Browser-based access, pre-arrival delivery, multilingual interfaces and immediate activation can further reduce friction and increase actual use.

A further lesson emerging from the broader portfolio is that hybrid access models are becoming more common. Some destinations now combine automatic guest entitlements with optional resident cards, annual local-user products, employee benefit cards or premium purchasable upgrades. These layered structures broaden the economic base of the system and may strengthen social legitimacy, while allowing different user groups to access the destination through distinct but connected pathways.

Overall, access design is not a minor technical detail but a foundational strategic choice. It shapes user reach, behavioural influence, data quality, commercial viability and perceived fairness. Systems with low-friction access and broad territorial coverage are consistently better positioned to operate as destination-management instruments than those relying on selective or discretionary uptake.

For the Costa Daurada, this finding is particularly relevant. Given the destination's large accommodation base, high seasonal volumes and concentration of short-to-medium leisure stays, a stay-linked model with automatic or near-automatic issuance would likely maximise visibility and practical uptake. It would also create a stronger platform for integrated mobility incentives, visitor guidance and more reliable destination intelligence. More selective or purely retail models could still play a complementary role, but would be less suitable as the primary architecture for a region-wide management instrument.

5.4.2 Public Transport Integration and Behavioural Steering

Public transport integration is one of the clearest mechanisms through which guest card systems can evolve from promotional visitor products into practical destination-management instruments. Whereas attraction-led cards primarily create value through discounts, bundled admissions or perceived savings, transport-integrated models can influence how visitors actually move within a destination. This gives them a stronger capacity to affect congestion, accessibility, territorial distribution and the environmental footprint of visitor mobility.

The strongest behavioural potential is found in systems that provide simple access to substantial parts of the public transport network. The Südtirol Guest Pass, Trentino Guest Card, Ticino Ticket, KONUS, Gästekarte mobil in the Sächsische Schweiz, Salzburg Guest Mobility Ticket, MeineCardPlus and Oskar all demonstrate different forms of this logic. By removing the need to understand local fare structures, buy separate tickets or compare operators, these models reduce both financial and cognitive barriers. For visitors unfamiliar with local systems, simplicity can be as important as price. Public transport becomes easier to try, easier to repeat and, in some cases, the default option during the stay.

This behavioural steering effect is strongest where mobility access is embedded directly into the accommodation stay. Automatic or near-automatic issuance means that visitors receive the mobility entitlement without making a separate purchase decision. In such cases, the card changes the choice environment: public transport is no longer an additional cost or planning burden, but part of the already available holiday package. This is why mobility-integrated guest cards can be understood as soft governance instruments. They do not restrict car use directly, but they make collective mobility more convenient, visible and attractive.

However, the comparative evidence also shows that transport inclusion alone is not sufficient. The underlying network remains decisive. Infrequent services, weak evening connections, overcrowding during peak periods, limited first-mile and last-mile options, poor interchange design or confusing passenger information can significantly reduce the practical value of fare-free access. A card may remove the ticket barrier, but it cannot compensate fully for inadequate service quality. The Sächsische Schweiz case is especially instructive in this regard, as its evidence base emphasises not only fare-free travel, but also timetable improvements, visitor-oriented route communication, stop-to-stop excursion logic and the broader usability of public transport.

A second major lesson concerns the relationship between transport integration and territorial behaviour. Where cards provide region-wide mobility access, they can lower the practical barriers to exploring beyond the immediate accommodation area. Secondary towns, rural attractions, heritage sites, mountain valleys or inland landscapes become more accessible to visitors without cars. This does not automatically guarantee redistribution, but it creates the infrastructural precondition for wider visitor circulation. In this sense, mobility integration contributes not only to sustainable transport policy, but also to visitor dispersion and regional value distribution.

Several cases further demonstrate that tourism-generated ridership can support the wider viability of public transport. If visitor demand becomes more visible and predictable through card usage, it may strengthen the argument for seasonal capacity increases, route extensions, higher frequencies or improved service integration. South Tyrol, Trentino, Sächsische Schweiz and Salzburg all show, in different ways, how tourism mobility can be linked to broader public transport policy. This is particularly important because transport benefits are not limited to tourists. Where tourism demand helps sustain or improve services, residents, workers and other local users may also benefit.

Transport-integrated cards therefore operate at the intersection of visitor convenience and public infrastructure. Their value lies not only in reducing individual ticket costs, but in connecting tourism demand with shared mobility systems. This distinguishes them from purely commercial attraction passes, whose effects are generally limited to visitor spending and experience consumption. A mobility-inclusive guest card can become part of a wider mobility strategy, especially when linked to transport authorities, fare integration, digital journey planning and service monitoring.

This logic is also reflected in practitioner evaluations and policy initiatives beyond the core case portfolio. The MÜRITZ rundum assessment linked the integrated guest card to increased public transport use, reduced private car traffic and wider accessibility benefits, while Rostock's revised visitor-charge proposal explicitly framed public transport inclusion as a tool to reduce local car use and relieve environmental and urban traffic pressures. (IGES Institut, 2020; Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023).

Digital usability can reinforce this behavioural role. Browser-based or app-based access, pre-arrival delivery, QR validation, integrated journey planning and multilingual communication reduce uncertainty and make public transport more legible to occasional users. The most promising systems are therefore not simply those that include transport, but those that combine entitlement, information and journey confidence. This is particularly relevant for visitors travelling with children, older visitors, international guests or short-stay users who may be less willing to experiment with unfamiliar mobility systems.

At the same time, mobility integration also involves financial and operational risks. Transport operators require compensation for included trips, and contribution levels must be credible if systems are to remain sustainable. If visitor use is high but funding formulas are weak, disputes may emerge around hidden subsidies or unequal cost distribution. Conversely, if contribution levels are too high, accommodation providers or municipalities may resist participation. Public transport integration therefore requires a carefully negotiated balance between visitor value, operator compensation, accommodation-sector affordability and political legitimacy.

For the Costa Daurada, transport integration would not be a secondary feature, but potentially the central rationale for a regional guest card model. Seasonal road congestion, parking pressure, coastal concentration and a still fragmented visitor-facing transport environment all point toward the need for a mobility-first approach. The existence of ATM Camp de Tarragona provides an important institutional foundation, but a guest card would only be effective if transport access were simple, visible and sufficiently broad to connect coastal accommodation hubs with Tarragona, Reus, Vila-seca/La Pineda, PortAventura World, Camp de Tarragona station, Reus Airport and inland municipalities.

A Costa Daurada guest card limited to minor discounts or narrow tourist shuttle services would likely reinforce existing fragmentation. By contrast, a model linked to the wider regional public transport network could help shift the destination from isolated mobility initiatives toward a more coherent visitor mobility system. Its effectiveness would depend not only on fare inclusion, but also on service quality, multilingual information, real-time guidance, digital legibility and clear communication through accommodation providers. Under these conditions, public transport integration could become one of the strongest strategic arguments for introducing a regional guest card in the Costa Daurada.

5.4.3 Visitor Dispersion and Territorial Rebalancing

A major strategic value of guest card systems lies not only in influencing how visitors travel, but also where they travel within a destination. Many tourism regions experience strong concentration in a limited number of hotspots, while secondary towns, inland areas or peripheral attractions receive lower visitor flows despite possessing available capacity and valuable assets. Such imbalances can intensify congestion, parking pressure, environmental stress and resident irritation in dominant nodes, while wider territorial potential remains underused. Guest cards can therefore contribute to destination management when they help shift tourism from passive concentration toward more balanced spatial circulation.

The comparative evidence suggests that visitor dispersion is most likely where three conditions align: low-friction mobility access, a geographically broad partner network and active communication of alternative places and experiences. Mobility integration reduces the practical effort of reaching secondary locations. A distributed network of attractions, cultural sites, leisure providers or local businesses creates reasons to travel beyond the immediate accommodation area. Communication, through digital interfaces, route suggestions, host information, maps or itinerary design, makes these alternatives visible and usable. Without all three elements, the spatial effect of a card is likely to remain limited.

The strongest dispersion potential is therefore found in regional systems that combine transport access with a wide territorial offer. Trentino, the Echt Bodensee Card, MeineCardPlus, the Sächsische Schweiz model and, to a more mobility-focused extent, South Tyrol and Ticino, all illustrate how regional card systems can connect multiple places within one visitor framework. Their value lies not only in offering benefits, but in reducing the perceived fragmentation of the destination. Visitors are encouraged to understand the region as a connected space rather than as a set of isolated municipalities or attractions.

This is particularly relevant in polycentric destinations. Where several towns, valleys, lakeside communities, cultural sites or leisure areas each possess tourism value, guest cards can help operationalise a shared destination logic. By bundling access, mobility and information, they make it easier for visitors to move across administrative boundaries and to distribute time and expenditure more widely. In this sense, card systems can function as territorial connectors. They do not create attractiveness by themselves, but they can improve the accessibility and visibility of places that might otherwise remain peripheral within the visitor journey.

Attraction-led and commercial systems may also support spatial circulation, but their steering power is more difficult to isolate where they operate alongside automatically issued mobility schemes. This is particularly true in the south-western German cluster. The DreiWelten Card, SchwarzwaldCard, Schwarzwald Plus and Hochschwarzwald Card include geographically distributed attraction networks and may encourage users to visit multiple leisure sites across the region. However, parts of their operating areas overlap with the KONUS framework, which is automatically issued in many municipalities and already provides a broad public transport layer. It would therefore be misleading to attribute territorial movement effects to the attraction cards alone. In this cluster, spatial circulation is better understood as the result of layered systems: KONUS provides a mobility backbone in many areas, while attraction-led cards add experiential incentives and partner visibility.

The same distinction is important when comparing purchasable leisure cards with stay-linked systems. Cards such as the SchwarzwaldCard, Kärnten Card, Bodensee Card PLUS, Oskar or Côte d’Azur Pass can package dispersed attractions effectively, especially for visitors who actively choose to buy them and plan intensive use. They may encourage exploration across wider territories, but their reach remains more selective because uptake depends on purchase motivation, awareness and expected value. Their spatial effect is therefore more likely to be concentrated among active users rather than across the visitor population as a whole.

By contrast, automatically issued or accommodation-linked systems can influence a much broader user base. Even if not all guests actively use every benefit, the card places a wider regional opportunity structure in front of the visitor from the beginning of the stay. This matters because many visitors do not make detailed decisions before arrival. If mobility, attraction access and suggested routes are already embedded in the stay, the probability of spontaneous or semi-planned excursions to secondary places increases.

Digital functionality can strengthen these territorial effects. User interfaces that highlight nearby experiences, thematic routes, lower-pressure alternatives, public transport connections or weather-responsive suggestions reduce search costs and make exploration easier. This is especially relevant for destinations where secondary places are not unknown because they lack quality, but because they are less visible, less connected or less strongly embedded in the dominant visitor narrative. The Sächsische Schweiz case is particularly instructive here because the card's mobility function is reinforced by public-transport-first communication, tourist-friendly route maps and stop-to-stop excursion logic.

However, dispersion should not be understood as an automatic or unlimited outcome. Visitor behaviour remains shaped by trip motivation, time constraints, travel party composition, weather, car availability, symbolic attraction hierarchies and perceived effort. In beach destinations, for example, many visitors may continue to prioritise coastal leisure even when inland alternatives are discounted or accessible. In heritage destinations, flagship attractions may continue to dominate itineraries even when secondary sites are bundled into a card. Guest cards can lower barriers and create incentives, but they cannot fully override the underlying geography of demand.

The comparative evidence therefore suggests a realistic interpretation of territorial rebalancing. Guest cards are unlikely to eliminate spatial concentration altogether. Their value lies instead in creating incremental shifts: more public transport use to secondary locations, higher awareness of inland or peripheral assets, increased attraction uptake outside core hotspots, longer circulation routes, and a broader spread of tourism expenditure. These effects may be modest in the short term, but strategically important if accumulated over several seasons and supported by communication, mobility planning and partner development.

For the Costa Daurada, this lesson is central. The destination is characterised by a strong coastal concentration of accommodation, beach demand and family tourism, while inland areas possess cultural, gastronomic, natural and heritage assets that remain less fully integrated into mainstream visitor behaviour. A regional guest card could help bridge this gap by linking coastal accommodation hubs with Tarragona, Reus, Valls, Montblanc, Poblet, wine landscapes, inland festivals and other secondary experiences. The card itself would not make visitors leave the coast automatically, but it could reduce the effort, cost and uncertainty associated with doing so.

The most promising model for the Costa Daurada would therefore be one that combines broad mobility access with curated territorial storytelling. Rather than simply listing discounts, the system would need to make regional exploration easy and meaningful: coast-to-inland itineraries, rail- and bus-linked excursion routes, family-friendly day trips, gastronomy circuits, heritage clusters, low-congestion alternatives and seasonal recommendations. This would align the card with wider objectives of territorial balance, diversification and more efficient use of existing assets.

In this sense, visitor dispersion should not be treated as a side effect of a guest card, but as a design principle. If the Costa Daurada were to develop such a system, the question would not only be which benefits to include, but which spatial behaviours the card is intended to encourage. A card built mainly around already dominant coastal attractions would risk reinforcing existing concentration. A card designed around regional connectivity, inland visibility and low-friction movement could instead become a practical tool for territorial rebalancing.

5.4.4 Governance Capacity and Institutional Coordination

Governance capacity is one of the clearest determinants of whether guest card systems remain promotional products or develop into practical destination-management instruments. Across the case portfolio, the most effective systems are not defined primarily by the attractiveness of individual benefits, but by the institutional arrangements that make those benefits possible. Guest cards operate at the intersection of tourism management, transport policy, municipal finance, accommodation registration, attraction partnerships, data governance and visitor communication. Their success therefore depends on coordination across actors whose priorities do not automatically align.

The strongest models tend to be embedded within mature cooperative environments. South Tyrol, Trentino and Ticino demonstrate the value of regional or provincial governance structures capable of aligning tourism organisations, mobility actors, accommodation providers and public authorities around a common operational framework. In these cases, the card does not function as an isolated visitor product, but as part of a wider destination system. The same applies, in a different institutional form, to the Echt Bodensee Card, where municipal participation, regional coordination and transport-association agreements are directly linked through the tourist-tax framework.

A second pattern concerns the relationship between scale and coordination complexity. Larger regional systems can generate stronger destination-management value because they connect multiple places, mobility networks and benefit partners. However, they also require more demanding governance arrangements. Public transport inclusion, in particular, requires agreements on fare validity, operator compensation, usage data, revenue allocation and service responsibilities. The cases show that where such structures already exist, guest cards can build on them. Where they do not, the card project may expose or intensify existing institutional fragmentation.

Polycentric destinations face an additional challenge. Visitors often experience a region as one tourism space, while governance remains divided between municipalities, districts, transport associations, tourism boards and private actors. The Bodensee case illustrates this particularly well: the lake region functions as a highly recognisable cross-border destination, yet guest-card and transport validity remain segmented by administrative and tariff boundaries. Similar tensions appear in the Black Forest, where several overlapping systems coexist within one wider tourism landscape. These examples suggest that guest cards can help operationalise regional cooperation, but they also depend on the willingness of institutions to bridge boundaries that visitors themselves may not perceive.

Not all successful systems rely on public-sector coordination alone. Several cases demonstrate the importance of intermediary organisations and managed partner networks. DreiWelten Tourismus GmbH, Regionalmanagement Nordhessen, Thüringer Wald Service GmbH and tourism technology providers such as AVS, feratel, cariboo, or related platform operators show that implementation often requires specialised operational capacity beyond classic DMO marketing functions. These intermediaries manage contracts, partner onboarding, reimbursement systems, digital issuance, data flows and communication. In this sense, advanced card systems require organisational infrastructure, not just strategic agreement.

Voluntary and host-funded models present a different governance challenge. Their success depends on whether accommodation providers, attractions and service partners perceive sufficient mutual benefit to participate. MeineCardPlus, Schwarzwald Plus, Chiemgau and DreiWelten illustrate that voluntary systems can be highly innovative, but they remain vulnerable to uneven participation, partner withdrawal, perceived cost imbalances and "chicken-and-egg" dynamics. Network value increases when more partners join, yet early participation may be difficult to secure before the system has proven its attractiveness. Transparent reimbursement formulas, clear communication and visible commercial benefits are therefore essential.

Governance is also closely linked to financial legitimacy. Systems based on tourist tax, overnight contributions or host payments must be able to explain how costs are distributed and how value is returned. Cases such as South Tyrol and the Echt Bodensee Card show that even operationally successful models can face political debate when contribution levels, cost recovery or resident fairness become contested. Conversely, the unusually transparent reimbursement and partner-financing information in systems such as Thüringer Wald or Oskar demonstrates how clarity can strengthen trust among participating actors.

A further lesson is that governance structures must remain adaptive. Guest card systems are not static products. Benefit portfolios change, transport costs rise, digital expectations evolve, partner networks expand or contract, and visitor behaviour shifts over time. Systems that can revise funding formulas, update eligibility rules, expand digital functions and incorporate new user groups are better positioned to remain relevant. This is particularly visible in cases such as Sächsische Schweiz, Thüringer Wald, Trentino and the south-western German cluster, where card systems have developed through staged expansion rather than one-off implementation.

The comparative evidence therefore suggests that governance capacity should be understood as an operational precondition, not only as a contextual factor. A destination may have strong attractions, high visitor volumes and a clear strategic need for visitor management, but without a credible coordinating structure, implementation will remain fragile. Questions of leadership, mandate, financing, partner incentives, data ownership, branding and accountability must be resolved before the card can function as a genuine management instrument.

For the Costa Daurada, this is likely to be one of the decisive implementation challenges. The destination has several potentially favourable foundations: the Costa Daurada umbrella brand under the Diputació de Tarragona, the ATM Camp de Tarragona as a regional mobility coordination structure, strong accommodation and tourism business associations, and the emerging metropolitan cooperation agenda within the Camp de Tarragona. These elements suggest that the region is not starting from an institutional vacuum.

However, these structures would need to be aligned around a shared operational project. Coastal municipalities, inland municipalities, Tarragona, Reus, Salou, Cambrils, Vila-seca/La Pineda, transport operators, accommodation businesses, attractions and tourism associations may each perceive different priorities and risks. Some actors may focus on congestion management, others on visitor redistribution, others on commercial value, fiscal return or local brand visibility. A regional guest card would therefore require more than technical design. It would require a negotiated governance framework capable of balancing these interests.

Associations such as hotel, apartment, camping, transport, commerce and tourism business organisations could play a particularly important intermediary role. They may also represent one of the most sensitive stakeholder groups because their members would be directly affected by financing, implementation workload, visitor communication and perceived competitiveness. If engaged early, they could help legitimise the model, identify operational barriers and support partner mobilisation. If treated merely as implementation recipients, they could become a source of resistance.

The Costa Daurada case therefore points to a broader lesson from the comparative analysis: card systems are governance tests. They reveal whether a destination can move from shared strategic language toward shared operational responsibility. If the relevant actors can align around mobility, visitor dispersion, data use and shared territorial value, a guest card could become a catalyst for stronger regional destination management. If coordination remains fragmented, the same instrument could easily become partial, contested or reduced to a conventional promotional product.

5.4.5 Data Generation, Registration Reliability and Destination Intelligence

Beyond mobility integration and territorial distribution, one of the most strategically significant dimensions of guest card systems lies in their capacity to generate usable data. When linked to accommodation registration, transport use, attraction access or digital interaction, guest cards can create information flows that help destinations better understand visitor behaviour, operational pressures and spatial demand patterns. In this sense, they may function not only as benefit instruments, but also as components of wider destination intelligence systems.

This potential varies considerably across the analysed cases. At the most basic level, accommodation-linked cards can strengthen the reliability and standardisation of visitor registration. Where entitlement depends on formal check-in procedures, guest-card systems can reinforce more complete data capture on arrivals, length of stay, nationality mix, occupancy timing and accommodation geography. This is particularly relevant in destinations where fragmented reporting, under-declaration or inconsistent registration practices weaken the quality of tourism statistics. In such contexts, guest cards may indirectly improve governance simply by making formal registration more valuable and more operationally embedded.

A broader comparative lesson is that advanced guest card systems often build upon pre-existing digital registration infrastructure. Large-scale automatic issuance becomes far more feasible when accommodation providers already use standardised electronic check-in, reporting and host-management systems. Guest cards are therefore frequently a second-stage digital innovation rather than the starting point of destination modernisation. Cases such as South Tyrol, Trentino, Ticino, the Bodensee region, Sächsische Schweiz and Thüringer Wald all suggest that digital registration architecture is often a prerequisite for scalable card systems.

A second and more valuable layer of intelligence emerges when cards record actual usage behaviour. Public transport validations, attraction entries, leisure redemptions, route planning interactions or app-based browsing behaviour can reveal how visitors move through a destination rather than merely where they sleep. Conventional accommodation statistics usually say little about day-to-day spatial pressure, attraction popularity, mobility preferences or time-of-day demand peaks. Usage-linked systems therefore create a richer evidence base for understanding real visitor behaviour.

This distinction is especially important. Overnight data may show that two visitors stayed in the same municipality for five nights, yet one may spend most time locally while the other travels widely across the region. Guest-card usage data can begin to capture these differences. In destinations seeking to reduce concentration, improve transport planning or spread tourism benefits, this behavioural layer may be significantly more valuable than static overnight counts alone.

The strongest strategic potential arises when datasets are integrated across domains. Conventional transport smart cards may reveal boarding volumes or route usage, but usually say little about whether users are tourists, where they stay or how mobility relates to the wider travel experience. Attraction ticketing systems may show attendance, but not how visitors travelled there or what else they did during the stay. By contrast, integrated guest card ecosystems linking accommodation, transport and attraction access can generate anonymised insights into broader visitor journeys, including movement sequences, stay profiles, activity combinations and territorial circulation patterns.

Several benchmark cases point in this direction. Trentino's Mio Trentino ecosystem illustrates how guest cards can sit within a wider digital platform combining communication, booking tools, operator services and shared dashboards. South Tyrol's fully digitalised guest pass model suggests strong potential for mobility intelligence and system planning. The Bodensee region's progressive digitisation indicates how formerly analogue guest-card systems can evolve into richer data environments. Sächsische Schweiz demonstrates the value of combining digital issuance with formal evaluation, transport monitoring and iterative policy learning. Even where public evidence of dashboard sophistication remains limited, these systems indicate that guest cards increasingly function as data infrastructures rather than simple entitlement products.

Consumer-facing digital tools may add another layer of value. Browser-based or app-supported cards that combine entitlement, route planning, attraction discovery, nearby suggestions and multilingual information can generate signals about visitor interests, search behaviour and decision pathways while simultaneously improving usability. In this sense, digital guest cards may serve both sides of the management equation: reducing friction for users while strengthening real-time intelligence for destinations.

However, data does not automatically create intelligence. Many destinations collect operational information without converting it into meaningful decision support. Data may remain siloed between tourism boards, municipalities, transport operators, attractions or private contractors. Analytical capacity may be weak, governance responsibilities unclear, or political willingness to act limited. In such circumstances, guest cards risk becoming data-producing systems without strategic application.

The issue is therefore not only data collection, but data governance. Questions of ownership, access rights, anonymisation standards, reporting frequency, interoperability and decision responsibility become central. If transport operators guard mobility data, attractions hold separate redemption data, municipalities protect registration records and tourism bodies lack analytical mandate, the theoretical value of an integrated card system may remain unrealised.

Privacy, trust and proportionality are equally important. Viable models are likely to depend on anonymised or aggregated behavioural insights rather than intrusive individual tracking. Clear governance rules, transparent communication and demonstrable public-value purposes are essential if data-rich guest card systems are to remain politically and socially acceptable.

The comparative evidence suggests five main lessons. First, stay-linked systems can improve registration quality and statistical reliability. Second, usage-linked systems provide richer insights into movement and activity patterns. Third, integrated ecosystems linking accommodation, mobility and attractions offer substantially greater strategic value than single-domain datasets. Fourth, outcomes depend as much on governance capacity, analytical competence and technology partnerships as on the card itself. Fifth, public trust and privacy safeguards are preconditions for durable implementation.

For the Costa Daurada, this dimension may be one of the least visible yet most valuable arguments for a guest card. The region combines strong seasonality, varied visitor segments, high excursionist volumes, second-home dynamics and marked coastal concentration, all of which are only partly captured through conventional overnight statistics. Existing data often reveals where visitors stay, but less clearly how they move, what they use, how far they travel inland, or where pressure accumulates during peak periods.

A well-designed guest card could significantly improve this picture. If linked to accommodation issuance, ATM Camp de Tarragona mobility systems, selected attractions, museums, PortAventura partnerships, heritage sites or regional experiences, it could generate stronger intelligence on coastal versus inland circulation, public transport demand, attraction uptake, weather-related substitution patterns, peak congestion moments and cross-municipal visitor flows.

This could support more evidence-based decisions on transport scheduling, seasonal service reinforcement, marketing focus, inland product development, infrastructure investment and visitor-dispersion strategies. It could also help reveal whether policy ambitions are actually working. For example, if inland campaigns increase awareness but card data shows limited movement beyond the coast, strategy could be adjusted accordingly.

The decisive condition, however, would be institutional readiness. Without interoperable systems, clear governance agreements, analytical capacity and trusted technology partners, the Costa Daurada could generate data without creating insight. With those foundations in place, a guest card could become not only a visitor product, but one of the most valuable shared intelligence tools in the regional tourism system.

5.4.6 Resident Integration and Tourism Legitimacy

Although most guest card systems are designed primarily around visitor benefits, the comparative evidence suggests that their long-term success also depends on the extent to which they generate visible value for residents, workers and wider local communities. In mature destinations especially, tourism policy is increasingly judged not only by visitor numbers, expenditure or marketing performance, but by whether local populations perceive tourism as fair, manageable and connected to quality of life. Guest cards should therefore be assessed not only as visitor products, but also as potential instruments for strengthening, or weakening, tourism legitimacy.

Explicit resident integration remains less common than visitor-oriented functionality, but it is more varied than might initially be assumed. Across the case portfolio, local inclusion appears through several different models: low-cost annual resident cards, parallel local-user schemes, employee-oriented benefit cards, volunteer recognition instruments, open-access leisure cards and commercially purchasable products that are equally available to residents and visitors. This indicates that the boundary between guest card, leisure card and community benefit platform is increasingly fluid.

One pathway involves dedicated resident or local-user cards that visibly connect tourism infrastructure with everyday local benefit. Examples such as EBC HOME, Thüringer Wald Card, DreiWelten BürgerCard, AuszeitCardPlus and Schwarzwald Plus Heimatkarte show how attractions, leisure facilities, local commerce or mobility-related benefits can be extended beyond overnight guests. Such models help broaden the perceived beneficiaries of tourism investment. They also address an important fairness issue: where visitors receive bundled access to services, residents may question why similar assets are not made available to the local population in some form.

A second pathway concerns worker inclusion. The Appenzeller Mitarbeiterkarte, DreiWelten JobCard and AuszeitCardPlus employer model demonstrate how destination-card systems can be adapted to support employees and regional labour markets. This is particularly relevant in tourism-dependent destinations where recruitment, retention and seasonal staffing are persistent challenges. Employee-oriented cards can improve the attractiveness of working in the destination, strengthen identification with the region and function as informal familiarisation tools by enabling staff to experience local attractions first-hand. In this sense, the card contributes not only to quality of life, but also to service quality and destination knowledge within the workforce.

A third model links benefits to civic contribution rather than residency or tourism consumption alone. The DreiWelten EhrenCard is especially relevant in this respect because it connects the card logic with volunteer recognition and civic engagement. This expands the role of tourism-card infrastructure beyond the visitor economy and into broader place-based value creation. Such models are still relatively rare, but they demonstrate that destination cards can support community recognition as well as visitor management.

Resident value can also be generated indirectly. Mobility-integrated visitor systems may improve the viability of public transport services, support seasonal frequency increases, strengthen regional connectivity or justify better passenger information. These improvements can benefit residents, workers and local businesses even when the card itself is reserved for visitors. Similarly, systems that encourage visitors to move beyond saturated hotspots may spread expenditure toward smaller towns, inland areas and secondary attractions, thereby widening the territorial distribution of tourism benefits. In these cases, residents benefit not through direct entitlement, but through shared infrastructure and more balanced economic effects.

Recent German practice further illustrates this shared-benefit logic. In the MÜRITZ rundum evaluation, improved mobility provision was framed not only as a visitor benefit, but also as a contribution to better accessibility for local residents (IGES Institut, 2020)., while in Rostock, the planned digital guest card and revised visitor contribution were explicitly framed not only as visitor services, but as mechanisms to fund infrastructure, public transport, free public toilets, events and improvements to resident quality of life. This demonstrates how visitor-contribution systems can be politically legitimised when they are clearly connected to public value and everyday place quality rather than presented solely as tourist benefits (Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023).

However, indirect benefits are not always visible to local communities. This is a critical governance issue. A guest card may generate public transport revenue, support attractions or increase regional spending, yet still be perceived as a tourist privilege if residents do not recognise how the system improves their own quality of life. Communication and transparency therefore matter. Destinations need to explain not only what visitors receive, but also how the system supports public services, local businesses, cultural infrastructure, transport viability, employment or community access.

Perceptions of fairness are especially important where guest cards are financed through tourist taxes, public contributions or accommodation-linked charges. If residents experience congestion, housing pressure or public-space crowding while visitors receive highly visible benefits, the card can become politically sensitive. The South Tyrol case illustrates this tension clearly: operational success and high visitor coverage do not automatically remove debates around cost sharing, resident access and perceived unequal treatment. Conversely, models that include resident, worker or civic layers are better positioned to present the card as a shared territorial instrument rather than a gift to tourists.

The comparative cases also show that resident integration does not need to follow strict municipal residency boundaries. Some annual cards or open-access local-user products are available to wider regional populations, repeat visitors, second-home owners or neighbouring communities. This flexibility may be important in destinations where lived relationships with place extend beyond formal administrative registration. In tourism regions with second homes, commuting patterns, seasonal workforces and repeated family visits, a narrow resident-only model may exclude groups that are functionally connected to the destination. More flexible access categories can therefore better reflect real territorial communities, provided the rules remain transparent and politically legitimate.

At the same time, resident-oriented card layers require careful design. If benefits are too generous, they may create financial pressure on attractions or undermine existing revenue streams. If they are too limited, they may be dismissed as symbolic. If eligibility rules are unclear, perceptions of unfairness may increase rather than decrease. The challenge is therefore not simply to add a resident discount, but to design a benefit structure that is financially viable, socially meaningful and aligned with wider destination objectives.

The comparative evidence points to four main lessons. First, resident integration is still secondary in many guest card systems, but it is becoming more strategically relevant. Second, local value can be created directly through resident, worker or civic access schemes, and indirectly through improved transport, wider economic distribution and shared infrastructure. Third, visible fairness and transparent communication are essential for long-term legitimacy. Fourth, card systems with broader community value are better aligned with destination stewardship than purely visitor-facing products.

For the Costa Daurada, these lessons are particularly important. The destination faces seasonal congestion, parking pressure, housing and tourist-apartment debates, labour-market challenges, second-home dynamics and uneven distribution of tourism benefits between coastal and inland areas. A purely visitor-facing card could therefore be vulnerable to criticism if it were perceived as another privilege for tourists in an already tourism-intensive region. By contrast, a model that combines visitor mobility with local benefit layers could help demonstrate that tourism-generated value is being returned to the territory.

Possible local adaptations could include a resident card linked to cultural and leisure access, a worker card for employees in tourism and related sectors, benefits for second-home owners or long-stay seasonal users, and community recognition mechanisms connected to volunteering, cultural participation or environmental stewardship. Such layers would not replace the visitor-management function of the guest card, but they would strengthen its legitimacy as a place-based governance instrument.

In this sense, resident integration should not be treated as an optional social add-on. For a mature Mediterranean destination such as the Costa Daurada, it may be central to implementation feasibility. A guest card that supports mobility, visitor dispersion and data generation will be strategically valuable, but a guest card that also creates visible local value is more likely to gain the political and social support required for long-term durability.

5.4.7 Key Comparative Lessons

The comparative analysis demonstrates that guest card systems differ widely in territorial scope, governance setting, financing logic and strategic ambition. Some remain relatively simple visitor-benefit products, while others have evolved into multi-functional governance tools linked to mobility policy, regional coordination, destination intelligence and community value creation. Despite this diversity, several consistent lessons emerge across the case portfolio.

First, access design matters significantly. Low-friction systems, particularly those automatically or near-automatically issued through accommodation providers, tend to achieve wider reach and more consistent practical use than models dependent on active purchase decisions. By embedding the card within the normal visitor journey, such systems reduce behavioural barriers and increase the likelihood that visitors engage with mobility, attractions or wider regional experiences. Optional purchase products may still perform strongly in selected market segments, but their territorial reach is structurally narrower.

Second, public transport integration emerges as one of the most strategically valuable components of advanced guest card systems. Where mobility access is simple, visible and meaningful, cards can support modal shift, reduce parking and road pressure, improve accessibility for non-car users and encourage exploration beyond immediate accommodation zones. In several cases, tourism-generated demand also appears to strengthen the wider case for transport investment or seasonal service improvements. Guest cards can therefore function not only as tourism products, but as practical mobility-policy tools.

Third, territorial effects depend strongly on network design. Systems that combine transport access with a geographically broad ecosystem of attractions, heritage sites, leisure providers and local experiences are better positioned to encourage visitor dispersion and spread expenditure more widely. By contrast, cards focused mainly on already dominant nodes may reinforce existing concentration patterns. The strategic question is therefore not simply whether a card exists, but which spatial behaviours it incentivises.

Fourth, governance capacity consistently appears as a decisive success factor. Effective card systems rely on cooperation between municipalities, tourism organisations, transport providers, accommodation businesses, attractions and technology partners. Questions of financing, reimbursement, branding, data access and operational responsibility often prove more challenging than technical delivery itself. Where stable coordinating structures and mutual incentives exist, systems are more likely to scale, adapt and endure. Where institutional fragmentation dominates, even well-designed concepts may struggle to move beyond symbolic implementation.

Fifth, the strategic value of guest cards increasingly lies in their role as data infrastructures. When linked across accommodation registration, mobility use and attraction access, they can generate insights into visitor flows, behavioural patterns, peak demand and territorial circulation that go far beyond conventional overnight statistics. The strongest models do not solely collect data, but convert it into shared intelligence, dashboards or evidence for planning decisions. However, this potential depends on governance capacity, interoperability and analytical competence.

Sixth, resident integration and perceived fairness influence long-term legitimacy. While most systems remain visitor-led, cases that generate visible local value through resident access models, worker benefits, volunteer recognition, improved shared transport services or wider territorial redistribution are better positioned to sustain political and social acceptance. Conversely, cards perceived only as additional tourist privileges may encounter resistance even where they perform well operationally.

Seventh, guest card systems should not be understood as one uniform category. The portfolio includes mobility-led models, integrated regional systems, host-funded benefit networks, commercial leisure cards, heritage-anchor city passes and hybrid community-oriented schemes. Their suitability depends heavily on destination structure, institutional capacity and strategic priorities. Destinations centred on one iconic flagship attraction may sustain premium anchor-pass models, while polycentric or territorially dispersed regions may be better served by integrated bundling systems combining mobility and multiple assets.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the greatest value of guest card systems lies not in marketing visibility alone, but in their capacity to connect several policy objectives within one operational mechanism: mobility access, visitor steering, regional cooperation, data generation, economic distribution and community benefit. Destinations that approach cards purely as promotional products are likely to underuse their wider potential.

Recent practitioner evidence reinforces these comparative findings. The IGES evaluation of MÜRITZ rundum highlights the importance of measuring mobility effects, resident co-benefits and visitor-contribution acceptance after implementation (IGES Institut, 2020). Rostock illustrates how guest cards and visitor charges can be framed as tools for financing shared public services, mobility and urban quality of life (Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023). The BrandenburgCard proposal for the Uckermark, in turn, explicitly recommends a phased levy-funded overnight guest card with region-wide public transport as the base benefit, followed by later expansion into attractions, discounts, local add-ons, further target groups and a purchasable card layer (Kohl & Partner, 2022). These examples confirm that guest cards are increasingly understood in practice as modular destination-governance instruments rather than simple promotional products.

Successful systems are therefore less defined by any single feature than by the alignment of multiple elements: low-friction access, meaningful mobility integration, territorially coherent benefit networks, effective governance arrangements, intelligent data use and credible value creation for both visitors and residents. Where these elements reinforce one another, guest cards can become durable destination-management tools rather than short-lived tourism promotions.

These comparative lessons provide the analytical bridge to the following chapter, which assesses the applicability of guest card models to the Costa Daurada. As a mature tourism region with strong seasonality, coastal concentration, diverse attractions, existing transport coordination structures and growing metropolitan cooperation dynamics, the Costa Daurada presents both favourable conditions and significant coordination challenges for implementation.

6. From Comparative Evidence to Regional Application: A Guest Card Strategy for the Costa Daurada

6.1 Purpose and Structure of the Regional Application

The preceding chapters examined guest card systems as evolving destination-management instruments and assessed a diverse portfolio of international and regional case studies. The comparative evidence demonstrated that such systems can extend well beyond their traditional role as promotional visitor products when they combine mobility integration, territorial connectivity, stakeholder coordination and data-generating capacity within a coherent operational framework.

The next analytical step is not to replicate any individual model, but to assess how these broader lessons may be translated into the specific conditions of the Costa Daurada. As one of the principal tourism regions of Catalonia, the destination combines high visitor volumes, strong seasonal concentration, a polycentric territorial structure, significant mobility pressures and a wider inland asset base that remains comparatively underutilised. At the same time, emerging metropolitan cooperation and existing regional governance structures create a potentially favourable context for more integrated tourism management approaches.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 6 evaluates how a guest card model could be adapted to the Costa Daurada as a practical governance tool rather than merely a marketing initiative. The chapter first reviews the structural context of the destination, then identifies the most transferable lessons from comparative evidence, before outlining a realistic model concept and its principal implementation considerations.

6.2 Structural Conditions and Strategic Context of the Costa Daurada

The practical applicability of a regional guest card model depends not only on the strengths of systems observed elsewhere, but also on the structural characteristics of the receiving destination. In the case of the Costa Daurada, several conditions appear favourable, including a large tourism economy, diversified accommodation capacity, an established destination brand, and a geographically varied offer extending beyond the coast (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025; Agència Catalana de Turisme, 2025). Persistent challenges relating to seasonality, spatial concentration, mobility fragmentation and multi-level governance complexity nevertheless suggest that any future model would need to be carefully adapted to local realities rather than directly transferred from other regions (Ajuntament de Tarragona, 2026; OECD, 2020).

The Costa Daurada is one of Catalonia’s principal tourism regions and a major pillar of the visitor economy of the Province of Tarragona (Agència Catalana de Turisme, 2025). Its international profile has historically been shaped by coastal leisure demand, family tourism and resort development, particularly in municipalities such as Salou, Cambrils and Vila-seca/La Pineda (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025). However, the destination also possesses a broader and more diversified product base, including the UNESCO-listed Roman heritage of Tarragona, urban cultural assets, gastronomy, wine territories, inland rural landscapes, natural areas and one of Europe’s leading leisure attractions in PortAventura World (UNESCO, 2024; Agència Catalana de Turisme, 2025). This creates favourable conditions for a more distributed and higher-value tourism model, but also requires stronger coordination across municipalities, tourism products and territorial identities.

Recent demand data underline the scale of the destination. Between January and November 2025, hotels on the Costa Daurada registered 10,347,401 overnight stays, campsites 7,449,037, and tourist apartments 2,350,141. International markets accounted for 51.5% of overnight stays, while the domestic market represented 48.5% (FEHT, 2025). These figures suggest that tourism demand is sufficiently large to justify investment in shared destination-management instruments. They also indicate that any future guest card would need to function across multiple accommodation formats rather than depend on a single segment. Finally, the balanced domestic and international market mix reinforces the importance of multilingual usability, intuitive access systems and clear communication.

Recent Costa Daurada-specific evidence further reinforces the importance of this mobility challenge. Based on a survey of 1,954 tourists, Cattaruzzo et al. (2026) show that excursions from the main coastal accommodation areas remain strongly associated with private vehicle use, while public transport plays a more limited and context-dependent role. Their findings also indicate that the mode of arrival shapes mobility behaviour within the destination, with visitors arriving by public transport being less likely to use private vehicles locally and more likely to use public transport during the stay. This is particularly relevant for the present study because it confirms that a guest card cannot generate sustainable mobility behaviour through fare inclusion alone. Its effectiveness would depend on the simultaneous development of attractive excursion products, clear visitor-oriented information and sufficiently usable public transport connections.

The region continues to display marked seasonality, even if recent industry figures suggest gradual progress in extending activity beyond the traditional summer peak. FEHT described 2025 as the most deseasonalised tourism year in the history of Tarragona province (FEHT, 2025). Nevertheless, concentrated summer demand still creates structural rather than episodic pressure on roads, parking capacity, public space, attractions and local services, while parts of the tourism economy remain underutilised during shoulder and low season periods (Diari de Tarragona, 2024). This strengthens the case for instruments capable of smoothing demand across the calendar, supporting off-peak travel and improving the efficiency of existing infrastructure.

Visitor behaviour is also evolving. Local reporting indicates shorter average stays, later booking decisions and increasingly fragmented holiday patterns, with shorter breaks replacing part of the traditional one or two-week summer stay model (Diari de Tarragona, 2025). This trend is strategically significant because shorter visits reduce the time available for spontaneous discovery and increase the importance of low-friction tools that rapidly connect visitors with mobility options, attractions and curated experiences. In this context, a guest card could help intensify visitor engagement and territorial spending within more limited timeframes.

A further defining structural condition concerns spatial imbalance within the destination. Tourism demand remains strongly concentrated in coastal municipalities, while inland areas often capture a smaller share of visitor flows despite possessing recognised cultural, gastronomic and landscape assets (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025). Earlier regional reporting indicated that around 60% of visitors had no intention of visiting interior areas because their trip motivation was centred primarily on beach holidays (Diari Més, 2016). Although dated, the finding remains analytically relevant because it illustrates a persistent challenge: a geographically broad destination does not automatically become a behaviourally broad one. Without active incentives, improved accessibility and stronger destination storytelling, established coastal movement patterns may continue to dominate.

Social sustainability considerations are likewise increasingly visible. Public debates in Tarragona have highlighted concerns regarding tourist apartments, commercial change and the gradual transformation of the historic Part Alta into a more visitor-oriented environment, raising wider questions about housing pressure, neighbourhood identity and tourism acceptance (Diari de Tarragona, 2024; Diari Més, 2025). Although these dynamics are more urban and housing-related than those directly addressed by guest card systems, they reinforce a broader point: future tourism instruments will operate within a context where resident legitimacy and perceived fairness matter increasingly.

Mobility conditions further reinforce the relevance of an integrated management approach. The Costa Daurada functions within the wider Camp de Tarragona urban and regional system, where tourism flows intersect with commuter, educational and service mobility (Observatorio de la Movilidad Metropolitana, 2014). Seasonal concentration along the coast places additional pressure on road infrastructure and parking capacity, while public transport remains comparatively fragmented from a visitor perspective, involving multiple operators, varying service frequencies and differing information systems (Diari de Tarragona, 2022; Diari Més, 2024). Although transport infrastructure exists, the tourist mobility experience is not always sufficiently integrated, intuitive or low-friction. For short-stay, family or international visitors unfamiliar with the territory, this complexity can favour private car use or highly localised movement patterns.

Important institutional assets already exist. The Autoritat Territorial de la Mobilitat (ATM) Camp de Tarragona provides a regional transport coordination framework and fare integration base (ATM Camp de Tarragona, 2025). In parallel, the planned TramCamp system and related mobility investments indicate a medium-term direction toward stronger interurban connectivity (Diari Més, 2025; El País, 2025). These developments are significant because guest card systems tend to be most effective where they can build upon existing mobility governance rather than attempt to create it from scratch.

Governance readiness also appears stronger than is sometimes assumed. The Costa Daurada brand, promoted through the Diputació de Tarragona and related tourism structures, already provides an umbrella identity connecting multiple municipalities (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025). In addition, the ongoing development of the Camp de Tarragona metropolitan area, with an expanding functional geography and increasing cooperation between municipalities, reflects wider momentum toward coordinated territorial planning (La Ciutat, 2025; Diari Més, 2025; Diari de Tarragona, 2025). Such processes do not eliminate institutional complexity, but they do suggest a more favourable environment for collaborative destination-wide initiatives than in many fragmented regions (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

Recent regional discourse has likewise emphasised the need for more active visitor management. Anton Clavé argued that "tourism intelligence and knowledge of tourist behaviour are essential" for managing visitor movements, while Marta Farrero stated that optimal visitor management would be key both to destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. In the same debate, Salou mayor Pere Granados described the need to transform the municipality into a "smart and sustainable tourist destination", highlighting mobility, deconcentration measures and responsible tourism as strategic priorities (Diari de Tarragona, 2021). These statements are particularly relevant because successful guest card systems generally emerge where destinations seek practical management instruments rather than simply new promotional products.

Overall, the Costa Daurada presents many of the structural conditions under which guest card systems can be strategically relevant: high visitor volumes, concentrated seasonal pressure, shortening stays, territorial redistribution needs, mobility frictions, diversified accommodation supply and improving regional governance capacity. The destination therefore appears less constrained by lack of demand or territorial potential than by the challenge of coordinating existing assets through a coherent regional management framework.

6.3 Transferable Lessons from Comparative Evidence for the Costa Daurada

The comparative analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrated that guest card systems vary considerably in territorial scale, governance design and operational sophistication. Despite this diversity, the case portfolio revealed several recurring principles that are relevant for assessing transferability to the Costa Daurada. Their value lies not in identifying a single best-practice model to replicate, but in distinguishing between design features that merely add promotional appeal and those more likely to generate meaningful destination-management outcomes. The strategic task for the Costa Daurada is therefore to identify which elements are compatible with its own territorial structure, visitor markets, mobility conditions and governance capacity.

One of the clearest implications concerns access design. Across the stronger systems analysed, low-friction participation consistently emerged as a decisive factor. Models issued automatically or near-automatically through accommodation providers generally achieved broader reach than voluntary purchase-based products, because they became part of the normal visitor journey rather than requiring an additional consumer decision. For a high-volume destination with extensive hotel, campsite and apartment accommodation, this is particularly relevant. A purely commercial card would likely attract only a narrower and more motivated share of visitors, whereas an accommodation-linked model could reach family groups, longer-stay visitors and convenience-oriented leisure segments more effectively. In this sense, access design is not only a technical matter, but a condition for whether the card can operate as a destination-management instrument rather than a niche tourism product.

Mobility emerges as the second major field of transferability, although it should not be treated as a separate add-on to the card. Comparative evidence indicates that public transport integration is often the component that most clearly distinguishes strategic guest card systems from promotional benefit schemes. Where cards simplify access to regional transport networks, they can reduce uncertainty for unfamiliar visitors, lower practical barriers to modal shift and widen access to secondary locations. For the Costa Daurada, this is likely to be decisive. Seasonal congestion, dispersed settlements and a still fragmented visitor-facing transport experience suggest that mobility would need to form the operational backbone of any future model. In strongly seasonal destinations, transport integration could also perform a dual function: relieving pressure during peak months while supporting wider accessibility and local mobility use in shoulder and low seasons.

The mobility question is closely connected to territorial distribution. The most effective systems for visitor dispersion were not those that simply listed many attractions, but those that combined accessible mobility, visible alternatives and a geographically broad network of relevant experiences. Guest cards can help destinations move from passive concentration towards more active territorial circulation when the wider offer is both reachable and legible to visitors. This is especially relevant for the Costa Daurada, where coastal municipalities dominate tourism demand despite the presence of inland wine landscapes, heritage towns, gastronomy, rural spaces and nature-based assets. The card itself would not create inland attractiveness, but it could reduce some of the behavioural and practical barriers that currently limit wider exploration.

This challenge is already visible in existing local initiatives. Efforts by Unió de Botiguers de Reus (UBR) to attract visitors from Salou and Cambrils to Reus through dedicated tourist shuttle services demonstrate both the commercial interest in redistributing coastal demand inland and the limitations of relying on parallel mobility solutions where regular public transport connections already exist. A guest card model could pursue similar objectives through more integrated, scalable and territorially coherent mechanisms. In line with destination stewardship principles, stronger tourism-generated demand could also help support the case for improved public transport services whose benefits extend beyond visitors to residents and everyday regional mobility.

Territorial redistribution, however, depends not only on the formal benefits included in the card. The surrounding communication ecosystem is equally important. Comparative cases show that digital platforms, route suggestions, themed itineraries, targeted notifications and integrated journey-planning tools can actively surface inland experiences and lesser-known alternatives. More traditional formats, such as printed guides, curated maps, hotel reception materials and destination storytelling, can perform a similar function for less digitally oriented user groups. For the Costa Daurada, the implication is that a guest card would need to be accompanied by active interpretation and communication. If visitors are simply given access without being shown how to use the wider destination, the redistributive effect would remain limited.

A related issue is the relationship between card design and the destination's asset structure. The comparative evidence suggests that tourism-card models are shaped partly by whether a destination is organised around a singular flagship attraction or around a dispersed portfolio of assets. Where one globally recognised site dominates demand, as in Granada or Dubrovnik, anchor-pass models centred on premium access to scarce heritage assets can be commercially viable. The Costa Daurada has a different structure. Its visitor appeal is not carried by one single icon, but by the combination of coastal resorts, PortAventura World, Tarragona's Roman heritage, Reus, Cambrils, wine landscapes, inland towns and natural areas. This polycentric and multi-nodal structure strengthens the case for a mobility-based regional guest card that aggregates value across transport, heritage, leisure, gastronomy, nature and distributed attractions, rather than for a narrowly attraction-led pass.

Governance is the area where transferability becomes most conditional. Across the analysed cases, long-term success depended less on the technical format of the card than on the ability of public authorities, tourism bodies, transport operators and private partners to cooperate around shared objectives. Stable financing, clear coordination structures and mutual benefit perceptions repeatedly emerged as enabling conditions. In the Costa Daurada, this issue is especially relevant because fragmented territorial promotion and multi-actor governance have historically constrained integrated destination management. Existing structures such as the Costa Daurada umbrella brand, ATM Camp de Tarragona and the ongoing development of Camp de Tarragona metropolitan cooperation may provide a stronger starting point than in the past. Nevertheless, implementation would still depend on sustained cross-sector coordination rather than technology alone. The comparative cases also suggest that phased implementation, modular rollout and progressive expansion would be more realistic than expecting full functional sophistication from the outset.

The data dimension reinforces this governance argument. Several advanced systems demonstrated that guest cards can generate value not only through visitor benefits, but also through anonymised insights into movement patterns, attraction use, seasonal pressure points and wider tourism behaviour. In the Costa Daurada, where overnight statistics reveal scale but less about day-to-day spatial dynamics, this could be particularly valuable. A well-designed system could improve understanding of coastal versus inland flows, transport demand, attraction usage and seasonal concentration, while also offering richer insight into broader visitor journeys, including mobility choices, activity sequences, dwell times, retail behaviour and consumption patterns where participating partners are integrated. Such intelligence would provide a more detailed evidence base than accommodation statistics alone. However, the comparative evidence also shows that data only becomes strategically useful when supported by analytical capacity, governance capability and clear institutional ownership.

Social legitimacy is another important transferability condition. While most systems remain primarily visitor-focused, the comparative cases suggest that long-term durability is stronger where local communities also perceive visible value. This may occur directly through resident access schemes or indirectly through improved mobility services, wider territorial benefit distribution and reduced pressure on saturated hotspots. In the Costa Daurada, where debates around congestion, tourist accommodation pressure and local quality of life have become more visible, this lesson is especially significant. Existing local initiatives such as the Passi Tarragoni, which extends access to cultural assets for residents, and broader discussions around citizen-card models in Reus indicate that locally oriented benefit systems are not alien to the territory, but already form part of wider governance thinking.

The concept of local value should also be interpreted broadly. In destinations with important second-home communities, seasonal long-stay users and territorially embedded non-resident owners, perceptions of inclusion may influence the social legitimacy of tourism policy. Participation models reflecting wider functional communities, rather than only narrow administrative residency, may therefore deserve consideration. A further social dimension concerns the tourism workforce. In a destination strongly dependent on hospitality and seasonal employment, employee-oriented access schemes, mobility benefits or leisure privileges could support recruitment, retention and stronger destination identification among workers. Such measures would widen the perceived beneficiaries of tourism beyond visitors and businesses alone. A future guest card framed solely as a tourist privilege could risk resistance, whereas one linked to broader territorial, community and workforce benefits would likely have stronger legitimacy.

At the same time, the comparative evidence also makes clear that transferability requires selectivity. Purely urban commercial cards focused on dense clusters of paid attractions are less suited to the Costa Daurada's polycentric and mixed coastal-regional geography. Highly sophisticated digital ecosystems dependent on extensive legacy integration may likewise exceed realistic short-term implementation capacity. The most useful external cases are therefore not those that appear most advanced in absolute terms, but those whose mechanisms can be adapted to local conditions. For the Costa Daurada, this means prioritising broad access, mobility integration, territorial activation, governance feasibility and gradual system development over immediate technical complexity.

Overall, the strongest transferable lesson is that successful guest card systems are rarely defined by any single feature. Their most effective performance emerges when several elements reinforce one another: low-friction access, meaningful mobility integration, broad territorial relevance, credible governance structures, useful data generation, effective communication and visible value for both visitors and local communities. For the Costa Daurada, the strategic opportunity lies not in copying an external benchmark, but in combining these principles into a regionally adapted model. The following section therefore considers what form such a model could realistically take.

6.4 From Principle to Practice: A Costa Daurada Guest Card Model

Building on the territorial diagnosis presented in Section 6.2 and the transferable lessons identified in Section 6.3, this section outlines a realistic guest card model adapted to the Costa Daurada. The objective is not to propose a fully finalised operational blueprint, but a strategic framework through which tourism mobility, territorial balance, destination intelligence and shared local value could be advanced through one integrated instrument.

The proposed model also responds to strategic priorities repeatedly identified in regional and supra-regional tourism policy, including sustainable mobility, diversification, digitalisation, visitor management and improved governance. In this sense, the guest card is approached not primarily as a promotional product, but as a practical delivery mechanism capable of translating strategic ambitions into operational outcomes.

Rather than replicating any single benchmark case, the concept combines elements that appeared most effective across the comparative portfolio while adapting them to the Costa Daurada's specific characteristics: strong seasonality, coastal concentration, diversified accommodation supply, inland underutilised assets, fragmented visitor-facing mobility systems and evolving metropolitan governance capacity.

6.4.1 Strategic Purpose and Core Design Logic

The proposed model would be mobility-first rather than discount-first. While attraction benefits and commercial incentives can support uptake, the central rationale would lie in simplifying movement across the destination, reducing dependence on private vehicles, widening access to inland areas and generating more balanced visitor circulation. In practical terms, transport integration would form the backbone of the scheme, while other benefits would reinforce territorial and behavioural objectives.

The preferred issuance model would be accommodation-linked and automatically or near-automatically activated through registered overnight stays. Comparative evidence suggests that systems embedded within the normal visitor journey consistently achieve wider reach than voluntary purchase-based models. Given the Costa Daurada's substantial hotel, campsite and apartment sectors, this logic appears more suitable than a standalone commercial city-card model. Automatic digital issuance would also create an important functional advantage: visitors could access benefits before reaching their accommodation, including for arrival journeys from Camp de Tarragona station, Reus Airport or other gateways.

A digital-first format would therefore be preferable, using browser-based access or wallet-compatible QR credentials rather than requiring a dedicated app from the outset. This would reduce friction for short-stay visitors while remaining operationally scalable. At the same time, digitalisation should remain service-led rather than technology-led, ensuring that convenience, privacy and accessibility guide system design. Physical alternatives or printable formats could remain available for less digital user groups.

6.4.2 Mobility Integration as the Operational Backbone

The strongest strategic component of the model would be integrated public transport access. If the objective is to widen territorial circulation and encourage exploration beyond the established coastal core, inclusion should ideally extend across the full ATM Camp de Tarragona network rather than only a limited tourist zone. Restricting access to the main coastal corridor would risk reinforcing existing concentration patterns rather than changing them.

Full network inclusion would significantly lower barriers to reaching inland municipalities, secondary towns, cultural sites and wider regional experiences. It would also create a simpler and more legible system for visitors unfamiliar with local fare structures, operators or ticketing channels. In destinations seeking behavioural change, simplicity is often as important as price. This aligns with wider Catalan and Spanish policy priorities around sustainable mobility and connected visitor transport systems.

Priority flows would naturally include the principal tourism and functional links of the territory, particularly Tarragona, Salou, Cambrils, Vila-seca/La Pineda and Reus, alongside connections to Camp de Tarragona station, Reus Airport, PortAventura World and inland destinations. However, these should be treated as part of one coherent regional network rather than as a separate tourism sub-system.

Complementary partnerships could further enhance the mobility layer. Discounts or integrated offers with operators such as BusPlana, including airport links, excursion services or selected day-trip routes, could reflect existing visitor behaviour while broadening practical travel options.

The objective would not only be visitor convenience. Tourism-generated ridership could also strengthen the case for improved frequencies, seasonal reinforcements and better integrated regional mobility that residents likewise benefit from. In this sense, the guest card could help convert tourism demand into wider public transport value, consistent with destination stewardship principles.

6.4.3 Territorial Redistribution and Experience Activation

A second core function would be to widen the spatial distribution of tourism benefits. The Costa Daurada already possesses inland and secondary assets including heritage towns, wine territories, gastronomy, rural landscapes and cultural attractions, yet visitor behaviour remains heavily concentrated along the coast. The guest card should therefore be designed to connect existing assets rather than artificially manufacture demand. Such redistribution logic is consistent with regional objectives around territorial balance and product diversification.

This territorial rebalancing logic also aligns with recent institutional priorities in the Costa Daurada. The Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona has launched a joint promotion plan for the interior of the Costa Daurada for 2025 to 2027, with €900,000 committed by the Patronat and a further expected contribution of €150,000 from participating municipalities and comarcal councils. The plan aims to strengthen the positioning and competitiveness of the interior offer through strategic and innovative marketing actions, while explicitly considering demand segmentation, accessibility and sustainability. A regional guest card could therefore complement this agenda by connecting interior promotion with mobility access, visitor incentives and measurable use data (Diputació de Tarragona, 2024; Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025).

This could be pursued through targeted incentives such as discounted or included admission to inland attractions, transport-linked bonuses, themed itineraries and bundled excursion logic linking coast and interior. Potential examples include the Casteller Museum in Valls, the medieval heritage of Montblanc, Poblet Monastery, Priorat wine landscapes, Reus modernist and Gaudí-linked assets, Tarragona's Roman heritage ensemble, inland festivals and family-oriented day trips.

Communication would be as important as benefits themselves. A strong digital interface could surface suggested itineraries, nearby experiences, low-congestion alternatives or weather-responsive recommendations. Traditional formats such as hotel reception materials, maps and curated route guides would remain valuable for less digital user groups. Comparative evidence indicates that redistribution succeeds not only through discounts, but through visibility, convenience and reduced planning effort.

Redistribution would therefore require not only inclusion of inland assets, but also active reduction of planning effort for visitors.

6.4.4 Seasonal Dynamic Logic

Because the Costa Daurada is strongly seasonal, the same scheme should not operate identically throughout the year. During peak summer months, the primary role would be congestion mitigation, modal shift and dispersal away from saturated zones. Mobility incentives, inland excursion promotion and real-time steering tools would be especially valuable in this phase.

During shoulder and low seasons, the emphasis could shift toward demand stimulation, business support and year-round activation. Enhanced off-season benefits, gastronomic campaigns, cultural weekends, wellness packages or local commerce incentives could help lengthen the visitor calendar and support enterprises outside the summer peak. This would also respond to sector concerns that additional visitor taxation may be especially sensitive outside the main summer season unless linked to measures that strengthen off-season competitiveness.

The resident layer could become particularly valuable in these periods. Encouraging local and regional communities to use cultural, leisure and commercial offers more actively during quieter months would help broaden the user base of the visitor economy beyond tourists alone while supporting more stable year-round demand.

Such dynamic logic would allow the guest card to respond to changing territorial needs rather than remain a static one-size-fits-all product.

6.4.5 Resident, Worker and Community Benefit Layers

Long-term legitimacy would likely depend on visible local value. A purely visitor-facing model risks being perceived as another tourism privilege in a mature destination already debating congestion, housing pressure and quality of life. The scheme should therefore include optional local benefit layers. In conceptual terms, such layers would operationalise distributive fairness and destination social responsibility by making tourism-generated value visible to groups beyond visitors and tourism businesses alone.

One option would be an annual resident card launched from the outset, provided a sufficiently broad partner network exists. This tier would not need to include public transport, but could otherwise mirror much of the core guest card logic through access to attractions, cultural sites, selected leisure offers and commercial partner benefits. Existing local precedents such as the Passi Tarragoni and wider citizen-card discussions in Reus suggest that resident-oriented access logic is already compatible with the territory.

A second layer could target workers across the regional economy, while being particularly valuable for businesses within the visitor economy. Employee-oriented access to attractions, experiences or selected benefits could support recruitment, retention and stronger destination identification. In tourism-facing sectors, it would also enable staff familiarisation with the destination, potentially improving service quality as employees recommend and interpret local offers for paying guests.

A third, more innovative pathway would be a civic participation component inspired by volunteer recognition models seen elsewhere. Community volunteering, environmental initiatives, cultural support or recognised civic engagement could generate access to selected benefits. Such a mechanism would symbolically and practically widen the beneficiaries of tourism beyond visitors and businesses alone.

These layers would also translate the principle of destination social responsibility into a practical benefit system.

Consideration could also be given to second-home owners and long-stay non-resident users in municipalities where they form an important part of the functional community, provided participation rules remain transparent and politically legitimate.

6.4.6 Destination Intelligence and Data Use

If linked to accommodation registration, transport validations and partner usage, the guest card could generate substantially richer intelligence than overnight statistics alone. Anonymous or aggregated insights could improve understanding of visitor flows, corridor demand, inland uptake, seasonality patterns, attraction usage and behavioural differences between market segments. This reflects broader policy emphasis on tourism intelligence and data-driven management.

Used responsibly and transparently, this data could support infrastructure planning, targeted promotion, transport scheduling, congestion management and evidence-based investment decisions. However, comparative evidence clearly indicates that data only becomes valuable when supported by analytical capacity, interoperable systems and clear governance rules. The objective should therefore be practical intelligence rather than data accumulation for its own sake.

A shared dashboard accessible to public stakeholders would be valuable, but broader regional intelligence-sharing could create even stronger network effects. Participating accommodation providers, attractions, retailers and service partners could receive appropriate aggregated insights relevant to their role in the scheme, helping businesses better understand demand patterns, visitor behaviour and seasonal opportunities.

6.4.7 Governance, Funding and Phased Implementation

Governance should precede product design. Before deciding the exact benefits of the card, the Costa Daurada would need to establish which actors are authorised to decide, finance, operate and evaluate the system. This reflects the Realizing Progress argument that destination transformation requires a shift from isolated action towards coordinated life-space management, where cooperation becomes a strategic necessity rather than an optional ideal. (Realizing Progress, 2026)

No guest card model would succeed without robust governance. A plausible coordinating framework could involve the Diputació de Tarragona tourism structures, the Costa Daurada destination brand, ATM Camp de Tarragona, participating municipalities, accommodation representatives and relevant commercial or attraction partners.

Existing cooperation mechanisms could provide a starting point for such a governance process. The Conveni Córner of the Costa Daurada demonstrates that the destination already has experience with multi-actor coordination between the Patronat de Turisme, municipalities, comarcal councils, tourism associations, chambers of commerce and major private attractions. In 2026, the agreement brought together 36 public and private entities and channelled €426,000 into joint promotional activity. However, its current function remains primarily promotional. A regional guest card would require a deeper operational layer, extending collaboration from joint marketing towards shared rules on issuance, mobility integration, reimbursement, data governance and territorial benefit distribution.

A regional guest card would therefore require a coordinated stakeholder architecture rather than a stand-alone technical solution. At strategic level, the Diputació de Tarragona / Patronat de Turisme, participating municipalities, metropolitan cooperation structures and the Generalitat de Catalunya would need to provide policy alignment and legitimacy. At operational level, ATM Camp de Tarragona, transport operators and transport associations, accommodation providers, experience partners and technology providers would need to coordinate issuance, validation, service access, reimbursement and data governance. The funding logic would also need to be centrally managed, with tourism-tax or visitor-contribution revenues redistributed transparently to both mobility and attraction partners. This underlines that the central challenge would not be the card technology itself, but the ability to align mandates, incentives and responsibilities across the destination system.

Table 2 summarises the main stakeholder groups and their likely roles within such a regional guest card system.

Stakeholder group	**Main actors**	**Role in the guest card system**
Strategic governance	Diputació de Tarragona / Patronat de Turisme, municipalities, Generalitat de Catalunya, metropolitan cooperation structures	Policy alignment, legitimacy, territorial coordination and strategic oversight
Mobility system	ATM Camp de Tarragona, bus and rail operators, transport associations such as FEAT	Mobility integration, ticketing agreements, service coordination and transport reimbursement
Accommodation and issuing partners	Hotels, campsites, regulated holiday rentals, rural accommodation, FEHT and other associations	Guest registration, card issuance, communication, collection of visitor contributions
Experience and territorial partners	Cultural sites, wine tourism actors, natural areas, museums, attractions, local commerce, gastronomy partners	Benefit provision, visitor dispersion, experience activation and territorial value distribution
Technical and data infrastructure	Card technology provider, CRM, digital registration and validation systems	System operation, data collection, privacy compliance, dashboards and reporting
Users and beneficiaries	Overnight visitors, residents, workers, second-home owners, optional day-visitor segments	Use of mobility and benefits, feedback generation, contribution to local legitimacy

Funding and re-imbursement	Tourism-tax or visitor-contribution pool, municipal and regional co-financing, partner contributions where applicable	Central revenue management and reimbursement to transport and experience partners

Table 2 Key stakeholder groups and functions in a regional Costa Daurada guest card system
Source: own elaboration

The table highlights that implementation would require not only political agreement, but also operational coordination between mobility, accommodation, experience, technology and funding actors.

Funding would likely depend partly on the expanded fiscal possibilities created by the reformed Catalan tourist tax framework. Ley 2/2026 modifies the tax on stays in tourist establishments, changes the distribution of revenues, and creates a municipal surcharge mechanism for municipalities outside Barcelona, with surcharge revenue remaining outside the Tourism Promotion Fund and corresponding to the municipality that imposes it (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026). This creates a potential opportunity to channel part of visitor-generated revenue into visible destination-management improvements. However, such revenues are increasingly contested across multiple policy priorities, including housing, infrastructure, sustainability, inspection capacity and broader destination management.

Implementation should ideally aim for destination-wide territorial participation from the outset rather than a narrow pilot geography. Given that tourism taxation decisions remain municipal, participation would likely depend on local political commitment and negotiated entry into a common framework. Full ATM network inclusion should also be present from day one if the scheme is to credibly pursue regional redistribution objectives.

Phasing would therefore relate less to territorial scope and more to functional sophistication.

This staged approach is consistent with practitioner recommendations elsewhere. The BrandenburgCard concept for the Uckermark identifies a visitor-contribution-funded overnight guest card with public transport across the full destination area as the preferred base model, while explicitly allowing for later expansion into attractions, discount benefits, local add-ons, additional target groups and an eventual purchasable card layer (Kohl & Partner, 2022). For the Costa Daurada, this reinforces the argument that a mobility-first base card could be designed not as a final product, but as the first stage of a broader destination-management platform.

Phase 1: Costa Daurada-wide launch with accommodation-linked issuance, full ATM network mobility inclusion, core partner benefits and resident card introduction.

Phase 2: Enhanced data capabilities, stronger communication tools, thematic routing, worker card layer and broader partner ecosystem.

Phase 3: Advanced dashboards, dynamic pricing or incentives, civic participation layer and deeper integration with wider regional planning and destination management systems.

Phase 4: Optional premium commercial upgrade layer positioned above the publicly oriented base card. This tier could replace selected discounts with full-entry benefits and potentially include flagship attractions such as a one-day PortAventura World ticket, subject to commercial partnership agreements.

The proposed multi-layer structure is summarised in Figure 3.

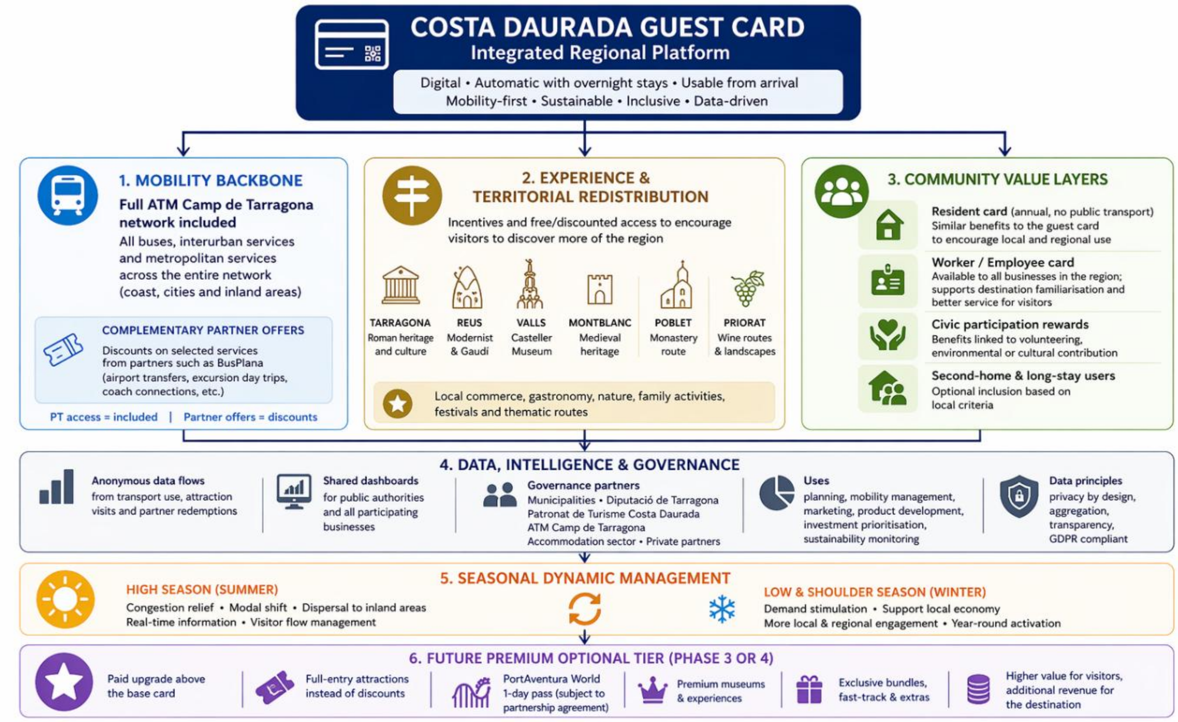

Figure 3 Proposed Costa Daurada Guest Card Model integrating mobility, territorial redistribution, community value, governance coordination and phased commercial expansion. Source: own elaboration

6.4.8 Strategic Assessment

The analysis suggests that the Costa Daurada is not constrained by a lack of tourism demand, insufficient attractions or weak market visibility. Rather, the more fundamental challenge lies in connecting existing strengths through a coherent regional management instrument capable of aligning mobility, territorial distribution, destination intelligence and shared local value. The proposed model translates existing strategy rhetoric into an operational tool. Figure 3 summarises how these functions could be integrated within one multi-layer system rather than addressed through fragmented standalone initiatives.

From a strategic perspective, the strongest potential advantage of such a scheme lies in its capacity to convert tourism scale into wider territorial benefit. The Costa Daurada already receives substantial visitor volumes, yet many positive effects remain unevenly distributed, while pressures linked to congestion, seasonal peaks and concentrated coastal demand persist. A mobility-first guest card could help redirect part of this existing demand toward inland municipalities, secondary urban centres, cultural assets and local businesses, thereby improving the regional spread of tourism expenditure without depending solely on additional visitor growth.

A second major strength concerns transport and accessibility. If linked to the full ATM Camp de Tarragona network, the model could simplify visitor movement across the destination while simultaneously reinforcing the strategic case for stronger year-round public transport provision. In this sense, tourism demand would not merely consume infrastructure, but could actively support broader mobility improvements that also benefit residents, workers and everyday regional users.

Third, the proposed system offers a more advanced approach to tourism intelligence. Conventional indicators such as arrivals and overnight stays remain valuable, but provide only partial insight into how visitors move, what they use and where pressures emerge. A well-governed guest card platform could generate anonymised evidence on visitor journeys, attraction uptake, modal choices, seasonal patterns and territorial behaviour. Used effectively, such intelligence could strengthen planning, infrastructure prioritisation, business participation and more adaptive destination management.

The social and political dimension is equally important. In mature tourism regions, legitimacy increasingly depends on whether local communities perceive tourism as fair, useful and connected to quality of life. By incorporating resident, worker and community benefit layers, the proposed model seeks to widen the visible beneficiaries of tourism beyond visitors alone. This could be especially valuable in a context where debates around congestion, housing pressure and uneven local returns have become more prominent.

However, the model should not be interpreted as a universal solution. A guest card cannot substitute for transport investment, land-use planning, housing regulation, enforcement against illegal accommodation or broader governance reform. If mobility services remain weak, institutional coordination fragmented or partner participation limited, the system would struggle to deliver transformative outcomes. Equally, if reduced to a narrow discount product, much of its wider strategic potential would be lost.

Implementation feasibility therefore depends less on technology than on coalition-building. The Costa Daurada already possesses several enabling foundations, including a recognised destination brand, an established regional mobility authority, strong tourism demand and growing metropolitan cooperation dynamics. If these assets can be aligned around a shared territorial project, the destination may be better positioned than often assumed to pioneer an innovative Mediterranean guest card model.

The proposal is also significant as it translates strategic objectives already present in tourism policy documents into a practical operational mechanism. Priorities such as sustainable mobility, territorial diversification, digitalisation, visitor management and improved governance are widely articulated across local, regional and national strategies. The guest card model offers one possible means of implementing these ambitions through a single coordinated instrument rather than through isolated measures.

In summary, the proposed framework indicates that a guest card for the Costa Daurada should be understood less as a visitor perk and more as an operational instrument of destination stewardship. Its principal value would lie not in isolated discounts or symbolic branding, but in helping the region manage flows, distribute benefits, improve intelligence and strengthen the long-term relationship between tourism and place.

6.5 Key Implementation Challenges and Critical Limitations

While the proposed model demonstrates significant strategic potential, comparative evidence and current territorial conditions indicate that successful implementation would depend on overcoming several structural constraints. Recognising these limitations is important in order to avoid treating the guest card as a universal solution and to frame it instead as one instrument within a wider destination governance agenda. As with many tourism policy innovations, the principal barriers are likely to be institutional, financial and behavioural rather than technological.

6.5.1 Governance Complexity and Institutional Alignment

The most immediate challenge concerns governance coordination. A Costa Daurada-wide scheme would require sustained cooperation between municipalities, tourism authorities, ATM Camp de Tarragona, accommodation representatives, attraction partners and commercial stakeholders whose priorities may not always align. Coastal municipalities experiencing the highest visitor volumes may perceive different needs from inland municipalities seeking stronger tourism capture. Larger urban centres may prioritise mobility and congestion management, while smaller localities may focus on visibility and economic participation.

This is particularly important in the Costa Daurada, where the main implementation barrier is unlikely to be technical card design alone, but the ability of municipalities, accommodation providers, transport operators, attractions, public administrations and tourism bodies to act within a shared framework. The Realizing Progress handbook (2026) is especially relevant here because it argues that life-space-oriented destination management requires mandate clarity, system understanding, political and administrative support, and the ability to distinguish and connect institutional actors, space-shaping actors and the wider public. It also stresses that such transformation is not an individual organisational achievement, but a negotiation process across the regional system.

Recent debates surrounding the newly expanded municipal tourism surcharge illustrate this challenge clearly. While some municipalities such as Vila-seca and Altafulla have moved toward adoption, others including Salou, Cambrils, Calafell and Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant have publicly rejected implementation or expressed concerns regarding competitiveness and sectoral impact (Diari de Tarragona, 2026a; Diari de Tarragona, 2026b). Even before any regional guest card discussion, tourism-related fiscal policy is therefore already evolving unevenly across the territory. Such divergence would complicate attempts to finance or coordinate a shared Costa Daurada-wide scheme through locally controlled revenue instruments.

Governance complexity may also be reinforced by territorial branding dynamics. Although the Costa Daurada functions as an umbrella destination identity, municipalities and sub-destinations also promote themselves individually. Aligning local visibility ambitions with a common regional card brand would therefore require careful institutional design.

Questions relating to leadership, voting rights, funding contributions, territorial branding, data ownership and benefit distribution would need to be resolved through credible governance arrangements. Without a trusted coordinating structure, the project could be slowed by fragmentation or reduced to a partial and uneven scheme. Even where political agreement exists, public procurement procedures, contractual negotiations and inter-agency approval timelines could significantly delay implementation.

For the Costa Daurada, this means that a guest card cannot be implemented as a project owned by one tourism body alone. It would require a formal coordination structure in which participating municipalities, the Diputació, transport authorities, accommodation associations, attractions and resident-facing institutions agree on roles, funding, data access, communication and evaluation. Without such an arrangement, the card risks reproducing the very fragmentation it is intended to overcome.

6.5.2 Funding Viability and Cost Allocation

Although tourism taxation may provide an increasingly relevant funding base for destination-management instruments, financial feasibility cannot be assumed automatically. Recent reforms to the Catalan tourism tax system have increased regional rates, expanded municipal powers to introduce local surcharges and redefined the allocation of revenues. Under the new framework, part of the proceeds is directed toward housing policy, while the remaining share continues through the Tourism Promotion Fund, alongside a revised municipal surcharge mechanism and administrative collection fee structure (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2026; El Periódico, 2026).

For the Costa Daurada, these changes create both opportunity and competition. On the one hand, the revised framework broadens the practical relevance of tourism taxation by explicitly linking revenues to wider territorial priorities such as sustainability, deseasonalisation, infrastructure, mobility, digitalisation, tourism intelligence and destination competitiveness. These objectives align closely with the functions of an advanced guest card model, particularly transport integration, visitor redistribution, destination intelligence and regional coordination. On the other hand, tourism-tax revenues are now likely to face increasing pressure from multiple policy demands, including housing, urban maintenance, mobility investment and other public services. Access to such resources for a guest card scheme could therefore not be taken for granted.

Sector reaction further illustrates this tension. Accommodation and tourism representatives in Tarragona province have criticised the higher tax burden and warned about potential competitiveness impacts, particularly in destinations outside Barcelona and during more price-sensitive shoulder periods (Diari de Tarragona, 2026a; El Periódico Tarragona, 2026). At the same time, industry voices have also argued that if taxation is levied, revenues should be managed transparently, with sector participation, and clearly reinvested into destination competitiveness, especially mobility infrastructure, stronger public services and tourism promotion (Diari de Tarragona, 2026b). This position is analytically significant because it suggests that resistance may concern not only taxation levels themselves, but also uncertainty regarding visible and destination-specific returns.

The Rostock case illustrates how such a return-on-contribution logic can be framed in practice. In its proposed reform of the visitor charge, the city linked the digital guest card, public transport access and free public toilets to a wider argument that tourism supports services, events, infrastructure improvements, resident quality of life, residential attractiveness and city image. This is relevant for the Costa Daurada because it suggests that tourism taxation may be more politically defensible when residents and businesses can clearly see how revenues are converted into shared territorial benefits (Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023)

In this context, a guest card model could offer a more tangible reinvestment logic than abstract fiscal spending alone. If part of tourism-tax revenues were visibly converted into integrated public transport access, improved passenger information, destination-wide mobility enhancements, shoulder-season incentives, inland experience activation or better tourism intelligence, visitor contributions could be more clearly linked to practical territorial benefits and strengthen the perceived fairness of tourism taxation. In a strongly seasonal destination, such a mechanism could also support demand smoothing by financing enhanced off-season offers while peak-period revenues help sustain the wider system.

Nevertheless, implementation costs would remain substantial. Initial expenditure would likely include digital infrastructure, branding, partner onboarding, administration, communication campaigns, technical integration and governance capacity. Where public transport is included, compensation arrangements with operators would also need to be negotiated. Financial viability would therefore depend not only on revenue availability, but on credible cost-sharing structures between public authorities, tourism bodies, mobility actors and participating partners.

Overall, the key funding challenge is less whether resources exist in principle than whether a politically legitimate and strategically coherent allocation model can be created. A phased approach may therefore be prudent, but long-term acceptance would depend on demonstrating that tourism-generated revenues are being transformed into measurable value for visitors, businesses, residents and the wider territory.

6.5.3 Mobility Supply and Usability Constraints

A guest card can simplify access to transport, but it cannot by itself create high-quality mobility where service limitations remain. This limitation is reinforced by Costa Daurada-specific evidence showing that public transport accessibility remains uneven for less popular inland attractions, while tourist excursion behaviour continues to be strongly associated with private vehicle use (Cattaruzzo et al., 2026). Infrequent routes, overcrowding in peak periods, weak rail coordination, poor evening services or inadequate first-mile and last-mile links would reduce the practical value of integrated ticket inclusion.

Equally important are informational and user-experience barriers. In the Costa Daurada context, public transport remains less digitally legible than in many leading visitor destinations. Network visibility within third-party journey-planning tools appears uneven, the ATM Camp de Tarragona platform offers limited end-user route-planning functionality, and simple visitor-oriented explanations of ticketing products, smart card acquisition and fare use are not always prominent or intuitive (ATM Camp de Tarragona, 2026).

At the street level, information gaps at bus stops may further weaken usability. In many locations, visitors encounter limited route explanation, absent network maps, unclear timetables or inconsistent passenger information standards. In some interchange environments, information appears oriented primarily toward habitual daytime local users rather than occasional regional or visitor users. For example, major departure points may clearly display urban daytime services while offering little visible guidance regarding regional evening or night routes. Such gaps are particularly problematic after dark, when user confidence, perceived safety and certainty of travel become more important.

Where real-time data, multilingual guidance or simple orientation cues are missing, occasional users may default to private cars, taxis or pre-booked tourist transfers even when public transport services exist. A mobility-led guest card would therefore need to be accompanied by minimum standards for passenger information, digital legibility and network presentation across key visitor nodes. In this sense, transport inclusion is only as strong as the underlying network quality.

6.5.4 Uneven Stakeholder Participation

Beyond public-sector coordination, a second challenge concerns market participation within the partner ecosystem. The strategic strength of guest card systems depends heavily on network breadth. If major municipalities, large accommodation providers, flagship attractions or key mobility actors remain outside the scheme, perceived value may weaken significantly. Visitors compare practical usefulness rather than institutional intentions.

This creates a classic collective-action challenge. Many actors may benefit from a successful scheme, yet some may hesitate to participate unless success is already proven. Others may seek preferential conditions, fear cannibalisation of direct revenues or seek stronger negotiating positions due to market importance. This may be particularly relevant where large anchor attractions or dominant accommodation actors hold substantial leverage.

Recent destination stewardship research also highlights that fragmented tourism systems rarely align automatically around shared projects. Post-Lundgaard, Thomsen and Dragin-Jensen (2024) argue that collaborative design processes can help destinations move beyond passive stakeholder consultation toward more active co-creation, trust-building and joint problem solving. In the Costa Daurada context, this is highly relevant: a regional guest card would likely require not only bilateral negotiations, but structured forums through which municipalities, transport actors, accommodation providers and attraction partners can shape a common value proposition.

This suggests that implementation should be approached not merely as partner recruitment, but as coalition design. Early working groups, pilot partnerships, transparent revenue models and jointly defined success metrics could help reduce resistance and strengthen ownership across stakeholders.

Building an attractive initial coalition is therefore likely to be one of the decisive implementation tasks.

6.5.5 Behavioural Limits and Market Realities

Even well-designed incentives do not fully determine visitor behaviour. Many tourists select the Costa Daurada primarily for beach holidays, family leisure, second-home use or short breaks and may have limited interest in inland exploration regardless of incentives offered.

Time constraints, weather conditions, car availability, family preferences and the brand recognition of established coastal zones will continue to shape decisions (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025).

This challenge may be especially relevant for domestic and repeat visitors arriving by private vehicle, whose mobility habits and territorial familiarity differ from international visitors arriving without a car. Behavioural responses are therefore likely to vary substantially across market segments. This suggests that evaluation should distinguish between international car-free visitors, domestic repeat visitors, family markets and second-home users rather than treating uptake as homogeneous.

For this reason, expectations around redistribution should remain realistic. A guest card may widen participation in alternative experiences and gradually rebalance flows, but it is unlikely to eliminate structural concentration patterns altogether. Success should therefore be measured in incremental behavioural shifts rather than transformative overnight change.

6.5.6 Data Governance, Privacy and Analytical Capacity

The intelligence potential of the proposed model depends on public trust and institutional capability. Even anonymised systems require clear legal compliance, transparent communication and robust cybersecurity standards. If users perceive opaque tracking practices or unclear data-sharing arrangements, reputational resistance could emerge, particularly in a context where digital visitor management may be interpreted as surveillance rather than service improvement. This reflects wider concerns that technology in tourism can both support management and intensify destination pressures if it is not embedded within responsible governance (Bourliataux-Lajoinie et al., 2019; Gretzel et al., 2015).

This challenge is especially relevant because a guest card system could connect several data sources at once, including accommodation registration, transport validations, attraction entries, partner redemptions and digital interactions. While such integration creates considerable management value, it also increases the need for clear rules regarding data minimisation, access rights, retention periods, anonymisation, aggregation and permitted uses. A system designed for destination intelligence should therefore define from the outset which data are collected, who can access them, for what purpose, and how public-interest benefits are communicated to users and stakeholders.

Rostock’s model-project framing is useful in this respect. The city explicitly presented the digital guest card not only as a visitor benefit, but also as a basis for evaluating usage behaviour through statistical analysis during the implementation period. For the Costa Daurada, this reinforces the need to design data governance from the beginning: usage data should not simply be collected, but linked to a transparent monitoring framework that supports service improvement, mobility planning and public accountability (Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023).

At the same time, collecting data does not automatically create useful intelligence. Public institutions and private partners would require the capacity to interpret information, translate findings into action and maintain interoperable systems over time. Smaller firms may also have limited ability to engage with dashboards or data outputs unless these are simple, relevant and practically useful. Without this capability, the destination risks generating data-rich but decision-poor systems (Del Chiappa & Baggio, 2015; Gretzel et al., 2015; Xiang et al., 2015).

A further challenge concerns data ownership and institutional trust between partners. Accommodation providers, attractions, transport operators and municipalities may be reluctant to share information if they fear commercial disadvantage, loss of control or uneven use of insights by larger actors. The value of the system would therefore depend not only on technical interoperability, but also on a governance framework that defines shared standards, protects sensitive business information and ensures that aggregated intelligence benefits the wider destination rather than only selected institutions. In this sense, data governance should be treated as a strategic component of the model, not as a technical afterthought.

6.5.7 Political Continuity and Strategic Patience

Many destination innovations require time before measurable outcomes become visible. Early years may involve negotiation costs, technical adjustments, partner onboarding and gradual behavioural adoption rather than immediate headline success. However, political cycles often reward short-term visible wins over long-term system building. This reflects a broader implementation gap in destination governance, where sustainability and stewardship ambitions often remain difficult to translate into operating routines, monitoring systems and measurable action (Crabolu et al., 2026; Scuttari et al., 2025).

A guest card strategy would therefore require continuity across electoral terms and administrative leadership changes. Municipal elections or changing regional priorities could weaken previously agreed common approaches. If priorities shift rapidly or the scheme becomes politicised, implementation momentum may weaken before benefits are fully realised. This risk is especially relevant in a multi-municipal destination such as the Costa Daurada, where the withdrawal or hesitation of a small number of strategically important municipalities could reduce the perceived coherence and territorial value of the whole scheme.

Strategic patience would also be needed in relation to behavioural outcomes. Modal shift, inland visitor redistribution, resident acceptance and partner confidence are unlikely to change immediately after launch. The first implementation phase would probably generate operational learning, identify weaknesses and build familiarity rather than deliver full destination-management impact. Evaluation should therefore distinguish between short-term outputs, such as card activations, transport validations and partner participation, and longer-term outcomes, such as reduced car dependency, improved territorial dispersion, stronger off-season demand and higher resident legitimacy.

The Müritz and Rostock examples also underline the importance of monitoring after implementation. MÜRITZ rundum was evaluated after two years, while Rostock explicitly framed its digital guest-card initiative as a model project whose use patterns would be statistically assessed during the initial implementation period (IGES Institut, 2020; Hanse- und Universitätsstadt Rostock, 2023).

For this reason, a scheme on the Costa Daurada would need a stable monitoring framework and a pre-agreed review cycle rather than ad hoc political judgement after the first season. Clearly defined milestones could help maintain support while allowing adjustments over time, reflecting the need for destinations to move from agenda-setting towards action and monitoring in mature sustainable destination development (d'Angella et al., 2025). Without such continuity, the risk would be that early difficulties are interpreted as failure, even though comparable systems elsewhere often required several years of institutional learning, technical refinement and stakeholder consolidation before reaching maturity.

6.5.8 Overall Assessment of Feasibility

Overall, these limitations suggest that the principal challenge for the Costa Daurada is not whether a guest card is conceptually attractive, but whether the destination can sustain the cooperative capacity required to make it effective. The territory already possesses many favourable conditions: substantial tourism demand, a recognisable umbrella brand, growing metropolitan coordination dynamics, a diversified attraction base and an existing regional mobility authority (ATM Camp de Tarragona, 2026; Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, 2025). These assets provide a stronger starting position than is often assumed. Yet favourable structural conditions alone do not guarantee successful delivery.

The most realistic interpretation is therefore that a Costa Daurada guest card would represent a medium-term governance project rather than a quick technical launch. Its success would depend less on the existence of a digital platform or discount package than on sustained institutional alignment, credible financing, broad stakeholder participation, usable mobility integration and the capacity to learn and adapt over time. If approached incrementally, transparently and with realistic expectations, the scheme could evolve into a valuable strategic instrument. If pursued primarily as a short-term marketing initiative without deeper coordination, its impact would likely remain limited.

More broadly, this assessment reinforces one of the central arguments of the thesis: the real value of advanced guest card systems lies not in the card itself, but in the governance functions embedded within it. Where destinations use such instruments to coordinate actors, steer visitor behaviour, generate intelligence and create visible territorial benefits, guest cards can contribute meaningfully to destination stewardship. Where these wider functions are absent, they risk remaining little more than promotional add-ons.

The decisive question is therefore less whether the Costa Daurada needs another tourism product, and more whether it is willing to build the cooperative governance capacity required for a regional management instrument. In this sense, the feasibility of a guest card is ultimately a test not of technology, but of territorial governance maturity.

7. Conclusions and Final Reflections

7.1 Answering the Research Question

This thesis set out to examine whether guest card systems can be understood not solely as promotional visitor products, but as practical destination-management instruments, and whether such a model could be meaningfully applied to the Costa Daurada. Drawing on the literature review, comparative case analysis and territorial assessment developed in the preceding chapters, the study indicates that guest cards can indeed perform significantly broader strategic functions than is commonly assumed, provided that they are designed and governed in an appropriate way.

The central finding is that the strongest guest card systems are not defined primarily by discounts or attraction bundling, but by their capacity to support wider governance objectives. When embedded within broader destination structures, they can encourage more sustainable mobility behaviour, facilitate wider territorial circulation of visitors, strengthen stakeholder coordination, improve destination intelligence and contribute to greater local legitimacy. Their strategic value therefore lies less in their role as standalone tourism products than in their potential to operate as integrated management mechanisms.

For the Costa Daurada, the analysis suggests that several enabling conditions are already present. The destination combines high visitor volumes, marked seasonality, concentrated pressure in coastal municipalities, a diversified inland offer, an existing regional mobility framework and growing forms of metropolitan and inter-municipal cooperation. Together, these features create a plausible basis for the development of a regional guest card model. At the same time, the comparative evidence makes equally clear that plausibility alone is not enough. Institutional coordination, funding design, mobility usability and sustained political commitment would all be decisive to implementation and long-term effectiveness.

The research question can therefore be answered in conditional terms. A regional guest card appears strategically plausible and potentially valuable for the Costa Daurada, but only under clearly defined circumstances. Its contribution to more sustainable mobility, improved visitor dispersion, stronger tourism intelligence and greater resident acceptance would depend on at least five interrelated conditions: first, broad and low-barrier access, ideally through accommodation-linked distribution; second, meaningful public transport integration as the operational backbone of the system; third, governance arrangements capable of coordinating municipalities, transport actors and tourism stakeholders at regional scale; fourth, a funding logic that is both credible and politically acceptable; and fifth, visible forms of shared value that extend beyond visitors alone. Under those conditions, a guest card could function not simply as a tourism product, but as a practical governance tool for a mature Mediterranean destination.

7.2 Main Conceptual Contributions

This thesis advances the conceptual understanding of guest card systems by reframing them from visitor-oriented products into place-based governance infrastructure. Earlier models of destination policy were largely associated with promotion, branding and growth-oriented performance indicators. More recent debates, by contrast, emphasise stewardship, sustainability, quality of life, mobility management and data-informed decision-making. In that context, guest cards can be understood as operational tools that help translate abstract strategic ambitions into concrete, day-to-day management practices.

A second contribution lies in the conceptualisation of guest cards as integrated governance infrastructures rather than as isolated retail products. The comparative evidence indicates that the most advanced systems do not derive their significance from any single component. Their strength emerges from the way multiple functions are combined within one mechanism: transport access, behavioural steering, data generation, stakeholder cooperation, territorial redistribution and, in some cases, broader public-value creation. This perspective offers a more comprehensive analytical lens than conventional product-focused interpretations centred mainly on visitor convenience or savings.

The findings also contribute to debates on territorial scale in destination management. Much of the existing discussion around tourism cards has concentrated on urban city-card models designed for concentrated sightseeing environments. The present study shows that regional and polycentric destinations may derive different, and in certain respects greater, strategic value from such systems. In destinations where mobility integration, seasonal pressure and uneven spatial distribution are central concerns, guest cards can become relevant not only as visitor services but as territorial coordination tools.

Finally, the thesis contributes to the understanding of transferability in destination policy. Rather than treating guest card systems as best practices to be copied directly, the comparative analysis highlights the importance of mechanisms, preconditions and contextual adaptation. What matters is not imitation of one successful model, but the identification of design principles that can be translated into different territorial and governance settings. This is particularly relevant for destinations such as the Costa Daurada, where the challenge is not simply to import an external instrument, but to adapt it to a complex coastal and metropolitan-regional reality.

7.3 Practical Implications for the Costa Daurada

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that any future guest card on the Costa Daurada should be mobility-first rather than discount-first. Among all the components considered in this thesis, public transport integration across the wider ATM Camp de Tarragona network appears to offer the strongest strategic leverage. It would reduce friction for visitors, widen effective access to inland and secondary areas, and potentially convert tourism demand into broader support for the regional mobility system.

The territorial logic of the card would be equally important. A narrowly coastal model would do little to address the structural imbalance that characterises the destination. Greater strategic value would come from a system explicitly designed to connect coastal demand with inland assets, including heritage towns, wine territories, cultural landscapes and rural leisure spaces. In that sense, the guest card should function not merely as a benefit package, but as a soft steering mechanism capable of reinforcing a more polycentric destination model.

Questions of legitimacy are also central. In a mature tourism region where concerns around congestion, housing pressure and uneven benefit distribution have become more visible, a purely visitor-facing scheme would likely face political resistance. The inclusion of resident, worker or civic participation layers may therefore be important not only from a social perspective, but also from a strategic one. Shared-value elements could strengthen local acceptance by making tourism-related infrastructure and services more visibly beneficial beyond the visitor economy alone.

Implementation, moreover, should be approached as a staged governance process rather than a one-off technical rollout. The comparative evidence suggests that robust systems tend to evolve over time. For the Costa Daurada, a credible pathway would likely begin with broad issuance and meaningful mobility integration, and only later expand into more sophisticated features such as data dashboards, dynamic incentives or wider community benefit layers. Such sequencing would allow learning, adjustment and coalition-building to develop alongside the instrument itself.

The proposed model also aligns with several existing strategic directions rather than standing apart from them. At Spanish, Catalan, regional and municipal levels, recent tourism strategies increasingly emphasise sustainability, digitalisation, tourism intelligence, deseasonalisation, territorial balance and resident quality of life. Within the Costa Daurada itself, the interior promotion strategy, the broader destination strategy, the tourism strategy of Tarragona and smart-destination initiatives in parts of the destination all point towards a similar need: moving from promotion alone towards more integrated tools for managing mobility, visitor flows, data and local value creation. A regional guest card would therefore not replace these strategies, but could help operationalise them through a concrete mechanism linking access, incentives, information and governance.

In summary, these implications suggest that the key question is not whether a guest card can be launched, but how it is positioned within the regional system. Its strategic value depends less on individual features than on whether it is embedded within a broader agenda linking tourism, mobility, territorial balance and social legitimacy.

The principal practical implication is therefore institutional rather than technological. The Costa Daurada does not primarily need a guest card as a new promotional product; it needs the card as a structured mechanism to bring together actors who currently operate in parallel. In this sense, the guest card would function not only as an instrument, but as a governance catalyst: its feasibility would reveal whether the region is capable of moving from fragmented destination promotion towards coordinated destination stewardship.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations frame the interpretation of this study. Most fundamentally, the analysis relied primarily on secondary sources, comparative case evidence and territorial assessment rather than on primary fieldwork such as stakeholder interviews, surveys or participatory workshops. Direct engagement with municipalities, transport operators, accommodation providers, tourism organisations and residents would have strengthened the assessment of political feasibility, institutional preferences and practical implementation conditions.

The thesis likewise did not include detailed financial modelling. Questions such as reimbursement formulas, cost-sharing arrangements, projected uptake levels or long-term operational budgets were beyond its scope. Such work would be highly valuable for judging the practical viability of any future Costa Daurada model with greater precision.

It must also be recognised that the policy environment remains dynamic. Tourism taxation frameworks, mobility investments, digital infrastructures and political priorities in Catalonia and the Costa Daurada continue to evolve. Some of the contextual observations presented in this thesis should therefore be read as time-sensitive rather than permanently fixed.

A further limitation concerns the nature of comparative case-study research itself. Although this approach is well suited to identifying mechanisms, patterns and transferability conditions, it does not establish causal certainty. The study does not claim that any single guest card feature automatically produces a given outcome. Instead, it identifies configurations that appear more or less favourable under particular territorial and governance conditions.

Finally, transferability must remain conditional. Even where external systems appear promising, no destination can simply replicate another. Institutional cultures, market structures, visitor profiles, governance capacities and territorial morphologies differ significantly across contexts. The value of comparison lies not in imitation, but in informed adaptation. These limitations affect the precision of implementation assessment more than they weaken the broader comparative insights generated by the study.

7.5 Directions for Future Research

Several avenues for future research emerge from the findings of this thesis. The most immediate priority would be stakeholder-based feasibility research within the Costa Daurada itself. In-depth work involving municipalities, tourism organisations, mobility providers, accommodation sectors and resident representatives would provide a much clearer picture of political willingness, governance preferences and likely implementation barriers.

Alongside this, consumer-oriented research would be highly valuable. Questions of visitor willingness to use accommodation-linked guest cards, preferences regarding included benefits and likely behavioural responses to mobility incentives would help clarify demand-side viability. Such work could also explore differences between visitor segments, travel motivations and accommodation types.

A further area concerns economic and organisational modelling. Detailed examination of funding scenarios, whether based on tourism taxation, public-private partnerships, phased contribution systems or hybrid arrangements, would be essential for assessing financial sustainability. This could be combined with analysis of reimbursement structures, stakeholder incentives and likely administrative burdens.

Resident legitimacy represents another particularly promising field for further inquiry. Future research could explore how different design choices, such as resident access, worker benefits, civic participation layers or differentiated pricing, affect perceptions of fairness, usefulness and exclusion. In a destination where social acceptance is increasingly central, such work would be especially relevant.

Beyond these analytical strands, pilot-based research would offer an important practical next step. Testing selected corridors, municipalities or thematic clusters could generate evidence on uptake, modal shift, territorial redistribution and operational feasibility before any broader regional rollout. In that sense, future research could move progressively from comparative interpretation towards applied experimentation.

7.6 Final Reflections

The Costa Daurada does not lack tourism demand, recognisable brands or attractive assets. Its deeper challenge lies in managing success more intelligently and distributing benefits more widely across territory, seasons and communities. In that respect, it reflects a broader dilemma faced by many mature destinations: how to move from tourism growth as an end in itself towards a more balanced and governable form of destination development.

Seen in this light, the significance of a guest card lies not in discounts or symbolic branding, but in its capacity to connect systems that too often remain fragmented: tourism and transport, coast and interior, visitors and residents, data and decision-making, economic performance and stewardship. The comparative cases examined in this thesis suggest that where such connections are institutionalised effectively, guest cards can become much more than visitor-facing products.

Until now, the most advanced models have been especially visible in Alpine, Austrian, Swiss and German-speaking destinations, where traditions of regional cooperation, mobility integration and accommodation-linked visitor benefits are relatively well developed. Yet the concept is no longer confined to those geographies alone. Its gradual spread into other territorial contexts suggests that guest cards are becoming more widely relevant as destinations search for instruments that combine practicality, behavioural influence and governance value.

Whether such a model is ultimately implemented on the Costa Daurada remains a political and institutional question beyond the scope of this thesis. What the study does demonstrate, however, is that guest cards deserve to be taken more seriously within destination-management debates. They should not be dismissed as minor promotional devices, nor romanticised as simple technical fixes. Their relevance lies in the middle ground: as potentially useful governance instruments whose value depends on design quality, institutional alignment and strategic purpose.

If supported by rigorous feasibility work, credible coalition-building and long-term political commitment, the Costa Daurada could become an instructive Mediterranean example of how a mature coastal destination moves beyond volume-led tourism management towards a more integrated model of territorial governance.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

In the preparation of this Master's thesis, generative artificial intelligence tools, specifically language-model-based systems, were used in a limited and supplementary capacity during selected stages of the research and writing process.

Such tools were employed primarily for editorial and technical support purposes, including linguistic revision, improvement of style and clarity, restructuring of text passages, refinement of academic phrasing, organisation of ideas, and consistency checks across chapters. They were also used selectively to assist with the presentation of comparative material and the overall coherence of the manuscript.

The use of artificial intelligence did not replace the author's independent academic work. The conception of the research topic, formulation of the research objectives and questions, design of the methodology, identification and evaluation of relevant sources, analytical interpretation, development of arguments, and formulation of conclusions were undertaken solely by the author.

All data, factual statements, references, and academic content included in this thesis were critically reviewed, verified, and incorporated under the author's responsibility. Responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final submitted version of this thesis rests exclusively with the author.

Artificial intelligence was therefore used solely as an auxiliary instrument to support aspects of drafting and text development, while intellectual authorship, critical judgement, and academic responsibility remained entirely with the author.

Appendices

Appendix A

Table A1

Comparative Mapping of European Guest Card Schemes Used for Case Screening and Typology Development

This appendix presents a structured comparative mapping of selected European guest card schemes compiled during the research process. The inventory supported the typology developed in Chapter 4 and informed the strategic selection of detailed case studies in Chapter 5. Inclusion in this appendix does not imply equal analytical depth, but reflects the broader benchmark universe considered for this study.

Card / Pass	Region	Country	Model Type	PT Integration	Resident Model	Issuance Model	Notes
DreiWelten Card	Black Forest	DE/CH	Attraction-based	No	Yes	Automatic (universal)	Cross-border
KONUS Gästekarte	Black Forest	Germany	Mobility-focused (PT-only)	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Transport-only
SchwarzwaldCard	Black Forest	Germany	Attraction-based	No	Yes	Purchasable	
Schwarzwald Plus Karte	Black Forest	Germany	Attraction-based	No	Yes	Partner-based	Partner-based dual model
Hochschwarzwald Card	Black Forest	Germany	Attraction-based	Partial	No	Partner-based	Large-scale
Thüringer Wald Card	Thuringia	Germany	Dual system	Partly	Yes	Partner-based	Resident annual card

Card / Pass	Region	Country	Model Type	PT Inte-gration	Resident Model	Issuance Model	Notes
Echt Bodensee Card	Lake Constance	Germany	Dual system	Full	Yes	Automatic (universal)	Strong benchmark
BODENSEECARD WEST	Lake Constance	Germany	Integrated regional	Full	No	Automatic (universal	
Bodensee Card Plus	Lake Constance	DE/AT/CH	Dual system	No	Yes	Purchasa-ble	Cross border card moel
Allgäu-Walser Pass	Allgäu	DE/AT	Dual system	Partial	Yes	Automatic (universal)	Multi-region
Alpbachtal Card	Tyrol	AT	Dual system	Full	Yes	Automatic (universal)	Highly integrated
Montafon Brandnertal Card	Vorarlberg	Austria	Integrated regional	Partial	No	Partner-based	Regional
Lech Card	Lech	Austria	Integrated regional	Partial	No	Partner-based	Alpine
Campania Artecard	Campania	Italy	Integrated regional	Partial	No	Purchasa-ble	Cultural regional
Pass Provence	Provence	France	Integrated regional	Partial	No	Purchasa-ble	Cultural regional
Trentino Guest Card	Trentino	Italy	Integrated regional	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Regional system
Südtirol Guest Pass	South Tyrol	Italy	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Rural dispersion benchmark
Ticino Ticket	Ticino	Switzerland	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Clean integration

Card / Pass	Region	Country	Model Type	PT Integration	Resident Model	Issuance Model	Notes
Salzburg Guest Mobility Ticket	Salzburg	Austria	Mobility-focused (PT-only)	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	PT-only reference model
BaselCard	Basel	Switzerland	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Urban
Oskar Gästekarte	Eastern Switzerland	Switzerland	Integrated regional	Full	No	Purchasable	
Geneva Transport Card	Geneva	Switzerland	Mobility-focused (PT-only)	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	PT-only
Montreux Riviera Card	Montreux	Switzerland	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Regional
Engadin Guest Card	Engadin	Switzerland	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Alpine
Graubünden Guest Card	Graubünden	Switzerland	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	Regional
MeineCardPlus	North Hesse	Germany	Attraction-based	None	No	Partner-based	Free attractions
Chiemgau Karte	Chiemgau	Germany	Attraction-based	Partial	No	Partner-based	Regional
Gästekarte Erzgebirge	Erzgebirge	Germany	Attraction-based	Partial	No	Partner-based	Rural
Gästekarte Sächsische Schweiz	Saxon Switzerland	Germany	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic (universal)	
SauerlandCard	Sauerland	Germany	Integrated regional	Full		Automatic	

Card / Pass	Region	Country	Model Type	PT Integration	Resident Model	Issuance Model	Notes
Gästekarte Tegernsee	Tegernsee	Germany	Integrated regional	Full	No	Partner based	
HarzCard	Harz	Germany	Attraction-based	None	No	Purchasable	Regional
Harzer Urlaubs-Ticket (Hatix)	Harz	Germany	Mobility-focused	Full	No	Automatic	
RUHR.TOPCARD	Ruhr area	Germany	Attraction-based	No	No	Purchasable	
GästeCard Erlebnisregion Nationalpark Eifel	Eiffel National Park	Germany	Integrated regional	Full	No	Partner based	
NordSeeCard	East Frisia	Germany	Attraction-based	Limited	No	Automatic	
Kärnten Card	Carinthia	Austria	Attraction-based	Partial	No	Purchasable	Large region
Düsseldorf Card	Düsseldorf	Germany	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Barcelona Card	Barcelona	Spain	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Valencia Tourist Card	Valencia	Spain	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Malaga Pass	Malaga	Spain	City card (commercial)	None	No	Purchasable	Urban
Madrid City Card	Madrid	Spain	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban

Card / Pass	Region	Country	Model Type	PT Integration	Resident Model	Issuance Model	Notes
Granada Card	Granada	Spain	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Tarjeta Turística Amigos de Segovia	Segovia	Spain	City card (fragmented)	None	No	Open registration	Weak discount model
Copenhagen Card	Copenhagen	Denmark	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Oslo Pass	Oslo	Norway	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
I amsterdam City Card	Amsterdam	Netherlands	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Lyon City Card	Lyon	France	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Budapest Card	Budapest	Hungary	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
Ljubljana Card	Ljubljana	Slovenia	City card (commercial)	Full	No	Purchasable	Urban
French Riviera Pass	Côte d’Azur	France	Attraction-based	None	No	Purchasable	Coastal regional
Dalmatia Card	Dalmatia	Croatia	Attraction-based	Limited	No	Purchasable	Coastal
Dubrovnik Card	Dubrovnik	Croatia	Attraction-based	Partial	No	Purchasable	Coastal

Note.

Model types are categorised based on the typology developed in Chapter 4.

PT integration refers to the level of public transport inclusion within the card system (none, limited, partial, full).

Issuance models distinguish between automatic distribution through accommodation providers, partner-based systems, purchasable products, and open registration schemes.

The table is based on a structured mapping of European guest card systems conducted as part of this study and serves as the empirical basis for case selection.