

ACTION PLAN

BULGARIA, 2022



This action plan was prepared by Euroregion Pleven-Olt Association under Interreg Europe programme project Revitalizing Remote And Mountainous areas through Sustainable Alternative Tourism (RAMSAT). This project - RAMSAT project is supported under the European Union (Interreg Europe / ERDF).

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Summary

Despite of its small size territory, Bulgaria is rich in natural heritage, which is one of the most valuable resources for the development of alternative tourism in our country, and the mountains are its last natural habitat. They offer forests and fresh air, rivers and drinking water, medicinal herbs, pastures and clean food, wild animals and birds, beautiful landscapes. Apart from being a guardian of wild animals and rare plants, the mountain is also home to many people who need work and incomes. The source of such is the tourism sector. The same needs are felt in the remote areas, where there are all the factors that determine the successful development of tourism. Mountainous and remote areas are equally important to the communities that live there, and it is crucial that they develop and operate wisely and sustainably. However, their potential for the development of tourism in Bulgaria is not used in the best way. Mountain tourism is second in popularity after sea tourism, but is associated mainly with winter ski tourism. Today, the rapidly changing reality requires the provocation of an innovative interest of modern society in the riches and advantages of remote and mountainous areas. The traditional notion that jobs in these areas are created by external investors must be replaced by provoking the innate entrepreneurial potential of the people living there, which can be transformed into offering attractive, diverse and modern tourist services.

The RAMSAT project aims to protect the natural and cultural heritage of remote and mountainous areas through sustainable alternative tourism. In line with this goal and through a sustainable balance between environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects, Partner 2 presents this regional action plan. During the meetings of local stakeholders within the project, good practices shared by the partner regions were discussed, which presented successful initiatives in the four main thematic pillars of the RAMSAT project - eco-tourism, adventure, cultural and rural tourism.

Discussions with stakeholders contributed to the creation of the Regional SWOT analysis, which outlined the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the development of alternative tourism in the region of Partner 2. Stakeholders were engaged in identifying good practices and sharing ideas. Based on the results of the completed questionnaires, their views were analyzed and after each meeting good practices were identified that have the highest potential for inclusion in the current action plan. Good practices were assessed at three different levels: Level of Implementation, Strategic Significance, Financial / Technical / Legal / Policy Constraints. After analyzing the collected results, conclusions were prepared on the need and feasibility of applying the relevant practices at the regional level. By using this methodology after each stakeholder group meeting, certain indicative activities have been identified for future inclusion in the regional action plan, the implementation of which will contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and the natural environment, while achieving growth in number of visits to sites/objects of cultural and natural heritage.

Policy instrument initially identified by Partner 2 in the RAMSAT application form was OP "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020, Priority axis 6: Regional Tourism, Investment Priority 6c: Conserving, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage, Specific objectives 1: Enhancement of the tourism supply of cultural monuments of national and world importance.

It was established that no further calls for project proposals are expected under the above-mentioned priority axis, due to the exhausting of the financial resources allocated to it. In order to fulfil the commitment of Partner 2 to Interreg Europe Programme through its participation in the project, it was expected to be identified a new policy instrument to finance the transfer of good practices identified during the learning process, part of RAMSAT project and assessed by stakeholders as most necessary and applicable in the region of Partner 2 and with the potential to be included in the Action Plan developed by Partner 2.

Partner 2 explained at the application stage that they will try to influence the mentioned policy instrument through new supported projects achieving sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage.

In the view of the new circumstances, it was obvious that it will not be possible to achieve the desired influence within the initial policy instrument. The conclusion was that Partner 2 has to focus on a new policy instrument and after deep investigation and discussion with the stakeholders during the stakeholders group meetings, has been identified another policy instrument whose priorities are closely related to the RAMSAT project idea and objectives - Interreg VIA Romania-Bulgaria 2021-2027 Programme.

In addition, one of Partner 2 stakeholders came with a proposal for developing two project ideas as project proposals, inspired by the good practices shared so far within the RAMSAT project and thus there is a significant possibility for influencing the new identified policy instrument, by using funds from the new policy instrument for new projects, and to apply the lessons learnt and benefits of the interregional experience exchange during phase 1 of RAMSAT project. Also, the first call for project proposals within Interreg VIA Romania-Bulgaria 2021-2027 Programme is expected by the end of 2022, so which in terms of timing fits perfectly to the period of phase 2 of RAMSAT project, dedicated to monitoring and reporting of results.

Part I – General information

Project: Revitalizing of remote and mountainous areas through sustainable alternative tourism RAMSAT, PGI06218

Partner organisation: Association Euroregion Pleven-Olt

Country: Bulgaria

NUTSII region: Северозападен

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Part II – Policy context

1. The Action Plan aims to impact:
 - Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
 - European Territorial Cooperation programme
 - Other regional development policy instrument
2. Name of the policy instrument(s) addressed: Interreg VIA, Romania-Bulgaria 2021–2027
3. Further details on the policy context and the way the action plan should contribute to improve the policy instruments:

Programme Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria covers seven counties in the southern part of Romania (Mehedinti, Dol, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Calarasi and Constanta) and eight districts in the northern part of Bulgaria (Vidin, Vratsa, Montana, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, Ruse, Dobrich and Silistra). The programme will contribute to the development of sustainable forms of tourism and sustainable mobility solutions in the Danube region, promoting the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture through direct support of SMEs and public-private partnerships. This objective is in line with EUSDR Priority Area 03 (PA 03).

Part of the activities that could be supported:

- Set-up of natural sites for economic use: trails / paths, waste disposal, security, signalling, camp sites, other open-air attractions etc.
- Supporting sites with tourist potential: construction, modernization/restoration of castles, fortresses, churches, monasteries, palaces, archaeological sites, private/public museums, libraries, art collections/galleries, exhibitions places, wineries, agro-farms (e.g. lavender farms/fields; roses farms/fields, traditional oil factories, sheepfolds), adventure parks, open air attractions etc.
- Creating common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services, expanding and improving services, targeting new markets and creating jobs in the cross-border area, including by setting up on-site and on-line shops, especially for traditional / local products (local food, bread, wine, cheese, rose, lavender, honey etc.);
- Support for local and regional actors to valorize potentially valuable tourist sites/experiences, including by creating sustainable tourist trails or developing quality labels for excellence in services, promoting and marketing tourist offerings, etc., such as using trends in social media - such as Insta-Tourism - is also encouraged. According to preliminary information, the programme is expected to launch a call for project proposals during 2022.

Following the 5th working local stakeholders' meeting within the RAMSAT project, organized by Partner 2 and held on December 1st 2021,

Association National Center for Information Services - Pleven, stated in written form their intention for the development of two project proposals: "Creation of joint cross - border interactive open - air exposition, presenting objects of regional nature and culture heritage" and „Promotion and protection of herbal natural heritage in the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria“, which to be included as actions in the current Action Plan and to be submitted for approval within policy instrument Interreg VIA Romania-Bulgaria 2021-2027. At the last working local stakeholders' meeting of the project will be held a discussion regarding the inclusion of indicative actions into the regional action plan and will be presented the mentioned above project ideas.

Representatives of the Association actively participated in the interregional learning process during phase 1 of the RAMSAT project both at interregional online thematic seminars and at the local stakeholders' working meetings and within informal discussions.

Association National Center for Information Services - Pleven is a private nongovernmental non-profit organization, which aims to improve the regional socio-economic development. In order to achieve its goals, the Association carries out a number of activities, in particular related to the implementation of projects co-financed by the EU, providing business support services, consulting and knowledge to SMEs to increase their competitiveness.

Part III – Details on the actions envisaged

ACTION 1:

Name of the action: Creation of joint cross-border interactive open-air exposition, presenting objects of regional natural and cultural heritage

Relevance to the project

The area of Interreg VIA Programme, Romania-Bulgaria 2021–2027 covers a total area of 69,285 sq. km, which amounts to 19.8% of the territory of the both countries, with about two thirds in Romania and one third in Bulgaria. It has a population of about 4.20 million (1.35 million in Bulgaria and 2.85 million in Romania). The main geographical and natural element that shapes the whole landscape is the Danube River, which stretches for 470 km along the border from west to east. The area is mostly rural and large areas are used for agriculture. There are also significantly large areas covered with forests and water bodies, mostly tributaries of the Danube. The area also includes many natural objects on both sides of the border, with rich biodiversity (many Natura 2000 and Ramsar objects).

The cross-border area is one of the least developed areas in the EU. All regions lag behind other EU regions and both countries are facing major socio-economic disparities that have remained constant over time. In general, the low level of economic development weakens the business environment and encourages emigration, which in turn hinders the region from realizing its potential. The north-south division along the Danube, especially in terms of physical accessibility and connectivity, but also due to language and administrative barriers, are among the most important structural challenges affecting the cross-border area.

With the help of its rich natural and cultural heritage, tourism as an economic sector can provide good conditions for economic diversification throughout the cross-border area, but its potential remains untapped. The both countries of the border region share a common historical and cultural heritage - remnants of Roman times, religious sites, traditions. The Black Sea coast is a popular tourist destination, although limited by the length of the season. There are numerous objects of the natural and cultural heritage along the Danube River and the river itself.

However, tourist sites and heritage sites are not used to their full potential. This is determined by various factors such as: poor quality of tourist infrastructure, pollution of natural sites, limited accessibility and poor transport infrastructure, lack of support services and ineffective promotion, as well as lack of manpower. Tourist offer is not coordinated across the border.

Through the joint cross-border tourism product "Interactive open-air exposition, presenting objects of regional natural and cultural heritage", created on the basis of the common natural and cultural heritage and with the use of the most modern digital technologies to attract the interest of tourists, will be created conditions for the development of cultural tourism in the border areas covered by the eligible Programme area.

The current action is inspired by two separate good practices presented at the thematic seminars held during the implementation of the RAMSAT project, namely:

➤ QUESTO – presented during thematic seminar No. 1 „Use of natural heritage in ecotourism “, on 22.10.2020 by project partner No. 6. The idea was developed by a group of young people under the guidance of their teachers - “Cocosul de Munte”. Youth club Green Impact. By using QR codes, cultural objects are visualized, accompanied by information about a specific place. The visitor can learn about the history, everyday life and sights of the area using the mobile application QUESTO. In the form of a fairy tale, you can get acquainted with the people and gastronomy of the area.

➤ Project ASTRA VR, realized by Astra Museum, Sibiu County, Romania. The project was presented during the thematic seminar 3 „Use of natural heritage in culture tourism “, 04.11.2021 by project partner 6. The ASTRA VR project enables visitors to get to know virtually the world of the Romanian village, animated in 3D, with the help of virtual reality, in which scenes from everyday life, landscapes, nature, architecture and traditional customs are presented.

Both good practices respect the basic principle of the cultural policy of the European Union, ie. Preservation and development of the cultural diversity of each country and region, which helps to achieve the EU strategic goal, namely the creation of a "common" European identity, achieving its goal through the development of programs and products based on information and communication technologies.

Providing digital access to the cultural heritage will contribute to its public availability and recognition, and will contribute to its preservation, protection and promotion. In addition, the modern technologies offer the opportunity to create attractive tourist attractions and use the untapped tourist potential of the remote border areas, which have a huge number of natural and cultural heritage sites, often left undiscovered by mass tourists.

Combining the two types of approaches and technologies included in the identified good practices will allow the adaptation of the lessons learnt during the learning process and shared good practices by the partners regions to create a unique joint cross-border tourism product, which in turn corresponds to the goals and priorities of the new Interreg VIA Programme, Romania-Bulgaria 2021–2027, but namely the development of sustainable forms of tourism, promoting the development of quality products, infrastructure and innovative forms of tourism and culture.

Nature of the action

Based on the learning process part of phase 1 of the project implementation and after an analysis of the new Interreg VIA Romania-Bulgaria Programme priorities, Association National Center for Information Services - Pleven, proposed the development of a project proposal “Creation of joint cross-border interactive open-air exposition, presenting objects of regional nature and culture heritage”, to be included as an action in this action plan.

The current proposed action aims to create an interactive open-air exposition using modern digital technologies, which by exposing and promoting the natural and cultural heritage and way of daily life of people typical for the cross-border area, will create a unique tourist attraction. Precise inspection and selection of the most

suitable objects of the natural and cultural heritage will be made in advance, the location of the exhibitions at a pre-selected location in urban or rural areas will be determined, software and 3D visualizations of the selected sites will be built.

The project proposal will address the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border area on both sides of the border, which is extremely suitable for the transfer of these good practices because it owns many values of natural and cultural heritage, stored mainly into indoor cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, etc. and so far, they have been presented to the public only in the traditional way.

Taking into account all the changes and difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related prolonged closures of the physical premises of the cultural institutions, as well as the imposed restrictions on the number of visitor groups, the project idea to be developed an interactive open-air exposition provides opportunities for safe access to cultural content by large groups of people and at the same time it represents a quality, modern and attractive tourist attraction. An additional advantage of the project proposal is the cross-border cooperation itself, which always takes into account the similarities and additionalities between the border areas in terms of knowledge/promotion of natural and cultural heritage, natural resources and related tourism services.

The benefits of creating interactive open-air expositions are as follows:

- Protects against congestions crowds indoors and is fully applicable in a pandemic situation;
- Interactive presentation in 3D AR of natural and cultural heritage objects, partially or completely destroyed by the time;
- Extremely easy construction of the interactive expositions in different regions from the eligible cross-border area. In this way, digital expositions can easily tour different cities across the border in the form of interactive visiting exhibitions. 3D markers can easily be sent to different places in order to promote the natural and cultural heritage of the region and create a unique, easy to maintain tourist attraction without having to leave state borders.

The main activity in the project proposal will be the creation of interactive open-air expositions. The rest planned activities are: project management, procurements for the purchase of necessary equipment and external services, organizing events on both sides of the border to present the interactive expositions, publicity and information activities, etc.

The implementation of action 1 will lead to the creation of a sustainable solution for ensuring equal open-air access and wider promotion of natural and cultural objects in the cross-border area through the implementation of a specific attraction – outdoor mobile installations presenting digitized cultural content through the means of augmented reality in order to raise awareness on natural and cultural cross-border values.

Another aspect of action 1 is its reaction to the challenges imposed by the pandemic environment – tourism is the economic sector that is slowly recovering due to the gradual removal of travel and physical distance restrictions. International travel restrictions have constrained many travellers to explore local and regional tourist destinations. These have prompted a preference for domestic tourism, which has recovered more quickly than incoming tourism. In this view the action 1 will contribute for achieving full capacity of the domestic and regional tourism along

the cross-border area to relieve the travel industry crisis in the situation of significant loss of international demand, such as the one being produced by COVID-19.

Main project activity will be digitally supported through the use of the opportunities provided by augmented reality. It is one of the latest technologies in the electronic world and is considered a continuation of the well-known virtual reality (VR). The cumulative effect of perception of the presented cultural heritage will be achieved through superimpose of images and sounds. It will be necessary visitors to use a smartphone or tablet to alter the existing reality, via an app. The user stands in front of the vinyl canvas and holds up their device. It will display a realistic version of the digitized object.

The implementation of the action 1 will pass through several main steps/activities in order to achieve the results expected:

- Studies will identify the most suitable objects of natural and cultural heritage in the cross-border area in order to be digitised and promoted through the proposed innovative open-air exhibitions;
- Will be collected, selected and adapted information on the selected values in terms of location, history, transformation, etc. about each object and this information will be used at later stage to enrich the digital material providing knowledge to exhibitions' visitors;
- Will be digitised the pre-selected natural and cultural objects - the multimedia will be created for each object during the shooting process in a format, which allows detailed processing of digital material, each material will be supported by audio material (a narrator's voice telling the history and interesting and useful information about the specific object);
- Will be created files with 3D markers linked with each digital material created
- Will be printed the 3D markers on specific vinyl canvas further used to create outdoor digital expositions through movable installations.
- Will be built an interactive mobile application linked to the project web platform used to enrich visitors experience and contribute to improving knowledge about natural and cultural values part of the open-air exhibitions
- Will be organized and held the open-air exhibitions of digitized natural and cultural objects - The necessary equipment and logistic arrangements will be provided in order to organise the physical environment of the digital exhibitions planned. Physically the installations are consisting of vinyl canvas with printed 3D markers of the digitised objects on them. The first stage is selection of the proper easily accessible location in a proper environment. The concept envisages construction of modules made of pressed cardboard or Plexiglas in order to place augmented reality markers on them.
- By entering the open-air museum and using the mobile application, the user will revive the experience to monitor realistically the digitized natural and cultural objects. The digital performance is accompanied by realistic digital view and storytelling with possibility of language selection.
- Promotion campaign - a communication and raising awareness campaign will be designed and activated in order to inform all the potential beneficiaries on the events (digital exhibitions) planned during the project implementation. The promotion campaign will include networking, mutual communication and continuous dissemination, exploitation and communication of project results to stakeholders, media and the civil society as well as the general public. Robust promotion campaign will aim to pave the way for the exploitation of the project's results in a best possible way even after the end of the funding phase, i.e., to ensure the sustainability of the whole action.

Results of the expected policy change will be monitored through regular meetings with representatives of the Association NCIS in order project team to be constantly informed on the stage of implementation of the action concerned and to report any updates.

Territorial impact is expected to result in increased number of the visits to natural and cultural objects and the overnights in the cross-border area, creation of integrated tourist products – mobile installations for the purposes of the open-air exhibitions , touristic marketing studies valorising the cultural and natural heritage through its preservation and promotion for sustainable economic uses, number of the organized of open-air exhibitions, seminars and conferences for institutions and stakeholders.

Stakeholders involved

Association National Center for Information Services – Pleven

Timeframe

By the end of 2022 – expected first call for project proposals, development and submission of the project proposal; 1st semester of 2023 – evaluation of the project proposal submitted.

Costs

250 000 € for the implementation of the activity. Maximum indicative budget of the entire project proposal – 500 000 €

Funding sources

Interreg VIA Programme Romania-Bulgaria 2021–2027. Priority 4: Integrated Region, Specific objective: 5.2 Promoting integrated and inclusive social, economic and ecological local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in rural areas.

ACTION 2:

Name of the action: Promotion and protection of herbal natural heritage in the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria

Relevance to the project

The cross-border region covered by Programme Interreg VIA Romania- Bulgaria 2021-2027 covers 19.8% of the area of the both countries and is characterized by exceptional biodiversity and uniqueness of the landscape in terms of environment and rich cultural heritage. Unfortunately, they are strongly affected in the negative aspect of different types of influences and pressures (industry, excessive agriculture, climate change, transport, improper management of tourist flow, etc.). Due to its geographical location, the ecological structure of the region (structured around the Danube as a main natural corridor connecting the both countries at national level) and the common evolution, from an ethnographic and historical point of view, on both sides at national level, the single and consistent cross-border approach would be extremely valuable in terms of the preservation and use of natural and historical heritage.

The conservation and sustainable use of regional natural resources is essential for the restoration and maintenance of biodiversity and the management and prevention of risks caused by environmental and climate change. Supporting the conservation of the biodiversity is directly related to the tourism sector, which in turn has great potential for development and would contribute to the economic prosperity of the region.

Action 2 of the current Action Plan corresponds directly to Priority 2 of the Programme: "A greener region" and in particular: Specific objective: 2.7 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution.

In view of the challenges affecting the cross-border area, the Programme may support actions related to improving the conservation of biological diversity, restoration and sustainable use and protection of the natural heritage, including Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites, and in particular:

- Promoting, facilitating and encouraging citizens engagement in protecting biodiversity, including its conservation and sustainable use – in this activity will be included thematic routes related to herbs that are most important for the economic development of the region (Lavender Route, Sea buckthorn Route or other herbs characteristic for the cross-border region);
- Data collection and information sharing in respect to biodiversity between the two sides of the border;
- Sharing good practices and implementing eco-friendly and innovative solutions that address invasive alien species and strengthen sustainable environment management practices (e.g. pollinator-friendly management, management of water bodies, forests etc.)

Given the current situation and socio-economic difficulties in the cross-border region, new economically viable ways for sustainable use of the natural heritage

need to be identified and implemented. The sustainable tourism is known to be the sector that is to contribute to the creation of sustainable economic benefits for the local communities and therefore the development of the tourism and environmental protection are conditioned within a single policy objective, expecting the development of integrated tourism products between the zones of the Danube and the Black Sea and the creation of new connections with the tourist infrastructures of the upper Danube River to contribute to the increase of the contribution of the tourism for the sustainable growth of the cross-border region.

The similar climatic and anthropogenic conditions and relief and the availability of equal natural resources are a prerequisite for identifying the joint cross-border product that will create the conditions for the development of ecological tourism in the cross-border region within the scope of the Programme.

The area is blessed with exceptional nature, which endows its population with an abundance of medicinal plants. Herbs are also associated with the folklore and cultural traditions of each nation. The healing flora found in our places is not only the most distinguished in Europe, but also the best studied. The rich archives and herbariums of the specialized institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences are valuable for science and accessible to everybody. Bulgaria is a main supplier of herbs worldwide. Herbal medicine has been popular since the Middle Ages, and herbal healing is the basis of traditional medicine. In the contemporary world, an increasing part of the population is turning to the use of natural products due to their widely recognized benefits: affordability, rare side effects, non-addictive, easily digestible products that allow combination with other therapies. In addition to the healing aspect, knowledge and cultivation of herbs can be a good economic opportunity for the region.

Despite the abundance of easily accessible information, the population across the cross-border region is not well acquainted with their own herbal wealth and heritage. Addressing this problem finds a solution in the concept of sustainable tourism development, i.e., creating a sustainable tourism product in order to increase the attractiveness of lesser-known and exploited tourism opportunities.

The idea of developing the project proposal is based on two good practices identified and presented by the Lead Partner in the framework of the thematic seminars under the RAMSAT project, namely:

Megalithic route of the Municipality of Marvão, presented during the first thematic seminar, addressing the use of natural heritage for the development of ecotourism. Due to the importance of its megalithic heritage, with the creation of this thematic route, the municipality of Marvão is developing a new tourist form to represent the region, which has great potential and which is expected to contribute to the creation of new tourism programs. Marvão Municipality is working on the creation of the thematic megalithic route in cooperation with the University of Évora. During the first phase of its development, a study was made of all existing known monuments in the municipality - a total of 26 megalithic monuments.

After the analysis of the questionnaires distributed during the local stakeholders meeting in terms of Level of implementation, Strategic importance and existing constraints, the practice was assessed with relatively high strategic and operational importance and weak constraints and secondly according to the Importance/Limits.

The Route of the coffee smuggling is a good practice presented during the second thematic seminar on the use of natural heritage for the development of adventure tourism, demonstrating the transformation of a hiking route into a tourist trip as a sign of respect and remembrance of past historical moments in Portugal. Apart from the historical aspect and the fact that it is based on real historical facts and events, this route also has a strong landscape and natural impact. It offers an opportunity to get to know with the area with its natural resources and to experience some of the historical moments.

Following the analysis of the questionnaires distributed during the local stakeholders meeting in terms of Level of Implementation, Strategic Importance and Existing Constraints, the practice was assessed with relatively high strategic and operational importance and weak constraints and with the best Importance / Limits.

Based on the approach of the shared good practices and the proven positive results of their implementation, the idea of Action 2 from the Action Plan will be developed in a project proposal aimed at raising the awareness of local residents and tourists about the territorial herbal wealth; to contribute to the protection of the herbal natural heritage; to promote the cross-border region, which in turn will attract more tourists and support the economic development of the region.

The approach for the implementation of this action is based on the two proposed good practices by combining the development of a new tourist form for presenting a regional natural landmark (Megalithic route/herbal fields) and the idea of the Route of the coffee smuggling, which offers an opportunity to explore the area through the creation of thematic route (The Route of Herbs).

Nature of the action

After holding the fifth working local stakeholders meeting within the implementation of the RAMSAT project, organized by Project Partner 2, the Association National Center for Information Services - Pleven, expressed interest in adapting the above good practices by developing a project proposal "Promotion and protection of herbal natural heritage in the cross-border region Romania-Bulgaria", which to be included as an action in the current action plan.

The idea of the project proposal aims to preserve the natural herbal heritage and to stimulate the sustainable development of tourism in the cross-border region, by promoting the existing herbal wealth. Within the project proposal is planned to be identified the habitats of various herbs in the region with their respective specifics for cultivation and application, forming the tourist route.

"The Route of the herbs" project proposal envisaged implementation of the following activities in order to achieve the initially planned project objectives and results:

- Within the project will be elaborated a common consolidated study on the herbal biodiversity within the programme scope, analysis of the group of plants according to their healing effect and usable parts. The document will include also a part related to ethnobotanical study of the current state of the knowledge about the herbs and their practical use by the local population living in the area. The second part of the regional studies will include identification of other near touristic objects and attractions (culture and nature sights, recreation, entertainment and food).

Based on the information identified by the analysis, will be selected the most valuable and appropriate territories and objects in order to be combined and formed a

new touristic service fully satisfying the tourists needs - the herbal route, exploring the territories where the herbs are growing, together with the specific flora, fauna and different tourist attractions.

- Trainings of the population will be held, aiming to increase the knowledge and skills of preservation of the herbs within the region, their proper collection, what processing they go through and how the useful substances in them are extracted and used.
- Placing of information signs.
- Editing and printing of book about the herbs in the cross-border area containing information and interesting facts about the herbs existing, their cultivation as well as receipts with different application.
- The promotional campaign for the project will include organisation of different information events and publications, informing about the project nature and implementation progress and achievements.

Results of the expected policy change will be monitored through regular meetings with representatives of the Association NCIS in order project team to be constantly informed on the stage of implementation of the action concerned and to report any updates.

Territorial impact is expected to result in the increased number of the visits to natural objects along the Route of herbs and the increased number of the overnights in the cross-border area, creation of tourist products – 2 routes of herbs, 2 studies valorizing the herb treasure through its preservation, and promotion for sustainable economic uses, increased consumers awareness on own herbal wealth and heritage, increased the attractiveness of lesser-known and exploited tourism opportunities, organization of seminars and conferences for institutions and stakeholders.

Stakeholders involved

Association National Center for Information Service – Pleven

Timeframe

By the end of 2022 – expected first call for project proposals, development and submission of the project proposal; 1st semester of 2023 – evaluation of the project proposal submitted.

Costs

150 000 € for the implementation of the activity. Maximum budget for the entire project proposal – 500 000 €

Funding sources

Programme Interreg VIA, Romania-Bulgaria 2021–2027. Priority 2: A greener region: Specific objective: 2.7 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution.



Date: 11/04/2022

Name of the organisation: Association National Centre for Information Service

