



**EPICAH**  
Interreg Europe



# JOINT REPORT

**How the Resilience of Cross-border Areas Can Be Increased as a Result of the COVID19 Pandemic?**



Environment &  
resource  
efficiency



**Interreg  
Europe**



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**TITLE**

How the Resilience of Cross-border Areas Can Be Increased as a Result of the COVID19 Pandemic (Management and Enhancement of Natural and Cultural Heritage as a Dynamic Element of the Economy Through Tourism).

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

After almost five years of transnational cooperation, **EPICAH** project continues to work on the **EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY INSTRUMENTS FOR CROSS-BORDER ADVANCEMENT IN HERITAGE** by promoting several exchanges between the 8 border regions represented in its partnership aiming at to identify and better understand ways and solution to increase the resilience of cross-border territories based on the lessons learned with the COVID19 (Coronas Virus Disease 19) Pandemic. In other words, and following the previous work done between 2017 and 2021 promote the exchange of knowledge and good practices to improve the management and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage as a dynamic element of border territories economies through tourism).

Those exchanges contents and results are gathered in the present working document which main objectives is to facilitate the exchanges between project partners and facilitate the capitalization of the exchange results with the Managing Authorities of EPICAH policy instruments and partners territories (through their Local Stakeholders Groups (LSG)). In addition, it is also presented some joint messages partners considered crucial to be addressed by the European Union (EU) with concerns to a sustainable economic recovery of based on a balanced valorisation of natural and cultural heritage as driver of the economic activity.

The document is structured in the following chapters:

-  Chapter 1 – Introduction: In this chapter the reader will find a brief description of the document aim and contents.
-  Chapter 2 – State of play of policy instruments implementation in the pandemic context: This chapter compiles and compares the main problems and constraints face by the project policy instruments due to the pandemic and the solutions and actions taken to overcome them in what concerns to the natural and cultural heritage of the border areas. It also tackles how the next generation of policy instruments are preparing the border region economic recovery and the role cross-border heritage and tourism will have in that context.
-  Chapter 3 – Good practices on the increase of resilience of cross-border areas: This chapter comprises both the good practices proposed by the partners to each other, and the good practices effectively exchanged between them (that is to say, it also includes the practices partners only met on-site despite not having been proposed as such).
-  Chapter 4 – Recommendations: This chapter is divided in two different parts. In its first part it can be found each partner improvement proposals to their own managing authority. In the second part, it is presented common recommendations to the cross-border cooperation programmes and policies resulting from the joint work developed by the partnership.
-  Chapter 5 – Joint messages for a sustainable economic recovery of EU cross-border areas based on a balanced valorisation of natural and cultural heritage as a driver of the economic activity: This last chapter is presented as an autonomous chapter, aiming at to be disseminate among the main European Union policy-makers with competences in the fields of cross-border cooperation, natural and cultural heritage and tourism, the main findings of the joint work of the project 8 border territories. These findings should be understood as bottom-up knowledge and experience transfer to those decision takers



aiming at to contribute to the effectiveness of the European Union policies and strategies.

One last note to explain this document has been written in two different moments: the first one, at the beginning of EPICAH extended period gathering the data needed to define and organize the interregional learning activities (the peer-reviews study visits); the second one, after those interregional activities gathering the conclusions of the exchanges and the recommendations and joint messages.



## 2. STATE OF PLAY OF THE POLICY INSTRUMENTS IMPLEMENTATION IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) was one among several fields impacted by COVID19 consequences and contingency measures, being particularly relevant the “re”-establishment of physical EU internal borders and prohibition or limitation (on most of the cases, in a unilateral way) imposed to the entrance to the different countries.

In fact, the re-establishment of the border controls due to the pandemic impacted directly on the “heart” of cross-border cooperation. In some European border it had contributed to the resurgence of ancient mistrusts between neighbours’ communities and in others had a direct impact on all those sectors (social and economic) which rely on cross-border workers (impacting also in the family’s income).

Formal and informal relations between neighbour countries had to be rethought and redefined, especially a moment when everybody (from public authorities to civil society organization) were focused on answer to their citizens health and care needs. Additionally, the option was at the beginning (with very few exceptions) to face the pandemic health and economic crisis with individual decisions resulting in a wide range of contingency strategies, policies, and measures. Often the measures taken were in direct conflict with the strategies of the neighbours.

At the European cross-border cooperation programmes level, the first impact was to “freeze” their implementation and, in a second moment, to slowly introduce virtual tools as main formula to continue cooperating.

Collaborative management of natural and cultural heritage had slowdown and cross-border tourism had completely stalled. As time went by a new tourist profile and a new demand for border regions emerged. Likewise, new challenges and risks were rise from the search for non-mass destinations.

Policy-makers and decision takers of the border regions were forced to face new scenarios and to learn from other practices and experiences.

At EPICAH’s level, the exchanges on the COVID impact on cross-border cooperation in general, on border territories and on border territories tourism activities started months before Interreg Europe 5<sup>th</sup> call (launch to promote inter-regional learning on COVID19 effects upon the different European Union policies, programmes and strategies) having as a result the position paper “Tourism Post-COVID in Europe”<sup>1</sup>. This document was shared with different European Commission and Europe Parliament representatives.

Since then, EPICAH partners continued to exchange on these issues to better know and understand how the project policy instruments were impacted by the pandemic (in what concerns to cross-border cultural and natural heritage management and valorization, and cross-border tourism), the main challenges faced, and the measures applied to try to overcome those constraints. It also tackles how the next generation of policy instruments are preparing the border region economic recovery and the role cross-border heritage and tourism will have in that context.

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<sup>1</sup>Available at:

[https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/tx\\_tevprojects/library/file\\_1590589030.pdf](https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1590589030.pdf)





## 2.1. Analysis of the situation and its evolution, establishing a comparative analysis by border

The synthesis of the main conclusions of the analysis of the impact and reaction to the pandemic context per policy instruments, during the current programming period is presented in the next points.

### 2.1.1. Policy Instrument 1: Cross-border Cooperation Programme Spain-Portugal (POCTEP) 2014-2021

The Spain-Portugal border is not only one of Europe's largest borders but also one of the more dynamic UE internal borders and these two characteristics made of it one of the most vulnerable borders to the pandemic impacts.

COVID19 contingency policy had imposed the total closure of the borders (with a few exceptions in what concerns to crossing places and crossing aims) almost eliminating the activity of cross-border workers and businesses which had huge impact on the border communities' economies (most of them based on these goods and works flows) and on the isolation of inland and rural territories (deepening the demographic crisis)<sup>2</sup>.

It had also a great impact on the institutional relationship between border authorities and governments as they had focused on finding answers for the need and problems generated by the pandemic at the internal level (cross-border collaborative answer were not a priority, at least at the beginning of 2020).

However, in the summer period (and following holiday periods) border regions had saw they tourism attractiveness increased, especially because they are rich natural heritage places where is possible to enjoy open fresh air (thus safe destinations) within tourists own countries but near "the abroad" that were supposed to be non-mass destinations. The gigantic increase of the demand faced during this period was not except from the problems of overcrowded destinations with the aggravating factor of that local authorities were unprepared for this phenomenon. There was no planning to uptake this opportunity in a sustainable way and the policies adopted to support the tourism sector were only focused on solving the financial end employment problems tourism SMEs faced during lockdowns.

Currently, investment in general and in the border territories in particular is still dampened by the uncertainty generated because of the pandemic negative impact on the economic development.

At the end, COVID19 had been able to demonstrate interdependency of the border economies of the neighbouring communities raising policy-makers awareness on the daily life of their own citizens. As a result, several border authorities and entities claimed for a "Recovery plan for the border areas" (to be funded by the cross-border cooperation programme).

The POCTEP programme implementation and results were also seriously impacted by COVID19 pandemic due to the "inoperability" of almost every project beneficiary the state of emergency/alert declared for a period of 3 months.

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<sup>2</sup> At the national level it should be highlighted that according to data from the second quarter of 2020, the year-on-year change in GDP per capita was -21.1% for Spain and -12.7% in Portugal, and all reports and forecasts point to a sharp decline in production, with the consequent negative effects on the labour market and the social situation of the population.



During this exceptional period, projects staff were in telework, public entities were closed, and legal deadlines were suspended. No tender or procurement procedures could be launched or concluded for the duration of its term. Only online reporting procedures were open.

After this period, the Managing Authority had decided the automatic extension of 3 months for the projects under development, allowing bigger extensions if dully justified.

Under the regulation (UE) 2020/558 of the European Parliament and Council of 23 of April of 2020, the programme had introduced some flexibility on the use of POCTEP funding, namely by approving the change of onsite activities/face-to-face events for other activities or online events with similar objectives.

Despite those measures it was very difficult for the beneficiaries to reach the projects expected results and outputs (and to spend the allocated budget).

On the other hand, the programme bodies had taken advantage of the extended use of the digital tools to make a closer follow-up of the projects by increasing their participation/attendance to the project online events and to intensify the communication on the projects tackling health, social assistance, and employment issues because of its relevance to face the pandemic impacts.

In general, both the programme bodies (especially the joint secretariat) and project beneficiaries had increased their digital skills and new methodologies were introduced in central issues of the project like management and coordination, communication, networking, interregional learning and capacity building.

### 2.1.2. Policy Instrument 2: Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

During 2020, the Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Program 2014-2020 has achieved positive results despite the criticalities linked to the COVID19 health emergency.

The impact of COVID-19 on the economy of the regions of the cooperation area (Sardinia, Liguria, Corsica, Alpes Maritimes, Var, and the coastal provinces of Tuscany territories) and in particular on the tourism as these are important and internationally recognized destinations.

According to the **“Report on tourism in Tuscany. The economic situation of 2020”** (*“Rapporto sul turismo in Toscana. La congiuntura 2020”*) prepared by IRPET, Tuscany Region, Information systems and services sector - Regional Statistics Office in July 2021, in Tuscany about 15% of businesses and employees belong to the “characteristic tourism” sectors. The Report evidenced that the collapse of tourism in Tuscany in 2020 was dramatic: attendance in official accommodation facilities registered-54.3%. Naturally the most penalized sector was the foreign segment (-76.5% attendance). In the PACA Region, where the tourism economy accounted for 10% of jobs and 13% of GDP, according to the data concerning the results of the summer tourist season presented by the Regional Tourism Committee Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur in November 2021, the recovery of tourist flows in 2021 compared to 2020 remained insufficient to reach the level of 2019: in the first 9 months internationals mark -40% compared to 2019.

For the 5 regions of the Programme, the good performance of domestic tourism in summer 2020 and summer 2021 was not, however, sufficient to compensate for the collapse in foreign presences, especially considering the higher average daily expenditure of foreign tourists compared to Italians.

As specified in the Summary of the Annual Implementation Report of 2020 of the Maritime Program (*“Sintesi della Relazione di Attuazione Annuale Anno 2020”*), in order to contain the negative



effects of this epidemiological emergency on CBC and on the implementation of the funded projects, the program had to adopt a series of extraordinary measures ("COVID" measures) aimed at minimizing that impact acting on 3 fronts:



#### Knowledge:

- ✓ An online "COVID Survey" aiming at to analyze in more depth the most urgent needs of the projects related to the COVID19 emergency was run. This survey main results are presented in Annex I.
- ✓ Continuous relations with the leader and beneficiaries were assured through the preparation of a calendar of online meetings to better understand the needs of the projects and give them a quick answer as possible.



#### Information:

- ✓ Creation of a "COVID19" section on the policy instrument website, constantly updated, where all the news and measures of the Programme relating to the Coronavirus emergency are entered, together with other useful documents produced by national and European institutions.
- ✓ Drafting of the document "COVID FAQ" which collects all the answers given by the Program to the beneficiaries following the various meetings and the online survey.
- ✓ Creation of an "SOS" section: Services, Opportunities, Support.
- ✓ Calls, opened by projects financed by the Maritime Program, to finance SMEs, training courses, etc. The Strengthening of the support of SMEs has been suggested in particular in the field of sustainable tourism and blue and green supply chains, with the aim of encouraging the maintenance of tourist services previously provided despite the changed framework of health security needs.



#### Action:

- ✓ Several proposals and documents have been developed. In particular, the lead partners were invited to present "*COVID oriented*" conversion plans.

As result of the "knowledge" actions, the policy instrument has implemented the following "COVID measures":



#### Administrative measures:

These measures consisted of:

1. Temporal exceptions to the half-yearly deadline for submitting the refund request.
2. Simplification in the reporting of expenses with lower administrative burdens for beneficiaries.
3. Changes to the program manuals for the implementation of COVID measures.



#### Reprogramming / conversion measures:

These measures included:


1. The possibility for all projects to submit a project conversion plan.
2. The approval of all the conversion plans presented by the projects<sup>3</sup>.
3. The conversion plans allowed:

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<sup>3</sup>A total of 77 project changes approved between July and September 2020.



- i. To modify the initial project in all cases where the new health situation hindered its implementation.
- ii. To introduce expenses for the acquisition of equipment to enhance smart working and devices to safeguard health safety and social distancing. Expenses to enhance the actions envisaged by the Programme in a digital sense (for example apps and ICT platforms to provide health information or to promote mobility) and in relation to health security (sustainable tourism and blue and green supply chains, in the port area, etc.).

 Measures to improve financial liquidity for projects:

These measures consisted of the immediate reimbursement, up to a maximum of 80%, of the amount of Reimbursement Applications (RA) presented whose expenses had been 100% verified by the controllers of first level. On these RA, the Managing Authority (MA) has carried out the checks required by law on the subject of social security contributions, anti-mafia and the verification of the presence of first level certificates. The reimbursement of the remaining 20% was paid following the completion of all the checks required by the operating rules of the policy instrument. Only after the conclusion of the checks and the total settlement of the RA these reimbursements were included in the request for payment to the Commission.

 Supporting measures for beneficiaries:

These measures included:

1. An ad hoc general seminar with the lead partners/beneficiaries to provide assistance with respect to the modification/revision measures that can be implemented in the COVID Plans<sup>4</sup>.
2. Additionally, 70 ad hoc meetings with each individual project to provide specific assistance on the conversion plans implemented between May and June 2020.

At the end of 2020, the results achieved through the implementation of these set measures were considerable. The Summary of the Annual Implementation Report of 2020 of the Maritime Program (*"Sintesi della Relazione di Attuazione Annuale Anno 2020"*), affirms that the Program funded a total of 119 projects (3 more than the previous year) involving 831 beneficiaries. The resources allocated to their financing amount to € 198.353.672,75€<sup>5</sup> and correspond almost to the overall financial endowment of the Programme<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding physical achievements, the program has made positive progress despite the health emergency:

- + The number of beneficiary companies and joint strategies to improve the competitiveness and innovation capacity of companies is considerable.
- + The population benefiting from flood protection measures has increased.
- + The level achieved in reference to the number of participants in joint local initiatives for employment and joint training activities has increased.

<sup>4</sup> This seminar count with over 80 participants.

<sup>5</sup> European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and National Contribution (NC).

<sup>6</sup> Corresponding to 99,35% to the overall financial endowment of the Programme. As regards the overall expenses incurred and declared by the beneficiaries, they represent 43.67% of the Program endowment, with a significant increase compared to the level of expenditure achieved in 2019 (+ 66.87%).



However, some output indicators still showing an achieved value equal to zero or achieved values very far from the forecasted by the projects. The non-progress of these indicators or the gaps recorded are primarily due to the fact that the projects that feed them should have started their activities in full during 2020, but due to the pandemic they have slowed down. The approved conversion plans and the enhanced monitoring will soon make it possible to recover all the accrued delays.

### 2.1.3. Policy Instrument 3: Regional Operational Programme of Region of Western Macedonia

The COVID-19 pandemic is considered as one of the most critical setbacks for Western Macedonia cross-border cooperation with Albania and North Macedonia in the past decades, impacting somehow the regions' economy and mobility, as well as access to emergency services between the three countries.

Even before the outbreak of the pandemic, the two border regions with Greece were already struggling with a plethora of unique regional obstacles. The border regions cited cross-border transport and connectivity infrastructures, as well as many bureaucratic hurdles for citizens and businesses, as the critical and strong obstacles that they face in their territories, during the last years. Citizens living in those border regions continue to encounter many difficulties in their daily lives, whether it be finding a job, accessing healthcare services, commuting every day or overcoming administrative problems. Similarly, businesses in all economy sectors face obstacles that hamper their growth and limit their potential.

Some of the first measures taken were the reinstatement of internal border controls and the denial of access to the territory of our neighbours, who, under normal circumstances, often cross the border for various reasons.

Regarding the economy of Western Macedonia, the big shortage of land workers, coming from the cross-bordering regions, was a big problem that was reflected on the raise of the vegetables' prices during the crisis.

Movements to the region for health and medical reasons in local hospitals were also zeroed or reduced.

Finally, most of the trade activities were clearly set-back and their financial results were limited, especially during the lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021.

Nobody knows whether after COVID-19 crisis, the situation will go back to how it was, or if we will enter, even in cross-border areas, a new era of contacts (interpersonal, intergovernmental, and multilevel relationships).

Two things have already changed forever in cross-border relations:

- + wider-ranging and more democratic cross-border meetings,
- + fast and wider networking.

General and quicker consensus are also built around major challenges, and the pandemic has clearly shown the need for stronger coordination between countries, particularly in border regions. Even after the expected end of the pandemic crisis it is important to draw great attention to the external borders of the region of Western Macedonia, while both, the difficulties and the challenges are still very big and where deeper analyses and additional very well-prepared actions are needed.



The two sectors of cross-border cultural and natural heritage were clear left behind from 2020 to 2021 end in the regional development agenda. Since the cultural-natural heritage exchanges were almost impossible to happen in person, almost all planned activities were cancelled.

However, decades of good neighbourly relations and constructive cross-border cooperation have also led to notable acts of solidarity. Western Macedonia cross-border neighbours that were more affected by the extremely high number of patients in need of intensive care were offered assistance in taking care of patients with greater needs. Along the borders, established cross-border structures coordinated crisis management and proved to be a valuable source of reliable information for people who were often confused by changing and inconsistent rules.

Cross-border region with Albania and North Macedonia is considered as a “special laboratory” due to the historical relations between the 3 countries. The pandemic crisis has revealed some cross-border interdependencies in cultural and natural heritage management and valorization. It has also shown that citizens, associations, elected representatives and diplomats are able to come up with solutions that recognise the rights of those living in "cross-border population hubs" to have public services and shared cross-border assets, ensuring support and cohesion. The challenges posed by the recovery and the various transitions will require more coordination between neighbouring states: more cross-border and European integration.

Tourism from the Western Macedonia’s cross-bordering regions has also specific characteristics, as the two regions are not in EU and in terms of economy are considered as poor. Practically, there are very few tourism activities between the regions and cannot considered as critical.

Due to the restrictive measures and the closed borders with Greece, the low and middle-income citizens did not choose, as usual, coastal or other summer vacations, thus positively affecting the domestic tourism industry, but causing losses in the tourist areas of Greece and mainly Northern Greece.

The number of road arrivals (crossings) from Northern Macedonia to Greece in 2020 decreased to about 500,000, or a decrease of 84.5%, from about 3 million in 2019, due to the pandemic and closed borders, according to data from the Association Institute Hellenic Tourism Enterprises (INSETE). To address the crisis, the Government of Northern Macedonia implemented various measures to support the economy, including the distribution of vouchers for domestic tourism for low-income individuals and households, the financial support of companies most affected by the pandemic, the increase wage costs for companies that were forced to close in order to keep the staff they employed etc.

On the other hand, the region of Western Macedonia placed in the specific area of the country and not bordering with, is coming of bigger interest to other visitors from the EU or worldwide.

The effects of the pandemic have dramatically changed the targeted tourists to visit the two cross-border prefectures of the region, that are considered mostly as winter tourist destination. During the wintertime of 2020-2021 all these areas were locked down and practically all tourism activities were cancelled. The enterprises related with the tourism sector had to fire their employees and were received special government grants to survive during the crisis.

When the region was hit by the pandemic like all other regions around the world, the overnight closing of normally open borders had serious consequences for the cross-border communities. The interdependencies revealed by the crisis require new policies: functional approach considering persons in their cross-border living areas; multi-level governance involving cross-border regions,



States and EU. The cross-border regions of Greece, Albania and North Macedonia were test cases of non-EU countries and an EU country integration.

Concerning the INTERREG programmes the Greek Managing Authority for cross-border programmes worked on making some rules and procedures less complicated and on reducing the implementation time, as this poses challenges to cross-border cooperation.

Local and regional authorities should be given more powers to address and to remove legal and administrative obstacles that burden cross-border cooperation in their regions, especially when crisis like the pandemic one, are suddenly appear to affect the regional economies.

Regarding the tourism sector there were no other measure taken to overcome the obstacles, as the lockdowns were the critical factor.

All projects funded by the Regional Operational program 2014-2020 of Western Macedonia Region, were strongly delayed in their implementation and adsorption from March 2020 and on.

The solutions given were to extend the deadlines of finalizing these projects, for those of them being implemented and also to extend the last calls of the programming period, as the public bodies that were responsible to apply in them need more time, due the situation caused by the pandemic crisis.

No special methodologies and solutions were adopted.

#### 2.1.4. Policy Instrument 4: Estonia-Latvia Programme 2021-2027

The lockdown in spring 2020 and the uncertain times that have followed, affected especially harshly the capital regions of Estonia (Tallinn) and Latvia (Riga), where the tourism industry was to large extent dependent on foreign visitors. Naturally, the tourism businesses also in the border regions of Estonia and Latvia have been suffering due to COVID, especially the establishments that had focused on serving larger tourism groups. However, the losses were moderate compared to the capital regions.

The lock-down in the spring of 2020 that halted the tourism sector was followed by a small boom of domestic tourism in the summer of that year that helped the tourism businesses of the border areas to recover to some extent. However, the period since autumn/2020 can be characterised in the tourism industry by adaptation to the everchanging situation and uncertainty due to the COVID rules and restrictions. In addition, customer behaviour and preferences have changed considerably since the spring of 2020.

The rules or focus of the Estonia-Latvia Programme 2014-2020 was not changed due to COVID pandemic. On one hand large majority of the funds of the policy instrument had been allocated by spring/2020. On the other hand, the financial need for support measures in the tourism sector in Estonia and Latvia was tens of times larger than the programme could have ever provided. Also, the alleviation measures against the sharp fall of the tourism industry had to be implemented rapidly, which would have been impossible according to the rules of the Estonia-Latvia Programme.

Nevertheless, both countries have implemented several financial support schemes since the spring of 2020 to support tourism businesses and compensate the losses. No special means have been provided for the border regions.

#### 2.1.5. Policy Instrument 5: European Territorial Cooperation Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020

COVID 19 brought, undoubtedly, difficult times to the Czech-Bavarian territory. This situation was all the sadder because it happened in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the "East" and "West"



borders at that time (spring-summer 2020). Instead, however, they experienced a situation alike the one experienced by former generations. Border territories looked at each other again from the lookout towers and the border was guarded by the police.

This situation further showed that the barriers between the Czech Republic and Bavaria still exist. People often talk about language barriers. But it seems that the communication barriers are even deeper at all levels of the public and state sphere. Neither the states nor the regions are used to coordinating their procedures in cross-border contexts, they do not have strong personal cross-border links with other responsible persons to consult specific steps operatively, but above all were able to perceive concrete decisions in a broader context. As an example, it is worth to mention the situation when education institutions and kindergartens were closed in the Czech Republic and many nurses must stay at home with their children. However, they do take care of patients not only in Czech hospitals but also in Bavarian ones. The German neighbours thus suddenly had to deal with a shortage of medical staff, although they did not make any decision to trigger such a situation.

Furthermore, the last two years explained clearly the importance of formal cross-border institutions or organizations for which coordination of cross-border cooperation is the main agenda. In crises situations they will be the ones in charge of continue that work, as most of the regional development bodies' institutions (including municipalities and regional authorities) had to focus on issues that were the most important (and cross-border cooperation were not seen as such). Thus, although many interesting online cross-border conferences and discussions have taken place, it is obvious that the cross-border cooperation itself rather became stagnant. Bavarian politicians from the border territories responded to the situation with a compilation of a list of priorities for recovery of the border regions and strengthening of cross-border links across diverse thematic fields (outside the cross-border Policy Instrument (PI)). However, this initiative remains at the stage of political debate so far.

The MA organized an interesting conference on this topic in November 2021. According to the presented contributions, it is clear that the cross-border cultural heritage "suffered" only to the extent that it suffered at the regional level. However, the fundamental problem occurred in the case of national parks and other environmental organizations. The level of their cross-border cooperation is unique and long-standing. However, at the time of border closure, it also threatened the course of routine work (e.g. some environmentally important places are normally maintained in relevance with their transport accessibility not according to borders, professional laboratories are commonly used on the other side of the border, "normal" sharing and transfer of laboratory samples or stray animals).

With regard to the impact of the pandemic on tourism in the border regions, two phenomena can be identified:

- + Of course, tourism has suffered greatly during the closure of borders or even restriction of movement for people at regional level. It will need a long time to recover from such a situation, because many entrepreneurs have had to close down (restaurants, guesthouses, etc.). Or, consequently, they have not been able to respond to the changing situation because of a major labour shortage at the border territory. Restaurant workers often commute and at the time of the outage, they accepted other jobs inland and never returned to the border areas.
- + On the contrary, in the summer season, when restrictions were relaxed, most people were afraid to travel to foreign countries. The crowds that used to go to the sea now preferred the top domestic destinations. Unfortunately, there are mainly national nature parks. Similarly, cross-border tourism was mostly oriented directly on the border of the neighbouring





country. Such tourism is mostly based on one-day trips, often at the time of the closure of restaurants, etc. Thus, those naturally highly-priced areas were so suddenly devastated by crowds of tourists who all came by cars. But there was no economic impact on the territory due to zero spending.

As far as PI management is concerned, the inability of the authorities to communicate online (with the target groups or even with each other) has proved to be crucial. Although the individual staff of the MA, the Secretariat, and the Czech National Body were very willing and tried to use any opportunity to communicate with the applicants, as part of the state administration they often had their hands tied. Public authorities in the Czech Republic and Bavaria cannot routinely use commonly freely accessible applications (like Google forms), and their complex structure did not help them to rapidly implement the principles of online communication. Therefore, for example, almost all cross-border events of regional partners took place through the Zoom application, the state administration selected the Webex application within the competition, with which other regional partners were not very familiar. Of course, the closure of public offices, alternating shifts of officials, and regular "home offices" also brought problems. These conditions are often complied with by the state administration even at a time when "other" regional actors are already functioning "normally".

However, this situation has already developed over the last year, and it seems that they are ready to communicate together flexibly and without any problems for the year 2022.

Also, the authorities responsible for the control of the implementation of projects did not seem to be able to answer quickly to the situation. It was probably due to the belief that the situation would not be repeated (which unfortunately was not confirmed). Thus, although project beneficiaries were allowed to extend project time-plans beyond the standard 36 months and some activities (necessarily face-to-face) did not always have to be implemented, the final assessment of project objectives and indicators remained equally rigorous and did not reflect sufficiently changes in implementation conditions.

#### 2.1.6. Policy Instrument 6: Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County

Satu Mare County, through the County Council, carries out the Program of non-reimbursable financing from public funds based on Law 350/2005 on the regime of financing from public funds allocated for non-profit activities of general interest, starting with 2017. Areas for which non-reimbursable financing from public funds is granted are: cultural, sports and youth activities. The contracting authority is Satu Mare County through the Satu Mare County Council, and the non-reimbursable financing budget is approved by the Decision of the Satu Mare County Council.

The programme previews the following categories of eligible applicants:

- + In the field of culture: any legal person without patrimonial purpose, having the headquarters / branch in Satu Mare County, which carries out its cultural program / project / action within Satu Mare County. The general purpose of the non-reimbursable financing is the capitalization of the cultural patrimony of Satu Mare County, the harmonious development of the cultural potential of the inhabitants of the county by engaging them in cultural and scientific activities. The areas of application of these grants are: shows, traditions, cultural days and scientific sessions; writing, editing and launching prints (books, magazines, monographs, albums, etc.); organization of fine arts exhibitions (painting, sculpture, photo art, etc.); identifying, preserving and promoting elements of tangible and intangible heritage; capitalizing on the



economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors in order to increase the quality of life of the inhabitants of Satu Mare County and other types of programs / projects / actions.

- + In the sports field
  - a. the private law sports clubs established within the Satu Mare County, constituted as legal persons without patrimonial purpose, holders of the sports identity certificate.
  - b. the county associations on the sports branch with the headquarters on the administrative territory of Satu Mare County.
- + For programs / projects / actions in the field of youth activity: non-governmental organizations of and for youth, according to the Youth Law no. 350/2006 (art. 11 and 12), with subsequent amendments and completions that carry out activities of and for youth, non-governmental organizations for and for youth with headquarters/branch in the administrative-territorial area of Satu Mare County and that carry out their program/project/action in the field of youth on the administrative-territorial area of Satu Mare County.

The annual program for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County is presented as follows:

- + in 2021 it included 900,000 lei, broken down by fields of activity as follows: 500,000 lei for culture, 300,000 lei for sports and 100,000 for youth.
- + in 2020 it included 1,500,000 lei, broken down by fields of activity as follows: 1,000,000 lei for culture; 500,000 lei for sports.
- + in 2019 it included 1,500,000 lei, broken down by fields of activity as follows: 1,000,000 lei for culture and 500,000 lei for sports.
- + in 2018 it included 1,800,000 lei, broken down by fields of activity as follows: 800,000 lei for culture, 500,000 lei for the celebration of the Centenary of the Great Union of Romania (1918-2018) and the War for the Unification of the Nation and 500,000 lei for sports.
- + in 2017 it included 1,700,000 lei, broken down by fields of activity as follows: 500,000 lei for sports and 1,200,000 lei for culture.

The conditions for granting funding and the specific evaluation criteria are those approved by Decisions of the Satu Mare County Council regarding the approval of specific Norms and documentation for the elaboration and presentation of proposals for cultural, sports and youth programs/projects/actions for granting non-reimbursable funding. The local budget of Satu Mare County, for each year, as well as the framework laws specify to each field of financing.

COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on society as a whole and still has a number of significant implications regarding the situation of non-reimbursable financing under law 350/2005. Nevertheless, in the context of the pandemic, locally, the county grant program was carried out in the same stages as in previous years regarding the preparation of specific rules for awarding grant contracts from the budget of Satu Mare County, selection of applications, verification of eligibility, evaluation of project proposals as well as the entire funding procedure.

The pandemic situation limited the number of activities that could be carried out, especially in terms of valorization through cultural events. The number of applications received for financing has decreased, as a consequence, and also funding which have been selected had to reorganize their activities or decrease the budget because some activities had to be limited in terms of participants or even reprogrammed or cancelled. The main lesson learned regards the flexibility of the beneficiaries in terms of re-scheduling/limited organization of events. In some cases the consequence of the state of emergency/alert imposed in the territory, determined the abandonment of the financed projects due to the impossibility of their realization (sports competitions, cultural events that were to



take place in arranged spaces and outdoors), respectively some of them could be carried out only in compliance with the regulations providing for health protection measures established by joint order of the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Health and Sports.

Also, the pandemic had put the tourism ecosystem under unprecedented pressure. As a result of travel and other restrictions, tourism has gradually ceased to operate in the first quarter of 2020 in the EU and worldwide.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, virtually all States have implemented restrictions on non-essential travel, which are often accompanied by the obligation for cross-border travellers to remain in quarantine. The EU's external borders have been closed to non-essential travel and many Member States have temporarily reintroduced internal border controls. This meant that suddenly, millions of European citizens could no longer travel for business, study, or leisure, many being separated from family and friends for months.

### 2.1.7. Policy Instrument 7: Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020

The COVID-19 epidemic that erupted in 2020 significantly affected the domestic service sector, including tourism and hospitality. The losses of commercial accommodation establishments exceeded HUF 257 billion compared to the same period of 2019, which means a decrease of 54%. In many countries around the world, including Hungary, the biggest victim of the crisis is the provision of metropolitan accommodation and catering facilities and attractions, especially in the capital, as well

The closing of the border between Slovakia and Hungary due to the pandemic created a lot of problems for our region. Labour mobility was and still is restricted or has an administrative burden. The most significant impacts are however experienced by families that live on both sides of the border and those who need to access services, for instance, shopping, schools, healthcare, and tourism. Many of the difficulties were caused by differences in legislation between the two neighbouring countries and not least by the extremely different approaches to the pandemic.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for further development of the regional risk management and intensify cross-border planning on issues such as labour market, civil society, and people-to-people activities. The pandemic situation limited the number of activities that could be carried out, especially in terms of valorization through cultural events.

On the other hand, cross-border activities came dramatically to a halt in the spring of 2020 as a result of measures adopted to limit the spread of the Coronavirus. The ability to travel, to work, socialise, do business and use services across borders is an integral part of daily life in border communities all across Slovakian-Hungarian border area.

This “extreme context” had impact on the policy instrument management. The main challenges to be faced are:

- + the reorganization of the project activities
- + the decrease the of the budget because some activities had to be limited in terms of participants or even reprogrammed or cancelled.

The main lesson learned regards the flexibility of the beneficiaries in terms of re-scheduling/limited organization of events.



## 2.1.8. Policy Instruments main conclusions

PI	Border	CBC		CB Heritage		Tourism in border regions		PI management		Projects implementation	
		Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied
POCTEP	Spain-Portugal	Reduction of the border activities, in general.	Local communities, cross-border workers, local and regional authorities had kept contact using virtual/ telematic tools.	Border regions were first choice tourism destinations by nationals (especially rich natural heritage places). Nevertheless, these regions were unprepared to face this sudden and huge increase of the demand.	No special attention was given to this problem as most of the local authorities were focused on solve the health issues.	Border regions were first choice tourism destinations by nationals (they were seen as safe destinations within their own countries or nearby their homes)	No planning was developed to uptake this opportunity. Support measures only targeted the financial problems of tourism SMEs during lockdowns	Several project activities and events were cancelled to the pandemic restrictions. Consequently, many projects were not able to spend their budget on time and many others did not reach their expected results and outputs	The projects implementation periods were administratively extended for the duration of the emergency/alert states.  Projects were allowed to propose alternative ways of implementing the project activities and/or to reach similar results/outputs/target groups.	Several project activities and events were cancelled or postponed due to the pandemic restrictions.	Projects had changed the way partners contact and meet with each other; partners digital competence were improved as digital tools were integrated as means to carry out some project activities.



PI	Border	CBC		CB Heritage		Tourism in border regions		PI management		Projects implementation	
		Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	Italy-France	Suspension of events and technical meetings.	Smart working.  Conversion plans.			Collapse of arrivals and permanencies , especially of foreigners.	Encouragement of domestic tourism.	Impossibility to work in presence (Governmental disposals for the public officials).  Necessity to adopt additional urgent measures necessary to guarantee the development of the projects.	Since March 2020, the members of the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat have been fulfilling their activities in teleworking mode.  Concretely putting in place the necessary measures to adapt to the crisis.	Suspension of tenders in progress.  Closure of entities active in projects.  Suspension of public works.	Conversion plans.
ROP of Region of Western	Greece – Albania – North Macedonia	Big shortage of land workers.	Grants for employment.	All cultural events were cancelled.	No solution applied.	Practically no tourism activities between the 3 cross bordering regions.	No solution applied.	Delays in implementation.	No solution applied.	Delays in implementation.	No solution applied.



PI	Border	CBC		CB Heritage		Tourism in border regions		PI management		Projects implementation	
		Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	Estonia – Latvia	Reintroduction of land border controls.  Restriction to people mobility.	Cooperation through virtual means, hybrid format.  Green pass, PCR test use to facilitate travel.	Museum closed for several month. culture events, festivals cancelled.	Several museums had virtual tours, exhibitions; online museum hours.	Spas, restaurants closed for several month, seminars/ events cancelled.	Government support programs for closed institutions, training programs (virtual tools, etc.).	No face-to-face meetings, trainings.	Some online events and consultation.	No face-to-face meetings, trainings; leftovers of training, travel events budgets. In some projects change of focus.	Prolongation of projects, project activity and budget changes, more online events, smaller events.
ETC Bavaria- Czech Republic 2014-2020	Czech Republic - Bavaria	Low level of attention to cross-border context.	Establishing a debate at the political level, increasing the work intensity of some cross-border entities (NGOs).	Mainly limiting the possibility of effective care for valuable natural areas close to the border.	None yet.	Overtourism in border areas in contrast to the closure of services (restaurants, guesthouses).	Better management of the movement of visitors, the government's effort to no longer close restaurant facilities completely.	Restrictions on communication (personal and online) – to each other, toward the target group, ...	Increased capacities of state administration, orientation to publicly available applications, more effective procedures for streamlining work from home.	Problems with the fulfilment of all planned activities and achieving all tent goals.	The main applied solution is to extend the projects until the maximum time (31.12.22).



PI	Border	CBC		CB Heritage		Tourism in border regions		PI management		Projects implementation	
		Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied	Main impact	Solution applied
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	Romania-Hungary	Limited number of cross-cultural events. organized physically	Online events where possible.	Limited number of beneficiaries that applied for funding.	A better promotion of the programme.	Decrease in the number of tourists.	Tourism goes more online.	No impact, procedures remained unchanged.		Some activities within the project did not meet the criteria to be organizer in pandemic conditions, constant changes in the rules to be applied to limit the pandemic.	Re-scheduled events, limiting the number of participants, decreases in the budget and in extreme cases cancelling events.
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	Slovakia-Hungary	Limited number of cross-cultural events organized physically.	Online events.	Limited number of beneficiaries that applied for funding.	Effective promotion.	Dramatic loss of tourists.	Online tourism contents.			Less effect of the policy instrument actions	Re-thinking, re-schedule.

Table 1 – Policy Instruments  
Source: Own elaboration.



## 2.2. Status of the preparation of the new generation of policy instruments and how each of them addresses the post-COVID situation in general, and in the sector of cultural and natural heritage enhancement as a driver of the economy in particular.

The recovery of the economies of the members States of the pandemic devastating effects is currently the main concern and the focus of the action of the UE and it is expected that lessons learned with COVID19 phenomenon, the opportunities it brought, and the increase of the border territories resilience and recovery are also absorbed and included in the next programming period (2021-2027) cross-border cooperation programmes.

The way the next generation of EPICAH policy instruments are doing, namely in what concerns to the cultural and natural heritage sector and tourism activity is presented in the next points.

### 2.2.1. Policy Instrument 1: Cross-border Cooperation Programme Spain-Portugal (POCTEP) 2021-2027

POCTEP 2021-2027 environmental assessment highlights the impact of the COVID19 in the sustainable development of the border regions in different aims: demographics (increase of isolation of rural areas); economy (highlighting the challenges faced by the current productive model and the need of increasing the resilience to face high unemployment and activity destruction phenomena); Human resources skills and qualifications (to answer the new forms of work and the new demands of the labour market) or social welfare (to face the increased inequalities, risk of poverty and exclusion).

Nevertheless, it clearly states that the programming period overcomes the pandemic recovery period and that the programme should not be “reduced” to a recovery and resilience plan for the border regions, therefore tackling other needs and constraints.

The new POCTEP (still under development) has 7 strategic priorities, presenting a wider scope of intervention:

1. To harness the potential of cooperation to consolidate the scientific and technological ecosystem, foster the creation of knowledge and business networks, promote digitalisation and improve the competitiveness of enterprises, especially SMEs and micro-SMEs.
2. To promote cooperation to maximise the profitability of the territory's endogenous resources and the development of key initiatives and sectors, progressing towards smart specialization.
3. To advance in the ecological transition and climate change adaptation in the cross-border area through cooperation as a tool for promoting the green economy and the blue economy.
4. To protect and preserve biodiversity in natural and rural areas and improve natural ecosystems and the urban environment in the cross-border area through cooperation.
5. To strengthen cooperation to address the demographic challenge in the border area by creating attractive living conditions based on access to the labour market, essential public services, mobility, and the application of principles of social inclusion, equal opportunities, and treatment.
6. To promote, through cross-border cooperation, the development of multi-sectoral strategies for integrated and sustainable development.
7. To overcome border obstacles by applying a transformative multi-level governance approach to cross-border cooperation.





Natural resources seem to be presented as a cross-cutting value to several priorities (smart specialization, research, digitalization, climate change & risk management, green economy, biodiversity & natural ecosystems).

Cultural heritage is one vector of the programme strategy for overcome the demographic challenge and the regional sustainable development resilience. Tourism is also considered as such but also as a sector that should be addressed in close cooperation and with the support with collaborative governance tools.

Natural and cultural heritage and tourism are presented as key elements of the development of cross-border multi-sectoral strategies. And tourism will be addressed aiming to achieve a “model of sustainable growth (...) based on improving the competitiveness and profitability of the industry, the natural and cultural values that distinguish the destinations, and the equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of tourism”<sup>7</sup>.

Small grants (small scale projects, with small budget, limited duration and to be developed under simplification rules) are included in POCTEP for the first time. They are introduced as “cooperation micro-initiatives” directly linked or promoters of the civil society participation which main objective should be to increase the communities’ capacities and knowledge and to promote the intercultural respect. Culture and sustainable tourism are themes that, also, can be tackled through small scale projects. Small scale projects will also fund people-to-people actions.

The set of potential beneficiaries of project tackling Natural and cultural heritage and tourism are similar to the eligible beneficiaries set of other thematic: public authorities, companies (including micro-SME’s), business associations, interested parties (like NGO and CSO) and other relevant stakeholders acting in the field of tourism and the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage in the cross-border area.

The first call for proposals is planned to be launched before the end of 2022.

### 2.2.2. Policy Instrument 2: Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

The architecture of policy instrument 2 in the new programming period (awaiting approval from the European Commission) is presented bellow. It is being developed on the basis of the progress of the discussion held within the task-force and described in the document “Priorities, strategic and specific objectives, examples of actions, types of projects: initial reflections” (*Priorità, obiettivi strategici e specifici, esempi di azioni, tipi di progetti: prime riflessioni*), published in December 2020.

The strategy focuses on five priorities:

1. An attractive cross-border area, marked by intelligent and sustainable modernization (strategic objective 1).
2. A resilient and resource efficient cross-border area (strategic objective 2).
3. A cross-border area physically and digitally connected (strategic objective 3).
4. A cross-border area efficient in social capital and which stands out for the quality of its human capital (strategic objective 4).
5. Better cross-border governance (Interreg strategic objective 1).

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<sup>7</sup>In *Cross-border cooperation programme Spain-Portugal (POCTEP) 2021-2027 (initial version of the programme*, page 32.



Strategic Objective 1 - An attractive cross-border area, marked by intelligent and sustainable modernization		Strategic Objective 2 - A resilient and resource efficient cross-border area			Strategic Objective 3 - A cross-border area physically and digitally connected	Strategic Objective 4 - A cross-border area efficient in social capital and which stands out for the quality of its human capital		Better cross-border governance		
Enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs including by productive investments	Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience	Promoting the transition to a circular economy	Enhancing nature protection and biodiversity, green infrastructure in particular in the urban environment, and reducing pollution	Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	Enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social innovation and infrastructure	Strengthen the role of culture and sustainable tourism in development economic, social inclusion and in social innovation	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders	Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions	Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions

Figure 1 – Policy instrument 2 architecture.

Source: Priorities, strategic and specific objectives, examples of actions, types of projects: initial reflections (December, 2020).

There are four transversal themes:

1. Tourism.
2. Digitization.
3. The insularity dimension represents at the same time the strong identity and richness of the programme and a significant obstacle to the development of the territories. Insularity will be considered a cross-cutting theme to all the strategic objectives that will be selected.
4. Industrial transition is an opportunity to expand sustainable and job-generating economic activity. There is considerable potential in global markets for low-carbon technologies and sustainable products and services. Similarly, the circular economy offers great potential for new businesses and jobs.

In particular, the program intends to respond to the crisis situations caused by the pandemic. To this end, the following strategies/actions are being discussed and evaluated:

- + make of tourism a transversal theme, to respond to the particular hardship that the pandemic has had for this economic sector.
- + make of digitization a transversal theme due to the potential it can represent in a context of new post-COVID normality.
- + develop DIGITAL TOURISM.
- + increase digital connectivity to encourage smart working.
- + improve the efficiency of the cross-border labour market.
- + develop actions to support the cultural offer, with the aim of contributing to improving the capacity of the public system of the area to conserve, develop and promote the cultural heritage, jointly experimenting with innovative management methods, based on the enhancement of the identity relationship between museums / places of culture and the reference community (e.g., Tuscany has implemented support actions for museums and ecomuseums of regional importance through the RACINE project).
- + promote the digitization of cultural heritage.
- + activate processes of territorial regeneration (to be understood as processes of "urban regeneration" applied to small centres spread in rural areas and along the coast) that see the joint participation of institutions, economic operators, the third sector and citizens, who are based on the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage and on cross-border territorial networks.
- + enhance tangible and intangible cultural heritage, also through innovative tools for the use of the heritage and the development of experiential tourism (use of ICT technologies - augmented reality, geolocation maps; thematic itineraries on the model of the cultural itineraries of the Council of Europe that would synergistic actions between coast and hinterland; development of ecomuseums, etc.).
- + develop joint cross-border campaigns on the theme of natural heritage (in particular maritime) and the pressures it faces.
- + promote sustainable tourism based on the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage and favouring innovation, seasonal adjustment and extension of stay periods through the networking of cross-border tourist destinations.
- + promote support for the competitiveness, sustainability, innovation, presence in the global value chains and industrial transition of SMEs:
  - ✓ support for the competitiveness, innovation and technology transfer of cross-border SMEs, in line with the smart specialization strategies of the territories.



- ✓ strengthen the competitiveness of cross-border SMEs for the management, development, innovative promotion of territories, and of tourism assets and related tourist and cultural services.

With regard to the last two actions, the sub-actions envisaged as of particular interest to EPICAH are presented in the following table:

Sub-action	Description
Support for the competitiveness, innovation, and technology transfer of cross-border SMEs, in line with the smart specialization strategies of the territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Creation of cross-border centres of competence (or cross-border networks of centres of competence) specialized in the priority chains defined by the programme.</li> <li>b. Cross-border collaborative initiatives of "open innovation", between SMEs, Start-ups, and other relevant innovation and research actors.</li> <li>c. Actions aimed at supporting the technological and digital transformation of production processes through joint innovation projects between MPMI and other innovation actors through the adoption of enabling technologies (such as technologies related to industry 4.0).</li> <li>d. Actions for the development and strengthening of synergies between companies, research centres and competitiveness poles and other actors.</li> <li>e. Support for the creation and/or strengthening of cross-border enterprises and networks of enterprises/clusters/innovation poles (and other relevant actors).</li> <li>f. Actions aimed at strengthening and developing internationalization, identifying new markets, diversifying them, developing and strengthening the presence of cross-border SMEs in global value chains, through the creation of cross-border partnerships (also for aggregative) between companies, clusters/business networks, innovation poles and other actors of cross-border innovation.</li> </ul>
Strengthen the competitiveness of cross-border SMEs for the management, development, innovative promotion of territories, and of tourism assets and related tourist and cultural services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Cross-border actions to promote an innovative tourist and cultural offer, based on strategic alliances between public and private actors (including the cultural and creative industry) that go, for example, in the direction of sustainability, innovation, digital and intelligent transformation, the quality of hospitality and new ways of managing tourist and travel flows.</li> <li>b. Actions to support and promote territories through the enhancement of natural, cultural, agricultural and forestry resources.</li> </ul>

Table 2 – Policy Instruments

Source: Priorities, strategic and specific objectives, examples of actions, types of projects: initial reflections (December, 2020).

### 2.2.3. Policy Instrument 3: Regional Operational Programme of Region of Western Macedonia

The decade 2021-2030 will be crucial for long-term development of the Region of Western Macedonia.

The current situation that has been affected (as worldwide) by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by the re-destabilization it causes, after ten years financial crisis (2010-2020), is combined in Western Macedonia with the delignitisation and the radical reshaping of the development over the last 60 years model. Delignitisation creates strict obligations, but also provides significant opportunities that are at least financially expressed by the Fair Transition Facility. At the same time, the new NSRF 2021-2027 is accompanied by the National Plan for Recovery and Sustainability, a financially equivalent mechanism, which focuses on supporting the European economy in the face of the crisis. In this context, the Regional Operational Programme Western Macedonia 2021-2027 is called to focus, contribute, specialize and finally implement a set of interventions that will shape the development landscape of the Region for the coming decades.

The effects of the pandemic on private investments in Western Macedonia pose significant obstacles to its strengthening competitiveness of the regional economy.



The health infrastructure provides for the expansion-upgrade of the building facilities of the health infrastructure (hospitals, health centres) of the Region and the supply of upgraded medical equipment with the main aim of readiness response to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, no other lessons learnt during this trouble period were included in the Programme.

On the contrary, policy instrument 3 embraces a specific objective including cross border cooperation actions:

- + [Specific objective 5ii]Strengthen the integrated and inclusive social, economic, and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, and security in areas other than urban.

This ROP is prepared and will address the EPICAH project policy topic.

The NSRF 2021-2027 identifies as areas for the implementation of Integrated Spatial Investments (IOs) areas with thematic and/or spatial continuity, the possibility of the utilization of resources and special local characteristics (cultural, local production and sustainable tourism activity) and with the possibility of synergy with other policy instruments (e.g., in Natura 2000 areas).

Actions will be financed according to the Business Plans that will be prepared.Indicatively they may concern:

- + the integrated development and protection of lake and river ecosystems.
- + the promotion and development of the Geopark of Grevena (Kozani).
- + the conversion of Prespa into a Green Ark.

No specific information about if it is being addressed as driver of the cross-border/regional economy and how the balance between economic activity and preservation of the heritage will be fostered are given in the program description.

The expected results from the implementation of actions under the Specific Objective2.1.1.3 (Create employment opportunities for educated graduates by exploiting comparative advantages of the cross-border area, preferably with the use of innovative tools and practices) of the policy instrument to support the main beneficiaries (the tourism sector SMEs and other tourism bodies) are expected to contribute to flagship projects of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy (EUSAIR) and specifically to the 4<sup>th</sup>pillar (Sustainable Tourism).

The flagship projects in which the positive contribution of the actions of the programme is expected are the following:

- + CULTOURAIR, which strengthens interregional and intra-regional synergies in order to capture cultural tourism in order to take advantage of similar business opportunities to increase the overall tourism size of the Region.

Flagship projects are considered projects that have a special contribution for:

- + The development of the network of sustainable tourism businesses and clusters green mapping for the AI region; supporting the development and market access for responsible and sustainable tourism destinations and micro/SME operations in the EUSAIR region.
- + expanding the tourist season to all-year round.
- + development of sustainable and thematic cultural routes/connecting cultural routes in EUSAIR.



Actions focusing on the Prespa cross-border area may be combined with projects of the cross-border programmes (ERDF and IPA) Greece-Albania 2021-2027 and Greece-Northern Macedonia 2021-2027. In this occasion the main beneficiaries are the Municipality of Prespes and the Prefecture of Florina.

#### 2.2.4. Policy Instrument 4: Estonia-Latvia Programme 2021-2027

The official preparation works of the 2021-2027 programme started in 2019 that included a number of stakeholders consultation actions. Among others, a special thematically targeted discussion took place with tourism experts in the summer of 2020. By November 2021, the programme has reached the public hearing process in Estonia and Latvia. The comments and feedback to the draft programme document are expected by 8 December 2021. The Managing Authority plans to submit the programme document to the European Commission during the first quarter of 2022, after it has been approved by the governments of Estonia and Latvia. The first call for proposals is planned to be launched during the second half of 2022.

Due to the rich cultural and natural heritage of the programme area, and successful development initiatives carried out in cooperation during the previous programming periods, also the 2021-2027 programme will have tourism development based on cultural and natural heritage as one of its priorities. The priority of the programme dedicated to tourism development is called “More accessible and sustainable cross-border tourism experience.”

The new programme will have smaller budget - 24 million euros - compared to 35 million euros for the period of 2014-2020. Similarly, the budget for the grants related to tourism will be smaller: a bit over 4 million euros (compared to nearly 7 million euros during the 2014-2020 period).

The programme recognises that due to the COVID19 pandemic crisis, both countries suffered significant decline in terms of domestic and foreign visitors, turnover and jobs in accommodation, catering and travel agencies and tour operators. Fortunately, the decline in overnight stays has been smaller in the regions outside capitals, including the core areas of the Estonia-Latvia programme. The sector is expected to gradually recover, and the programme is planning to contribute by developing new products and adding value to the already created tourism products built on natural and cultural heritage of the border areas. Estonian-Latvian joint cross-border tourism products (routes and sites) are mostly outside the capitals and bigger urban centres. Therefore, they will need joint efforts to sustain the regional jobs in the sector and raise the visibility and competitiveness of the tourism offer in the programme area.

In addition, the new programme has re-introduced the people-to-people actions under priority “More cooperating cross-border regions and development of joint services” (SO Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions) . Such priority was absent and greatly missed during the 2014-2020 period. This priority, which will focus on more local grassroots actions will help to address also the issues related to enhancement of cross-border cultural and natural heritage enhancement.

Last, but not least, the environmentally focused priority “Sustainable and resilient programme area” plans to address among other challenges “the decline in the quality of the ecosystem services, especially in terms of habitat provision and supporting cultural services, such as recreational benefits”. Hence, it will be possible to enhance the management of cultural and natural heritage also under this priority.



In the context of tourism development based on natural and cultural heritage, the next programme has a strong social dimension besides the economic viability of tourism products and services. Hence, the programme does not focus only on the economic benefits of enhancement of cultural and natural heritage.

Throughout the programme the concern about preservation of the cultural and especially natural heritage is stressed. Among other topics, the programme will focus on the protection of biodiversity, both in rural and urban areas, native species, and traditional landscapes.

The re-introduced priority “More cooperating cross-border regions and development of joint services” that will be part of the new programme will set the framework for strengthening cross-border people-to-people ties. Such small-scale actions have repeatedly proven to be an efficient tool for maintaining, restoring, and promoting local traditions, both tangible and intangible.

Sustainability has always been a horizontal feature of the project applications. Although the detailed implementation rules of the projects are not yet public, it can be assumed that sustainability and increasingly also circularity will be horizontal features also during the next programme period.

Naturally, the Estonia – Latvia Programme 2021-2027 will be implemented in a reality, which has been significantly altered by COVID19 during the last two years. Adaptation to COVID19 presence has become a daily routine of nearly all fields of life, including the focus areas of the next programme. Nevertheless, the programme does not lay a special focus on the most acute problems, which have been exposed due to the pandemic. For example, the difficulties related to distant learning at schools, scarcity of staff at the hospitals in case of health emergencies, etc. As such issues require more systematic and centrally managed responses, those will rather be addressed by national initiatives.

However, in the sector of cultural and natural heritage enhancement, the programme will support the tourism stakeholders in their efforts to adapt to the post-COVID situation, which can be characterised by the following main challenges and trends generated by this “new reality”:

- + increased interest towards (nature) tourism outside bigger cities.
- + more focus on the development of personalised products and services.
- + more focus on digital services.
- + more focus on the health safety and the credibility of the service provider.

### 2.2.5. Policy Instrument 5: European Territorial Cooperation Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020

On March 17, 2022, the European Commission approved the INTERREG Bavaria – Czech Republic 2021-2027 Programme. It is thus one of the first programs approved for the new grant period.

The expected key parameters of the programme are the following:

- + five priority axes that respond to 7 specific objectives.
- + the total budget of the programme is 99 million euros.
- + subsidy rate up to 80%.
- + Eligibility period is 2022-2029.

By June 2022, may be possible to have the programme completed and ready to start functioning. The first call could be launch around September 2022. If the expectation will be fulfilled, the first



successful award projects of Bavaria-Czech Republic programme 2021-2027 could be approved around March 2023.

The programme should be structured in 5 priorities:

1. Research and knowledge transfer.
2. Climate change adaptation and environmental protection.
3. Education.
4. Culture and sustainable tourism.
5. Better cooperation governance.

The program itself states in its documents that, based on experience from previous years, it is possible to acknowledge some of the lesson learned. These concern both the content of the program and its management.

Aim	Recommendations
Content of the program	Language – Regarding the content of the programme, language barriers continue to be a major challenge in the programme area. The programme wants to respond to this problem primarily by focusing on language education, especially on the forms that proved to be good practices within the pandemic situation (online education, non-formal adult, and labour market-oriented education, etc.)
	SMEs – Furthermore, the program is aware of the insufficient involvement of companies in the implementation of the project (SMEs’ formal involvement used to be allowed only the priorities dealing with research, innovation, or knowledge transfer). The programme sees the lack of interest of companies as a reason, but also complications with mandatory pre-financing. To make it possible to better engage SMEs in the future, the new program focuses more on intermediaries and multipliers.
	Tourism – From our regional expert point of view, we perceive the impact of the pandemic on the content of the program in the issue of tourism, which was neglected in the last programme due to its excessive focus on the economic context. However, in our opinion, these connections are rather desirable in the given period, because the economic impact of the pandemic on the border areas is considerable.
	People-to-people actions – Furthermore, from our point of view, the programme responds appropriately to the weakening of personal ties and the impossibility of cross-border (but also cross-regional) personal meetings with an emphasis on people-to-people activities. Applicants can now focus on them not only in the framework of the so-called small funds but also in the framework of classic "large" cross-border projects.
Management of the program	Electronic system and communication - The program learned lessons during the last period in the case of the functional setting of the electronic system (for submitting applications, monitoring of the projects, including data exchange). During the last programme implementation, some problems were caused by the electronic system (especially in the first half of the programming period). MA would like to avoid such a situation this time, especially when taking into account the fact that during the pandemic, electronic communication was the only possible one. For this reason, it also places greater emphasis on the electronic submission of all project monitoring reports. An ideal technical environment has not been created for this in the current period. Therefore, in the beginning, the programme wants to consistently focus on capacity building (how to use the new system) and on more effective communication in general. The new concept of the main website, which will be newly dealing more with the presentation of good practices, is also perceived as very helpful.
	Thematic calls - The program plans this measure to better target funds in the thematic areas currently needed for the territory. Anyway, this measure is planned exclusively for Priority 1 (Science, Research, Knowledge Transfer).
	Specifics of smaller applicants and simplification of the reporting process – From our point of view, the complexity of the reporting process proved to be crucial, especially for smaller applicants during the pandemic. The current monitoring system in the Czech Republic is very detailed focused and requires a large administrative capacity, which is unfortunately mostly missing in the case of small organizations. To support, the programme emphasizes the so-called small-scale funds. These projects are more targeted, shorter-term, with smaller budgets, and focused on people-to-people events. This makes them more acceptable to smaller applicants who can thus respond to their current problems operationally (e.g., COVID19).

Table 3 – Policy instrument 5 lessons learned

Source: Own elaboration





In the previous programming period, the issue of natural and cultural heritage was taken into account within one priority. Emphasis was placed on nature protection and biodiversity. It was also possible to pay attention to the enhancement and presentation of common cultural or natural heritage.

The new programme creates a special priority for natural heritage, which is perceived as the main prerequisite for further development of the area (priority 2: adaptation to climate change and environmental protection). The previous emphasis on the appreciation of natural heritage, its presentation, and popularization is suppressed. Priority is given to climate change management, even in urban environments, instead of pure species protection. Very important topics are the destruction of forest areas in the Czech-Bavarian bark beetle border (due to the long-term preference of spruce as the main planted tree). Water and its retention in the landscape is a further important topic.

The connection between the protection of naturally valuable areas and species with economic benefits for the territory could anyway be found. Above all, it is a fact that caring for a landscape that is effectively resistant to natural disasters is less economically demanding. Furthermore, effective care and nature protection contribute to improving the quality of life of local people, and thus brings economic benefits (it contributes to reducing demographic change, etc.)

The topic of culture has its priority in the new programme, together with tourism, which is now a separate theme for the programme (priority 4: Culture and sustainable tourism). In a way, the natural heritage is also mentioned there (e.g., development of trails and cycle paths in areas suitable for nature tourism). The main topics in this priority are the expansion and interconnection of tourism products at the border, joint marketing and coordination, creation of exhibitions, etc. Emphasis is also placed on smart solutions for tourist mobility.

A phenomenon that makes the Czech-Bavarian programme exceptional is the emphasis on people-to-people actions (priority 5: better cooperation governance and better cooperation governance). These projects traditionally take into account the themes of cultural and natural heritage, and now also formally tourism. In the past, these actions were implemented mainly within the so-called Disposition Funds (small projects). However, the new programme also allows applying for these activities in large projects.

Although cooperation with small and medium-sized enterprises is an important topic for the program, in all three of the above-mentioned priorities they can appear only as a knowledge expert, lecturers, participants in discussions, etc. They cannot be the project partners or even play the role of the target group of individual activities.

#### 2.1.6. Policy Instrument 6: Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County

Policy instrument 6 is an annual programme therefore more flexible and open to the inclusions of new needs and lessons learned to better answer to the territory needs. In the particular case of the pandemic, the programme is aware of:

- + the importance of ensuring the openness and transparency of the funding process.
- + the importance of digitizing procedures (in as many stages as possible) in the grant process.
- + the need of finding new ways of interaction between citizens and public institutions.
- + the need of strengthen the responsibility of public authorities.



- + the need of specialization and professionalization of public services in this field.
- + the need to assure adequate and prompt information of applicants on any changes in the conduct of the funding procedure.
- + the reasons for the decisions taken by the administration should be clear, evidence-based where necessary and explained in documents by reference to the particular context and circumstances of the decision.

From the perspective of the beneficiaries of the non-reimbursable financing, the imposed restrictions generated a series of inconveniences which are manifested by the following aspects:

- + uncertainty about the date or even the possibility of organizing the events.
- + additional expenditure relating to health safety procedures.
- + low number of addressability (of the public, of the participants) of the projects/actions.

The pandemic offers citizens an opportunity to enjoy the rich diversity of culture and nature in their own country and to discover new experiences throughout the year. Many regions and cities rely heavily on cultural tourism.

Technology has contributed to the reinvention of cultural tourism during this pandemic by opening up new opportunities in terms of creating innovative and local recreational and business tourism offerings. New opportunities arise to discover naturally and culturally hidden or forgotten treasures closer to home and to taste locally made products.

Tourism can benefit from the digital transition, offering new ways to manage travel and tourist flows, opportunities, and more options, as well as more efficient use of limited resources.

### 2.1.7. Policy Instrument 7: Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020

The new programming period policy instrument is still in development. It is previewed to be structured in 7 different priorities. Under the “More Social and Inclusive Europe” specific objective (enhancing of the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation) it is included the following actions:

- + preservation of the local heritage:
 

Under the influence of processes such as globalization, modernization and urbanisation rural municipalities see their authenticity, the identity, the traditions of places becoming undermined making them less capable to work on the preservation of their local identity. This action enables to small urban areas and rural municipalities to sustain and strengthen their local identities.

This is mainly carried out in the form of activities concerning place making activities; thereby strongly linking local identity to place identity. The action contributes to the improvement of the life-quality and preservation of local values and traditions on small urban areas and rural municipalities. The action supports among others cross-border initiatives that:

  - ✓ valorise cultural, historical, and religious heritage sites ensuring its sustainable utilization for community-building, education or cultural purposes increasing the life-quality of the local community.
  - ✓ promote “smart and competitive villages” in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths and opportunities.
- + complex development of tourism destinations:



this action is expected to enhance the overall sustainability and competitiveness of the regions' tourism, by providing integrated, interlinked, harmonised touristic offers (e.g., thematic routes, tourist packages etc.) The action is primarily aimed to support small scale eco-, green-, thematic- and MICE (Meetings, incentives, conferencing, exhibitions) tourism which involves visiting natural areas that minimize the environmental impact, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education. The complex tourism experience with supplementary services and easy-to-access digitalized information is expected to contribute to the extension of stay in the region. Moreover, with an integrated approach via Territorial Action Plans built on cooperation among already existing individual developments can support the overall sustainability of recent years' touristic projects.

From the perspective of the beneficiaries of the non-reimbursable financing, the imposed restrictions generated a series of inconveniences which are manifested by the following aspects:

- + uncertainty about the date or even the possibility of organizing the events.
- + additional expenditure relating to health safety procedures.
- + low number of addressability (of the public, of the participants) of the projects/actions.

The COVID19 pandemic has impacted the demand for city breaks as tourists now seek destinations away from crowds and urban hotspots. City breaks were globally the third most popular holiday type in 2019, among respondents but their choices are expected to shift to prioritize green, outdoor spaces for leisure.

It cannot be understated that the role of technology in travel will continue to grow in importance during 2022 and beyond. From digital vaccine passports to real-time travel notifications, technology solutions will play a pivotal role in keeping the public informed and providing guidance with all travel decisions.

Travelers will be seeking out hidden gems, dream destinations, and opportunities for nature-focused activities such as hiking, photography, or kayaking.

Travel requirements, health and cleaning protocols, safety measures, and sustainability will remain continuous topics in future tourism.



### 3. GOOD PRACTICES ON THE INCREASE OF THE RESILIENCE OF CROSS-BORDER AREAS

COVID19 measures such as border closures, restrictions to transnational travels, social distance, limitation of attendees in a close-space and health measures have had severe impact to the world economy in general, but to tourism sector especially.

This section presents the tools, practices, solutions, and contingency measures implemented in EPICAH partners policy instrument regions, which helped the sector to adapt with the situation generated by the pandemic in 2020-2021.

Several excellent measures have been worked out in different European border areas to respond to the new situation and challenges the natural and cultural heritage and in the tourism sector, and which also could be transferred to other border regions. There are good practices initiated by cross-border programmes (management authorities and JTS), by regional cross-border cooperation institutions or at single project level, while many of those importantly emphasise digital solutions.

The collected good practices will promote capitalization of the successful experiences on cross-border heritage and tourism management and support the border territories recovery in post-COVID era.

#### 3.1. Programmelevel-initiated practices

##### 3.1.1 Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme: Conversation plans

One of the best cases by programme level it was considered the work done by Italy-France Maritime Programme at early times of pandemic in March 2020 (case presented by ASEV – *Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa*). The Program decided to give concrete support to its beneficiaries already in the beginning of COVID pandemic (that is to say, in the spring of 2020). The Interreg project leaders were asked to fill in an online survey where it was analysed the most urgent needs of the projects due to the pandemic. After that the Managing Authority invited the projects to draw up a "Conversion Plan". The Steering Committees of projects analysed then each component of their project and decided whether activities (a) can be kept intact; (b) need to be adjusted because of the pandemic; (c) need to be replaced. Project Steering Committee then drew up the conversion plan proposing the revision/adaptation of the related work plan.

There were 87 conversion plans approved, which allowed to modify the initial project, to introduce expenses for the digital work and devices for better health security and accomplishment of the social distancing measures.

Conversion plans allowed the project to request several changes to their projects in a single moment in order to reconvert their activities, adapting them to the contingencies raised by the COVID19 emergency and post-emergency limitations.

Through conversion plans, the projects had the opportunity to equip themselves to be able to move forward with their commitments and to make a contribution to health and economic needs. Some projects have been extended, others have reconverted part of their activities in a "smart" key, others have moved to make a concrete contribution to the emergency.



### 3.1.2. Estonia-Latvia Programme: Enforced digital marketing of the outdoor tourism attractions

Starting from spring 2020 Estonia-Latvia Programme Joint Secretariat (JS) made several efforts to enforce digital marketing of the outdoor tourism attractions based on natural and cultural heritage as people started to look for travel options outdoors, as indoor activities (e.g., spas, water parks, cinemas, etc.) were either closed or had restricted access, and people were in general more cautious on gatherings.

The practice of JS focused on making maximum use of the Facebook profile of the Estonia-Latvia Programme<sup>8</sup> for promoting the 7 joint tourism routes and products, which had been developed with the programme funding (e.g., coastal hiking, green railways, military heritage, among others).

That Facebook profile had approximately 2.500 followers in spring 2020 increasing to over 3.100 followers in December 2021. Since spring 2020 the JS has promoted the seven tourism products listed above in 33 posts, also some videos have been created together with national partners.

The same materials were used for promotional works of the cross-border nature trails also by the other 3 CBC programmes in the Baltic Sea region, thus the publicity effect was multiplied.

The second great example of joint promotion took place in July 2021, when the JS compiled and promoted, also on Facebook, a “Summer holiday package” based on the abovementioned tourism products and routes developed with the support of the policy instrument. In addition, the JS promoted the use of hashtag #EstLatTourism and since summer 2021 also the hashtag #estlatonholidays.

The practice supported overall digitalisation of the marketing materials and visibility of the joint tourism products in social media and in Estonia and Latvia in general.

As the practice does not require significant financial or human resources, it can be easily replicated by other programmes. Besides, it helps to sustain the tie between the projects and the programmes after the end of projects, which is mutually beneficial.

## 3.2. Good practices of border region authorities and associations

### 3.2.1. Saint James Way: Eixo Atlántico del Noroeste Peninsular

Saint James Way, the most significant cross-border/transnational tourism product based on the natural and cultural heritage of the Galicia-Northern Portugal region, witnessed the loss of several jobs, SMEs and development opportunities for rural and border areas due to COVID19 restriction.

The Galician Government as “manager” of the Saint James Way took several support measures (and funded them) to reactivate this tourism product and assure to the visitors that the territory and the tourism experience are safe. Some examples of those measures are:

- + the programme “safe Hostels” (a label created to certify the implementation of specific COVID safety measures in Saint James Way accommodation units).

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<sup>8</sup>[www.facebook.com/estlat](http://www.facebook.com/estlat)



- + An especial system to allow digital pilgrims' to have access to the "Compostela" (the formal certification of having done at least 100km of the Way).
- + An online booking system for the beds available along the paths (allowing pilgrims to make informed decisions on where to stay and how to avoid "crowded" places).
- + The extension of the Holy Year (*Xacobeo*) to 2022 (aiming at to enlarge the most important season of the pilgrimage to *Santiago de Compostela*, both for pilgrims and business).

Most of the measures taken were mandatory to tourism agents with the objective of making of the Saint James paths, safe tourism products. In addition, more than 42 million euros of NEXT Generation funds will be invested in the next years in the preservation and restoration of the natural and cultural heritage of the paths in Galicia.

It was a good example of cooperation between all the relevant stakeholders as pilgrims were almost the only person that could cross the different Spanish regions during the mobility restrictions period.

### 3.2.2. Tokaj Wine Region: Slovakia-Hungary border region

Tokaj wine region has suffered a lot, as during COVID pandemic wine tasting was not possible because of social distancing regulations. Therefore, the most important event of wine producers (the wine tasting) was all cancelled.

Looking for solutions, the companies Taste Hungary and Tokaj Guide, managed to bring Tokaj wine experience into homes all around the world with the Zoom as virtual tastings.

Virtual tasting is a great way to introducing new ideas, flavours, and stories about Tokaj culinary culture. Virtual tasting is an opportunity for an online team-building session with colleagues, or to connect with wine-loving friends.

Taste Hungary and Tokaj Guide can supply wines to residents in Hungary, most EU countries, and many of the US states. Each tasting session is customized, with various tasting themes (and wine styles) to choose from.

Online wine-tasting events remained popular even after the COVID19 rules were lifted. More and more companies are choosing the online tasting experience. Of course, moving wine tastings to the digital space is no substitute for an onsite experience, but it is a great way for anyone to check in securely for a tasting, from anywhere. Thus, it is also making it possible for not only groups of friends and colleagues to taste together, but also to lonely people to have a communitarian experience from their own home. This allows to create an online community which hopefully will visit the wine region together after the pandemic.

Digital tools and content are a vital source of information for vacationists organizing their next holiday or creating a destination wish list.

### 3.2.3. Eixo Atlántico: "Author's Tourism" concept

Based on EPICAH project exchanges Eixo Atlántico is developing the "Author's Tourism" concept and testing its implementation at the border regions. This concept is already being used by different tourism agents as a marketing label aiming at differentiating their portfolio from the products of their competitors.

The preliminary studies concluded this tourism modality can be defined as a tourism offer that is designed for a specific guest/visitor according to their profile but "prepared" without the



intervention of the buyer (differing from tailor-made tourism). "Author's Tourism" responds to different challenges: how to attract visitors and positioning the destination in the global market; how to assure tourism flows are sustainable (avoiding seasonality and mass tourism) or how to assure a relevant tourism experience even in pandemic times.

Eixo will launch in the next programming period pilot experiences, which will enable border territories to include this product in their portfolio, with a higher value.

This concept, even in its earliest stage, can be presented as a good practice as it is an innovative process launched to face the impact of the pandemic contention measures in the tourism activity at the border regions, sustainably reactivating tourism.

#### 3.2.4. Centre Bavaria Bohemia (CeBB)

CeBB operates in the Czech-Bavarian border territory and has very well succeeded in the role of maintaining cross-border coordinator in the COVID and post-COVID period. CeBB is based in the Bavaria, but its members are also Czech public bodies (municipalities, local and regional authorities). A long-term established network of partners and target groups, as well as the ability of the Centre to function in a virtual space proved to be crucial in the pandemic period.

The original "house" for organizing of cultural events with a cross-border dimension and the tourist information centre has quickly become a coordination and innovation platform that is able to address key topics, discuss and coordinate active people and initiative virtually.

Some of their traditional events have moved online during COVID times, for example, the "Week of the Neighbours", which is aimed to present the diversity and richness of the cultural life of the neighbouring regions was "transformed" into a virtual platform, where Czech participants could discuss online with German colleagues who participated directly at the venues. Cultural concerts or dance performances were broadcast on screens in open spaces on the other side of border, virtual tours of individual places were organized. This way, the common Czech-Bavarian culture and debate was maintained at a time when the borders were closed.

"Border Academy" is a new initiative that organizes cross-border targeted meetings (virtual and of offline) and communication of experts on specific topics ("labs") to seek solutions to common problems or to support the potentials of the territory. Coordination cultural point is another initiative, which gives an overview of cultural actors from both sides of the border, cross-border internships, information on the possibility of funding. This role became very important in the time when people were not able to meet and share know-how in the "natural" way.

#### 3.2.5. Satu Mare StreetMusic Festival and the Local and traditional products Fair

In 2020, due to the pandemic the Satu Mare Street Music Festival was cancelled. The solution was made by the organisers, together with local authorities that the street performances could be watched freely by passers-by, respecting the recommended distance. Access to some locations (inner courtyards) was possible after 21h00 only with a vaccination certificate or a negative test, according to the regulations in force. Starting from 2021, the advertising of the event was extended in the WizzAir system, where the event and the city were promoted as a city break destination.

The aim was to make Satu Mare more attractive both for tourists from the country and for those from abroad.



### 3.3. Cross border heritage tourism project level improvements

#### 3.3.1. Interreg Italy-France Maritime Program project "Intense"

Motivated by COVID pandemic restrictions, the "Intense" project took initiative to develop systems to promote local slow tourism, and which was tested in the Tuscan coast. The online Labs have been organized for the co-design of cycle tourism packages, suitable for tourists from the same region or from neighbouring regions.

As basis of the success of this initiative, several stakeholders got involved - specialists of relevant municipalities, small local tour-operators (TO) specialized in cycle tourism and bike friendly accommodation facilities, touristic guides, sports tourism associations. As a result, 6 tourist packages have been developed for different targets (couples, families, small groups) and for different types of cycle tourists (slow tourists, sport cycle tourists). The packages are linked to local pieces of the cross-border cycle path developed by the "Intense" project.

This online co-planning methodology has potential to be transferred to other regions as a good example of networking and involvement of entrepreneurs, also of using online and ICT tools related to slow tourism development (cycling, trekking, etc.). The practices respond to widespread needs as how to use digital tools to help tourism restart, how to develop slow, sustainable tourism linked to the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage, with high potential for seasonal adjustment.

#### 3.3.2. Intelligent Cross-Border Accelerator (iCBA): the Greece-North Macedonia cross-border area

The Greece-North Macedonia cross-border area has a significant knowledge capital, but limited business activities by young people regarding tourism, environment, culture, and other sectors are there, especially during the COVID19 pandemic that the borders were closed for many months.

The iCBA project's main objective was to provide entrepreneurial training and mentoring, so as to help people from the cross-border area into creating their own start-up companies through expert laboratories and webinars, which can allow them to start their own businesses or find employment in existing businesses more easily. The main target groups were aspiring entrepreneurs with priority to the sectors of tourism, culture, agrofood and ICT.

This practice is considered as a good one in (post) COVID19 context since it was implemented from 2020 to 2021 (remotely, hybrid and with physical presence) and managed to prepare, during the pandemic, a number of young entrepreneurs to start-up and support the border territories local economies (a number of them in tourism and culture sectors).

Almost 30 analytical investment plans created in collaboration between new business idea owners and mature start-ups or high-level experts will search for funding the next years. A sectoral study report of the ICT-enabled sectors in the cross-border area was also prepared in order to identify the most beneficial moves for new start-ups, a useful reference for cross-border policy development.

This practice is potentially interesting for other regions to learn from (in post-pandemic context) as a well organised and supported Accelerator for start-ups is considered a very good tool to support not only tourism and culture sectors, but also other cross-border financial sectors. Young entrepreneurs





and young people in general in the cross-border areas need to be guided in entrepreneurship, to further trained in many aspects to become active and innovative as possible.



## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of the individual analysis of the policy instruments addressed by EPICAH project, provided in the previous chapters, it was possible to stress out a set of recommendations for each one of them. Nevertheless, the exchange made by the partners had allowed to discuss also some recommendations that are common to all of them.

Considering that statistics and in deep research on this subject are almost inexistent, the recommendations are focused not only on what was done to overcome the pandemic but also on what was postponed and how the effect will be addressed in the future.

### 4.1 By Policy Instrument

The recommendations on the management and governance of the PI both at the programmes and at projects levels were considered aiming at helping to define how (through which measures and actions) the PI can support border areas to be drivers of economic development through the valorisation of their natural and cultural heritage also in post-pandemic period.

#### 4.1.1. Policy Instrument 1: Cross-border Cooperation Programme Spain-Portugal (POCTEP) 2014-2021

POCTEP21-27 was under public consultation until last 21<sup>st</sup> of January and some of the recommendations included in this chapter were also reported to this policy instrument managing authorities by Eixo Atlántico and AIMRD within that procedure.

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Lack of digital competences of tourism actors/stakeholders</li> <li>+ Lack of knowledge on the costumer behaviour and needs of tourism actors/stakeholders</li> <li>+ Support the tourism products added-value creation and competitiveness development</li> </ul>	Implementation of new projects	<p>Support of new types of projects aiming at overcoming the criticalities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Supporting the creation of unique narratives in the creation of innovative tourism experiences and products</li> <li>+ Supporting the creation of digital experience/online events, based on new business models that integrates the lessons learned due to the pandemic (e.g.: create a virtual portfolio as communication and driver of future onsite visits/experiences).</li> <li>+ Supporting the development of new digital competences (e.g.: how to take gastronomy pictures; how to base the tourism experience offered in a unique story telling) .</li> </ul> <p>Note that despite the importance of the generic digital competences, it is crucial to develop digital competences in specific field or for specific activities like tourism.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Acknowledgment of the lessons learned and opportunities created by the pandemic for cross-border tourism as such</li> </ul>	Implementation of new projects	<p>The 21-27 programme includes tourism as a specific priority. Nevertheless, its current version is focused mainly on the “traditional” typologies of projects.</p> <p>As states in the “handbook for tourism projects” it will be key to include actions to specifically target the impact of COVID19 in the tourism sector of border regions, to prepare the sector for extraordinary phenomena (crisis management), to support governance models for cross-border tourism/cross-border destinations and to develop and implement tourism intelligence models and smart tourism systems.</p> <p>On the other hand, cross-border territories had been highly demanded destinations in pandemic times (because they are safe, natural and not massified destination) open new opportunities for</p>



Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
		cross-border tourism products (that are not addressed by the current text of the programme as such). Note that the programme text clear state that its action will surpass the post-pandemic recovery period.
+ Maintenance of last programming period bureaucratic and administrative requirements	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	The policy instrument should be a supporting tool for the recovery and resilience increase of the border regions and it still kept the pre-COVID requirements concerning reporting. Following the example of other Intereg A programmes, it seems important to use the set of simplification measures the European Commission introduced in the current programming period allowing beneficiaries to focus their attention, invest and time on actions instead of in the reporting procedures. No less important is to ensure that the beneficiaries' cash flow is not critically impacted by their active participation in the project or by their timely completion of their tasks for the implementation of the project.
+ Smarter usage of the small project grants	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	Despite the introduction of small project grants in the 21-27 policy instrument, it is previewed to be applied only to territorial approaches. It would be of relevance also to allow exploring all its potential regarding testing solutions or developing pilot actions. They can be addressed as pre-test of solutions to be implemented in a wider scale through standard projects or as pilots for the implementation resulting from the strategies, activities and/or opportunities/needs emerging from standard projects.
+ Need for a closer support from the policy instrument JS	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	COVID19 pandemic had introduced digital tools as means of communication used by the policy instrument bodies to support and follow up the programme project and beneficiaries and they should continue to be used in the future to keep and improve this closer support. Webinars on the programme tools, objectives, results, and expectations are useful to keep beneficiaries involved and to assure their actions are in line with the programme approval and expectations. COVID19 pandemic also proved this closer relationship and follow-up of the projects are key for a smarter usage of the policy instrument funds and for more transparent and efficient amendment/modification/adaptation processes of the approved projects.

Table 4 – Policy instrument 1 specific recommendation

Source: Own elaboration

#### 4.1.2. Policy Instrument 2: Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
+ Fragility of tourism enterprises in the cooperation area, due to their micro size, low digital maturity, strong dependence on international tourism	Implementation of new projects	New projects aimed at strengthening the "resilience" of the tourism supply chain (for example, through the construction and promotion of new "health tourism products": develop "physical and mental detox" activities in the CB areas that help improve physical and mental health, primarily aimed at local and domestic tourist markets).
+ Fragility of companies managing the cultural and	Implementation of new projects	New projects that strengthen the "resilience" of the supply chain that manages the cultural and natural heritage (for example, with projects for the development of hybrid experiences of fruition of the cross-border cultural and natural heritage).



Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
natural heritage of the cooperation area		
+ Absence of an ecosystem between tourism chains, cultural chains, creative chains, natural & cultural heritage	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	Promote an integrated governance of the poles related to tourism, natural and cultural heritage, etc. (for example: strategic projects across the poles, mechanisms of dialogue and comparison between the poles for the capitalization of their respective flagship projects, etc.).
+ Difficulties in carrying out supra-regional and cross-border actions (common events, common workshops, and labs, etc.)	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	Development of structures (and digital tools to support) for the realization of hybrid cross-border events/workshop/lab, made available to projects by the Programme.

Table 5 – Policy instrument 2 specific recommendation

Source: Own elaboration

#### 4.1.3. Policy Instrument 3: Regional Operational Programme of Region of Western Macedonia

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
+ Limited operation of visited sites	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	Improving infrastructures of the surrounding areas of the visited sites is a critical aspect that affects their operation in general. Since the PI focuses on actions/projects by public authorities to conserve, protect, promote and develop natural and cultural heritage, the recommendation is driven to improve governance and specifically to include as possible beneficiaries of the next calls (also financed by the new ROP of the RWM) public authorities that are responsible for these infrastructures. A critical municipality that can be in charge of projects to improve cross-border tourism is Prespes and the recommendation is to provide technical support to the municipality to prepare the technical studies needed to prepare those projects.
+ Strategies to stimulate tourism	Implementation of new projects	The role of the tourist destination is the one in which special emphasis should be given to the tourism sector. Every tourist destination has some features that make it stand out and meet all those conditions to attract visitors. All these features should be highlighted in order to enhance its value and contribute to the upgrading of the tourism product. The recommendation is to establish a regional DMO (Destination Management Organization). The role of a DMO in sustainable tourism development is critical and much discussed the last years in the framework of the policy instrument (ROP RWM). This effort, to establish a DMO in Western Macedonia requires the cooperation of the public administration with the private sector. Each municipality should focus its efforts through the DMO organization towards the implementation and evaluation of the development of the tourism sector for this destination.
+ Recognise opportunities for the enhancement of the tourist attractiveness and the tourism	Implementation of new projects	The recommendation is to implement new projects to: + Stimulate rural tourism + Stimulate city-breaks tourism in short-haul destinations + Differentiate through the alternative experienced-based tourism



growth after the end of the pandemic crisis COVID19		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Stimulate well-being tourism</li> <li>+ Enhance domestic tourism</li> <li>+ Adapt new technologies (5G, etc.)</li> <li>+ Stimulate the transition of the tourism strategy towards allow carbon economy</li> </ul>
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Table 6 – Policy instrument 3 specific recommendation

Source: Own elaboration

#### 4.1.4. Policy Instrument 4: Estonia-Latvia Programme 2021-2027

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<p>+ Most of the supported projects of EstLat 2013-20 Program include over 10 project partners, with a maximum of 35 project partners in one project. Such approach has been very challenging for the lead partners and all the project partners; also, in relation with the work with stakeholders. The COVID pandemic added here another problem of making quick decisions and changes - which is more complicated with large consortiums.</p> <p>+ Another problem during the COVID has been how to manage consortiums from different regions/ institutions (everybody with their own COVID restrictions).</p> <p>During COVID pandemic people started to look for travel options outdoors, as indoor activities (e.g., spas and water parks, cinemas, etc.) were either closed or had restricted access, and people were in general cautious about indoor activities.</p> <p>Travelling to more distant destinations had become riskier and more complicated due to COVID restrictions and constantly</p>	Implementation of new projects	<p>Multi-stakeholder collaboration and a systemic approach. The possible solution is to create projects which increase synergies, capitalisation of tourism projects/offers created.</p> <p>New projects should focus on emphasizing synergies between the tourism products, routes (developed with the programme support). This would help to fill the gaps (e.g., thematic, territorial), connecting more the different offers and service providers (e.g., accommodation, catering, museums, activities etc.).</p> <p>Another important aspect of new projects is to focus on online services and regularly updated info provision.</p> <p>There is a need of creating a virtual channel, map etc. which provides border regions cultural, nature tourism information, presenting also developed tourism routes/offers of the programme projects.</p> <p>The new heritage projects should focus the accessibility of the tourism experience for different groups of society.</p> <p>We also suggest to rather favour smaller consortiums and involvement of local partners to the projects; also introducing more simplified project management/reporting options.</p>



Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<p>changing policies of countries regarding incoming tourists. Therefore, people were looking for new destinations in homeland and in the neighbouring countries. Thus updated, online info on tourism routes, attractions on own and border country became very important, also synchronized offers of different routes.</p>		
<p>+ The recent years have increased the need to improve online services of policy instrument (e.g., info days, consultations)</p> <p>+ Secondly, during COVID pandemic and huge restrictions/ changes in tourism sector the project managers were in a need to get fast advice from MA, JS and to have more flexible rules in project changes/ modifications. In addition, harmonised communication to project leaders has been an issue.</p> <p>+ The programme MA could take proactive role in promoting cross-border heritage and tourism and contributing to the revitalisation of cross border relations</p>	<p>Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)</p>	<p>Virtual info days, consultations should become new normality also in post-COVID situation, as more flexible and environmentally friendly solution.</p> <p>CBC programmes should be more flexible in allowing changes and modifications in the project as even without COVID situation the world around us is changing very quickly.</p> <p>The programme MA, JS could support durability of the developed tourism products by making efforts also from the programme's side to continuously promote the developed tourism products after the project lifetime; also promoting revitalisation of cross border relations.</p>
<p>+ In post-COVID world the structural change in tourism and some other (service) sectors are taking place and strategic changes of policy instruments is needed.</p>	<p>Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)</p>	<p>Increased attention to the investments in locations, to be more accessible and sustainable, which would create jobs in the rebuilding as well as enhance its attraction.</p> <p>New opportunities needed for the diversification.</p>

Table 7 – Policy instrument 4 specific recommendation

Source: Own elaboration



#### 4.1.5. Policy Instrument 5: European Territorial Cooperation Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<p>+ Projects aimed at promoting and presenting cultural and natural heritage often respond primarily to concrete sites. Emphasis on the broader context (territorial and thematic) is rather missing, as well as educational benefits.</p>	<p>Implementation of new projects</p>	<p>A project focused on the promotion of the cross-border territory was complex. Currently, due to the considerable language barrier between the Czech Republic and Bavaria, it is very difficult to search for common types of trips (e.g., the idea for a Sunday family trip) across borders.</p> <p>The main target group of such a project would be primarily the inhabitants of the cross-border region. The aim is not only to develop a "tourist-promotional tool" but above all a presentation of the cross-border region as an interesting place to live in. As a region full of valuable cultural and natural heritage that is worthy of protection and preservation. Such an approach would ensure a major economic impact as well, as it would contribute to tackling adverse demographic phenomena (inland outflows).</p> <p>Such a tool would also respond appropriately to the principles of sustainable tourism in the COVID period (emphasis on "open space" tourism, the organization in small groups, especially families, orientation on close or neighbour destinations).</p> <p>Output: 1) bilingual online tool, 2) set up a system for processing contributions from all regions, 3) promotion plan for such a tool.</p>
<p>+ The cross-border area includes 3 Czech and 3 Bavarian self-governing regions. They are not used to sharing good practices within a single country, let alone cross-border. There are no organizations to take care of such activities, tools to process and present information, nor a structure for sharing outputs and encouraging joint discussions.</p>	<p>Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)</p>	<p>The solution is to initiate cooperation of appropriate entities (cross-regional and cross-border). To lead them to process the information on good practices from their territory (not only cross-border practices) and present it effectively (cross-border) to ensure the sustainable and conceptual development of the border territory. Next, tools for effective capitalization of the results of development actions in the territory should be developed and applied (presentation platforms, regular events, etc.).</p> <p>One of the added values is the presentation of good practices from the business sector (if it contributes to regional development, brings innovations in the social sphere, tourism, etc.). The involvement of SMEs in CBC is very desirable, but at the same time very complicated within the current legislation. Presentation of their "innovative and development results" shows us of the possible ways of their involvement.</p> <p>An important issue is "proactivity"- the role of active coordinator, who seeks good practices, creates their presentations, interprets them in a broader context. Actions, where such a role is left to the regional and local actors themselves, usually fail (such actors usually do not have time for such activities, there is no joint structure, no cross-border communication channels, ...).</p> <p>Outputs/indicators: 1) one platform for the presentation of good practices - all border regions involved. 2) at least one event (possibly online) to present good practices with cross-border potential (all regions involved at once).</p>

Table 8 – Policy instrument 5 specific recommendation

Source: Own elaboration

#### 4.1.6. Policy Instrument 6: Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<p>+ Some activities within the project did not meet the criteria to be</p>	<p>Implementation of new projects</p>	<p>+ Use the period to prepare for post-COVID period and for new influx of tourists</p>



Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ organized in pandemic conditions</li> <li>+ Constant changes in the rules to be applied to limit the pandemic effects</li> <li>+ Limited number of cross-border heritage beneficiaries that applied for funding</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Encouraging projects that focus on digitalization and do not necessarily depend on the physical presence of tourists</li> <li>+ Better promotion of the programme at regional level in media</li> <li>+ Encouraging projects that focus on small groups of tourists and not mass tourism</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Procedures remained unchanged</li> </ul>	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Speed-up the selection and grant process(preparation of specific rules for awarding grant contracts from the budget of Satu Mare county)</li> <li>+ The importance of ensuring the openness and transparency of the funding process</li> <li>+ The importance of digitizing procedures (in as many stages as possible) in the grant process</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Decrease in the number of cross-border tourists</li> <li>+ Limited number of cross-cultural events organized physically</li> <li>+ Restrictions on non-essential travel, which are often accompanied by the obligation for cross-border travellers to remain in quarantine</li> <li>+ Travel restrictions</li> </ul>	Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Tourism in border regions/tourism goes more online</li> <li>+ Online events where possible; tourism can benefit from the digital transition, offering new ways to manage travel and tourist flows, opportunities and more options, as well as more efficient use of limited resources.</li> <li>+ Gradual elimination of restrictions on free movement and the elimination of internal borders, proportionality and non-discrimination between citizens must be ensured.</li> <li>+ The pandemic offers citizens an opportunity to enjoy the rich diversity of culture and nature in their own country and to discover new experiences throughout the year. Many regions and cities rely heavily on cultural tourism.</li> <li>+ Reinvention of cultural tourism during this pandemic by opening up new opportunities in terms of creating innovative and local recreational and business tourism offerings. New opportunities arise to discover naturally and culturally hidden or forgotten treasures closer to home and to taste locally made products.</li> </ul>

Table 9 – Policy instrument 6 specific recommendation  
Source: Own elaboration

#### 4.1.7. Policy Instrument 7: Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Lack of coordinated development policy on both sides of the border in the field of cross-border tourism</li> <li>+ Lack of uniterred cross-border digital tourism strategy</li> <li>+ Lack of cross-border tourism product (e.g., bike or walking trails)</li> </ul>	Implementation of new projects	<p>Joint cross-border regional tourism development plan which coordinates individual developments on both sides of the border (such as cycling and themed hiking trails).</p> <p>Supporting the development of digital tourism products such development of a joint digital photo album on tourist attractions on both sides of the border.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Companies providing cross-border tourism</li> </ul>	Change in the management of the	Programs should be launched to revitalize cross-border tourism companies.





Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
services have found themselves in a difficult situation under COVID and have closed down	policy instrument (improved governance)	
+ Recognise opportunities for the enhancement of the tourist attractiveness and the tourism growth after the end of the pandemic crisis	Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)	+ Stimulating close-to-nature tourism + Build cross-border thematic cycle paths + Development of digital tourist products + Development of tourism services adapted to small communities and families, such as installation of cabins and sauna carriages in nature

Table 10 – Policy instrument 7 specific recommendation

Source: Own elaboration

## 4.2 Common Recommendations

The following chart summarises the common recommendations for PI's improvement to cope impact of the COVID on sustainable valorisation of CB natural and cultural heritage and on tourism (as a driver of a sustainable development of the border regions).

Criticality/Challenge /Problem addressed	Type of improvement to achieve	Recommendation/Possible solution
+ Fragility of tourism enterprises in the cooperation area, due to their micro size, low digital maturity, strong dependence on international tourism	Implementation of new projects	New projects aimed at strengthening the "resilience" of the tourism supply chain. The recommendation is to implement new projects to: + Develop cross-border tourism products (rural tourism, well-being tourism) + Enhance domestic tourism (and more generally present the cross-border region as an interesting place to live in) + Adapt new technologies and support the development of new digital skills + Develop of hybrid experiences of fruition of the cross-border cultural and natural heritage
+ Absence of an ecosystem between local actors and difficulties in carrying out supra-regional and cross-border dialogue/actions	Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	The recommendation is to promote an integrated governance: + Virtual cross-border info days + Digital cross-border consultations platforms + Multi-stakeholders hybrid collaboration tools + For the capitalization of flagship projects, GP...
+ In post-COVID world the structural change in tourism and other sectors are taking place and strategic changes of policy instruments is needed.	Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)	+ Tourism goes more online + Online events when possible + New opportunities arise to discover naturally and culturally hidden or forgotten treasures closer to home and to taste locally made products... + Acceleration of smart working, growth of digital nomads and working holidays, could lead to the repopulation of inland, rural and cross-border areas + Cross-border cooperation programs should accompany these processes

Table 11 – Common recommendation to all EPICAH policy instruments

Source: Own elaboration



## 5. JOINT MESSAGES FOR A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC RECOVERY OF EU CROSS-BORDER AREAS BASED ON A BALANCED VALORISATION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AS DRIVER OF THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The interregional learning exchanges and activities, focused in the COVID19 pandemic impacts and on the new cross-border reality, held in the aim of EPICAH project shown that to some extent all the policy instruments that were analysed had improved their performance (at least with regards to the importance and applicability of digital tools to networking and project/programme management) and that are being able to introduce some of the lessons learned in this extraordinary period into to the programme structure, especially with regards to the 21-27 programming period policy instruments.

Nevertheless, it is also a clear conclusion of this interregional learning process that currently more than before the pandemic, cross-border policy instruments must be faced by all governance levels as an effective tool to the recovery of the local economy (measured in growth and jobs), to leverage a sustainable and balanced development, and to foster the border regions resilience. This acknowledgement must be expressed by all policymakers and decision-takers levels with an increase of cooperation.

It is not only a question of overcoming the pandemic impacts on the different levels of sustainable development of the border territories but instead a strong conviction on the importance, for border territories, of having cooperation and shared policies focused on a resilient and sustainable development.

In the concrete case of tourism (and mainly of cross-border tourism) is crucial an institutional reinforcement of this sector and the recognition of this industry as first European economic sector. This means to give tourism the same institutional level of other relevant economic sectors like agriculture or the blue economy with the nomination of a concerned commissioner. This means also to give tourism the same treatment as it is given to the Urban Policy that despite of being of exclusive competence of the Member-States, joint actions and cooperation are assure through its own financial instrument.

At the operational level, there are two main basic and of general agreement premises:

- + Tourism is the main tool available to assure an effective and sustainable management, protection, and valorisation of endogenous resources (cultural and natural heritage).
- + Innovation is the only path to improve differentiation and attractiveness of border regions (not only to overcome the demographic crisis but also as tourism destinations).

In this post-pandemic period tourism is requiring support for the introduction (development and test) of new formulas with capacity to generate growth and jobs at the same time they are able to reduce seasonality and increase tourism spend and overnight stays, without jeopardising the heritage assets. With this regard, formulas like “cross-border tourism” and “author’s tourism” are examples of fields that should be explored aiming at making of the border regions “destinations of excellence”, adding



value to the tourism experiences and assuring competitiveness (by offering high added-value tourism experiences).

To invest/support innovative forms of tourism in the border regions is, at the end, to invest/support key development aims like training, capacity building and skills development; economic models based on endogenous resources or take advantage of the border effect (for example, by taking advantage of proximity outbound makers – the neighbouring regions – or the so called “missing outbound markets” – national emigration receiving markets).

Excellency should become the competitive advantage of border tourism industry and tourism new formulas must be tools to achieve sustainability, understood as the set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

On the other hand, it is crucial that the management of the cultural and natural heritage are made taking into account how to balance the needs of protection with those of valorization, opening up to innovative formulas for heritage sustainability. In this context, the European creative industry can have a particularly relevant role by introducing new ways of game design of the cultural experiences of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, convergence of physical and digital interactions in the Metaverse, etc.

In the same way, digitalization and ICT skills development remains (in a reinforced way in the post-COVID era) as keystone for cultural and heritage management.

A final remark to stress other crucial aim EPICAH partners consider urgent to be addressed at the European level: the joint work to eliminate the numerous bottlenecks European tourism industry is facing with regards to its full deployment. Some examples of these constraints are:

- + Limitations to the “free movement” of rental cars (namely in what concerns to pick and return vehicles on neighbouring countries).
- + Uniformization of the airports and flights access rules all over the European Union.
- + Inefficient travellers’ protection measures (especially with regards to big flights companies and airports restrictions).

With regards to this these last constraints, it should highlight one concrete inefficiency generated by the airports and airlines monopolistic behaviour: the control restrictions imposed to liquids within the boarding procedures. The “liquids rule”<sup>9</sup> imposes to the tourist higher prices if they want to return with, for example, a bottle of regional wine as they had to buy it at the duty-free shops. At the same time reduces the small/local producers’ competitiveness and market share as their products are excluded from these shops and tourists restrict their purchases because they cannot carry those items with their carry-on luggage.

Without a proper joint response to those limitations tourism will continue to be monopolist industry where consumer is the weakest link, and where European strategies will continue to unfit the needs of micro-SME which are the main stakeholders typology of the business fabric of this sector and, even more relevant, the development needs of the border regions.

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<sup>9</sup>Prohibition of pass the checkpoint with individual containers of liquids, aerosols, gels, creams and pastes with a maximum capacity of 100 millilitres each, in passengers carry-on bags.



## 6. SIX YEARS OF JOINT WORK: THE ADDED-VALUE OF EPICAH

After six years of interregional learning and exchange of experiences and knowledge activities, EPICAH partners are now entering in a new phase of the transnational cooperation they started within this project aiming at not only to capitalize the project results and outputs but also to continue to work together, supporting each other in straightening the development of their borders and in promoting a better investment of the European funds through cross-border programmes.

The added value resulting from EPICAH implementation is not only reflected in the achievements of the project in terms of cross-border policy instruments improvements but also in terms of the improvement of the professional capacity of the project team as well as of their personal growth.

In this final chapter of the joint report, each partner presents a personal view about the lessons learned with EPICAH.

### 6.1 Atlantic Axis of Peninsular Northwest (LP and PP2)

The participation of Eixo in EPICAH project has produced a series of benefits not initially foreseen but of great strategic value.

Firstly, it has made possible to spontaneously generate a network of knowledge and exchange of experiences based on personal understanding links that have been built up during the implementation of the project.

Secondly, it has allowed the exchange of valuable experiences for each one of the territories involved that are beginning to be developed with partners own resources and/or with the support of other territorial cooperation programmes.

Thirdly, it has enabled a global and, at the same time, transversal vision of the state of play, both of tourism development strategies and of the tourism products they include (from wine tourism to heritage, religious tourism, etc.).

Finally, it made possible the identification and the conceptual and operational development of innovative concepts like “border tourism” and “author’s tourism”.

### 6.2 Iberian Association of Riverside Municipalities of Duero River - AIMRD(PP3)

For AIMRD, EPICAH project has been a project that has allowed to learn about other cross-border European areas reality and ways of working.

Given the uniqueness of the Spanish-Portuguese border and its characteristics, it has been very interesting to discover the reality maritime borders and how cooperation is being developed in this context, which is so different from the border AIMRD works for.

Concerning the relationship with the partnership, it has been shaped by a high degree of involvement in the project of all partners and based on the close professional and interpersonal relation.

Despite having different approaches to improve the policies instruments addressed in each territory and the type of action taken by each partner, as the territorial diversity of the project fosters



and conditions them, they follow the logic framework of achieving territorial development of the border European regions and deepening neighbourhood relations.

In conclusion, EPICAH is a project from which we have all learned and have been enriched not only at the professional level but also at the personal level.

The relationships built during this 6 years of project implementation, should lead in the near future to new cooperation projects on tourism, local development and governance.

### 6.3 Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC (PP4)

The Interreg EPICAH project was the first and defining international project in the life of our organization. Cross-border cooperation in the Tokaj region, is still a difficult question due to historical reasons and being burdened with national feelings from the past. In the past 20 years, the historical Tokaj wine region saw lawsuits stemming from the protection of origin increased the resistance of the winemakers from both sides of the border. This heightened emotion slowly dissolved in the last 5-7 years since the Interreg projects have started.

The benefits of the EPICAH project are the following:

- First of all EPICAH project specifically contributed to the fact that our association could meet Slovak and Hungarian tourism experts and create a cross-border experts pool.
- Secondly, this expert pool enlarged with the project's network of partners, which covers the most important tourist counties of Europe.

Tokaj believes that EPICAH created European experts pool will make us able to design a common tourist product such as a trans-European wine route or cross-border advisory office.

### 6.4 Agency for the Development of the Empolese Valdelsa (PP5)

For the main part, the success of the project EPICAH, according to the PP5-ASEV, was given to an excellent partnership. Without talking of the professionalism of the involved organisations, which was crucial, there was a fortune to see involved in the project and to work together with a number of valuable and well-prepared persons. The Europe is composed by the countries, but the countries are represented by the people. Therefore, we can say that who forms the Europe are not the countries, but individuals. To work with open minded and smart persons permitted the ASEV staff improve their own abilities and skills, to enrich own culture and competences. We learnt a lot both as an organisation and as singular individuals.

It was then very educative to found out that each country and each smallest and unknown geographic destination in Europe has a lot to offer from the point of view of cultural and natural heritage. It was amazing observe the efforts that each country placed in field to preserve such heritage and let it be known by other countries.

The peer review with Czech-Bavarian cross-border area was well organised and was attended by PP5-ASEV local stakeholders and managing authority representative. The lessons learnt will help the Maritime Programme to define the improvements and apply them.



### 6.5 Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia (PP6)

RDF on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia found EPICAH (including the 1 year extension) as really fruitful and inspiring project. It was very well managed, and all working semesters well professionally prepared in advance.

Our organisation is taking part in many Interreg Europe projects, and this is considered of a clear added value, since it combined different inputs to our policy instrument, regarding cross border tourism, environment and culture.

The partnership was also interesting, especially speaking for organisations of different levels of governance. The idea of the use of the pool of experts was a brilliant one, as it supported partners to work more efficiently, following the experts' directions.

We can clearly indicate that specific individuals working in the project team, were very supportive and we fulfilled really good common reports, that were addressed to the EU directly.

RWM and stakeholders' capacity were increased in the policy topic addressed by EPICAH.

A real highlight of the project was the peer review in Portugal-Spain by EIXO (LP & PP2) in May 2022.

### 6.6 Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation (PP7)

Peipsi Centre has benefited greatly from exchanges within the EPICAH project, and being part of this pan-European very experienced consortium.

During these last 5 years the whole world has changed in a great deal, in tourism and other fields, and it has been great peer-learning process throughout. We have been able to learn from each other, as each partner and partner region is different and can share their best practices.

For Peipsi Centre very interesting has been cross-border joint structures to promote joint cultural and natural heritage.

The peer-review with TOKAJ allowed us to debate between professionals where one of the conclusions was that not all digital inventions (like online wine tasting) does not have to be immediate success and this type of tourism service have to be considered carefully.

### 6.7 Satu Mare County Intercommunity Development Association (PP8)

For us it was a great time that we spend in the six years of the EPICAH project. The network of participants and partners that we had the pleasure to know in project's activities is of great value. We appreciate our cultural and natural heritage values, and their place at European perspective, and we are all keen in promoting culture and tourism. We had the opportunity within the project to meet high level professionals and learnt a lot from their experience in managing transnational projects. We consider that EPICAH project is a success story in European transnational co-operation and a good practice to be shared through Interreg Europe Program. We consider that the personal contacts developed are of great value for further development of projects and we are interested to keep and even grow the network of partner institutions from all over Europe. We are thankful for the improvement of our personal skills and also for possibility to share our knowledge. The good practices identified in EPICAH and certified by Interreg Europe experts are useful to be shared at European level,



as well as the documents elaborated within EPICAH that were submitted to European Commission. We appreciate the work of experts and of the Lead Partner of the EPICAH project and we hope we will have the chance to continue our good cooperation.

### 6.8 Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region (PP9)

The implementation of an international project focused on cross-border cooperation in the last two years affected by the Covid 19 pandemic was in many ways very complicated but at the same time very beneficial - from a regional and even the cross-border point of view.

First, the restrictions showed us that we can overcome our limits - both personal and professional and that we can react immediately to the current situation, and it has finally taught us all to actively use modern technology. On the other hand, the situation proved to us that no cooperation is possible without strong personal ties, which are built on strong and quality foundations that are appreciated by both parties. If such ties exist and there is mutual understanding, it is possible to actively cooperate even across borders, even though we do not speak the same language, our common borders are forbidden to cross, and most of us struggle with a complicated family of situations outside the office.

Another thing that the EPICAH project has undoubtedly taught us is that problems will simply always exist. And overcoming them is always primarily about human will and desire. Legislative and financial difficulties are always objective trouble issues. But even these can be overcome in a certain way. This is doubly true for cross-border cooperation, as these legislative complications are always doubled. However, when you meet more and more people from the border area from other European countries and hear their stories, you realize that this is above all a kind of standard context, with which it is necessary to take it as a starting point and stop making excuses for it. However, if individual people, and of course on both sides of the border, do not have this insight and a very personal will to work together and achieve their common goals, all is lost.

And it's also about the fact that we tend to underestimate ourselves and look admiringly at others. I am glad that EPICAH project showed us that the differences between the West and the East have almost disappeared and there is no need to feel ashamed. All European countries have something to be proud of and everyone else always has something to learn. However, it is necessary to keep our eyes and minds open. And I feel grateful to EPICAH project, that it taught us TO BE OPEN TO NEW INPUTS AND APPROACHES.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AI - Adriatic-Ionian region

AIMRD – *Asociación Ibérica de Municipios Ribereños del Duero*

ASEV – *Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa*

CBC – Cross-border Cooperation

CeBB – Centre Bavaria Bohemia

COVID – Corona Virus Disease

CSO – Civil Society Organization

DMO - Destination Management Organization

EC - European Commission

EPICAH - Effectiveness of Policy Instruments for Cross-Border Advancement in Heritage

ERDF - European Regional Development Fund

EU – European Union

EUSAIR - European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region

GP – Good Practice

iCBA – Intelligent Cross-Border Accelerator

ICT – Information and Communications Technologies

IO - Integrated Spatial Investment

IPA - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

JS – Joint Secretariat

LSG – Local Stakeholders Group

MA - Managing Authority

NA - National Contribution

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NSRF - National Strategic Reference Framework

PI – Policy Instrument

POCTEP - Cross-border cooperation programme Spain-Portugal

RA - Reimbursement Applications

ROP – Regional Operational Programme

RWM – Region of Western Macedonia





SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

TO - Tour-operators

US – United States



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## ANNEXES

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### ANNEX 1 – Italy-France Maritime Programme survey on the needs of projects in relation to the COVID19 emergency: Results

#### General data:

- ✓ 85 projects responded.
- ✓ 73 reported the urgency of rescheduling the planned activities.
- ✓ 52% reported that the necessary reprogramming was both content and temporal.
- ✓ Main criticalities reported:
  - Suspension of events and technical meetings,
  - Suspension of tenders in progress,
  - Closure of entities active in projects,
  - Suspension of public works.
- ✓ Main advanced solutions:
  - Moderate extension,
  - Reverting activities into smart working
  - Boost activities not affected by the pandemic crisis.



## ANNEX 2 – Virtual seminar conclusions

With the main objective of promoting the exchange of experience between the managing authorities of the policy instruments addressed in the extension period of EPICAH, the project organized a virtual seminar under the theme “COVID19: Challenges Faced and Emerging Opportunities for the Border Territories” on April 4th, 2022.

This event was a key-activity as supporting to for the correct identification of the challenges faced by the project policy instruments with regards to reviving the development of border territories as well as the post-COVID relationship and exchanges between border territories and border communities. It had also allowed to deepen in the solution and actions that are being taken by the cross-border cooperation programmes aiming at contributing to their recovery and resilience in the specific filed of cross-border heritage and tourism.

Participant Managing Authorities were invited to present their point of view and experience with regards to:

- + Updates on the policy instruments implementation by the end of 2021.
- + How strongly did the pandemic crisis affected their PI?
- + What were the correction activities - measures to adopt their PI on the pandemic situation?
- + Were there any successful experiences on Cross order heritage and tourism management held during pandemic times?
- + How can the PIs support (through what type of actions and projects and methodologies) cultural and natural heritage to become resilient and drivers for the recovery of cross-border territories?
- + How to take advantage of cross-border heritage as valuable asset in a post-COVID scenario (ensuring its sustainable use and balancing preservation and economic activity)?
- + How to re-establish Cross Border relationships and trust on neighbouring countries?

The main conclusions of the presentations made<sup>10</sup>, and debate held during this event are summarized in the following points.

### A2.1 Updates on the policy instruments implementation by the end of 2021

Policy Instrument	Updates by the end of 2021
POCTEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ 6 calls</li> <li>+ 779 submitted projects</li> <li>+ More 1 600 partners</li> <li>+ Same cooperation area for 2021-2027, 427 M€</li> </ul>
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	The Program aims to achieve the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy in the central-northern Mediterranean area, promoting smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth taking into consideration the problems of marine, coastal and island areas, but also addresses inland areas, with specific risks of isolation.

<sup>10</sup>Mr. Andras Stefanik, representative of the Managing Authority of Interreg VI A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020, didn't make a presentation and didn't also give any inputs on the 7 topics addressed to all managing Authorities.



Policy Instrument	Updates by the end of 2021																			
	<p>The main objective is to help strengthen cross-border cooperation between the designated territories to make this area a competitive, sustainable, and inclusive area in the European and Mediterranean landscape.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ 2 States (Italy and France), 5 Regions</li> <li>+ 6,5 million people in the cooperation area</li> <li>+ Almost 200 million euros of total budget</li> <li>+ 122 projects financed</li> <li>+ 819 partner beneficiaries</li> </ul>																			
ROP of Region of Western	<p>Twenty projects are co-funded by the OP of Western Macedonia 2014-2020 which contribute to the promotion of visitable monuments of special physiognomy and importance, and aim to attract visitors, not just "random", seasonal tourists, but cultural visitors (priority axis 6).</p> <p>The overall budget of these project is about 21.000.000 € and most of them will be completed by the end of 2023.</p> <p>The aim is the Region of Western Macedonia to be a pole of attraction throughout the year, for both local groups (e.g. students) and for (foreign) visitors who are interested in gathering new essential information and experiences, in order to satisfy their spiritual needs. An increase in the number of visitors to the monuments, as well as to the wider area, will lead to the development of (cultural) tourism and the stimulation of entrepreneurship, will contribute to the development of the region.</p>																			
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	<p>Estonia - Latvia Programme 2014-2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Last projects are ongoing</li> <li>+ Commitments 99,2%</li> <li>+ Payments 80,58%</li> <li>+ Closing event planned to September 2022</li> </ul> <p>2014+</p> <p>Programme support to cultural and natural heritage   Tourism development - cultural and natural heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ More visitors at cultural and natural heritage sites</li> <li>+ Improve at least 35 cultural and natural heritage sites</li> <li>+ 7 million euros for tourism development.</li> </ul> <p>7 heritage tourism projects: Coastal Hiking, Green Railway, Industrial Heritage, Livonian Culinary Route, UNESCO tourism, Garden Pearls, Military Heritage</p> <p>1 project to improve sailing infrastructure and yacht harbours</p>																			
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	<p>An overview of the programme is on the following table:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="517 1397 1206 1675"> <thead> <tr> <th>Priority Axis</th> <th>Specific Objectives</th> <th>No. Projects</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="2">1 – Research, technological development &amp; innovation</td> <td>Research &amp; innovation</td> <td>18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Inclusion of SME</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2">2 – Environmental protection &amp; resource efficiency</td> <td>Joint cultural and natural heritage</td> <td>40</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Biodiversity and ecosystem services</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 – Competence and Education</td> <td></td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 – Sustainable networks</td> <td></td> <td>42</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Priority Axis	Specific Objectives	No. Projects	1 – Research, technological development & innovation	Research & innovation	18	Inclusion of SME	9	2 – Environmental protection & resource efficiency	Joint cultural and natural heritage	40	Biodiversity and ecosystem services	15	3 – Competence and Education		30	4 – Sustainable networks		42
Priority Axis	Specific Objectives	No. Projects																		
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	Inclusion of SME	9																		
2 – Environmental protection & resource efficiency	Joint cultural and natural heritage	40																		
	Biodiversity and ecosystem services	15																		
3 – Competence and Education		30																		
4 – Sustainable networks		42																		
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	<p>The policy instrument is the annual Programme for granting non reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County.</p> <p>Lessons learned with the pandemic included in the Programme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The importance of ensuring the openness and transparency of the funding process,</li> <li>+ The importance of digitizing procedures (in as many stages as possible) in the grant process,</li> <li>+ Finding new ways of interaction between citizens and public institutions,</li> <li>+ Strengthen the responsibility of public authorities in this area,</li> <li>+ Specialization and professionalization of public services in this field,</li> <li>+ Adequate and prompt information of applicants on any changes in the conduct of the funding procedure,</li> </ul>																			



Policy Instrument	Updates by the end of 2021
	+ The reasons for the decisions taken by the administration should be clear, evidence-based where necessary and explained in documents by reference to the particular context and circumstances of the decision.
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No updates were given.

## A2.2 How strongly did the pandemic crisis affected their Policy Instrument (PI)?

Policy Instrument	Impact of the pandemic crisis
POCTEP	+ After the first wave (Spring 2020) of the pandemic, border restrictions in the cross-border region have known successive stages of tightening and softening until now. + The impact was on: ✓ Cross-border mobility and work ✓ Economic activities and ✓ Administrative procedures - Social & cultural activities + Both countries have established restrictions based on health checks
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	The pandemic affected the PI, but It was MAs priority to ensure the continuation of funded projects during the Covid-19 emergency.
ROP of Region of Western	The Operational Program was and is still affected by the pandemic crisis and this is reflected in the delays in the implementation and the completion of infrastructure projects and also in the increases in the prices of construction materials. There were extensions to the project schedules, as well as extensions of the delivery time of the Public Procurement Contracts. The OP was last updated in December 2021 (5th update) to include the necessary measures/activities due to the pandemic crisis. 1/5 of the overall budget of the OP was transferred from all priority axes to reinforce the enterprises and the Health System of the Region.
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	A significant decline is recorded in tourism sector in 2020 regarding: + Domestic and foreign visitors + Turnover and jobs in accommodation + Catering + Travel agencies and tour operators
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	The pandemic affected the PI, but It was also the MAs priority to ensure the continuation of funded projects during the Covid-19 emergency. These projects are 21 regarding cultural heritage and 11 regarding natural heritage.
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	The consequence of the state of emergency / alert imposed in the territory, determined the abandonment of the financed projects due to the impossibility of their realization (sports competitions, cultural events that were to take place in arranged spaces and outdoors), respectively some of them could be carried out only with compliance with the regulations providing for health protection measures established by joint order of the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Health and Sports. From the perspective of the beneficiaries of the non-reimbursable financing, the imposed restrictions generated a series of inconveniences which are manifested by the following aspects: + Uncertainty about the date or even the possibility of organizing the events, + Additional costs relating to health safety procedures, + Low number of addressability (of the public, of the participants) of the projects / actions. The main challenges to be faced was to reorganize their activities or decrease the budget because some activities had to be limited in terms of participants or even reprogrammed or cancelled.



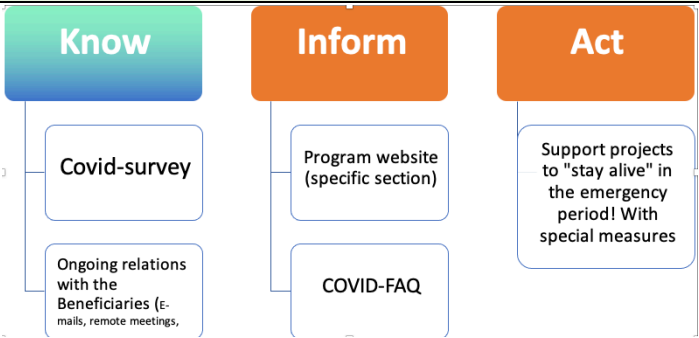
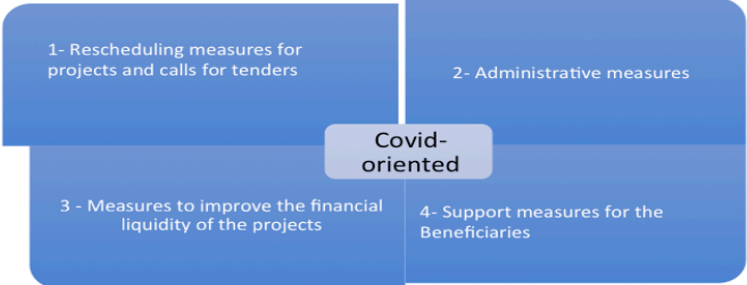
Policy Instrument	Impact of the pandemic crisis
	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on society. The pandemic put the tourism ecosystem under unprecedented pressure. As a result of travel and other restrictions, tourism has gradually reduced its activity in Satu Mare, as in the EU and worldwide. Since the beginning of the pandemic, virtually all states have implemented restrictions on non-essential travel, which are often accompanied by the obligation for cross-border travellers to remain in quarantine.</p> <p>The EU's external borders have been closed to non-essential travel and many Member States have temporarily reintroduced internal border controls. This meant that suddenly, millions of European citizens could no longer travel for business, study or leisure, many being separated from family and friends for months. For the gradual elimination of restrictions on free movement and the elimination of internal borders, proportionality and non-discrimination between citizens must be ensured.</p>
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No inputs for the impact of the pandemic.

### A2.3 What were the correction activities/measures to adopt their PI on the pandemic situation?

Policy Instrument	Activities/measures adopted on the pandemic situation
POCTEP	<p>The pandemic posed an unprecedented adaptation challenge for both the Programme and the projects. For this reason, a series of special measures were put in place to provide an agile response to continue with a certain degree of "normality" and to promote financial execution.</p> <p>Automatic extensions &amp; flexibility of actions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Interruption of deadlines for administrative procedures during states of alarm and emergency in Spain and Portugal.</li> <li>+ Automatic extensions for project implementation.</li> <li>+ Flexibility of actions foreseen in the projects, substituting, for example, the face-to-face format for the virtual format.</li> <li>+ Communication activities went online.</li> <li>+ Possibility of carrying out on-site verifications after the project completion date.</li> <li>+ Exceptional eligibility rules: cancellation of activities and adaptation of working methods.</li> </ul> <p>The pandemic forced all to change plans: POCTEP projects went further, adapted, contributed and responded to urgent needs.</p>
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	According to the provisions of the European Commission (Regulation (EU) 2020/460) targeting investments in the health systems of the Member States and/or in other sectors of their economies in response to the COVID-19 epidemic, the Programme Managing Authority implemented specific measures addressing Beneficiaries'.





Policy Instrument	Activities/measures adopted on the pandemic situation
	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>The “Covid-reaction” measures by the MA at a glance:</p> <p>The MA took over 4 different level measures in:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Projects (conversion plans for ongoing projects)</li> <li>+ Calls (content adaptation)</li> <li>+ Administrative measures (simplifications, exceptions of some obligations, etc)</li> <li>+ Liquidly improvements</li> <li>+ Beneficiaries support</li> </ul>
ROP of Region of Western	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ € 40 million were transferred to support the small and medium enterprises affected by the pandemic (ERDF),</li> <li>+ € 11 million were transferred for the reinforcement of the equipment of the Hospitals and the Health Centers (ERDF), and</li> <li>+ € 6 million were transferred for the salary of the medical and nursing staff of the 5 Hospitals of our Region (ESF).</li> </ul>
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	<p>The MA and the beneficiaries were not able to carry out certain project activities as planned, so activities / measures to overcome this situation were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Guidance about eligibility of costs</li> <li>+ Re-design of project activities: certain activities online</li> <li>+ Prolongation of projects</li> </ul>
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	<p>Since the borders were temporarily closed during Corona, joint activities could not take place (they were rescheduled), while seminars and other events were moved online, festivals and youth exchanges were not possible.</p> <p>All projects got the option to prolong their duration.</p>
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	<p>The crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has had, and still has several significant implications regarding the situation of non-reimbursable financing under law 350/2005. The imposed state of emergency/alert as well as the exceptional measures applied on the entire territory of the country, in some administrative-territorial units, led to the limitation of the freedom of movement, assembly, of the development of social activities in general. In the context of the pandemic, locally, the county grant program was carried out in the same stages as in previous years regarding the preparation of specific rules for awarding grant contracts from the budget of Satu Mare county, selection of applications, verification of eligibility, evaluation of project proposals as well as the entire funding procedure. The situations determined by the risk of infection with the SARS COV-2 virus determined the submission of a smaller number of applications for the three fields of financing: culture, sports, youth.</p>



Policy Instrument	Activities/measures adopted on the pandemic situation
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No inputs for activities/measures.

#### A2.4 Were there any successful experiences on Cross-Border heritage and tourism management held during pandemic times?

Policy Instrument	Successful experiences
POCTEP	Projects visibility is a priority and sharing experience is a necessity. POCTEP collaborated with EFE and LUSA new agencies during the pandemic. A successful experience is Euragora Forum' on Tourism & COVID Feat. EU Commission, Madrid & Lisbon Majors. Finally, Gêres-Xurés Dinámico was another project, where POCTEP mentioned: + Adaptation: support for all tourist establishments to obtain the "clean and safe" label. + Promotion of tourism based on historical and natural heritage. + Social dimension: tourists have to be safe, but especially local & older population
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	The Programme launched the #MarittimoChallenge (March 2020), a communication game-campaign with the primary objective of strengthening relationships, even informal ones, with the beneficiaries, in a period that forced everybody to remain physically further away.
ROP of Region of Western	No inputs for successful experiences.
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	No inputs for successful experiences.
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	New digitization opportunities and developed skills in use of new technologies are considered as successful experiences on Cross-Border heritage and tourism management during the pandemic.
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	Satu Mare County Council is a supporter of the event entitled Street Music Festival through co-financing. This kind of event is unique in Romania, it takes place annually and involves the participation in the competition of musicians and street artists from all over Europe who come to our city to present their talent. Respecting the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the street performances could be watched by a large number of locals and tourists. In conclusion, the main lesson learned in this pandemic is the one regarding the flexibility of the beneficiaries regarding the reprogramming and reinvention in the organization of events.
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No inputs for successful experiences.

#### A2.5 How can the PI support (through what type of actions and projects and methodologies) cultural and natural heritage to become resilient and drivers for the recovery of Cross-Border territories?



Policy Instrument	PI support to cultural and natural heritage
POCTEP	<p>COVID affected very hard the economy, especially the Cultural and Tourism sectors. Changes needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ To increase the attractiveness of the cross-border area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Encouraging and promoting sustainable and ecological tourism, adapted to CC</li> <li>✓ Improving seasonality levels</li> <li>✓ Promoting territorial attractiveness in areas affected by the phenomenon of depopulation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>And</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ To transform Tourism and Cultural sectors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Promoting the use of TICs and "data mining" allowing rapid adaptation to new requirements of the global economy, as well as remaining resilient during adverse situations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	The PI continuously supports cultural and natural heritage aspects by funding related topics projects.
ROP of Region of Western	The ROP of Western Macedonia supports several projects that are situated and held in Florina and Kastoria, both cross-border areas, and involve the development of cultural heritage and tourism.
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	<p>The PI support is continuously achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Development of attractive, sustainable, visible, and accessible cross-border tourism products</li> <li>+ New developments and improvement of the existing products with smart and targeted marketing</li> <li>+ Focus on Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Pierīga, West Estonia and South Estonia</li> <li>+ Public sector institutions and NGOs from capitals can participate to pass on their know-how and best</li> </ul>
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	<p>Cultural and natural heritage can become resilient and drivers for the recovery of Cross-Border territories, as these topics remain very important for the programme area. Tourism is also an additional component.</p> <p>The challenges to drive are the after Corona activities, the shortage of qualified personnel, the reduced number of visitors, "overtourism" cases and digitalization.</p>
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	<p>Lessons learned with the pandemic are included in the new programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ The pandemic offers citizens the opportunity to enjoy the rich diversity of culture and nature in their own country and to discover new experiences throughout the year.</li> <li>+ Many regions and cities rely heavily on cultural tourism.</li> <li>+ Thus, technology has contributed to the reinvention of cultural tourism during this pandemic by opening up new opportunities in terms of creating innovative and local recreational and business tourism offerings.</li> <li>+ So, there are new opportunities to discover hidden or forgotten treasures naturally and culturally, closer to home and to taste locally made products.</li> <li>+ Tourism can benefit from the digital transition, offering new ways to manage travel and tourist flows, opportunities and more options, as well as more efficient use of limited resources.</li> </ul>
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No inputs for successful experiences.

## A2.6 How to take advantage of Cross-Border heritage as valuable asset in a post-COVID scenario (ensuring its sustainable use and balancing preservation and economic activity).



Policy Instrument	Advantages uptake
POCTEP	No inputs for advantages uptake.
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	No inputs for advantages uptake.
ROP of Region of Western	By the completion of the OP, the diffusion of the results will be evident both in the scientific community and in civil society, ensuring its sustainable use of the cultural heritage of the area and balancing preservation and economic activity.
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	No inputs for advantages uptake.
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	No inputs for advantages uptake.
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	No inputs for advantages uptake.
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No inputs for successful experiences.

## A2.7 How to re-establish cross-border relationships and trust on neighbouring countries.

Policy Instrument	Re-establishment of cross-border cooperation
POCTEP	Mostly through better cooperation governance, since: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ A stronger involvement of key territorial stakeholders will be promoted.</li> <li>+ A focus on solutions to border obstacles will be adopted.</li> <li>+ Small Project funds will be implemented in order to increase mutual trust across border</li> </ul>
Italy-France Maritime Cooperation Programme 2014-2020	No inputs on CBC re-establishment.
ROP of Region of Western	No inputs on CBC re-establishment.
Estonia - Latvia 2014-2020	Development of 2021-2027 period programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Interreg: cooperation governance</li> <li>+ Administrative + people-to-people</li> </ul> Joint Programming Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Many representatives have experience in tourism, business</li> </ul> Public hearings 8.11.-8.12.2021 comments and proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Great interest of organisations in tourism development</li> <li>+ Municipalities: joint service development under ISO1</li> </ul> Close cooperation during and between the calls for proposals to widen the target group and raise knowledge.
ETC Bavaria-Czech Republic 2014-2020	The new programmatic period is a useful multi-level policy tool to partly support the re-establishment Cross Border relationships and trust on the two neighbouring countries.
Annual Programme for granting non-reimbursable financing from the local budget of Satu Mare County	It is well known that tourism is the backbone of the economy for many states. Cross-border cultural cooperation covers all areas of cooperation and provides a strong basis for human contacts and interactions. Now is the time to rebuild strong ties and cooperation between neighbouring areas to strengthen cross-border cultural cooperation in all areas: tourism, cultural activities and cultural heritage. The new experience and knowledge gained during this period can help to eliminate the accumulated barriers, thus creating a more competitive, credible and successful environment for neighbouring countries.



Policy Instrument	Re-establishment of cross-border cooperation
	It must promoted: + new cultural activities in the cross-border area (festivals, concerts, cultural activities) + tourist, cultural and gastronomic routes which bring out common cultural characteristics across frontier areas + to promote and protect the cross-border architectural heritage
Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2013-2020	No inputs on CBC re-establishment.

## A2.8 Conclusions

The main common concluding results for all Managing Authorities are:

- 💡 The borders were closed and travelling through them was a crucial problem for all cross-border activities
- 💡 The COVID-19 impact was on:
  - ✓ i. Cross-border mobility and work
  - ✓ ii. Economic activities and
  - ✓ iii. administrative procedures - Social & cultural activities
- 💡 There were many delays in the administrative procedures and progress of the approved - funded projects
- 💡 There were delays in the beneficiaries response to the new calls during the pandemic
- 💡 Some programs briefly modified their programs for the last calls of the programmatic period.
- 💡 Culture and tourism are still valuable assets for all CB territories.
- 💡 The specific period is a real chance to re-establish the cross-border relationship and trust.
- 💡 Common opportunities still are digitalization and ICT skills development
- 💡 Natural – cultural heritage remains important especially when connected with tourism financial activities.



## ANNEX 3 – Peer review reports

### A3.1 EIXO (LP & PP2) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Filipe Taveira   pec.gal@eixoatlantico.com
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)	Atlantic Axis of Peninsular Northwest
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	LP & PP2

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC   PP4
Title of the reviewed good practice	Tokaj Wine Region: Slovakia-Hungary border region
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Tokaj Wine Region, Hungary and Slovakia
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Attila Kovács   Attila.Kovacs@tbft.hu
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)	<p>Host (Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• István Dévald (Manager Director)</li> <li>• Attila Kovács (EPICAH team)</li> </ul> <p>Speakers (round tables)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hungary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Peter Molnár, President of the Wine Association Tokaj's past and present</li> <li>○ Hajnalka Szabó, President of Tokaj Reneszánsz (<a href="http://tokaji.hu">tokaji.hu</a>)</li> <li>○ István Dévald, Manager Director of PP4</li> <li>○ József Rák, Mayor of Hercegekút</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders (meeting and practices visits):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hungary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Andrásy Wine Hotel</li> <li>○ Rákóczi Celler Tokaj</li> <li>○ Tokaj City historical heritage</li> <li>○ Mercure Hotel Tokaj</li> <li>○ Götz Celler (UNESCO heritage)</li> <li>○ Oremus winery</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Slovakia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Chateaux Grand Bari</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Main interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promote the direct contact between EIXO and PP4's stakeholders</li> <li>• To understand what a wine tourism destination is (as an whole)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To know different formulas of local stakeholders' involvement (tourism product value chain cohesion)</li> <li>• To better understand the post-COVID recovery strategy of Tokaj Wine Region</li> </ul> <p>Geographical Scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tokaj cross-border wine region</li> </ul> <p>Issues debated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint development of a cross-border wine region</li> <li>• The role of cultural heritage in the development of a cross-border tourism product</li> <li>• How to provide an integrated and significant wine tourism experience</li> <li>• The impact of COVID19 in Tokaj wine region and measures to overcome/potentiate those impacts</li> </ul>
<b>NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)</b>	
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization / PI / ... you want to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b></p>	<p>COVID19 had a very important role highlighting not only the relevance of wine tourism for the development of the Galicia-Northern Portugal region but also the need of establish integrated strategies to develop this tourism product and of the joint work of all the agents of its value chain.</p> <p>Local authorities are a key stakeholder that usually are the head of the tourism product development and the main responsible for creating the basic conditions to its development.</p> <p>The selection of good practice for peer-review was made aiming at to discuss different perspectives on how to create and develop a wine tourism destination taking into account the post-pandemic context, how to create an integral experience (that goes behind the wine hotel, or the winery visit and wine tastings) and the role of cultural heritage should play. All of this from the perspective of a cross-border region which shares the wine production as a main development factor. Therefore, the role played by the Intereg A programme that supports this joint development.</p>
<p><b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<p>EIXO had proposed in advance, the following issues to be discuss during the peer-review meetings and study visits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact of COVID19 in the region, in tourism and, specifically in the regional wine tourism (and the opportunities generated in this period)</li> <li>• Tokaj wine tourism model/local wine tourism policies/the role of the city government</li> <li>• Tokaj most differentiating tourism products (with special emphasis in those with capacity to be considered Authors' tourism experience)</li> <li>• Digitalization of the wine tourism experience</li> <li>• Tokaj wine tourism promotional policy/strategy and funding</li> <li>• Most effective ways of involving local stakeholders in the wine tourism offer (mainly the private sector)</li> <li>• Measures to avoid both seasonality and massification</li> </ul>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to</b></p>	<p>Peer reviews followed two complementary methodologies to assure a fruitful exchange between EIXO stakeholders and the cross-border TOKAJ Wine Region stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Round tables discussions</li> <li>• On site visits</li> </ul>



talk, which sites would you like to visit?	
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MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW	
<p><b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b></p>	<p>When:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>July 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup></li> </ul> <p>Where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tokaj wine region, Hungary and Slovakia</li> </ul> <p>How:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Onsite meeting and study visits hold in different parts of the Slovakia-Hungary border (wine region)</li> </ul> <p>Background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EIXO representatives had the first contact with the Tokaj cross-border wine region during the first phase of EPICAH project, finding similarities with the Galicia-Northern Portugal region with concerns to the wine tourism development</li> <li>EIXO is supporting several of its associated cities in developing and promoting the wine tourism under a cross-border approach.</li> <li>COVID19 had generated several (contradictory) impacts on the Galicia-Northern Portugal region in general and in wine tourism in particular making of interest for EIXO cities to discuss formulas that could allow them to uptake the emerging opportunities and to overcome the problems and constraints.</li> </ul> <p>Preliminary information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tokaj Wine Region: Slovakia-Hungary border region was presented by PP4 as one possible good practice to be discuss by the partnership in the aim of EPICAH extension project.</li> <li>During the lockdowns, Tokaj Wine Region main stakeholders had design and implemented innovative strategies to attract/keep the attention wine costumers and wine tourist in the region and its products.</li> <li>Some of these strategies are proven to be successful as marketing target strategies also in the post-pandemic period if combined with other actions.</li> <li>They had also proven to be a successful formula for developing a more cohesive value chain of a wine tourism destination.</li> <li>Adding to that, the study visit made during the first phase allowed EIXO to identify relevant similarities between Tokaj cross-border wine region and Galicia-Northern Portugal region, making more attractive to better understand those formulas and take the opportunity to promote direct exchanges between the stakeholders of both regions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>The peer review and all lessons learnt meet EIXO stakeholders' expectations.</p> <p>It was very interesting to know how the virtual tastings that had been developed as a strategy to keep Tokaj wine in the consumers mind despite not having the opportunity of travel to taste and buy it in Tokaj Wine Region, are now a marketing tool used to address specific markets and target groups (like wine writers, sommeliers, restaurant owners, etc.).</p>





	<p>It was also very impressive to understand how Tokaj Wine Region development strategy has a central pillar the wine production and the wine tourism (both of them understood as complementary).</p> <p>Based on the assumption that “selling wine” is “selling the destination” and that “selling the destination” is “selling wine” it was possible to straighten the relationship and cohesion of Tokaj wine tourism destination stakeholders and prepare them to provide unique and integrated tourism experiences.</p> <p>In this context, the wine cultural heritage (both tangible and immaterial) is the basis of the tourism development strategy (it was very interesting to see that all study visits share a common narrative to present the historical roots of the wine production and of the wine region).</p> <p>On the other hand, COVID19 had increase the tourism demand for Tokaj as natural and not overcrowded destination where social distance is easy to maintain offering a perspective of safer destination.</p> <p>Despite of COVID19 impact Tokaj Wine Region is experiencing significant investments in favour of a stringer tourism activity.</p>
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>As initially previewed the peer-review was centred in the issues agreed during its preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact of COVID19 in the region and in wine tourism</li> <li>• The formulas used to overcome the negative impacts and to take most of the positive ones</li> <li>• The role of the city government in the construction of a wine tourism destination</li> <li>• Digitalization of the wine tourism experience and its impact as a marketing tool in the post-pandemic period</li> <li>• Ways of involving the value-chain agents in the wine tourism destination development</li> <li>• The incorporation of wine cultural heritage in every tourism experience provided by the destination.</li> </ul> <p>All these issues are critical concerns for Eixo wine cities.</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice?How could it be used in the case of your organization/territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	<p>The lessons learned will be addressed by Eixo (by the Galicia-Northern of Portugal border) by presenting a new project to POCTEP 21-27 (which first call is preview for the end of the year).</p> <p>One of the actions included should be the digitalization of the wine tourism stakeholders and the introduction virtual tastings as a marketing B2B tool.</p> <p>The construction of a common storytelling and the development of author tourism experiences based on the wine cultural heritage should also be a central action of that new project.</p> <p>If allowed, an exchange seminar will also be organized to allow to more Galicia-Northern of Portugal stakeholders to know Tokaj Wine Region wine tourism development model.</p> <p>The new project will be jointly developed by the Eixo stakeholders that had participated in the peer-review.</p>



<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice “at home”?</b></p>	<p>The main problems to be faced when transferring the good practice to Eixo territory are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lack of “integration” and cooperation currently existing between the wine tourism value-chain stakeholders</li> <li>• The lack of competences and skills of those stakeholders concerning wine tourism</li> <li>• The lack of “belief” in the potential wine tourism can represent for the cross-border area development</li> </ul>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>In the next Interreg A Spain-Portugal application period, EIXO will help to apply for projects which main objectives are: to promote innovative formulas of cross-border wine tourism and to develop cross-border wine tourism product.</p> <p>Most probably, the application resulting from the peer-review will involve all the stakeholders (Galician and Portuguese) that had participated in it.</p>
<p><b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b></p>	<p>No recommendation to the host with regards to the organization of the peer-review.</p> <p>The peer-review and the knowledge generated exceeded all the participants expectations.</p>



## A3.2 AIMRD (PP3) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Jesús Rivas   aimrd@lagunadeduero.org
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)	Iberian Association of Riverside Municipalities of Duero River
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	3

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	Agency for the Development of the Empolese Valdelsa (ASEV)   PP5
Title of the reviewed good practice	Interreg Italy-France Maritime Program project "Intense"
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Florence, Italy
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Ecaterina Constantinova   <a href="mailto:e.constantinova@asev.it">e.constantinova@asev.it</a>
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)	<p>Host:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASEV (Ecaterina Constantinova)</li> </ul> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emiliano Carnieri, Tuscany Region (a coordinator of the Intense project)</li> <li>• Massimiliano Gini (external expert involved in the project implementation)</li> <li>• Barbara Gizzi (expert in planning slow tourism experiences)</li> </ul> <p>Main interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve the knowledge of AIMRD on slow tourism initiatives</li> <li>• To understand how slow tourism is being developed in other countries and in other borders</li> <li>• To discuss how slow tourism can take profit of the COVID19 impact on the tourists' profiles</li> <li>• To exchange on the contribution of slow tourism to the border regions development</li> </ul> <p>Geographical Scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuscany Region</li> <li>• Italy-France Maritim cross-border area</li> <li>• Italy</li> </ul> <p>Issues debated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Intense project (actions implemented and main achievements and results)</li> <li>• How COVID19 had impacted/generated new tourism formulas (like slow tourism)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slow tourism development in Italy (at the national level): tourism products, demand profile, role of the public administration (diferente levels)</li> </ul>
<b>NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)</b>	
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization / PI / ... you want to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b></p>	<p>AIMRD is leading the creation of slow tourism products based on the cultural and natural heritage of Douro-Douro region. The first step taken was also in the aim of a cross-border cooperation project: the launch of the initiative <a href="https://slowriver.es">https://slowriver.es</a>. Now it is important to continue working in the consolidation of this product at the cross-border level and develop new and innovative actions. Intense project and the Italian experience seem to be a good source of inspiration.</p>
<p><b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<p>AIMRD had proposed in advance, the following issues to be discuss during the peer-review meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Online Labs have been organized for the co-design of cycle tourism packages, suitable for tourists from the same region or from neighboring regions"</li> <li>2. Involvement of the tourism value-chain/ecosystem aiming at providing an integral experience</li> <li>3. The role of the local administration (cities) in supporting/fostering/</li> <li>4. promoting slow tourism</li> <li>5. 6 tourism packages created in the aim of INTENSE project</li> <li>6. Other Italian slow tourism products portfolio</li> <li>7. Italian slow tourism demand profile</li> <li>8. Contribution of COVID19 for the development/stagnation of this tourism modality/product</li> </ol>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b></p>	<p>Peer reviews has followed a "round table" discussion with stakeholder involved based on a previous presentation of the Intense project and the Italian strategy for slow tourism development.</p>

<b>MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW</b>	
<p><b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b></p>	<p>When:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>July 6<sup>th</sup></li> </ul> <p>Where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Florence, Italy</li> </ul> <p>How:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Onsite meeting</li> </ul> <p>Background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AIMRD has experience in developing slow tourism proposals/experiences at the cross-border level (based on the heritage of the Douro-Douro region)</li> <li>Slow tourism experiences in Douro-Douro region are gaining followers due to COVID19 pandemic (which was responsible for an increase of the</li> </ul>



	<p>tourism demand in the cross-border regions North of Portugal- Castile and Leon).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is expected that slow tourism become a trend and an opportunity to this border tourism sector (that have optimal conditions to assure mind-body-soul balancing tourism experience.</li> </ul> <p>Preliminary information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intense project was presented by ASEV as one possible good practice to be discuss by the partnership in the aim of EPICAH extension project.</li> <li>• Intense project tested slow tourism as a product that fits the needs of post-pandemic tourists.</li> <li>• Intense project developed specific online methodological and planning tools at the cross-border level</li> <li>• There is a common basis shared by Tuscany region and Duero-Douro once cycling, trekking and other similar activities are already settled in those destinations being “available” to be adapted to be included in a slow tourism product.</li> </ul>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>In general, the peer review and all lessons learnt meet AIMRD’s expectations.</p> <p>It was very interesting to know that slow tourism is being addressed not only at the cross-border level but also at the national level due to its relevance in the post-COVID period.</p> <p>It was very interesting to realize that slow tourism is being faced as new approach to the changing profile of the tourism demand (mostly resulting from the COVID19 health and safety requirements).</p> <p>The innovation presented by Intense project is the online methodological and planning tools used to establish the slow tourism packages and to successfully involve all this product value-chain.</p>
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>The peer-review was centred in discussing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is slow tourism?</li> <li>• How can it be developed at the cross-border level?</li> <li>• What is the profile of the slow tourists?</li> <li>• What are the resources need to successful develop a slow tourism product?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice?How could it be used in the case of your organization/territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	<p>From some years now, the development of active tourism, health tourism and more recently slow tourism activities has been a very important line of work for AIMRD.</p> <p>This entity is pioneer in the development of slow tourism linked to the Duero River border region. The organization of the event “Slow River” was starting point of a new axis of a broader cross-border tourism strategy.</p> <p>Through the peer-review, it was possible to improve the knowledge of the reality of the slow movement in general, and slow tourism in particular, in Italy, which is the cradle of the movement.</p> <p>The exchange of experiences allowed the identification of specific activities (and actions) that could be very interesting for the Duero cross-border region, and also that work done is already an important seed to support the socio-economic development of that border area.</p>



	<p>The traditional assets of the territory and its endogenous characteristics critical point of the slow movement.</p> <p>Taking also into consideration the innovative tools and methodologies used by the Intense project, AIMRD intent to continue the slow river initiative under a new cross-border project (funded by POCTEP) capitalizing those tools.</p> <p>The main objective is to consolidate slow tourism within the Duero-Douro region portfolio by developing new tourism packages and experiences in a participatory way (involving as much stockholders as possible from its value chain).</p>
<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice “at home”?</b></p>	<p>The main problems faced are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to involve public authorities (local authorities, regional governments, and regional tourism boards) in the slow tourism development</li> <li>• How to assure the funds and resources (both human and technical resources) needed for the consolidation of the slow tourism in the border region of the North of Portugal-Castile and Leon.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>In the next Interreg application period, AIMRD will help to apply for projects related to slow tourism development in the Duero-Douro region.</p>
<p><b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b></p>	<p>No recommendation to the host with regards to the organization of the peer-review.</p>



### A3.3 TOKAJ (PP4) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Attila Kovács attila.kovacs@tbft.hu
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)	The Development of Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit Ltd.
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	4

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	EIXO Atlantico,LP
Title of the reviewed good practice	Saint James Way: COVID Safety Measures and related tourism recovery strategy)
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Braga, Ponte de Lima, Valenca, Sarria, Santiago de Compostela
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Ana Ladeiras, ana.ladeiras@aroundeurope.pt
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)	<p>Braga &amp; Valença:</p> <p>Stakeholders, Guest participants and experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. António Barroso (Braga Tourism representative)</li> <li>• Mr. Marco Sousa (Porto and North of Portugal Tourism board)</li> <li>• Mr. Nuno Ferreira (Porto and North of Portugal Tourism board)</li> <li>• Mr. Varico Pereira (religious tourism expert)</li> <li>• Mrs. Ana Ladeiras (moderator and rapporteur)</li> </ul> <p>Sarria &amp; Santiago de Compostela:</p> <p>Stakeholders, Guest participants and experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Claudio Garrido (Mayor of Sarria)</li> <li>• Mr. Xosé Bugallo (Mayor of Santiago de Compostela)</li> <li>• Mr Xoan Vázquez Mao - Secretary General, Eixo Atlántico</li> <li>• Mrs Rita Fidalgo (Eixo Atlántico)</li> <li>• Mrs. Fátima López (Sarria Tourism representative)</li> <li>• Asociacion de peregrinos que lleva la oficina de turismo a la entrada de Sarria</li> <li>• Mrs. Ana Ladeiras (moderator and rapporteur)</li> </ul> <p>Main interest – Geographical Scope - Issues debated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint James Way governance system (and the role of the pilgrims' office)</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Impact on the tourism sector and tourist reaction</li> <li>• Communication strategy</li> <li>• Resources needed/involved in the contention of measures and actions taken</li> <li>• Future expectations</li> <li>• Saint James way and “author’s tourism”</li> </ul>
NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)	



<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization / PI / ... you want to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b></p>	<p>The Development of Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit Ltd. (TBFT) is trying to boost the Saint Elisabeth cross border pilgrim road between Kosice (SK) and Sárospatak (HU)</p>
<p><b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<p>Main kind of answers/information/findings TBFT liked to gain from the peer review are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. More information on the organisations – stakeholders involvement in the Saint James Way project</li> <li>b. What is the governance system of the project</li> <li>c. Details on the problem addressed and the context related to COVID (statistics etc)</li> <li>d. Details of the measures to overcome the problems and how they were connected with the policy instrument</li> <li>e. What were the resources needed for them (human and budget and policy tools)</li> <li>f. What was the results of these measures</li> <li>g. How did the beneficiaries and the main stakeholders reacted, did they cooperated to better implement them and if they followed those measures</li> <li>h. How did tourists responded</li> <li>i. Were there specific dissemination activities to support those measures</li> </ol>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b></p>	<p>Relevant methods of peer reviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Round tables discussion with stakeholder involved and</li> <li>• On site visits of the proposed agenda by the host and exchanges with the stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>TBFT peer review participants followed the suggested by the host agenda.</p>

<b>MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW</b>	
<p><b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b></p>	<p>When: Braga, Sarria, Santiago de Compostela</p> <p>Where: Elevador Hotel, City halls in Sarria and Santiago de Compostela</p> <p>How (online, on-site, combination): Onsite</p> <p>What kind of information (in which form) did you gain before the peer review? Was it relevant and useful for you?</p> <p>Information from the Braga Municipality representatives about their role in the St James Way and their collaboration with the city of Santiago de Compostela.</p> <p>The role of the Church was also discussed during the roundtable.</p> <p>Braga is on the way of Saint James.</p> <p>The information provided were very useful.</p> <p>Methods/tools applied for the peer review. Was it relevant and useful for you?</p> <p>Focus group – round table discussion</p>





	<p>Participants (organizations presenting the good practices) – reviewees:</p> <p>3 different local organisations’ representatives were present.</p> <p>Further relevant information:</p> <p>Issues for the debate were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and to what extent the different local/regional organisations/stakeholders are involved in the Saint James Way development (including Church)</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Communication strategy</li> <li>• Characterization of the current situation (with special focus on tourism)</li> <li>• Measures taken under POCTEP</li> <li>• Future expectations</li> </ul> <p>As also in Sarria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint James Way impact on small villages</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Impact on the tourism sector and tourist reaction</li> <li>• Post-critical COVID period impact and measures taken (special mention to the real time information on the available beds)</li> <li>• Stakeholders coordination local policy/strategy</li> </ul> <p>And finally in Santiago de Compostela:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint James Way governance system (and the role of the pilgrims’ office)</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Impact on the tourism sector and tourist reaction</li> <li>• Communication strategy</li> <li>• Resources needed/involved in the contention of measures and actions taken</li> <li>• Future expectations</li> <li>• Saint James way and “author’s tourism”</li> </ul>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>In general, the peer review and all lessons learnt was very useful experience. The local stakeholders reacted very well to COVID times. The stakeholders were innovative in terms of adaptation in the main restrictions raised.</p> <p>Braga municipality invested a big amount from local resources for supporting main information spots infrastructures for visitors.</p> <p>Their main interest was to support visitors on the importance of the path.</p> <p>Many people start from Braga the way to St James Church. The Church is also very committed and supportive to Municipality.</p> <p>Regarding COVID effects, the problem was global, since the borders were closed, as also the transport form one region to another.</p> <p>During the 2nd phase things were better. The city of Braga, as also those of Sarria and Santiago de Compostela followed all national instructions and directions.</p> <p>Their main concern was how to promote more the territory after the COVID crisis.</p> <p>The 2nd local representative of Braga mentioned also that the role of the Church is more than critical. He worked for ten years in national level culture support, recently working in Braga. He mentioned that the cooperation with all public bodies</p>



	<p>related with the Way is still working really well, to overcome difficulties and to more promote the Camino.</p> <p>The 3rd local representative of Braga mentioned that the Camino is not a typical tourism product and needs special care and protection to keep its religious purpose.</p> <p>There is a public organisation named Xacobeo, that deals with all aspects regarding St James Way, representing all cities of the region and directly connected with the responsible Spanish ministry.</p> <p>More than 100.000 officially recorded visitors from Braga and Porto followed the Way in 2019.</p> <p>Galicia Region has an action plan for Camino delayed due to the pandemic.</p>
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>Religious tourism is a potential development opportunity for the Tokaj region. In a different way than on Saint James's Road, religious heritage is also decisive here. The area around Tokaj lived was religiously diverse until the Second World War. Jews, Catholics, Orthodox, and Reformed lived side by side. The tragedy of the Second World War broke this harmony. Sixty years later, the number of religiously motivated travellers in the region is reviving. The Camino provide a good example how to invest in religion tourism.</p> <p>The most inspiring example is how the Camino uses international film techniques. The stories that were connected to the road and filmed provide a great example of how to build an internationally known image of the region.</p> <p>Municipality of Santiago de Compostela is very well connected with international organisations for this purpose.</p> <p>There are many international workshops available in the city on the road.</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice?How could it be used in the case of your organization/territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	<p>In order to create the international image of Tokaj, the adoption of film techniques can be extremely useful in the future.</p>
<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice "at home"?</b></p>	<p>Due to historical reasons, the Slovak-Hungarian opposition can still be felt, so the coordination of the service providers on the two sides requires particularly persistent work. Another difficulty is the slow change in the post-communist atheist tradition.</p>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>In the next Interreg application period, TBFT will help to apply for projects related to religious tourism.</p>
<b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices</b></p>	<p>The hosting organisation prepared perfectly the peer-review.</p>



<b>(your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b>	
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### A3.4 ASEV (PP5) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Ecaterina Constantinova (e.constantinova@asev.it)
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)	ASEV – Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa Via delle Fiascaie 12, 50053 Empoli (Fi), Italy
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	PP5

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region
Title of the reviewed good practice	Centre Bavaria Bohemia
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Cross-border
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Lenka Křížková krizkova@rra-pk.cz
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)	
NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)	
Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization / PI / ... you want to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?	<p>Cooperation between stakeholders linked to the themes of culture and sustainable tourism in a maritime cross-border area is particularly difficult.</p> <p>In fact, the challenges are many:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administrative borders between regions</li> <li>- administrative differences between states</li> <li>- language barriers</li> <li>- the distances</li> <li>- the difficulties of connecting between regions separated by the sea</li> <li>- the fragmentation of the cultural sector and the tourism sector (particularly in Italy)</li> </ul> <p>The creation of a qualified entity to facilitate and animate this cooperation, using digital technologies in a smart way, constitutes a good practice to be deepened for its possible implementation in our cooperation space.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the participating subjects</li> </ul>



<p><b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the legal nature</li> <li>• What are the sources of funding</li> <li>• What are the tools and methodologies used</li> <li>• What are the activities carried out in detail</li> <li>• What are the results achieved</li> <li>• What are the main critical issues encountered and how they were managed / overcome</li> <li>• What are the tips and tricks for a good practice transfer</li> </ul>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b></p>	<p>To deepen the use of digital tools for the development of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- who managed the involvement of stakeholders</li> <li>- who has used digital tools</li> <li>- who managed the activities</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW</b></p>	
<p><b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b></p>	<p>GP presentation</p> <p>When: 23/06/2022</p> <p>Where: Zoom</p> <p>How (online, on-site, combination): online</p> <p>What kind of information (in which form) did you gain before the peer review? Was it relevant and useful for you?</p> <p>We received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the GP presentation form. It was done well, clear and with the fundamental information to begin to understand the importance of the GP itself;</li> <li>- the agenda of the event.</li> </ul> <p>Methods/tools applied for the peer review. Was it relevant and useful for you?</p> <p>In-depth slide on good practice. Question and answer session.</p> <p>Participants (organizations presenting the good practices) – reviewees:</p> <p>Organizations presenting the good practices:</p> <p>Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region Pilsen Region - Head of Department of European Funds Director of Centrum Bavaria Bohemia</p> <p>Reviewees:</p> <p>Anci Toscana – Sonia Pallai</p> <p>Interreg Italia Francia Marittimo – M.A. – Irene Ropolo</p> <p>Partner 5-ASEV – Lorenzo Sabatini, Ecaterina Constantinova, Massimiliano Gini (external expert of ASEV).</p> <p>Further relevant information:</p> <p>LSG meeting</p>



	<p>When: 01/07/2022</p> <p>Where: Zoom</p> <p>How (online, on-site, combination): online</p> <p>Participants</p> <p>Anci Toscana – Sonia Pallai</p> <p>Interreg Italia Francia Marittimo – M.A. &amp; JTS – Giulio Porrovecchio, Irene Ropolo &amp; Myriam Lamela</p> <p>Confesercenti Toscana – Gianni Masoni</p> <p>ASEV – Massimiliano Gini</p> <p>Main conclusions</p> <p>Anci: Anci Toscana is closing the Racine project, which has worked on the development of a cross-border network of local cultural ecosystems.  <a href="https://interreg-maritime.eu/web/racine">https://interreg-maritime.eu/web/racine</a></p> <p>It seems like a good idea to capitalize on the presented GP in a Racine 2.</p> <p>MA-JTS: the presented GP interests us because the online space allows us to break down physical and linguistic barriers, which are relevant in our area of intervention. The enhancement of the cultural heritage would also be consistent with our new priority number 4. Furthermore, the new multi-program capitalization initiative will have sustainable tourism as its pilot: this strengthens our interest in connecting the GP to our Racine project, which unites all the Program Regions and has experimented with an innovative way of involving many municipalities thanks to Anci Tuscany.</p> <p>Confesercenti Toscana: it is important for us to keep European initiatives together with business activities. I confirm the interest of our companies to capitalize on this GP, for example through a Racine 2.</p> <p>MA-JTS: in the new programming period we aim to strengthen the involvement of businesses to achieve a deeper impact on the territory.</p>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>The presented GP offered many valuable suggestions to face the challenges of the Interreg Italy France Maritime program, in particular the overcoming of physical and linguistic barriers. What is presented in the GP is certainly useful for enriching what the Racine project has experienced, emphasizing the design / implementation of activities / events / initiatives in hybrid mode.</p> <p>Peer review and lessons learnt were interesting, clear and very timely.</p> <p>Regarding the post-COVID context, it certainly allowed the project area to explore new ways and spaces of the cross-border dimension, in terms of skills, tools, communities of reference, relationships.</p> <p>The innovative dimension is linked to various aspects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the experimentation and acquisition of new tools</li> <li>- the acquisition of new skills and languages;</li> <li>- new audiences and spaces for dialogue and storytelling;</li> <li>- new point of view with respect to the potential and facets of cooperation</li> </ul>



	<p>resulting from the combination/integration of online and offline actions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the role of technology in reducing language barriers and enabling relationships;</li> <li>- awareness of skills that can enable cross-border cooperation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>Overcoming physical and linguistic barriers, which in a maritime cross-border area are particularly difficult to overcome</p> <p>The online dimension made it possible to "break down" physical and linguistic barriers, creating a common space for dialogue. The online dimension can be a functional tool/space to reduce distances between territories physically separated by the sea but culturally united by the sea.</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice? How could it be used in the case of your organization/territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	<p>Understanding how to support the creation of a smart entity capable of networking between the main tourist and cultural stakeholders of the cross-border area, to plan together and then implement cultural activities and the promotion of sustainable tourism.</p>
<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice "at home"?</b></p>	<p>The annual personnel and operating costs of a single structure such as the one presented in the GP.</p>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>We propose to Anci Toscana and Confesercenti Toscana to present a Racine 2 project that capitalizes on the tools and methods of intervention present in the GP.</p> <p>However, adapting the reviewed GP to our reality, and aiming also at overcoming the problems of financial maintenance of a single structure, we propose to enhance the existing cultural structures / museums already networked in the Racine project, enhancing (through a Racine 2 project) their skills in planning / organization / management of cultural events / cultural exhibitions / initiatives... in hybrid and multilingual mode. This network of hybrid cultural activators could also become an important player in the tourist enhancement of the cross-border area.</p>
<p><b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share qualitative and quantitative audience data to understand the impact of the initiatives;</li> <li>- Frame the experience on a European scale. E.g. by comparing the skills learnt and objectives achieved with the European skills frameworks (e.g. DigComp, EntreComp, ...) and the EU transition pathway for tourism. It might also be interesting, in order to enhance the experience and place it in the European panorama, to describe other similar experiences in Europe. This is also useful in view of the creation of new networks and synergies.</li> </ul>



### A3.5 RDFA (PP6) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Kostas Karamarkos
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)	Regional Development Fund on behalf the Region of Western Macedonia
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	6

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	EIXO Atlantico, LP
Title of the reviewed good practice	Saint James Way: COVID Safety Measures and related tourism recovery strategy)
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Braga, Ponte de Lima, Valenca, Sarria, Santiago de Compostela
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Ana Ladeiras, ana.ladeiras@arouneurope.pt
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)	<p>Braga &amp; Valença:</p> <p>Stakeholders, Guest participants and experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. António Barroso (Braga Tourism representative)</li> <li>• Mr. Marco Sousa (Porto and North of Portugal Tourism board)</li> <li>• Mr. Nuno Ferreira (Porto and North of Portugal Tourism board)</li> <li>• Mr. Varico Pereira (religious tourism expert)</li> <li>• Mrs. Ana Ladeiras (moderator and rapporteur)</li> </ul> <p>Sarria &amp; Santiago de Compostela:</p> <p>Stakeholders, Guest participants and experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Claudio Garrido (Mayor of Sarria)</li> <li>• Mr. Xosé Bugallo (Mayor of Santiago de Compostela)</li> <li>• Mr Xoan Vázquez Mao - Secretary General, Eixo Atlántico</li> <li>• Mrs Rita Fidalgo (Eixo Atlántico)</li> <li>• Mrs. Fátima López (Sarria Tourism representative)</li> <li>• Asociacion de peregrinos que lleva la oficina de turismo a la entrada de Sarria</li> <li>• Mrs. Ana Ladeiras (moderator and rapporteur)</li> </ul> <p>Main interest – Geographical Scope - Issues debated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint James Way governance system (and the role of the pilgrims' office)</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Impact on the tourism sector and tourist reaction</li> <li>• Communication strategy</li> <li>• Resources needed/involved in the contention of measures and actions taken</li> <li>• Future expectations</li> <li>• Saint James way and "author's tourism"</li> </ul>





NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)	
<b>Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization / PI / ... you want to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b>	<p>The Region of Western Macedonia (RWM) is trying to reorganise its tourism strategy to a more green and sustainable one, based on natural and cultural resources.</p> <p>The selected concrete good practise was selected as the most appropriate one to match the RDF on behalf the RWM needs.</p>
<b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b>	<p>Main kind of answers/information/findings RDF liked to gain from the peer review are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. More information on the organisations – stakeholders involvement in the Saint James Way project</li> <li>b. What is the governance system of the project</li> <li>c. Details on the problem addressed and the context related to COVID (statistics etc)</li> <li>d. Details of the measures to overcome the problems and how they were connected with the policy instrument</li> <li>e. What were the resources needed for them (human and budget and policy tools)</li> <li>f. What was the results of these measures</li> <li>g. How did the beneficiaries and the main stakeholders reacted, did they cooperated to better implement them and if they followed those measures</li> <li>h. How did tourists responded</li> <li>i. Were there specific dissemination activities to support those measures</li> <li>j. Are any specific additional actions recorder that need to be implemented in the near future to maintain the GP results</li> </ol>
<b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b>	<p>Relevant methods of peer reviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Round tables discussion with stakeholder involved and</li> <li>• On site visits of the proposed agenda by the host and exchanges with the stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>RDF peer review participants followed the suggested by the host agenda.</p>

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW	
<b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b>	<p>When: Braga, Sarria, Santiago de Compostela</p> <p>Where: Elevador Hotel, City halls in Sarria and Santiago de Compostela</p> <p>How (online, on-site, combination):Onsite</p> <p>What kind of information (in which form) did you gain before the peer review? Was it relevant and useful for you?</p> <p>Information from the Braga Municipality representatives about their role in the St James Way and their collaboration with the city of Santiago de Compostela.</p> <p>The role of the Church was also discussed during the roundtable.</p> <p>Braga is in the way of Saint James.</p>



	<p>The information provided were very useful.</p> <p>Methods/tools applied for the peer review. Was it relevant and useful for you? Focus group – round table discussion</p> <p>Participants (organizations presenting the good practices) – reviewees: 3 different local organisations’ representatives were present.</p> <p>Further relevant information: Issues for the debate were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and to what extend the different local/regional organisations/stakeholders are involved in the Saint James Way development (including Church)</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Communication strategy</li> <li>• Characterization of the current situation (with special focus on tourism)</li> <li>• Measures taken under POCTEP</li> <li>• Future expectations</li> </ul> <p>As also in Sarria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint James Way impact on small villages</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Impact on the tourism sector and tourist reaction</li> <li>• Post-critical COVID period impact and measures taken (special mention to the real time information on the available beds)</li> <li>• Stakeholders coordination local policy/strategy</li> </ul> <p>And finally in Santiago de Compostela:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint James Way governance system (and the role of the pilgrims’ office)</li> <li>• Impact of COVID19, safety measures and recover strategy</li> <li>• Impact on the tourism sector and tourist reaction</li> <li>• Communication strategy</li> <li>• Resources needed/involved in the contention of measures and actions taken</li> <li>• Future expectations</li> <li>• Saint James way and “author’s tourism”</li> </ul>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>In general, the peer review and all lessons learnt overcome RDF of RWM peer reviewers expectations. The context was clearly relevant for the post-COVID context and the approaches from all involved stakeholders were innovative in terms of adaptation in the main restrictions raised.</p> <p>Braga municipality invested a big amount from local resources for supporting main information spots infrastructures for visitors.</p> <p>Their main interest was to support visitors on the importance of the path.</p> <p>Many people start from Braga the way to St James Church. The Church is also very committed and supportive to Municipality.</p> <p>Regarding COVID effects, the problem was global, since the borders were closed, as also the transport form one region to another.</p> <p>During the 2nd phase things were better. The city of Braga, as also those of Sarria and</p>

	<p>Santiago de Compostela followed all national instructions and directions. Their main concern was how to promote more the territory after the COVID crisis.</p> <p>The 2nd local representative of Braga mentioned also that the role of the Church is more than critical. He worked for ten years in national level culture support, recently working in Braga. He mentioned that the cooperation with all public bodies related with the Way is still working really well, to overcome difficulties and to more promote the Camino.</p> <p>The 3rd local representative of Braga mentioned that the Camino is not a typical tourism product and needs special care and protection to keep its religious purpose.</p> <p>There is a public organisation named Xacobeo, that deals with all aspects regarding St James Way, representing all cities of the region and directly connected with the responsible Spanish ministry.</p> <p>More than 100.000 officially recorded visitors from Braga and Porto followed the Way in 2019.</p> <p>Galicia Region has an action plan for Camino delayed due to the pandemic.</p>
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>Religious tourism is considered as one of the strong points in RWM and is in the main focus of Western Macedonia priorities. The Camino peer review provided the Greek peer review team with many information to address RWM cultural and tourism challenges.</p> <p>A specific challenge that was addressed is that there are many SMEs supporting visitors with a variety of services, that sometimes are in contact with Xacobeo for any new rules or directions.</p> <p>A certification for supporting in a proper way is given every year to those SMEs. This is considered as a very useful approach for RWM next steps in religious tourism.</p> <p>There many religious paths like Camino (in smaller scale) and each territory needs to organise in a specific way to attract more visitors.</p> <p>Municipality of Santiago de Compostela is very well connected with international organisations for this purpose.</p> <p>The city is participating in many projects like BODAH project</p> <p>The main risk is mostly overtourism and this is a lesson learnt for RWM.</p> <p>In mid 2021 the Camino is considered as a safe mean of open air tourism.</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice? How could it be</b></p>	<p>There is a working group connecting all interesting in the Way parts, that meets from time to time to discuss problems or improvements in the support of visitors.</p> <p>The type of improvement RDF peer reviewers want to achieve with the exchange made is transferring partly of the Camino project planning to activities to be funded by the RWM Operational Program.</p>



<p><b>used in the case of your organization/territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	
<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice “at home”?</b></p>	<p>Camino is a real big project in national level, that has a strong past and history. It is very well organised and supported through the years and its root is based on a huge religious story.</p> <p>What is the main part to transfer is the way that the municipalities are organised to support the pilgrims and also to benefit from them in terms of local development.</p>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>Among the Greek peer reviewers was a representative of the Operation Program Managing Authority, that will use the exchanges made in the formulation of next calls of the EPICAH selected policy instrument.</p>
<p><b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b></p>	<p>The hosting organisation prepared and implemented a perfect peer review. No improvements are needed for similar future PRs.</p>





### A3.6 PEIPSI (PP7) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
<b>Your name and e-mail</b>	Margit Säre, margitsare@gmail.com
<b>Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)</b>	<p>Peipis Center for Transboundary Cooperation (CTC)</p> <p>Puiestee 71a, 51009 Tartu; Estonia</p> <p>www.ctc.ee</p> <p>CTC works since 1994 to promote sustainable development of transboundary Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe region in the Estonian-Russian border are, and in the Estonian-Latvian border regions,</p> <p>Our main focus of work is Environmental education and heritage; and sustainable local resources management.</p>
<b>Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)</b>	Number:PP7

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
<b>EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)</b>	<p>PP4</p> <p>Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC</p>
<b>Title of the reviewed good practice</b>	Digital Wine Tasting
<b>Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice</b>	Tokaj wine region
<b>REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)</b>	Attila Kovács, attila.kovacs@tbft.hu
<b>REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name,</b>	Gergely Ripka, host of TokajMagic and editor at TokajGuide, Hungary, <a href="https://tokajmagic.hu/en/#whoami">https://tokajmagic.hu/en/#whoami</a>



<p><b>address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)</b></p>	<p>Main interest: promotion of Tokaj wine region and its wines.</p> <p>Geographical scope: global.</p> <p>Hajnalka Szabó, president of Tokaj Renaissance Association, Hungary  <a href="https://www.tokaji.hu/en/new-president-appointed-at-tokaj-reneszansz-association/">https://www.tokaji.hu/en/new-president-appointed-at-tokaj-reneszansz-association/</a></p> <p>Main interest: promotion of Tokaj wine region and its wines.</p> <p>Geographical scope: global.</p>
<p><b>NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)</b></p>	
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization wants to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b></p>	<p>As of 2 December 2021, Estonia belongs officially to the northern wine growing zone of Europe, which simplifies exporting of Estonian wines, as wine production is thoroughly regulated in the European Union.</p> <p>At the same time, Estonia is a very young wine growing country and its wineries are small. For the Estonian wineries, considerable share of their revenue was generated at on-site wine tastings.</p> <p>Covid-19 and the restrictions caused by the pandemic have decreased or stopped on-site wine tastings and therefore the good practice promoted by Tokaj wine region was of interest for Estonian wineries.</p>
<p><b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<p>The peer review should answer to at least the following questions:</p> <p>What are the most important things and key steps to think about, when planning the online tasting?</p> <p>What have been your failures with organising online tastings?</p> <p>What kind of feedback have you received from the participants? Have you changed something in the set-up of online wine tasting due to the feedback?</p> <p>Have you promoted the experience of online wine tasting of Tokaj elsewhere in Hungary or Europe? What has been the feedback and what have you learned yourself from other wine regions?</p> <p>What has been the broader impact of COVID on Tokaj wine region and what other (digital) tools you have invented to overcome the problems caused by pandemic?</p>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b></p>	<p>The most relevant method of the peer review would be an online interview with the practitioners and organisers of digital wine tastings from Tokaj wine region.</p> <p>All participants of the online session are free to comment, ask questions and share their views.</p>



**MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW**

**Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)**

When: 7 March 2022

Where: Murimäe Wine Cellar, Valga county, Estonia and Google Meet platform

How (online, on-site, combination): combination of online and on-site; 5 persons on-site in Estonia, 2 persons online from Estonia, 4 persons online from Hungary, 1 person online from Spain.

What kind of information (in which form) did you gain before the peer review? Was it relevant and useful for you?

Before the event the reviewee (PP7) provided information about the key speakers of the event.

The information was useful, as it helped to design the list of questions and set-up for the event.

The information was useful also for promoting the event among Estonian stakeholders.

Methods/tools applied for the peer review. Was it relevant and useful for you?

The chosen method was a semi-structured interview, which was considered relevant and useful for the peer review.

Participants (organizations presenting the good practices) – reviewees:

Gergely Ripka, host of TokajMagic and editor at TokajGuide, Hungary

Hajnalka Szabó, president of Tokaj Renaissance Association, Hungary

Attila Kovács, project manager of Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC

Further relevant information: n/a.

**In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?**

The peer review met the expectations, as the two key speakers provided useful and practical information about their experience with organising online wine tasting. As the key speakers - Gergely Ripka and Hajnalka Szabó - had been involved in organising different types of events for different target groups (business to business and business to customers) and with different aims (tasting special wines from Tokaj region vs event focusing on introducing the region and finding new business partners), their answers from different perspectives were complementing each other.

The peer review was very relevant for the post-COVID context, as the issue of making one's business attractive online and engaging customers over virtual means remains significant during the years to come.



<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>The peer review addressed the challenge of making a winery (or any business of the food industry) attractive online during the present times, when all the businesses are investing into more visible presence in digital channels. The businesses have to make such investments, as the customer behaviour has changed due to COVID, and the expectations towards attractiveness of digital channels and availability of online content have increased among the customers.</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice? How could it be used in the case of your organization/territory?</b></p>	<p>The exchange of the good practice focused on very practical matters of organising an online wine tasting (as almost only possible tasting form for groups and foreigners during the pandemic).</p> <p>Most of the experience gathered during the good practice can be transferred and made use of by Estonian wineries. More specifically, the good practice helps to improve the preparedness of Estonian wineries, which are interested in online wine tastings, as their experience with organising such events till now is non-existent or very limited.</p> <p>As a result of the peer review, Peipsi CTC has compiled a short guidance document about organising an online wine tasting.</p> <p>The guidance document covers and helps to transfer the good practice regarding the following main points of organising an online wine tasting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>setting the aim of the event;</li> <li>setting the target group;</li> <li>putting together the organising team;</li> <li>drafting the scenario of the event;</li> <li>preparing the materials for the event;</li> <li>technical requirements of the event.</li> </ul> <p>As it was several times mentioned: good preparation of the organiser and good technical solution is essential for the success of the event.</p>
<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice “at home”?</b></p>	<p>The good practice is fairly easily transferable.</p> <p>There are no significant problematic issues.</p> <p>The main aspects affecting the extent of the use of the good practice is the availability of resources (time and finances) and the potential return on investment estimated by the local wine producers.</p>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>Peipsi CTC will share the guidelines with the Estonian Rural Tourism Association and the network of Estonian wineries (Estonian Wine Route).</p>



	<p>The guidance document will be disseminated also among the JS and MA of the Estonia – Latvia Programme, so they can make it available for the projects of the Estonia – Latvia Programme 2021-2027.</p>
<p><b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b></p>	<p>Firstly, feedback should be asked from the participants of the event. Based on the presented examples, the participants of the online wine tasting events were not asked to provide feedback for the event.</p> <p>For more systematic approach and improving the organisation of the event, it is recommended to send a short questionnaire to the participants 1-2 days after the event.</p> <p>Secondly, especially in case of business-to-business events, which have an aim to increase the sales, impact of an event should be monitored, as much as possible.</p> <p>For example, in case of the event, which promoted Tokaj wines for the restaurants of Poland (based on 15 wineries of Tokaj region), it would have been useful to ask these 15 wineries about their export volumes to Poland before and a few months after the online wine tasting event.</p>



### A3.7 SATU MARE (PP8) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Nicoleta Lașan, adijudetsm@yahoo.com
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests and geographical scope)	<p>Satu Mare County Intercommunity Development Association</p> <p>Project Partner in EPICAH</p> <p>Satu Mare County Intercommunity Development Association was established in 2015 in order to prepare, promote and implement projects for the development of the Satu Mare County, in the common interest of all communities associated, in various areas: social services, health, education, sports, culture, infrastructure, environment, business environment, tourism, territorial planning, information technology etc., to achieve joint development projects which are of interest at the county and local level by obtaining domestic and foreign financing, and to coordinate public policies</p>
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	PP8

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	PP9-Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region
Title of the reviewed good practice	Centre Bavaria Bohemia – in COVID time
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Centrum Bavaria Bohemia in Schönsee in the place of its residence (Germany)
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Lenka Křížková, krizkova@rra-pk.cz
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/ presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest and geographical scope)	<p>Centre Bavaria Bohemia</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <p>Lenka Křížková</p> <p>Pavel Hruška</p> <p>Veronika Hofinger</p> <p>Cultural Centre Brewery Pilsen – Domažlice, Czech Republic–</p> <p>Meeting with the regional and cross-border stakeholders regarding the Czech-Bavarian Conference ``Presentation and Interpretation of the Local Heritage``</p> <p>Geographical scope: regional</p>
NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER(to be filled before the peer review)	



<p><b>Which problem of your territory / organization / PI / ... you want address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b></p>	<p>In the Satu Mare region, there are no centres that have as main aim organizing activities on the border areas. Moreover, PP8 wanted to see the activities that the centre was able to organize during the pandemics and the measures they have adopted in order to continue to deliver services in the cross-border area.</p> <p>There is room for improvement in this area given the fact that Satu Mare County borders two other countries.</p>
<p><b>What main kind of answers / information / findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<p>PP8 would like to know how the centre is organized, functions and is being financed, what are the main activities and services that they offer and the measures they have adopted during the pandemics.</p> <p>What has been the broader impact of COVID on Bavaria-Bohemia region and what other tools you have invented to overcome the problems caused by pandemic?</p>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b></p>	<p>Participate at activities with cross-border character, visit the centre for cross-border activities, meet with members of the LSG.</p>

<b>MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW</b>	
<p><b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b></p>	<p>When: 5-6 May 2022</p> <p>Where: Plzen and Domažlice (Czech Republic), Schönsee (Germany)</p> <p>How (online, on site, combination): on site visit - ; 3 persons on-site</p> <p>What kind of information (in which form) did you gain before the peer review? Was it relevant and useful for you?</p> <p>Before the event the reviewee (PP9) provided information about the key speakers of the event.</p> <p>The information was useful, as it helped to design the list of questions and set-up for the event.</p> <p>The information was useful also for promoting the event among Romanian stakeholders.</p> <p>Agenda meeting, description of best practices from reports.</p> <p>The information was useful.</p> <p>Methods / tools applied for the peer review. Was it relevant and useful for you?</p>



	<p>Participation at a conference</p> <p>Site visits at border cultural/natural assets</p> <p>Meeting with LSG members during the visit</p> <p>Site visit at cross-border centre</p> <p>The methods and tools were very useful</p> <p>Participants (organizations presenting the good practices) – reviewees:</p> <p>LSG members</p> <p>Lenka Křížková-Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region</p> <p>Pavel Hruška-Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region</p> <p>Veronika Hofinger – Director Centre Bavaria Bohemia</p> <p>Further relevant information: n/a</p>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learnt meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>The peer review and lessons learnt were very useful and met the needs and expectations. We discovered new types of activities that can be implemented in times of pandemics and still have a cross-border character.</p>
<p><b>Which problems / needs of your organization / territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>We were interested to find ways to organize cross-border activities in the field of culture and there were many ideas being presented. Furthermore, we found interesting ideas about how the cross-border centre functions.</p> <p>It was a useful and well-punctuated exchange of experiences with practical examples from their field of activity: civic, cultural, administrative.</p> <p>It can also be a good example in the organization and operation of such centres in our region.</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part / detail of the good practice? How could it be used in case of your organization / territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	<p>The activity that can be transferred is the organization of cross-border thematic routes that focus on the common heritage of the border areas. We could develop this idea into a project for the future.</p> <p>The Centrum Bavaria Bohemia from Schönsee is an entity with a practical, pleasant and modern interface but at the same time preserving the authentic cultural values. Also, the Tourist Information Centre, organized inside this building, is equipped with leaflets, information brochures and maps, and offers partial and specialized information.</p> <p>The hosts of the centre showed us that although the COVID pandemic had less pleasant implications on the entire activity, they continued to support the daily activity and reinvent themselves, conducting a lot of events with local and cross-border involvement.</p>



<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice “at home”?</b></p>	<p>Lack of money, lack of a centre that focuses only on cross-border cultural activities.</p> <p>The good practice is fairly easily transferable.</p> <p>There are no significant problematic issues.</p> <p>The main aspects affecting the extent of the use of the good practice is the availability of resources (time and finances).</p>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>The idea of cross-border thematic route can be developed into a project and propose it for financing in the next financing period.</p>
<p><b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>	
<p><b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b></p>	<p>Find ways to finance from both sides of the border the cross-border centre. Though a sensitive issue, it could really help at improving the trust of both sides on its activity and offer it a more important place.</p>



### A3.8 PILSEN (PP9) Peer review report

REVIEWER	
Your name and e-mail	Lenka Křížková, krizkova@rra-pk.cz
Your organization (name, address, state, main interests, and geographical scope)	Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region Riegrova 1, Pilsen Czech Republic Regional scope  interest in cross-border cooperation, regional development, tourism, cultural heritage, natural heritage, municipalities, human resources
Representing which EPICAH project partner (number)	PP9

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE GOOD PRACTICE (to be filled before the peer review)	
EPICAH project partner responsible for the good practice (number, name)	EIXO Atlantico, LP
Title of the reviewed good practice	Saint James Way: COVID Safety Measures and related tourism recovery strategy
Location and geographical scope of the reviewed good practice	Portugal: Braga, Valenca Spain: Sarria, Santiago de Compostela
REVIEWEE: Main contact person (name and e-mail of the responsible / contact person)	Ana Ladeiras, ana.ladeiras@aroundeurope.pt
REVIEWEE: Main hosting organizations/presenters of the good practices (name, address, state, main interest, and geographical scope)	Braga & Valenca: Stakeholders and experts: Mr. António Barroso (Braga Tourism representative) Mr. Marco Sousa (Porto and North of Portugal Tourism board) Mr. Nuno Ferreira (Porto and North of Portugal Tourism board) Mr. Varico Pereira (religious tourism expert) Mrs. Ana Ladeiras (moderator) Sarria & Santiago de Compostela: Stakeholders and experts: Mr. Claudio Garrido (Mayor of Sarria)



	<p>Mr. Xosé Bugallo (Mayor of Santiago de Compostela)</p> <p>Mr Xoan Vázquez Mao - Secretary General, Eixo Atlántico</p> <p>Mrs Rita Fidalgo (Eixo Atlántico)</p> <p>Mrs. Fátima López (Sarria Tourism representative)</p> <p>Asociacion de peregrinos que lleva la oficina de turismo a la entrada de Sarria</p> <p>Mrs. Ana Ladeiras (moderator and rapporteur)</p>
<p><b>NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE REVIEWER (to be filled before the peer review)</b></p>	
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your territory/organization / PI / ... you want to address? Why did you choose the concrete good practice for the peer review?</b></p>	<p>Long-distance walking pilgrimages are becoming an important phenomenon for tourism in the Czech-Bavarian border region. The largest network of long-distance walking routes in Central Europe is located in the territory. Pilgrimage routes linked with traditional events or Christian personalities (Saint Jakub, Vintíř, Jan Hus) are gaining popularity. However, as a whole, this sector is currently dealing with the following problems, which are exacerbated by the situation related to the COVID 19 pandemic:</p> <p>Little interest of accommodation operators in this type of tourism</p> <p>Little interest from municipalities in this type of tourism + high costs for waste disposal, etc.</p> <p>Interest of tourists, but many of them are concerned about the high physical demands (heavy backpacks, etc.)</p> <p>Complex coordination of diverse stakeholders who are based in places very far from each other - experience is with coordinating stakeholders in one integrated location or destination</p> <p>Suitable tools for informing tourists online and in time</p> <p>Prevention of over-tourism in selected locations</p> <p>Methods of collecting data and information about tourists, their behavior in the area, and their needs</p> <p>The Saint James Way to Santiago de Compostela is the most popular and best-coordinated long-distance pilgrimage route in Europe. Therefore, we believe that it is here that we will find the most suitable inspiration for the development of our activities in the Czech-Bavarian border region.</p>
<p><b>What main kind of answers/information/findings would you like to gain from the peer review?</b></p>	<p>As part of the peer review, we would like to learn the following in particular:</p> <p>How are the local stakeholder groups organized?</p> <p>How is the trail organized in Spain as a whole?</p> <p>How is the trail organized in Portugal as a whole?</p> <p>How is the trail organized pan-European?</p> <p>Do strategies and CI manuals exist?</p> <p>Is communication with businesses representatives (accommodation, catering, transport, etc.) appropriated and with good results?</p> <p>What are the other accompanying services on the route?</p>





	<p>How COVID 19 disrupted progress and collaboration?</p> <p>How pilgrims use electronic information tools?</p> <p>Method of obtaining statistical data on the activities of tourists</p>
<p><b>What method of the specific peer review is the most relevant for you? What would you like to do, to whom would you like to talk, which sites would you like to visit?</b></p>	<p>Visits on sites and face-to-face discussions with the stakeholders.</p>

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEER REVIEW	
<p><b>Peer review general introduction (when, where, how, participants, background, and preliminary information gained before the peer review)</b></p>	<p>When: 18. – 19. 5. 2022</p> <p>Where: Braga, Valenca, Sarria, Santiago de Compostela</p> <p>How: Onsite</p> <p>Czech participants:</p> <p>Lenka Křížková – Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region (expert on cross-border tourism)</p> <p>Pavel Hruška - Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region (expert on the cooperation of local stakeholders and municipalities)</p> <p>Lucie Ženíšková – Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region (analytic and expert on statistic methods)</p> <p>Ilona Šnebergerová – Pilsen Region (Head of Department of Tourism)</p> <p>We have gotten all the relevant information about the main topics, speakers, and stakeholders that we should meet during the peer review.</p>
<p><b>In general, did the peer review and lessons learned meet your expectations and needs? How was it relevant for the post-Covid context? Was it innovative?</b></p>	<p>The event was very relevant to our needs and situations. It fulfilled our expectations and was very innovative – for the conditions before COVID and even in the COVID context.</p> <p>We especially appreciated the following information:</p> <p>Historical development of route development in Spain and Portugal</p> <p>Certification process</p> <p>Method of distributing pilgrims passports and obtaining stamps</p>



	<p>Forms of accommodation for pilgrims</p> <p>Feedback from the mayors of various cities, how they perceive the benefit for their area (if they present their territory well to the pilgrims, they will return with the whole family for a longer period of time)</p> <p>Innovative above-standard services (luggage transport based on filling out a form)</p> <p>Method of offering local products and their transport to pilgrims' residences</p> <p>Involvement of restaurant representatives - special pilgrim breakfasts and snacks</p> <p>Involvement of local communities - what it means for them to be on the route of this trail</p> <p>Methods of statistical monitoring of visitors in Santiago de Compostela</p> <p>Efforts to reach the various social groups of tourists</p> <p>Method of communication within the pan-European community of stakeholders, volunteers, pilgrims etc.</p>
<p><b>Which problems and challenges of your organization/territory / PI / ... were finally really addressed by the peer review?</b></p>	<p>Method of communication with stakeholders and communication of the main benefit for local communities</p> <p>What above-standard services do tourists appreciate = luggage transfer</p> <p>Involvement of other groups of actors to coordinate the route – church, volunteers, tourist associations, etc.</p> <p>Method of involvement of the business sector – catering and accommodation offer</p>
<p><b>Explain in detail the type of improvement you want to achieve with the exchange made? Would you transfer at least some part/detail of the good practice? How could it be used in the case of your organization/territory / PI / ...?</b></p>	<p>In the conditions of the Czech-Bavarian borderland, we would like to use the knowledge gained in the following areas:</p> <p>Involvement of other entities in communication and route coordination (mainly volunteers, business, and volunteers)</p> <p>Introduction of baggage transport services</p> <p>Improvement of the way of offering of the local products</p> <p>Long-term monitoring of the number of visitors and use of routes</p> <p>Conceptual emphasis on the contribution of this type of tourists to the territory</p>
<p><b>What are the most problematic issues for you to transfer the good practice “at home”?</b></p>	<p>The Czech-Bavarian routes do not have such a fundamental worldwide reputation. The complex rather consists of a larger number of smaller trails. Joint marketing is, therefore, more problematic. Pilgrimage and long-distance hiking is, however, suitable form of tourism in the COVID 19 context and very relevant for the territory.</p>
<p><b>How will you transfer the good practice and improve the policy instrument?</b></p>	<p>The knowledge gained was presented within the stakeholder group and will be used in the preparation of other cross-border projects.</p>



<b>MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>What do you think could be done differently to improve the reviewed good practices (your recommendation for the hosting organizations)?</b>	The event was prepared at a professional level and we do not have any comments on the methods, chosen topics or experts.



EPICAH (Effectiveness of Policy Instruments for Cross-Border Advancement in Heritage), an interregional cooperation project for improving natural and cultural heritage policies.

Project Partners:

- Atlantic Axis of Peninsular Northwest (PT)
- Regional Development Agency of the Pilsen Region (CZ)
- Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation (EE)
- Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia (EL)
- Atlantic Axis of Peninsular Northwest (ES)
- Iberian Association of Riverside Municipalities of Duero River (ES)
- Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC (HU)
- Agency for the Development of the Empolese Valdelsa (IT)
- Satu Mare County Intercommunity Development Association (RO)

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#NaturalHeritage #Cooperation  
#PolicyLearning #InterregEurope*



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