

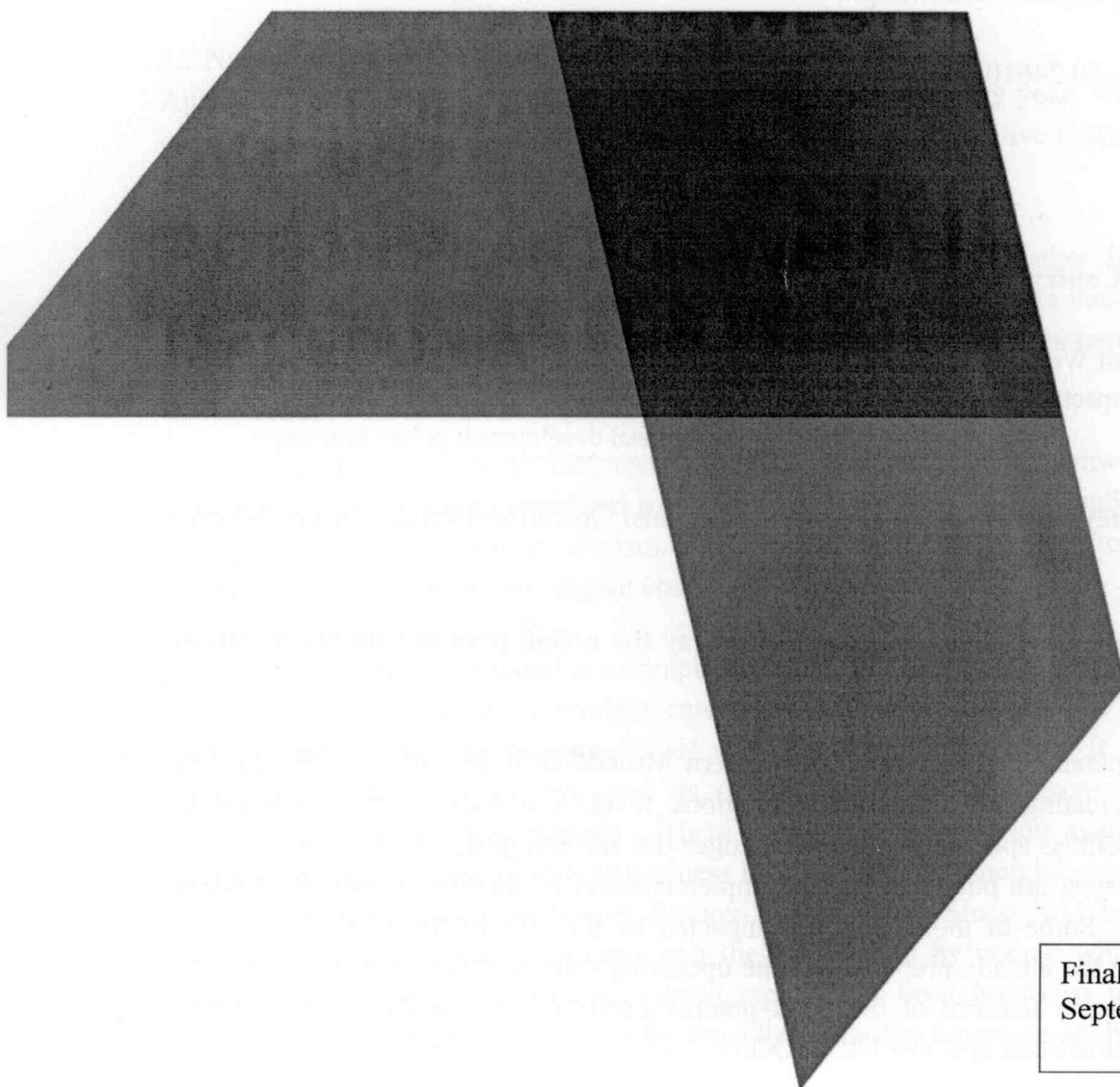


European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund



**SKILLS+**  
Interreg Europe

**SKILLS+**  
**ACTION PLAN FOR WESTERN**  
**MACEDONIA**



Final version  
September 2019

## Part I – General Information

**Project:** Supporting knowledge capacity in ICT among SME to engage in growth and innovation SKILLS+.

**Partner Organisation concerned:** Region of Western Macedonia, University of Western Macedonia

**Country:** Greece

**NUTS2 region:** Region of Western Macedonia

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## Part II – Policy Context

The Action Plan of Western Macedonia, Greece aims to impact:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
	<input type="checkbox"/> European Territorial Cooperation programme
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other regional development policy instrument

**Name of the Policy instrument(s) addressed:** Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia

### Further details on the policy context and the way the action plan should contribute to improve the policy instrument

The Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia is one of the main funding mechanisms for creating growth and jobs at regional level. A series of innovative measures are designed to address specific regional challenges that are recognised in the area. Calls for expression of interest are published for the implementation of specific actions that address those challenges. Some of those calls are impacted by the GPs of the SKILLS+ project. Certain aspects in the already prepared and the upcoming calls, mentioned in this document, are inspired by some features of the good practices selected for the Region of Western Macedonia i.e HalberStadt app, and DIGIBOOST .



### **Part III – Details of the actions envisaged**

This part presents the details of the actions envisaged to be implemented in the framework of the RWM ROP and the features adapted in the calls of proposals inspired by the SKILLS+ GPS.

#### **Action 1**

**Name of the action:** Create a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) in Western Macedonia

##### **1.1 Relevance to the Project**

A system that brings together the place, the characteristics of the region and the visitors and enhance business ICT skills, is found to be relevant to the HalberStadt app (implemented in Germany).

##### **1.2 Nature of the action**

Although the RWM is accepting a lower number of tourists every year, when compared to other regions in Greece, the Region has to offer a variety of alternative tourism activities and destinations.

Building a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) shall gather in one place the services/destinations offered within the Region of Western Macedonia thus maximising the impact of promotional efforts of SMEs in the Region and beyond. This requires the upscale of digital skills and services offered online by SMEs.

The digitisation of cultural heritage with GIS visualisation of pathways and virtual information assistants are considered a system that will create more incentives for new and existing business to invest in tourism. An upgrade of digital skills / tools of SMEs is necessary to cope with the new digital era of tourist experience.

The HalberStadt app (Germany) is a complete mobile web- and app-based information portal for city /region with a focus on tourism, enterprises and public services. The HalberStadt App was the first city-app in Saxony-Anhalt and was released in 2011. It is an important communication tool for the city and its online marketing, its citizens, its tourists and prospective enterprises and investors. There is different information available (e.g. about citizen services, activities as well as business locations and commercial properties). The app also won the special award "Pioneer Saxony-Anhalt 2014". Since 2014 information about accessibility of sights and restaurants and their utilization by people with handicap were included in the app. The function "citizen report" has been improved to allow a faster transmission of instructions to the city by the citizen. For the future, an english version of the



app is planned. A push button should be also involved to be able to spread news more effectively as well as the expansion and improvement of companies' database. Through the information portal business can attract visitors enhancing tourism activity. This GP is selected because of two important factors: a) the digital dissemination of cultural heritage, b) the promotion of local/regional business, and c) the increase of digital skills of SME's in the region as a facilitator in boosting economic activity.

The HalberStadt app GP impacted two different calls of proposals in the Regional Operational Programme of WM:

- **Call No.1.1:** Creation of a holistic Destination Management System that brings together the place and the cultural heritage, the public services offered and the visitors. Similarly, to the implementation of the Halberstadt app in Germany, the holistic destination management system of the RWM will be an important communication tool that will provide information about citizen and tourist services, activities as well as business locations and commercial properties. Further to the initial characteristics of the platform the RWM DMS will provide information on accessibility of sights and restaurants and their utilization by handicapped people. The way the HalberStadt app GP impacted this call is by enriching the concept and the features to be included in the RWM DMS App.
- **Call No.1.2:** Creation of a digital tool for guiding tourists and visitors along cultural routes by using their own smartphones along a predefined trail on the map. This tool will be part of the Destination Management System. It will be based on the geolocation of cultural heritage sites and information related to offers as restaurants, POI's, small scale food producers, art galleries and museums along the trail etc. Its primary use is in tourism. The aim is to introduce a simple and less time-consuming tool for digital marketing. *(Tools developed in this call will be funded by RWM OP. Thematic Priority 2: Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT. Investment Priority 2c: Enhancement of ICT applications in e-government, e-learning, e-inclusion, e-culture and e-Health however this Thematic Priority is discussed to be managed at a national level and discussion are not yet concluded. However, the RWM will submit a proposal to the Ministry about this action. The proposal will include elements adapted from the HalberStadt App as presented below).* The way the HalberStadt app GP impacted this call is by integrating it to the RWM DMS App providing a holistic support applications to tourists.

The specific activities and features to be implemented based on Halberstadt App are:

For Call No 1.1: Design, develop and test an application that will help citizens and tourists discover, live and work in the Region of Western Macedonia providing a gateway to the natural and cultural environment of the area.



Specifically, oriented activities, for **Guests** will include: The app will help guests explore opportunities for natural and cultural heritage sites and accommodations. With the application guests will be able to easily research attractions on the go, find accommodation and event taking place in the region. It will also provide booking services to events.

Specifically, oriented activities, for **Citizens** will include: Mobile citizen information, where citizens can be informed about opening hours and responsibility of regional/local offices. Events and press releases of the city will also be provided.

Specifically, oriented activities, for **Entrepreneurs** will include: Information about business, real estate, benefits, labor. Entrepreneurial Support mechanisms and financing schemes.

Further to the above characteristics that are refining and enriching the initial conceptual plans for the RWM App based on the Halberstadt App, the RWM DMS will provide information on accessibility of sights and restaurants and their utilization by handicapped people which is a special characteristic of the Halberstadt App that will be incorporated into the RWM DMS App.

For Call No 1.2: Design, develop and test a digital tool for guiding tourists and visitors along cultural routes by using their own smartphones along a predefined trail on the map.

Specifically, oriented activities, for **Tourists** will include: a GIS enabled system that will provide information and guidance to visitors about the trail, its history, the surrounding area and services provided along the trail. Te GIS enabled tool will be connected to the RWM DMS App providing an integrated way for informing and supporting tourists while their stay in RWM.

### 1.3 Stakeholder involved

Players involved - GP2   Call 1.1	Role
Higher Education Institutions - Research Centres – Chamber of Commerce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● University of Western Macedonia</li> <li>● Technical Education Institutions</li> <li>● CERTH</li> </ul>	Technical Experts - definition of characteristics to be integrated in the public calls
Managing Authority of Western Macedonia	Contracting Authority, Coordinator of the Actions and Measures implemented
RWM SMES	Beneficiaries and End Users
Municipalities	Facilitators
Players involved - GP2   Call 1.2	Role



Managing Authority of Western Macedonia	Beneficiary
Higher Education Institutions - Research Centres – Chamber of Commerce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Western Macedonia</li> <li>• Technical Education Institutions</li> <li>• CERTH</li> </ul>	Technical Experts - definition of characteristics to be integrated in the public calls

#### 1.4 Timeframe

Action 1 foresees the publication of the respective calls (1.1 & 1.2) of expression of interest by the Regional Authorities of Western Macedonia. The call is expected to be published in September 2019. However, delays may apply due to the local elections held in June 2019 and the change of the Regional Governor in August 2019. The implementation period is foreseen to be March 2020 - March 2021. Regarding Action 1.2 the decision on whether the axis will be managed regionally or centrally and whether the calls of proposal will be published by the regional authorities or the ministry is still pending as the national authorities changed after the national elections in June 2019.

#### 1.5 Indicative costs

Available funding (Action Cost): 1 M Euros

#### 1.6 Indicative funding sources

RWM OP, Thematic Priority 6: Preserving and Protecting the Environment And Promoting Resource Efficiency. Investment Priority 6c: Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage for tourist purposes.

#### 1.7 Main steps for the implementation of the action

The Regional Managing Authorities have the role to conclude the concept of the calls to be published under RWM ROP 2014-2020. The direct interaction between the SKILLS+ team and the Regional Managing Authorities was very beneficial and efficient in refining the initial concepts of the calls with characteristics and elements presented and implemented in the Halberstadt App. The Call is expected to be published in September 2019. Calls before being published are approved by the Regional Council.

#### Action 2:

Name of the action: Providing financial aid to companies with a view to making digital investments.



#### 4.1 Relevance to the Project

The creation of incentives for startups/existing business to increase digital skills is one of the main pillars for the RWM ROP and this is directly relevant the DIGIBOOST GPs from Finland.

Business in the rural area of the Western Macedonia Region are characterised by low exporting capacity. At the same time, WM is the only region in Greece that does not have sea resulting in reduced GDP related to tourism compared to other regions in Greece. Maximising the use and impact of digital tools can help regional business to boost their activity and survive amid of turbulent economic times.

DIGIBOOST is a policy tool that promotes the digitalization of SMEs and midcaps (less than 300 000 000€/annual turnover). DIGIBOOST co-funded by 50% ICT experts to work within businesses in order to: a) improve internationalization and networking; b) develop innovations; c) invest and advance the working capital; d) accessing financing solutions and/or securing the export receivables. The call for support is continuously open and businesses apply online (<https://www.tekes.fi/en/test-your-idea/#/>). The key criterion is that the effort must include internationalization and that there has to be a really new element in the company (to make the 'digital leap'). The person hired must be a new person with exact skills, not already existing in the company.

The services offered by the digital/innovation expert were combined with the purchase of IT aiming to lead to the production of digital products and products related to the preparation, provision and update of e-services with a focus on exports.

The DIGIBOOST GP impacted two different calls of proposals in the Regional Operational Programme of WM:

- **Call No. 2.1:** The DIGIBOOST GP has impacted the call of proposals of the RWM ROP on supporting entrepreneurship by supporting new/existing business to upscale ICT related services. The prepublication of the call included certain features of the DIGIBOOST GP like the availability of funding for start-ups or existing business to upgrade their ICT tools (both hardware and software) and hire experts for their digital marketing campaigns.
- **Call No. 2.2:** The DIGIBOOST GP has impacted the call of proposals of the RWM on creating local business incubators that have a focus on ICT business but will also support horizontally SMES with ICT experts' start-ups in other sectors. The aim of this call is to create supporting structures to companies (mainly start-ups) to enhance competitiveness, innovation and business visibility (incubator, regional business development structure) facilitated by the ICT tools. This call will offer business

consultants to local start up in various sectors i.e. business development, marketing, but also ICT experts and will help actively the start-ups to grow through innovations creating job opportunities and boosting the regional economy.

## 2.2 Nature of the action

DIGIBOOST has impacted two calls of proposal originally foreseen by the RWM. The specific activities and features of DIGIBOOST that impacted these two call are analysed below.

**For Call No 2.1:** Support startups and existing companies to upgrade their ICT skills with software and hardware equipment. A specific feature that was integrated into the pre-publication of this call and was based on the DIGIBOOST GP context, not included in the initial plans of the RWM, was to provide the opportunity to SMEs and startups to hire experts to design and implement a digital marketing campaign.

**For Call No 2.2:** Support the creation of new ventures by creating supporting mechanisms for entrepreneurs. The specific features that were integrated into the design of this call and was not included in the original plans was to provide within the supporting mechanisms ICT experts that would facilitate the development of new products and services for the start ups.

## 2.3 Stakeholder involved

Players involved - GP1   Call No. 2.1, Call No. 2.2	Role
Higher Education Institutions - Research Centers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Western Macedonia</li> <li>• Technical Education Institutions</li> <li>• CERTH</li> </ul>	Technical Experts - definition of characteristics to be integrated in forthcoming calls
Managing Authority of Western Macedonia	Contracting Authority, Coordinator of the Actions and Measures implemented
RWM Business	Beneficiaries

## 2.4 Timeframe

Action 2 foresees the publication of the respective calls (2.1 & 2.2) of expression of interest by the Regional Authorities of Western Macedonia. The call is expected to be published in September 2019. However, delays may apply due to the local elections held in June 2019 and the change of the Regional Governor in August 2019. The implementation period is foreseen to be March 2020 - March 2021.

## 2.5 Indicative costs





Available funding (Action Cost): 1.5M Euros

## **2.6 Indicative funding sources**

RWM OP. Thematic Priority 3: Enhancing Competitiveness of SMEs. Investment Priority 3a: Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and supporting the creation of new businesses, including through nurseries

## **2.7 Main steps for the implementation of the action**

The Regional Managing Authorities have the role to conclude the concept of the calls to be published under RWM ROP 2014-2020. The direct interaction between the SKILLS+ team and the Regional Managing Authorities was very beneficial and efficient in refining the initial concepts of the calls with characteristics and elements presented and implemented in the DIGIBOOST. The Calls are expected to be published in September 2019. Calls before being published are approved by the Regional Council.

## **3. The Action Plan responds to the Peer Review Recommendations**

The Action Plan of Western Macedonia responds to the recommendation made by the Peer Review held in Greece. Namely, the Peer Review proposed that actions should focus on:

1. Public support to internet providers to improve the mobile access
2. More intense cooperation between scientific institutions and SME's
3. Creation of incentives for start ups
4. Development of clusters and business centres
5. Creation of local business incubators
6. Support of innovation in SME's
7. Training for SME's in digital skills
8. Analyse the causes of brain drain and try to search solutions
9. Intensify the cooperation among regional institutions

Based on those recommendations the SKILLS+ team of UOWM designed and proposed features that could be integrated in the respective calls of proposals of the RWM ROP with the aim to create greater impact in boosting the regional economy.



Date 20/11/2019

Signature

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