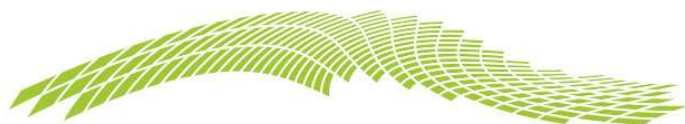


**ADRIONET**



**ADRIONET** Adriatic-Ionian  
Network of Authentic Villages

# Transnational report on result of the pilot demonstration actions (D.T2.1.4) (PP03)

Final | December 2022

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing and most resilient socio-economic sectors of our times. It accounts for 7% of global trade and has outpaced economic growth for the last decade. A leading employer, it generates millions of jobs directly and indirectly. However, in many places, the benefits of tourism, including enhanced employment and gender opportunities, have been concentrated in urban and coastal areas, contributing to an unequal territorial distribution of wealth and economic opportunities. Furthermore, pressure on the most visited locations comes with risks such as overcrowding, unsustainable demand for natural and cultural resources, and possible disruptions to social fabric and community life.

Promoting tourism in rural areas spreads the benefits of the sector more widely across regions and populations, while at the same time mitigating the risks associated with the concentration of tourism in specific locations. Tourism can be an effective means of providing socio-economic opportunities for rural communities. It can also help with increasing the attractiveness and vitality of rural areas, mitigating demographic challenges, reducing migration, and promoting a range of local resources and traditions while upholding the essence of rural life. It can also celebrate a territory's values, often the essence of the travel experience, in an active way to preserve both tangible and intangible heritage and complement the existing economic activities of these territories.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of tourism in rural development is more relevant than ever. Tourism in rural areas offers important opportunities for recovery as tourists look for less populated destinations and open-air experiences and activities. At the same time, communities in rural areas are less prepared to deal with the direct and indirect impacts of crisis. It is therefore of critical importance to support them in facing the economic and social effects of the pandemic. Despite being destructive for tourism COVID 19 crisis is also “an opportunity to rethink how tourism interacts with our societies, other economic sectors and our natural resources and ecosystems; to measure and manage it better; to ensure the fairer distribution of its benefits and to advance the transition towards a carbon-neutral and more resilient tourism economy (UNWTO, 2020).” As the world faces one of the most challenging crises of all times, there is a collective opportunity to renew our efforts and develop innovative approaches that will foster tourism's potential for development, including its unique ability to drive development for rural communities as one of the socio-economic activities engaging across and throughout communities and leaving no one behind.

The ADRIONET project was designed in 2019 and in 2020 faced the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic but even so, it could be said that it was designed at the right moment, because precisely during the pandemic, smaller marginalised villages and villages in the countryside experienced an increased visitation, in some places even massive. With the Adrionet project, those places that were included in the project and their stakeholders were involved in the preparation of a development strategy (action plans) for the sustainable development of their place, which enables visitors and local inhabitants a pleasant environment.

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## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE ADRIONET PROJECT

### Adriatic-Ionian Network of Authentic Villages -ADRIONET

The Interreg Adrion project with the acronym ADRIONET - Adriatic - Ionian Network of Authentic Villages started in 2020. In the project were engaged eight partners from seven countries:

- Italy: Emilia -Romagna Region as lead partner of the project and Association of Authentic Villages;
- Croatia: Pubic institution for the Development of the Međimurje County REDEA;
- Greece: Central Macedonia Region;
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: Department for Development and International projects of Zenica - Dobož Canton;
- Albania: Association of Local Autonomy of Albania,
- Serbia: Regional Centre for Socio - Economic development - Banat and
- Slovenia: Regional Development Centre Koper.

Each project partner involved in project Adrionet identified pilot areas. Those areas are filled with small authentic villages, often situated in remarkably beautiful locations, including fluvial basins, mountains, hills, rural peripheral or marginal areas, in certain cases at risk of depopulation and abandonment, due to spatial territorial development models characterized by intense urbanization and socio-economic polarization.

The main objective of the project was to overcome the current marginalization, fragmentation and sub valuation of these territories by establishing a Transnational Network of "authentic villages". The main goal of the network is to promote the preservation of natural and cultural assets, accompanying development based on social, environmental and economic sustainability, with better quality of life population, as well as the attractiveness and satisfaction of visitors.

Within the project ADRIONET project partners identified their pilot areas where the main activities took place. By following common transnational guidelines and templates, project partners prepared well-structured analysis of their pilot areas with the cultural, environmental and natural assets. Implemented activities allowed an accurate territorial analysis aimed at supplying needed knowledge background on which to build an integrated transnational Action Plan (TAP) involving both public (local governments of villages etc.) and private sector, agricultural clusters and hospitality operators.

Action plans were built through involvement, via general and thematic forums and focus groups, of local populations and stakeholders, who become active co-designers of processes envisaged. Following the action plan, each project partner was setting up an

“authentic village” as model for sustainable development, by starting a co-designing and co-implementing participation process with stakeholders in the village.

On the basis of the Transnational Action Plan and identified models of “authentic village” suitable for each pilot area, project partners worked together through transnational joint working groups for the implementation of the pilot demonstrative actions to test the solutions proposed by the action plan.

Assessment of the implementation of the pilot demonstrative actions will be presented in this transnational report, allowing useful evidence-based responses on how the same solutions (e.g. “Hospitable communities”) have worked in different territorial contexts and affected cultural and natural landscape.

## 2.1 PROJECT OBJECTIVE

General objective of the project ADRIONET was an establishment of a transnational network of ADRION “authentic villages”, aimed at promoting the conservation of natural and cultural assets, striving for development based on social, environmental and economic sustainability. Focus was primarily on the quality of life and well-being of the local population, as a precondition for the comprehensive care of the mentioned territories, as well as for their attractiveness and tourist satisfaction.

Specific objectives of the project are promotion and testing of transnational model of integrated territorial development and establishment of transnational network of “Authentic Villages”.

## 2.3 METHODOLOGY

Project partners involved in the project Adrionet carried out in each pilot territory mapping of cultural, environmental, natural assets: main features of local histories and identities; historical buildings and monuments; traditional food; typical handicraft; biodiversity, eco-systems and main environmental attractions (and concerns); survey of services available (fluvial navigation, other modes of accessibility to villages, hospitality facilities, signposting and information system to visitors etc.); verification if networks of national, European relevance cross areas involved in project (protected areas; Natura 2000 sites; cultural or mobility networks; etc.).

Activities above allowed an accurate territorial analysis aimed at supplying needed knowledge background on which partners built an integrated action plans involving both public (local governments of villages etc.) and private sector, agricultural clusters and hospitality operators (including families operating through Airbnb or other ways of sharing economy), representatives of fluvial mobility and green mobility, tourism etc.

Local Action plans which were later integrated into a transnational action plan (TAP), includes five topics that include the different dimensions of sustainable development.

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These topics have been analysed by the partners on their respective territories involving local stakeholders through a participatory (bottom-up) process. Starting from the analysis of the current situation, already implemented projects, the priorities to be addressed, the projects and actions to be carried out, the objectives to be set and the goals to be achieved in the short and medium term. The result was to bring the Action Plans a transnational value in the addressed topics and in the working methods, and to be able to subsequently and mutually exchange ideas and methods of intervention to address common challenges.

## TOPICS:

- Topic 1: Social and relational capital, a resource for development
- Topic 2: “Young people are the future of the village, without them the village has no future”.
- Topic 3: Intelligent and resilient villages and territories, bearers of an idea of the future
- Topic 4: Utilisation and increase of tourist vocatitiveness, with a view to sustainability and employment: the “hospitable community”
- Topic 5: Productive know-how

The Adrionet Transnational Action Plan represents a road map of eight action plans from the Interreg Adrion territory with a horizon beyond the duration of the project. It establishes a set of common and/or similar objectives and actions, tuned to the peculiarities and to the weaknesses of each territory involved. It envisages integrated approaches for the conservation and sustainable enhancement of river basins, of naturalistic areas both involved in Natura 2000 networks and not, and of marginal/peripheral areas, through generative and regenerative processes involving local communities.

## 3. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND “HOSPITABLE COMMUNITY«

### 3.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

#### A) HORIZONTAL PILOT ACTION

On the basis of the Transnational Action Plans and identified models of “authentic village” suitable for each pilot area, the project partners worked together for the implementation of the pilot demonstrative actions (horizontal and thematic pilot actions) to test the solutions proposed by action plan itself, aimed at triggering an overall improvement of the involved authentic villages.

Based on the result from the inputs coming from territorial analysis and participative process involving local populations and stakeholders the common Horizontal pilot action was designed HORIZONTAL PILOT ACTION: "train the trainers". Program focused on the "Hospitable Community" model.

For the implementation of the Horizontal pilot action, each project Partner had to select an on-site trainer who received training on the "Hospitable Community" model, through on-line sessions. Once received the training, local trainers worked in pilot villages with the stakeholders to realize the training sessions.

## B) THEMATIC PILOT ACTION

Based on inputs provided by the participatory process, which was held in each pilot area and after the elaboration of the Transnational Action Plan, were designed thematic actions (focused on the specific peculiarities and priorities of each territory) which were divided in sub-groups based on the objectives and outputs that want to achieve:

1. Sustainable tourism development and promotion
2. Cultural landscape
3. Social capital

Once the thematic pilot actions were implemented, partners prepared Regional reports on results of the pilot horizontal and thematic pilot actions<sup>1</sup> following common structure.

Questionnaires were structured as follows:

- 5 common questions for all for the Horizontal Pilot Action
- 8 common questions for all for the Thematic pilot Actions
- and 2 additional questions different for each sub groups, related to their specific situation

The results of the analysis of the regional reports and main findings will be presented in the next chapters.

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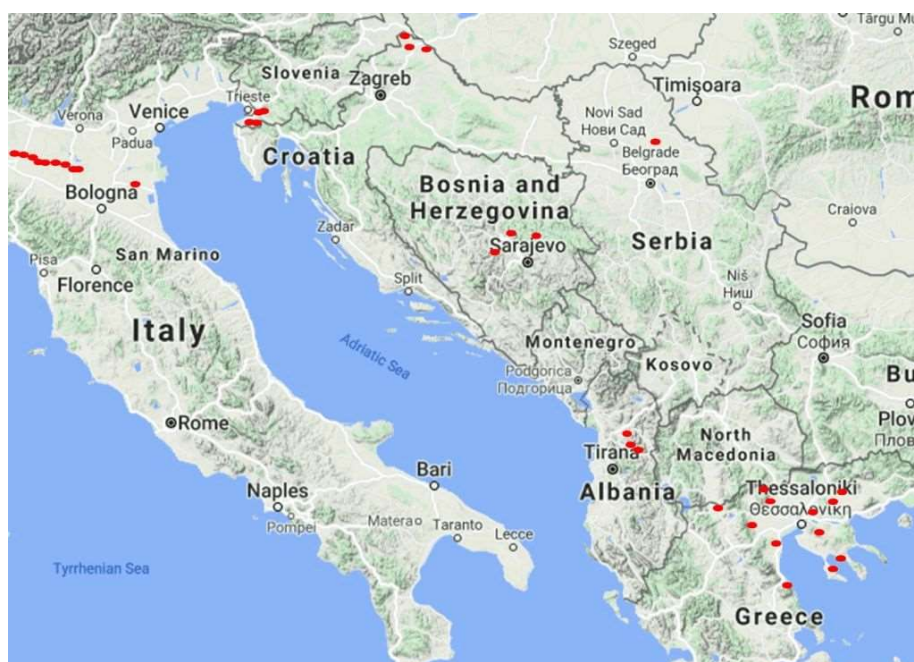
<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire is attached at the end of the report in the appendix chapter.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF HOSPITABLE COMMUNITY APPROACH IN ADRIONET PILOT AREAS

### 4.1 MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Project partners implemented horizontal pilot actions titled “train the trainers” in 29 sites/villages across the partners project areas, which is quite impressive achievement. Detailed analyses showed results, which are presented below.

*Picture 1: Pilot villages involved by project partner in the Adrionet project  
(Author of the picture: Association of Authentic Villages of Italy).*



*Table 1: Project areas selected for the implementation of the horizontal pilot actions with number of attendees on training sessions.*

PROJECT PARTNER	COUNTRY	PILOT AREAS	NUMBER OF TRAINING ATTENDEES
Emilia - Romagna Region	Italy	Calendasco, Caorso, Castelvetro P., Monticelli d' Ongina, Villanova sull'Arda, Colorno, Polesine-Zobello, Rocciabianca, Boretto, Brescello e Luzzara	72

Regional Development Centre Koper - RRC Koper	Slovenia	Beka, Rodik, Hrastovlje, Kubed	15
Public Institution for the Development of the Međimurje County - REDEA	Croatia	Sveta Marija, Nedelišće, Štrigova	22
Region of Central Macedonia	Greece	Vryta, Seli, Arkochori, Palaios Panteleimonas, Kytros, Nikiti, Afytos, Ossa, Petrokerasa, Skra, Goumenissa, Emmanouel Pappas, Daphne	54
Department for Development and International projects of Zenica-Doboj Canton	Bosnia and Hercegovina	Vareš, Olovo, Visoko	33
Association of Local Autonomy of Albania	Albania	Mirdita, Ulez, Plani Bardhe	13
Regional Agency for Socio - Economic Development Banat Ltd.	Serbia	Belo Blato	10
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>29 VILLAGES</b>	<b>212 TRAINING ATTENDEES</b>

*Table 2: Type of stakeholders and key remarks from the training sessions*

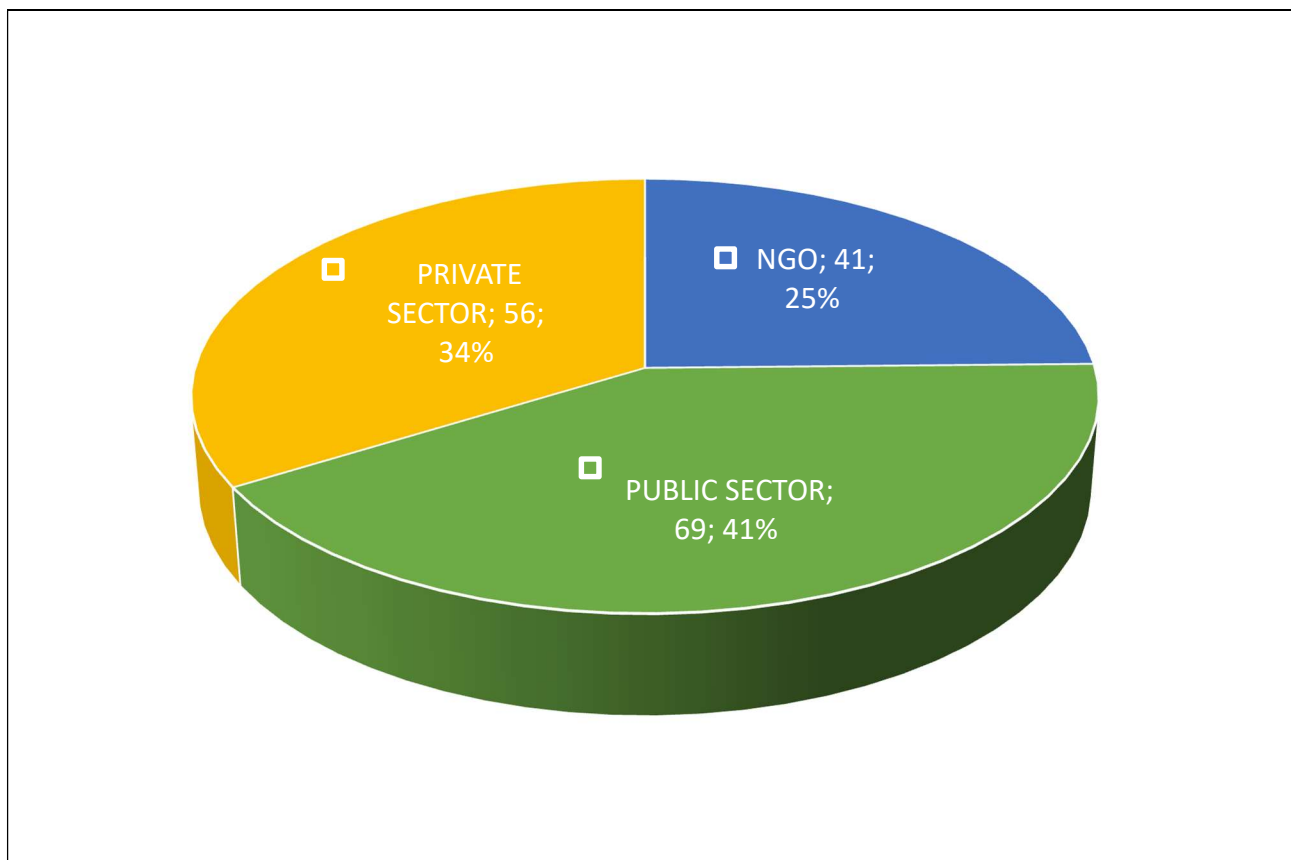
Emilia - Romagna Region, Italy	LP divided training into two meeting-sessions that took place at one location in each province. The first meeting session was held on- May 18 at 5 p.m. in Roccabianca (province of Parma) for stakeholders from that area and at 8:30 p.m. in Villanova for stakeholders from the Piacenza area. On May 19, it was held in Luzzara for stakeholders from the Reggio Emilia area. The second meeting session took place on July 6 at 4 p.m. in Roccabianca (province of Parma) for stakeholders from that area and at 9 p.m. in Villanova for stakeholders from the Piacenza area. On July 7 it was held in Luzzara for stakeholders from the Reggio Emilia area. For the first meeting session there were 35 participants, while 37 participants attended the 2nd meeting session. Considering all the meetings held the total number of participants in the meetings was 72 people.
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PP3 - Regional development agency Koper, Slovenia	PP3 has organised two trainings. One for the pilot area Beka and Rodik and the other for the pilot area Kubed and Hrastovlje. Due to the situation related to the Covid 19 pandemic, the training for the Beka and Rodik was organized via ZOOM application. A total of 11 people attended the training. The participants were from various organizations, mainly from non-governmental ones: from the University of Primorska, Regional Development Center, Tourist organization Visit Kras; Municipality of Hrpelje-Kozina; representatives of the Tourist association of Rodik and Beka. The second training was carried out live, in the premises of the local community of Gračišče. 4 people attended the workshop, namely from the private sector - Cooperative Bržanija and non-governmental organizations: a representative of the local community and cultural association Skala Kubed and a representative of the sports association for the development of bicycle tourism from Hrastovlje. In total 15 participants attended the training sessions.
Public Institution for the Development of the Međimurje County - REDEA, Croatia	PP4 has defined three pilot areas to be included in the implementation of the ADRIONET project - Municipality of Sveta Marija, Municipality of Nedelišće and Municipality of Štrigova. To gather all participants they have decided with subcontracted expert to conduct training session on "Hospitable Community" in Čakovec in "Međimurje tourism palace" where Međimurje Tourist Board is located. Two training session on 11th of May and on 17th of May 2022, 22 people participated from 12 different institutions.
Region of Central Macedonia, Greece	PP5 defined 12 locations (Vryta, Seli, Arkochori, Palaios Panteleimonas, Kytros, Nikiti, Afytos, Ossa, Petrokerasa, Skra, Goumenissa, Emmanouel Pappas, Daphne) where the training sessions have being held, were a blending scenario of both virtual as well as in-person workshops. In total 54 people participated the sessions.
Department for Development and International projects of Zenica-Doboj Canton, BiH	PP6 has conducted, through realization of external expert services, training sessions on the topic "Hospitable Community" on multiple locations in the pilot area (Municipalities of Vareš, Olovo and Visoko). The largest number of participants has been present at the six locations within the Municipality of Vareš. The participants were mostly from the private sector, mainly offering authentic touristic experience of small Bosnian villages, owners of restaurants, producers of

	authentic cheese and food products. A total number of participants to whom the training session has been delivered was in Vareš 17 participants (association of women doing traditional knitting, restaurant owners, producers of traditional food, NGOs, associations of hunters, historical associations, tourism promoters) in Olovo = 6 participants (representatives of resorts, NGO sector, hotels, countryside resort complex) and in Visoko = 10 participants (restaurants, NGO association "Young volunteers, Agricultural traditional producers, owners of apartments for rent). 33 participants were present at trainings.
Association of Local Autonomy of Albania	PP7 delivered on 19th of September the training on the "Hospitable Community" with stakeholders from all three pilot areas at Mat Municipality, Albania premises. In total, there were 13 participants.
Regional Agency for Socio - Economic Development Banat Ltd., Serbia	PP8 conducted training sessions in the village Belo Blato, Serbia. There was 10 participants from different organizations.

In total on all trainings of project partners locations were present 212 participants. Participants were in majority cases from all three sectors, means public, private and NGO. Some partners implemented one, in some cases there were more training sessions organized (from two to four), since different locations were chosen for the implementation of the trainings.

*Figure 1: Representation of each sector: private sector, public and NGO at training sessions organised in each participating country.*



#### 4.1.1 THE PROCESS OF STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT

The participants of the training have been keen on learning more about the concept “hospitable community” and they have expressed interest in learning more in order to better understand how this type of community will become an additional hand to create their locations more attractive and help them to create a better economic offers to potential visitors. It has been clarified that a certain territory cannot be hospitable unless the communities are hospitable as well. The participants were also interested in the environmental factor, meaning identifying interventions to raise awareness of visitors on the impact to the environment. The importance of social media data and availability of correct information, has been emphasized and marked as a very important factor in tourism development in this era of technical advancements and digitalization.

Most of participants expressed opinion that cooperation of all sectors on local level is of the most importance. They realized that only by working together they can accomplish more than working just individually and on local level only. They’ve agreed to work together in the area of promotion of hospitable community and authentic village, so they could have much better results and more tourists in the future.

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Another interesting remark was interest in the creation of a territorial system, kind of public-private partnership network in the pilot area, capable of promoting their own tourism offer. This system should take territorial marketing initiatives concerning territorial, cultural and economic promotion having direct and lasting impact on the socio-economic system of the territory of the pilot areas. This also embraces the issues of marketing in the story of a positive experience - model to give new emotions that generate positive memories.

Main concern of the participants of the trainings were how to integrate & motivate guest when they are only visitors or only staying for one or two nights in being guests to feel like a “temporary local citizens” that participate in community life. Many participants concluded that the marketing is the main course that they have to work on in the future. They made a plan and agree who will be responsible for what and where will be the main point for communication and presentation of their villages. Fact is that there is no magic and general method given how to enable this, but it needs to be developed on each of the destinations as “their own model”.

As the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the decline of foreign guests and an increase in the income of domestic guests, particularly in smaller & rural communities, this had the effect of increasing demand and consequently increasing supply. All this had an effect on the increase of income in smaller communities & rural places. This redirection of tourist flows to smaller local communities aroused the most interest to local stakeholders, namely, what opportunities are there for sustainable tourism, after the Covid-19 pandemic, and how local community can be organised.

In few cases participants also pointed out that what these village areas and initiatives planned in them need more financial incentives and financial support. Some participants were a bit “tired” of projects which included only theoretical information and which, according to them, is something that they have been receiving from a long time.

The most positive responds were on the concept of the “basket of local products concept”. When this has been explained and discussed many of the participants have expressed their own variations to this idea. In addition, the possibility of development of their tourism offer beyond season character was very interesting to the participants, and they have asked for guidelines on how to properly and gradually introduce contents to create a “whole-year-tourism offer” for their local community.

In many cases participants expressed a desire for additional trainings. Active members in local communities from local associations or cooperatives want to attract others to participate, especially younger generations, to take over the activities of the local community and to take an active role in organisation of events, communication with the municipality, preparation of development plans etc. Currently this is an obstacle in many villages, since young generation does not see any additional value of working in the local environment.

#### 4.1.2 PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LONG-TERM ACTION PLAN

Participants on the trainings were addressing some important action and ideas for their long-term development.

Firstly creation of a new experiences based on tourism concept of “hospitable communities” which has been rarely used and practiced in their pilot areas (and described as great potential for enriching the tourism offer and generating new income to the service providers). In this way, young people could be ambassadors of such a concept and it might prevent them from looking for opportunities outside of their native villages.

Secondly, new traditional and community events and activities could be reorganized as festivals and as activities in which tourists could take an active part. Tourism Operators are playing a focal point of these activities to be presented on the market and promoted in the close coordination with the appointed Tutors. In this context are also welcome opportunities within local communities and between partners, which will generate the exchange of ideas in order to create better touristic products and more interesting activities for the entire area such as introduction of “slow”, “wine” and “rural” tourism with the emphasis of authentic experiences in the villages targeted. In this category also fits the topic of artisan tourism, which has not yet been experimented, but was seen as a viable alternative to trainees.

Thirdly engagements and presentations in Social Media and website management - regular updates of working hours, locations, offer and prices make a huge difference as many tourists nowadays rely highly on the information, which can be found online.

Next what was exposed by participants of the training sessions was the fact, that post-Covid-19 tourism offers some new opportunities for the rural areas. The number of tourists who like walking in nature and discovering trails has increased. The closure due to COVID brought an explosion of tourism during the summer and especially there is a desire for green tourism and a need to go “out and active” and not stay just indoors.

Participants also find important that in their local destinations broader territorial strategies are developed and agreed, which will lead to advantage and support for tourism development initiatives.

Hospitable communities and sustainable tourism are one of the key measures that should be implemented and promoted on long term, at local and regional level i.e. through year. Partners in the pilot areas should raise awareness of environmental and nature protection, i.e. waste disposal treatments in more sophisticated manor (recycling and separation of waste).

Finally yet importantly, preparation of both local action plans showed the need to involve and encourage young people to play an active role in the local community and to design

activities that will be interesting for them. The pilot areas are aware that the further development of the village requires cooperation between local community stakeholders and participation in municipal initiatives.

#### 4.1.3 HOSPITABLE COMMUNITIES AND STEPS FOR LONG-TERM SUSTANABILITY

This kind of an endeavour needs to be carefully planned using participative & bottom-up strategies as well as embedding the - so much needed - harmonious collaboration between local citizens and authorities firstly, and then alongside visitors themselves. The already established networks of authentic supply chain of service in the pilot areas, will be the future for the territorial development and the trainings as well. This type of learning and training will have as its main aim to involve the territory and will be ready not only to welcome tourists, but to make them participate, transferring the training contents.

The sustainability of the implemented trainings and education with an emphasis on creating a genuinely "hospitable community" will be the basis for the improvement of the overall image of the area and the touristic offer which should plan for the future growth and success in all partner's pilot areas. The need to meet both current and future demands of the potential visitors and to develop products will increase efficiency and significance of a good tourism program, which will also reduce costs in this era of technological, social and economic change. The constant education and training must be provided. In this process, all sectors needs to be engaged in order to provide crucial and continuous development and improvement of the existing human resources in the pilot areas.

Some partners proposed engagement of s.c. "territorial mediators" who are and should be the representatives of the pilot areas and are employed (as one option) at the Municipalities in the tourism departments. These may be a model for some partners for the continuing processes in future and to pass all the information as well as provide capacity-building activities in the pilot areas.

In the cooperation with local tourism industry, it is needed to organise work with local stakeholders on further education in different integrated fields and topics. Some partners will, with this goal in mind, prepare MoU with all relevant institutions and organisations in order to continue starting cooperation in way that is more formal. The experience of these trainings, implemented on the "hospitable community" model has shown that the successful economy of the local tourism area is directly related to the knowledge, ideas and values of individuals. A higher level of education and training encourages free initiative, cooperation and exchange, without losing sight of values such as trust and equity. Namely, economic exchange encompasses a set of human potentials and resources that give rise to human capacity, which should transform the environment in which they live in order to achieve a greater degree of well-being of both the individual and the community stakeholders. Considering these, some representatives of the local governments in the pilot areas have committed themselves to try to meet the relevant and high-quality skills & training needs that are necessary for the overall & sustainable tourism growth of the area.

#### 4.2 PLANNING SUSTANABLE TOURISM AND ITS PROMOTION

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This thematic pilot action was selected by all project partners. In terms of the content, which they implemented following fields and topics, were elaborated in their activities:

Revitalization of old hiking trails, protection of the route and establishment of a new bicycle and hiking trail for the purpose of tourist development

Mapping and visual linking of all destinations on the area

Creation of the Management plan for the tourism development of the destination (general)

Social and relational capital, a resource for development

Young people are the future of the village

Intelligent and resilient villages

Utilization and increase of tourism vocation

Productive know-how for management of the protected area

Archaeological sites for developing tourism

Organisation of Heritage festivals

Creation of the Operational Tourism Marketing plans for individually defined pilot areas.

#### 4.2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE PILOT ACTIONS

The “thematic” actions have been focused on the specific peculiarities and priority needs of the seven Pilot areas and as such have been designed and implemented by relevant and different sub-groups working together on similar pilot action. Of course, due to different characters of the pilot areas selected also different objectives were followed.

In the first case partners were working on development of "attraction for new tourists" which embraced further enrichment of local tourist infrastructure and ensuring new tourist visits. This has been realized through the enhancement and improvement of the existing facilities with state of the art solutions for the problems that occur in some parts

of the pilot areas, with an additional emphasis on improvement of the experience of the tourists engaged in hiking and cycling. Next activity was visual promotion and increasing visibility of the pilot areas of the Municipalities. Visual promotion of the existing hiking mountain trails connecting the entire pilot area, together with the promotion of significant rural villages all advocating the concept of a "hospitable community" has been done and relevant data has been collected and processed on existing cycling and hiking routes. Last activity was preparation of the Master plan for Tourism. The master plan represents a long-term development plan. It provides an organised and structured framework for tourism development and promotion within the Pilot area. That includes things like planning for accommodations, transportation, tourist activities, legislation and regulation and marketing 4P concept (product, price, promotion and placement). Through the Master plan, the ADRIONET Pilot area will have a 6-year strategic vision and plan for developing tourism in a sustainable manner for the benefit of local residents, investors, and tourism operators.

In the second case partners have been focused on the priority needs of the pilot area. With stakeholders, they have designed and implemented following pilot action:

- create a shared Tourism Master Plan between the various villages involved, sharing the main actions to focus on in the short-term future
- define a technical and economic feasibility plan that identifies the priorities of services tourism and interventions, the different types of services needed to carry out and encourage the enhancement of the Po River, through the development of activities, services, and investments for the conservation of the area both at sites facing the river and in adjacent areas.

By participation of different stakeholders, following activities were agreed as key objectives in the pilot area:

- Construction of an integrated and intermodal model for the use of mobility: cycle, river and railway.
- Connection of a quality cycle network more connected to the centres of the villages along the Po; services for cyclists (bicycle rentals, maintenance workshops and dedicated refreshments).
- Use of the river through the redevelopment of ports and floodplain areas. Service centres, as refreshment points and structures dedicated to logistical support.
- Availability of a railway section, at the service of hiking and bike transport

In the third case it was established Mythical park - a visitor centre and two trails, walking and cycling one. These were established based on an archaeological site and narrative heritage. Excavations have shown that in the area can be found also other archaeological sites. Based on the workshops with the municipality and the locals, it was decided that it would be necessary to prepare a management plan for the sustainable development of the

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destination. Comprehensive management plan consist of guidelines and tools for monitoring and participatory planning process as well as the financial plan. A management plan will be used as a formal planning tool with aim to design the future operations in the destination. Action plan with the pilot action already become part of the planning process and methods of co-operation and standard tool in the area. Management plan is aligned with the Municipality's overall strategic goals and priorities. It provides a clearly defined, results-oriented action for successfully achieve quality of life balanced with stakeholder satisfaction tourists and local inhabitants.

The main objective of the fourth case area action was the implementation of the Heritage festivals. Aim was to improve and promote chosen pilot areas and to develop new tourism offer based on the rich cultural resources and most specifically, local intangible cultural heritage. In a long run this offer will be a part of the new sub-unit of creative and cultural tourism - intangible cultural heritage tourism that is based on ceramics/pottery, production of Svetomarska lace and traditional hand-knitted Ceker "corn husks bag" that could be further developed and promoted as such. Pilot action also included preparation of the Operational Marketing Plan for the development of sustainable tourism for each defined pilot area - Municipality of Sveta Marija, Municipality of Nedelišće and Municipality of Štrigova.

#### 4.2.2 ACTION PLANS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SELECTED PILOT AREAS

In general, the aim of sustainable tourism actions in the pilot areas was for a more balanced visit and greater satisfaction of guests and their hosts.

In the first pilot area, selected activities will increase the touristic visibility of the chosen locations and make them more attractive to the potential visitors. Once a unique program is created and advertised accordingly, it is the assumption that the first tourists will take part in this program; this will be the best recommendation and sustainability carrier of pilot area activities. Guest will be provided with a complete experience at one place and would be able to experience the core of the rural tourism in the local community. The increase number of tourists will of course be gradual and slow at first, but it is assumed that over two or three seasons, the numbers will scale up and then it will begin to show its economic justification and true sustainability. All-year tourism programs will be created, so instead of having seasonal tourism, all the mentioned programs can be used during the whole year with slight modifications according to the weather conditions. Selected pilot activities prove that, through promotion and visibility of the pilot area, attraction of new tourists and tourism development of the destination will create preconditions for the affirmation of authentic rural Bosnian villages. Pilot activities have shown that this concept of "hospitable tourism" has a good and stable base and, if directed correctly and following the objectives of the ADRIONET project, could gradually make these destinations in the pilot area of Zenica-Doboj Canton one of the most desirable destinations of rural tourism in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

In the second pilot area, the systematisation of services for the enjoyment of sustainable routes throughout the year will increase the visibility of the localities involved. This will highlight the richness of the area and the opportunities they have for tourism development.

In particular, the Po River, which is the general natural element to the whole area, requires a common tourism enhancement model to overcome the current fragmentation.

The creation of a local network that selects and promotes all initiatives in the area by increasing their number, including through the enhancement of seasonal markets with local products and items, may also increase the number of new visitors. Another important element that may influence the tourism development of these destinations is the adoption and enhancement of Territorial and/or Corporate Protocols and Certifications as a specification and declination of the MAB UNESCO recognition.

In the third pilot area by designation of the management plan and action performed in the project helps to identify & strategically set the most effective sustainable direction for the future development of the destination. During the project, work it was assessed the potentials for the archaeological heritage and management strategies and recommendations on how to manage that archaeology. The document is important tool for the Municipality to see in what direction can be developed tourism and can assist in the preservation of archaeological sites on the other side it is also important for local community in terms of preservation the narrative heritage; sustainable use of, enables communities to generate income that can be used for rural development, and promotes participation in local institutions. Cooperation of the local community had an important role in participatory planning process also for the future actions. The local community is an important element in the development of the village. Involvement and networking within associations and other interesting groups was and will be important because local people tend to make better economic decisions and judgments in the context of their own environment and circumstances. In order to achieve the set goals, the network of information points and park infrastructure will be upgraded if necessary, visitor management tasks will be carried out as a priority, and activities in the field of information, awareness raising and high-quality visitor management will also be strengthened.

In the fourth pilot area, new and different contents of tourist product were identified, important for the future organisation and implementation of Heritage Festivals. Through different actions related to pottery/ceramics, lace, cornhusk bags tourism development but also integration with other types of tourism, the proposed activities will increase networking and skills building capacities of tourism stakeholders but also local community especially the youth through different educational and skills building programmes, festivals, clubs etc. in cooperation with other partners in Međimurje, Croatia and Europe. These activities will also improve visibility of the Municipalities and help it become closer to its vision of becoming renowned destinations that value and promote intangible heritage and overall cultural tourism. Great satisfaction of guest and hosts will be affected

through implementation of the festivals that has expanded tourism offer of the pilot areas and made them as destinations more attractive to visit.

#### 4.3 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE, AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

This pilot action was selected by two pilot areas.

In the first pilot case, partners were choosing following two priorities:

- Training of young people on the awareness of the importance of participation in local decision-making and
- Installation of the road signs for finding cultural attractions, inns, restaurants, etc.

The main aim in selection these two actions was to engage young people in the local government decision-making by inspiring and encouraging them to become part of Local Councils as their legal right and with second, the construction of a basic signposting infrastructure including road signals, to facilitate and help finding the most popular paths in the area.

During the training, the participants highlighted that so far they did not receive trainings ever held in this topic, so it was the first time. They learn some information in the Citizenship module from the high school, but they still feel that the information is not enough and not very practical. As a result of this initial input they would like to have more information and to be more involved in the local decision-making in future. Through these training facilitators were able to give them more information and to connect them with the right people to get continuous information and to be involved in the future local decision-making. As it was said in the earlier part of this report, the Territorial Mediators are involved in the work of the respective municipalities of the pilot areas. These representatives are now qualified to provide training in this field, so it is believed that the municipalities, through tourism projects with a focus on capacity building, will enable the transfer of knowledge to all actors involved.

By this training a more qualified municipal staff and more informed actors in the field of tourism was achieved. Another benefit are young people, who are now more interested in the local decision-making. We believe this will bring a more complete approach to tourism and new market of future tourists.

The second pilot area partners were choosing thematic pilot action “Coordinated image of the village” - actions to “decorate” and improve the urban landscape (public furniture and facilities, removal of cables and overhead wires, horizontal and vertical signage, signs-postings, shelters, benches, etc.) . After the implementation of the pilot action, village is now presented in the such a way that everyone who is willing to visit local authentic village can first have all necessary information prior he comes to Belo Blato. On the digital display, which is also available on the web, everyone can see all interested places in Belo Blato, as well as their traditions with all relevant contacts and geographic

locations of all sites. Together with the special offer of Banat safari, they can use practical vehicles adopted for safari and visit all attractions with domestic food and beverages just in one day. Belo Blato as an authentic village with parts of the hospitable community prepared a special offer, together with all relevant service providers, for tourist and they already started working based on this offer. All of them in the chain of providers have their own interest, but still they all work together in order to provide a village sustainability. They also prepared an offer for different attractions that they have every month, so everyone can find something that is interested in.

#### 4.4 SOCIAL CAPITAL, A RESOURCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

This pilot action was chosen from one partner and pilot area. They chose thematic pilot action titled “Environmental actions for the promotion of alternative forms of tourism”. The reasons to choose this were multiple: the issue of energy, its use without waste, its production without damaging natural resources, and the management of resources that does not become a mere cost but an opportunity, transversally embrace every sector of development and growth of the communities in the pilot area. Smart villages are an opportunity to develop a set of urban governance methods and best practices. They want to enable their communities to improve their environmental quality for the benefit of the happiness of their present citizens and the future generations.

The approach was innovative. Innovation was achieved through the capture of social capital, which would mean introducing new products, services, processes, models or improving existing ones into the economic system. In the current economic and social context, innovation is one of the main drivers of development and is a determining factor for the success of “experiential” tourism - the one that is currently targeted in the pilot villages through ADRIONET.

If the pilot area “recognizes” itself and prepares for its use, it offers visitors a new perspective with which to be observed. The guest, surrounded by a narrative plot that gives him or her a sense of interacting with the products, the actors, the local culture, will be able to see the Destination/Territory with the eyes of those who live there and will be able to immerse themselves in words, language or dialect, in a unique territorial identity that no one will ever be able to clone. The aim is to present the visitors with a local sense of place, in which, together with the differences that amazes him/her, the visitor will likely feel a commonality that leads him to feel like a “temporary citizen of that destination”. A living, dynamic territory that through the proper exploitation of its social capital, excites and is being excited, is the key of success for the future.

### 5. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

#### 5.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ADRIONET “AUTHENTIC VILLAGES”

Above presented general objectives of UNWTO are exactly matching the main objective of the ADRION project “Authentic villages”. This was to overcome the current marginalization, fragmentation and sub valuation of these rural territories by establishing a Transnational Network of “authentic villages”. The main goal of the network was to promote the preservation of natural and cultural assets, accompanying development based on social, environmental and economic sustainability, with better quality of life population, as well as the attractiveness and satisfaction of visitors.

Rural areas in majority of projects pilot areas of ADRION »Authentic Villages« face increasing demographic challenges, particularly depopulation, lower income levels, a digital divide, decline in traditional economic activities and lack of economic diversity as well as scarce infrastructure, services and transport connectivity. As it was exposed in the main report above rural youth are one of the most vulnerable groups due to the lack of gainful employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and related rural economic activities. At the same time, they are also the most crucial when addressing rural development in the future.

Traditional economic and cultural systems are under threat from climate change. This particularly affects local indigenous people who are reliant on agriculture and local natural resources. In extreme cases, land abandoned due to migration can be affected by erosion, causing an altered cultural landscape and the potential loss of a sense of place. Such locations are also at higher risk from natural disasters.

Tourism, if managed in sustainable and responsible manner has proven to be a tool for economic diversification and a major employment engine with a multiplier effect on other sectors that contribute to rural development. Tourism in rural areas can particularly benefit traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women - who make up 54% of the workforce in the tourism sector compared to 39% for the whole economy - youth and local indigenous people. Tourism is also an easy access sector for micro and small enterprises and for the self-employed, who make up a significant part of the tourism sector and community level entrepreneurship in general.

As it was referred in the regional reports from many project partners, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered rising interest from tourists looking for new experiences based around natural and rural areas in the open air, far from congested settings. This, combined with the already rising demand for more authentic experiences that offer stronger engagement with local communities, their culture and products, as well as demand for a greener approach in all stages of the travel experience opens up immense opportunities for the economic, social and environmental revitalization of rural areas through tourism. This means that also partners in the ADRIONET »Authentic Villages« pilot areas should act according to their plans presented and use all these opportunities in their future activities for sustainable tourism development and management.

The current crisis has also emphasized the importance of building resilience among communities in those rural areas which rely on tourism. This implies better social protection and benefits-sharing among communities, as well as economic diversification

and the broadening of tourism products and markets through added value experiences. To achieve this, investment, skills development, access to finance, infrastructure development, digital transformation, sustainable development, impact assessment, improved governance and women's empowerment should be placed at the heart of the recovery plans for tourism in rural communities in the ADRIANET »Authentic Villages« project. This will help support them as they navigate through the crisis and emerge stronger.

Finally, creating new opportunities for jobs and economic activities in rural areas through tourism requires a holistic approach that engages all other sectors and activities in the tourism value chain and promotes Public-Private-Community (PPC) partnerships. However, realizing these opportunities requires an integrated and sequential strategic approach to tourism for rural development with a long-term vision towards 2030 and beyond.

## 6. APPENDIX

### 6.1. TEMPLATE FOR THE REGIONAL REPORT ON RESULTS OF THE PILOT DEMONSTRATION ACTIONS

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### D.T2.1.3 Regional reports on results of the pilot demonstration actions

## Thematic Work Package T2: Implementation of Pilot Demonstration Actions

Project partner:

Pilot areas:

### Foreword

On the basis of the Transnational Action Plans (TAP) and identified models of “authentic village” suitable for each pilot area, the PPs work together for the implementation of the pilot demonstrative actions to test the solutions proposed by TPA itself, aimed at triggering an overall improvement of the involved authentic villages.

Based on the result from the inputs coming from territorial analysis and participative process involving local populations and stakeholders the common Horizontal pilot action (T2.1.1) was designed - "train the trainers" program focused on the "Hospitable Community" model and working sub-groups of PP's to design and implement thematic pilot actions (T2.1.2).

For the implementation of the Horizontal pilot action, each project Partner had to select an on-site trainer who received training from BAI on the "Hospitable Community" model, through on-line sessions. Once received the training, local trainers worked in pilot villages with the stakeholders to realize the training sessions.

Based on inputs provided by the participatory process and the TAP, were elaborated and designed thematic actions (focused on the specific peculiarities and priorities of each territory) and sub-groups of PPs: Sustainable tourism development and promotion; Cultural landscape and Social capital).

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## Regional reports on results of the pilot horizontal and thematic pilot actions

Each project partner will have to carry out, regional report of the implemented horizontal and thematic pilot actions (T1.1.1 and T2.1.2).

Partners should use the common template consist of:

- 5 common questions for all for the Horizontal Pilot Action
- 8 common questions for all for the Thematic pilot Actions
- and 2 additional questions different for each sub groups.

Output to be achieved: 1 fulfilled template report per partner, consist of total 15 questions; (max 1000 characters for each question).

Partners must send the completed templates by e-mail to the Regional development centre Koper at the addresses [tina.primozic@rrc-kp.si](mailto:tina.primozic@rrc-kp.si).

DEADLINE TO SEND THE ABOVE MENTIONED DOCUMENTS: 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022.

**A) Horizontal Pilot Action: promotion of the «Hospitable Community» model**

1. In which locations have you conducted training sessions on "Hospitable Community", how many participants were there and from which institutions were the participants (please specify whether public, private or NGO sector)?
2. Which areas or topics of the training were of most/least interest or importance to local stakeholders in your pilot areas and in your opinion why?
3. What were the key responses of the stakeholders who participated in the training (positive as well as negative)? Please indicate any specific responses/reactions or concrete suggestions from the participants?
4. Which measures, proposals or activities were taken the most effectively and how do you intend to implement and promote them in the long term?
5. How do you intend to ensure permanent and sustainable training/education and management of human resources development (e.g who will lead the activities) on this topic, even after the formal end of the project?

**A) Thematic pilot Actions**

Thematic pilot action:

Topic (from the action plan):

1. a) What was the main objective of the local pilot action?  
b) Did you meet the pilot action objectives?
  - a) No
  - b) Mostly no
  - c) Mostly yes
  - d) Yes
2. What overall results have you have achieved with the implementation of the pilot action?
3. What are/were the reasons for different results achieved as compared to what was originally planned (i.e. difficulties in managing process, over ambitious objectives, resistance of local population, land owners resistance, communication problems, political & administrative problems, lack of budget available, lack of time available, climatic/environmental issues, other unforeseen factors)?
4. Did you have any problems before and while implementing pilot action?

5. What could be improved in that whole process from planning to implementation and are there any elements that in your opinion should be avoided in the future?
6. Will the action plan, pilot action planning process and methods of co-operation, become \_\_\_\_\_ part of standard tools in your area?
7. Did the pilot action reflect the needs of the Hospitality Community model?
8. Has the pilot action delivered tangible outcomes for local stakeholders? Which ones in \_\_\_\_\_ particular?

### EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR EACH SUB GROUP

#### Sustainable tourism development and promotion (PP1, PP3, PP4, PP6)

9. What are the new or different contents of tourist products that can be developed on the basis of the introduced pilot activities, describe and explain?
10. How will the selected activities affect the future development of sustainable tourism in the pilot area, a more balanced visit and greater satisfaction of guests and their hosts, describe and explain?

#### Cultural Landscape (PP7, PP8)

9. What are the new or different sustainable solutions that you have implemented in the field of the cultural landscape on the basis of the introduced pilot actions, describe and explain?
10. How will the selected activities affect the future and sustainable development of the cultural landscape in the pilot area, its higher quality or biodiversity and consequently the greater satisfaction of local stakeholders and their visitors, describe and explain?

#### Social Capital (PP 5)

9. What are the new or different features in the field of Social Capital that can be implemented or improved on the basis of the introduced pilot activities, describe and explain?
10. How will the selected measures affect the future development of Social Capital in the pilot area, better mutual relations between stakeholders and also greater satisfaction of guests and their hosts, describe and explain?

## ADRIONET

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