



FINAL PRESS RELEASE

The implementation of the project “Promote tourism and Culture through the water” with the acronym “ToCulter” was successfully completed on 02/07/2021. The project was approved in the framework of the 1st Call for Proposals of the European Cross-Border Cooperation Program INTERREG IPA Greece - North Macedonia 2014- 2020.

Project summary

“ToCulter” project partners come from areas that share common natural heritage such as lakes, reserves and natural parks. The eligible area in North Macedonia is an area of nature characterized by a wealth of lakes and mountains, while Greece also has rich natural heritage, with numerous rivers, lakes, mountain areas of natural beauty and hot springs. The aim of this project was to create a common tourist identity based on water trails, specialized according to location's identity and through an innovative platform and networking activities to develop promotional packages in order to improve the Cross-Border tourism product and services and to enhance tourism flow in the area. In addition, cultural and other social exchanges are supported, so that wider partnerships are created, growth and living standards will be improved and tourism and cultural heritage valorization will be developed.

Partnership

The partnership of the project is the following:

1. Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (Lead Beneficiary)
2. Organisation of Culture, Sport and Environment (O.C.S.E.) of the Municipality of Volvi (PB 2)
3. Municipality of Sidiki (PB 3)
4. Lifelong Learning Center of Region of Central Macedonia SA (PB 4)
5. Municipality of Strumica (PB 5)
6. Municipality of Struga (PB 6)



Main outputs

Regarding project management & coordination, partners submitted their progress reports, 5 technical meetings were organized in Thessaloniki, Sidirokastro, Stavros, Strumica, and two online meetings, and the Final Conference was held online due to the pandemic crisis. The “Quality Assurance / Risk Management Plan” was developed. Quality control involves monitoring specific project results to determine whether they are in compliance with quality standards and identifying ways of removing the causes of unsatisfactory results. Quality planning is outlined, defining the outputs required by the project, with their respective quality criteria, quality methods and the quality responsibilities of those involved, also explaining the role of Critical Path Analysis. Control methods to be applied are presented to ensure the high quality results of the project, as well as potential risks and monitoring mechanisms. The dissemination part of the project resulted in the development of a communication plan, the logo of the project, brochures and events (final conference), as well as publications in tourism magazines.

Concerning the improvement of Cross-Border tourism product and services, training seminars regarding the Quality Customer Services were organized and an investigation of the development of areas with water bodies as tourism spot in the Cross-Border area was elaborated. It contained a Benchmarking Study, which demonstrates the importance of sustainability in top European Resorts and Spas of the project’s area and a Master Plan, aiming to outline the actions in the direction of the already developed areas. A tourist platform was developed, more specifically an innovative Android and MYSPA application for mobile phones and tablets, where tourist packages with special offers are presented. The links are the following:
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gr.dotsoft.toculter&hl=en_US&gl=US and
<https://steprimo.com/iphone/ph/app/1511410265/ToCulter/>. An evaluation report was also carried out through a Primary Research via a questionnaire among Partner’s relevant stakeholders as well as all categories of Project Activities’ participants. An important conclusion was that private tourism companies need more support in order to improve their businesses, as most of the participants are businesses operating at the tourism sector and more specifically private businesses related to the tourism sector. However, the activities organized in the framework of ToCulter had a large participation and the degree of satisfaction of the respondents was great, while the importance of the activities was considered high. In addition, the level of skills of the participants for running a successful rural tourism business was improved after the implementation of the project. As a conclusion, despite the difficulties that were mentioned above, as well as the pandemic situation, the results of the project were positive.



As for the activities outside the program area, the project participated in the International Tourism trade fair B-travel in Barcelona - Spain and the International Tourism fair Holiday & Spa Expo in Sofia - Bulgaria. The B-travels trade fair is a business platform for establishing contacts with professionals in the industry, exchanging experiences and information about developments in it. Holiday & Spa Expo is one of the leading events of the Tourism Industry in Bulgaria as it gathers top local and foreign companies every year. Concerning networking and capitalization actions, a Project Evaluation is conducted through a survey among the main target groups and involved stakeholders of each partner's network, as well as the development of the relevant questionnaire.

Target groups

The results of the project "ToCulter" will be used by the beneficiaries of the project, as well as by the target groups such as local population, tourists, local businesses, associations for the elderly people and tour operators in tourist and all relevant sectors aiming to increase first of all the visibility of their area and then their income. The local and regional authorities dealing with development planning regarding tourism have strengthened their Cross-Border collaboration by sharing their common natural heritage.