Interreg

ADRION ADRIATIC-IONIAN

EUROPEAN UNION

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ADRIONET

ADRIONET Adriatic-Ionian Network of Authentic Villages

DISSEMINATION HANDBOOK D3.3.1

**Project partner 1
Emilia-Romagna Region**

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From Authentic Village to Hospitable Community

Thanks to the work carried out in the course of ADRIONET, the characteristics of the villages outlined above have been integrated and declined in the innovative concept of the "Hospitable Community". The community itself assumes the role of both the driving force of local development and at the same time the organiser - around its resources and values - of widespread and experiential hospitality. Transnational cooperation should then enable the small villages involved to be linked together and assume transnational visibility.

The territorial enhancement of areas of high value, but vulnerable and exposed to the risk of abandonment and therefore depopulation, such as those affected by ADRIONET, requires a complex interaction between the various components: the human and socio-economic component, biodiversity, vegetation, fauna.

ADRIONET has pursued the objective of territorially enhancing these areas through a model based on a conceptual and operational integration between the above-mentioned components, guided by the local communities understood as the driving force (co-designers; co-implementers) of the same territorial regeneration. At the end of ADRIONET, the project includes the formal establishment of the "Hospitable Communities" between all the stakeholders of the areas involved in the project. It will ratify the concrete commitment of the local communities to pursue their own well-being, as a prerequisite for hosting visitors and tourists, and thus for creating a virtuous mechanism of conservation and sustainable enhancement of cultural and natural landscapes. Finally, at the transnational level, a cooperation network is established between the institutions that have promoted the Adrionet project with the aim of promoting the transnational collaboration of authentic villages. A commitment that in the future may involve further members of the network: on condition that they have common characteristics and that they are able to activate the same operating methods positively tested during the life of Adrionet.

Olovo - Bosnia

Objectives of the Villages participating in the project

- ensuring the ongoing maintenance of the territory by man of river and lake basins, forests and green areas, as well as the cultural heritage of mountain, hill and rural areas;
- Redeveloping the urban and semi-urban contexts of the villages concerned, facilitating the accessibility of the areas also through the adoption of sustainable mobility practices;
- preserving and enhancing cultural landscapes and local identities (including local production traditions, food, etc.) through slow and ecological tourism, a growing segment in Europe and worldwide;
- encouraging the participation and involvement of inhabitants, through the promotion of genuine host communities, understood as a set of local actors (public administrations, citizens, economic operators) interested in systematising and improving the network of services available, firstly for residents, and then for tourists.

2 PHASES OF THE ACTIVITIES TO BE DEVELOPED

a) The territorial analysis

Each potential Authentic Villages have to carry out an analysis of its territory, in order to understand the main characteristics of the villages that could be boost for new scenarios of sustainable development. The analysis should integrate geographical diversity and biodiversity with local histories and identities, material and non-material cultural heritage (historical buildings, places, monuments; culinary and craft traditions, etc.).

In particular, the analysis should focus on the description of the geographical, cultural and environmental assets of the candidate areas and the villages involved, divided into four sections: a geomorphologic description, a focus on roads and accessibility of facilities, cultural and environmental heritage, social and demographic heritage; an analysis based on the data available for each area; one on tourism demand and supply; a final chapter, structured mainly with tables, with complementary and summarising information on the previous topics and the activities of the municipalities involved.

b) Training and the role of Territorial Mediators

Each territory have to identify subjects (professionals or volunteers) who will have to follow a specific training programme to support processes of participation, aggregation and mobilisation of endogenous resources.

c) The participatory process

Once trained, the mediators will have to guide the participatory construction of the "Authentic Village" model in their area of reference, with the involvement of both the public and private sectors in an informal local network. The whole process is based on the concept of "hospitable community": the community itself assumes the role of engine of local development and organizer of a widespread hospitality, able to generate important economic effects. The activity has to be carried out through targeted meetings with the territorial stakeholders (trying to involve the individual communities as much as possible, in their various economic, social and cultural components), up to the definition of common objectives and projects.

d) The promotion of entrepreneurial entities

At the end of the participatory process, the various territorial stakeholders interested in joining the network would set up an economic entity in charge of managing and promoting the supply chain of services for local communities and tourists. The entity may be of various legal natures; it may also be an existing entity that takes charge of the new activities.

e) Joining the Network of Authentic Villages

The informal local network and the established new Entity may officially sign the "Charter of Hospitality" that represents a strategic commitment document for the whole local community. It identifies priorities to be achieved through the touristic enhancement of the village.

Steps towards ADRIONET authentic villages

1. Identification of villages and territorial analyses

2. Selection and training of Territorial mediators

3. Organisation of Local forums for preparation of Local Action Plans of Authentic Villages

4. Adjustment/formation of local organizations for the management of a Hospitable Community

5. Identification and implementation of pilot actions for Hospitable Communities

3 MAIN RESULTS

Project partners involved in the project Adrionet carried out in each pilot territory mapping of cultural, environmental, natural assets. For instance: main features of local histories and identities; historical buildings and monuments; traditional food; typical handicraft; bio-diversity, eco-systems and main environmental attractions; survey of services available.

The activities described above enabled a thorough territorial analysis to provide the necessary background knowledge. The partners defined integrated action plans with the involvement of both the public sector (local village administrations, etc.) and the private sector, agricultural clusters and hospitality, tourism, etc. operators.

The Local Action plans, which were subsequently integrated into a Transnational Action Plan (TAP), comprised five themes with different dimensions of sustainable development. These themes were analysed by the partners in their respective territories, involving local stakeholders through a participatory (bottom-up) process. The result was to give the Action Plans a transnational value in the addressed themes and in the working methods, in order to exchange ideas and methods of intervention to address common challenges.

The image contains the five main themes.

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 input from territorial analysis and the participatory process involving local populations and stakeholders, a joint horizontal pilot action entitled: **"train the trainers"** was designed. The project partners implemented these activities in 29 sites/villages in the partners' project areas, a truly remarkable achievement.

B) THEMATIC PILOT ACTION

On the basis of the input provided by the participatory process that took place in each pilot area and after the drafting of the Transnational Action Plan, thematic actions (focusing on the specific peculiarities and priorities of each territory) were designed and divided into sub-groups based on specific themes and objectives:

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

The total number of participants in all partner training courses was 212. Participants came from all three sectors, public, private and NGO.

Training participants were addressing some important actions and ideas for the long-term development of their areas.

Firstly, the **creation of a new experiences** based on the tourism concept of "hospitable communities" which has been rarely used and practiced in their pilot areas (and described as having great potential for enriching the tourism offer and generating new revenue for service providers). In this way, young people could be ambassadors of this concept and could avoid seeking opportunities outside their home villages.
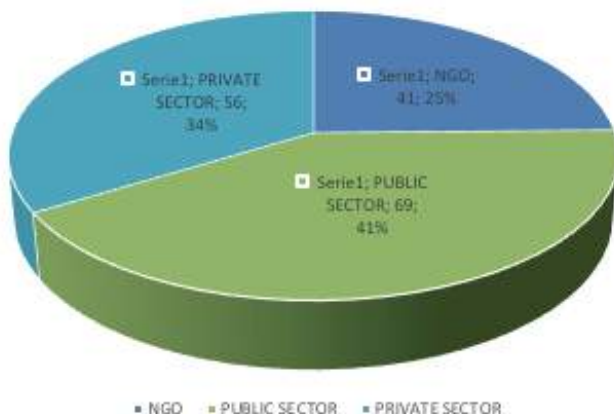
Secondly, new **traditional and community events and activities could be reorganized as festivals** and as activities in which tourists could actively participate. Tour operators play central role in these activities to be marketed and promoted in close coordination with the appointed tutors. Opportunities within local communities and between partners are also welcome in this context, which will generate the exchange of ideas in order to create better tourism products and more interesting activities for the entire area, such as the introduction of "slow", "wine" and "rural" tourism with an emphasis on authentic experiences in the targeted villages. This category also includes the topic of artisanal tourism, which has not yet been experimented, but was seen as a viable alternative by the trainees.

Thirdly, engagements and presentations on **Social Media and website management** – regular updates on business hours, locations, offers and prices make a huge difference, as many tourists today rely heavily on information that can be found online.

Participants in the training sessions also, pointed out that post-Covid-19 tourism offers **new opportunities to rural areas**. The number of tourists who enjoy walking in nature and discovering the trails has increased.

Po river- Italy

The closure due to COVID has led to an explosion of tourism during the summer and, in particular, there is a desire for green tourism and a need to get "out and active" and not just stay indoors.

Participants also consider it important that broader spatial strategies are **developed and agreed upon** in their local destinations, which will e benefit and support tourism development initiatives.

Hospitable communities and sustainable tourism are one of the key forms that should be implemented and promoted in the long term, both locally and regionally, throughout the year. Partners in the pilot areas should raise awareness of environmental and nature protection, e.g. regarding waste treatment and disposal (recycling and waste separation).

Last but not least, the preparation of the local action plans highlighted the need to involve and encourage young people to play an active role in the local community and to design activities that are interesting for them. The pilot areas are aware that further development of the village requires cooperation between local community actors and participation in municipal initiatives.

In particular, the planning of sustainable tourism and its promotion was a pilot action selected by all project partners. In terms of the content, the following areas 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 CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of the ADRIONET project was to overcome the current marginalization, fragmentation and undervaluation of these rural territories through the creation of a Transnational Network of "authentic villages". The main objective of the network is to promote the conservation of natural and cultural assets, accompanying a development based on social, environmental and economic sustainability with a better quality life for the population, as well as the attractiveness and satisfaction of visitors.

Rural areas in most pilot project areas face growing demographic challenges, in particular depopulation, lower income levels, a digital divide, declining traditional economic activities and lack of economic diversity, as well as poor infrastructure, services and transport connectivity. Young people in rural areas are one of the most vulnerable groups due to the lack of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and related rural economic activities. At the same time, they are also the most important when it comes to addressing rural development in the future.

Traditional economic and cultural systems are threatened by climate change. This particularly affects local indigenous people who on agriculture and local natural resources. In extreme cases, land abandoned due to migration may be affected by erosion, causing alteration of the cultural landscape and potential loss of a sense of place. These places are also at increased risk of natural disasters.

Tourism, when managed in a sustainable and responsible manner, has proven to be a tool for economic diversification and an important 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% in the economy as a whole - young people and local indigenous people. Tourism is also an easily accessible 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 has been reported in the regional reports of many project partners, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a growing interest on the part of tourists seeking new experiences based on natural and rural open-air areas away from congested settings. This, combined with the already demand for more authentic experiences that offer greater engagement with local communities, their culture and products, as well as demand for a greener approach in all stages of the travel experience, opens

Belo Blato - Serbia

up immense opportunities for the economic, social and environmental revitalization of rural areas through tourism. This means that also the partners in the pilot areas should also act according to the presented plans and utilise all these opportunities in their future activities for the development and management of sustainable tourism.

The current crisis has also emphasized the importance of building the resilience of communities in rural areas dependent on tourism. This implies better social protection and benefits-sharing among communities, as well as economic diversification and expansion of tourism products and markets through value-added 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 at the core of tourism recovery plans in the rural communities involved in the project. This will help support them in navigating through the crisis and coming out stronger.

Finally, the creation of new job and business opportunities in rural areas through tourism requires a holistic approach involving all other sectors and activities in the tourism value chain and promoting 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.

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