D.M.2.5

Monitoring and Evaluation Report

**Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges
for a more successful follow-up of the Open Tourism project**

Index

1. Methodological introduction

This *Monitoring and Evaluation Report* (D.M.2.5) aims to present the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges that emerged during the Open Tourism project.

In particular, this Report appears in some way complementary with the other evaluation tools developed during the project with which it composes a unique puzzle in which each one shows its own and specific peculiarity.

There are three tools in particular that make up the aforementioned puzzle.

The first one is the *Evaluation and Validation Report* (D.T.1.4.3) that is aimed to illustrate the evaluation and validation processes used for the construction of the new *Open Tourism Service*. The specific objective of this tool is to allow and facilitate the transfer of these processes used in other areas not affected by the project.

The second one is *Open Tourism Cross-Border Model Statute and Settlement (*D.T.1.2.2) that presents analysis of public-private models activated at local and cross-border level. The Statute and the regulation define the operating rules of the new Open Tourism Service identified starting from the choice of the collaboration model identified. The rules defined in the document concern public and private entities who wish to join the OT Service, obviously starting from the founders.

Finally, the third is this Monitoring and Evaluation Report (D.M.2.5), which focuses on the results obtained by the project in terms of change on systems, partners and beneficiaries. This document, therefore, focuses in particular on the strategic contents produced by the project in terms of networks of relationships, skills, services and visions.

An integrated reading of the three documents therefore allows framing the processes, rules and contents of the Open Tourism Service, allowing a complete vision of the new service and the possibility of developing in-depth perspectives on its development and dissemination.

Following the logic of participatory evaluation and the narrative approach,[1] the *Monitoring and Evaluation Report* is based on the information collected:

- during the *Open Tourism SCOM* where the partners were focus in recording and sharing the degree of implementation of the new tourist information and welcome service with particular reference to the governance model, products and tools for joining the service itself;

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[1] Main References: Benvenuti L., Lezioni di socioterapia, Baskerville, Bologna, 2008; Bertin G., Valutazione e sapere sociologico, Franco Angeli, 1998; Tomei G., Valutazione partecipata della qualità, Franco Angeli, 2004; Bichi R., Maestripieri L., La narrazione come metodo di indagine sociologica, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2012.

- during the *Open Tourism Board* in which the institutional representatives discussed the quality of the service offered, also with the comparison and support of the relative technicians;

- through the administration of the *Open Tourism Monitoring Sheet* provided for in the Evaluation and Validation Plan relating to the interest shown by the operators and stakeholders of the territorial systems involved in the project with respect to the proposal of the new Information and welcome to the tourist;

- enhancement of *Documents and Texts* developed during the project which contain countless monitoring data and evaluation considerations.

2. Activation of the new Information and Welcome Service "Open Tourism"

Open Tourism project allowed activating a new information and welcoming service for tourists (Open Tourism Service, hereinafter *OT Service*) aims to promote and valorise the natural and culture heritage of the Italia-Albania-Montenegro area. At the same time, the new Service intends to promote the development of a sustainable, open, safe and quality tourism.

The new service provides for the activation of a Circuit of public, private and non-profit operators (Open Tourism Circuit, hereinafter *OT Circuit*) committed to create a new idea of welcoming tourists in which the same operators become protagonists of the information activity for tourists, offering them the possibility of live an open, sustainable and community experience.

The *OT Circuit* is founded on a new vision of the tourist, defined as a temporary citizen of local communities, and on new services and increasingly direct and digital tools to inform and welcome tourists.

The OT Circuit is the result of the homonymous Open Tourism project financed by the Interreg CBC Italia-Albania-Montenegro program and coordinated by Union of Municipalities Terre del Mare e del Sole. The project has been realized by a partnership composed by: Union of Municipalities Sorgenti del Biferno di Campobasso; Consorzio Area Marina Protetta Porto Cesareo; Municipality of Cetinje (Montenegro); Municipality of Fier; Ong Cedir (Albania).

In this first phase, the OT Service is made up of 18 local communities belonging to 3 countries and 5 regions. However, the idea is that it can grow rapidly thanks to the interest aroused in the various stakeholders. It is in fact considered a good and strong response to the damage caused by the pandemic and, at the same time, an extraordinary opportunity for networking and aggregation of skills to face the tough challenges of tourism and support the relaunch of the sector.

The ultimate purpose of the project and the Circuit is to allow local communities and operators in the area to become more competitive, fully exploiting the attractive and extraordinary potential of the territories.

Addressing the main challenges of the area, Open Tourism has achieved the following objectives.

3. Implementation of the OT Board to manage the Circuit at local and cross-border level

Open Tourism has promoted, developed and supported the activation of virtuous relationships between public and private entities both at local and cross-borders level.

At the local level, **14 meetings were organized, managed with the Focus group technique**, in the 4 territories involved in the project (4 by the Union of Municipalities Terre del Mare and del Sole; 4 by the Union of Municipalities Sorgenti del Biferno; 4 from the Municipality of Cetinje; 2 from the Municipality of Fier). About 40 public and private entities (for a total value of 130 visitors) had the opportunity to discuss the challenges of the territories involved, seeking and sharing solutions to enhance the potential of the cultural and natural assets of the area from an economic, environmental and social point of view. The tools to be used to promote local development were also analysed. In particular, it's emerged the need to develop new skills, tools and work plans to promote effective and innovative management of marketing processes for tourism, especially for lesser known destinations.

On a cross-border level, the locally developed contents were shared in **8 meetings managed with the Round Table methodology** (1 meeting held in presence in Tirana, the other 7 digitally due to Covid-19). The Round Tables made it possible to define the governance model of the Open Tourism Service which finds its nerve center in the constitution of an institutional Board. The establishment of the **Open Tourism Board, which took place on May 5, 2021**, is in fact the most tangible sign of the activation of an effective and certainly lasting cross-border cooperation. The OT Board sees the direct presence of the main positions of the entities involved. In particular: seats in OT Board: Alfredo Longo, President of the Union of Municipalities 'Terre del Mare e del Sole' (coordinator of the Board); Carletto Di Paola, President of the Union of Municipalities 'Sorgenti del Biferno'; Pasquale Coppola, Councilor of the Area Marina Protetta Porto Cesareo (delegated by the President Remì Calasso); Florian Mucaj of the Municipality of Fier (delegated by the Mayor, Armando Subashi); Aleksandar Kašćelan, Mayor of the Municipality of Cetinje; and Florian Bilali President of Cedir.

As a demonstration of the interest shown by the project, the Board was convened 3 times in just 45 days. Among the main decisions taken by the Board are the launch of the campaign to join the Open Tourism Circuit; the approval of the strategies and tools of the Circuit; (iii) the validation of the Open

Tourism model; the activation of a sustainability plan, which finds its point of work and continuity in the periodic convocation of the Board.

In particular, the Board intends to commit: (i) to the continuous and constant involvement of local operators (economic, environmental, cultural and tourist) in promoting local attractiveness; (ii) in the development and cross-border movement of tourists; (iii) in the development of differentiated, innovative tourism products and services focused on de-seasoning; (iv) on the development of digital marketing strategies.

4. 210 operators participating in the Circuit and about 900 stakeholders contacted

The first action implemented by the Open Tourism Board was the activation of a Campaign to join the Open Tourism Circuit aimed at all economic, cultural, environmental and touristic operators in the territories affected by the project.

The Campaign was addressed at **18 Italian, Montenegrin and Albanian municipalities** belonging to the following territories and entities: Union of Municipalities Terre del Mare and del Sole (Municipalities of Avetrana, Fragagnano, Leporano, Lizzano, Maruggio, Pulsano, Torricella), Unione Municipalities Sources of Biferno (Municipalities of Bojano, San Massimo, Spinete, Campochiaro, Colle d'Anchise, Guardiaregia and San Polo Matese), Marine Protected Area of Porto Cesareo (Municipalities of Porto Cesareo, Nardò and Province of Lecce), Municipality of Cetinje (historical capital of Montenegro) and the Municipality of Fier (Albania).

210 operators have joined the Circuit including: n. 28 cultural operators, n. 18 environmental operators, n. 110 commercial operators, n. 54 tour operators. In the face of this mobilization, there has been an involvement and awareness raising of over 1,000 stakeholders from the public, private and private social areas.

IL PROGETTO OPEN TOURISM OPEN TOURISM PROJECT

3 PAESI EUROPEI EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

6 PARTNER TERRITORIALI TERRITORIAL PARTNERS

210 OPERATORI TURISTICI ED ECONOMICI TOURISM AND ECONOMIC STAKEHOLDERS

15 ITINERARI TURISTICI TURISTIC ITINERARIES

18 COMUNITÀ LOCALI LOCAL POPULATION

858 STAKEHOLDERS

16 WORKSHOP DIGITALI DIGITAL WORKSHOP

5. Qualify the skills of the operators through the Open Tourism Workshops

The operators, in particular, were invited to participate in dedicated capacity-building sessions managed through the Workshop methodology. Nr. 19 Workshops were held on different themes: tourism in the Recovery plan, experiential tourism, tools for tourism promotion, cultural and natural heritage, and more. The Open Tourism Workshops, in particular, were a great opportunity to meet, and above all to co-design solutions and common ideas by interested territories to promote effective tourism strategies.

Following the methodology presented by CEDIR, partner responsible for the action, the Workshops aimed to present the objectives, strategies and tools of the Open Tourism Circuit, highlighting above all the cross-border dimension of the Circuit itself.

In order to monitor and update the progress of the Circuit, questionnaires were designed and administered to operators and tourists in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Circuit.

Among others, the following themes emerged to continue to be developed and promoted:

(i) **Investing in the potential of the territory**: increasing the knowledge of operators, stakeholders and citizens on the potential and the value connected to the cultural, environmental and eno-gastronomic resources of the reference territory; given the increasing presence of foreign tourists, it is also useful to stimulate the learning of a second language among those pertaining to the international markets of origin of tourists;

(ii) **Investing in the digital skills of operators**: it is necessary to invest in improving the digital skills of public and private operators in order to increase their knowledge of the web and social networks, with a particular focus on the opportunities that these means can offer them in promoting their business;

(iii) **Develop tools for tourists' requests**: The needs of tourists, as well as their preferences, are constantly evolving. It is therefore necessary to constantly stay up-to-date on the wishes of visitors and keep track of them through tools designed to monitor the trend of sales in accommodation companies and to evaluate the satisfaction of local and foreign tourists. Thanks to this mapping it will be possible to define preferential tourist itineraries to be submitted to visitors;

(iv) **Qualify the relationship with the tourist**: the territory must support and support the tourist, provide quality information and capacity for involvement. This modality must allow a tourist to get to know and respect the territory in the best possible way, to become more and more a "temporary citizen" and to enjoy all the alternative and experiential tourist possibilities that the territory offers;

(v) **Promote the effective use of public and private funding**: it is necessary to acquire the skills that help to enhance the ability to use those public funds and to attract private ones.

6. Developed the information capacity of the operators through the use of the OT Kit

Open Tourism is a completely free circuit, because it was created thanks to the European Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro program. Open Tourism provides operators with innovative tools to offer tourists increasingly qualified information, promotion and marketing services.

Among the various tools developed, the most useful, practical and immediate is the KIT Open Tourism. The Kit provides operators with a series of products aimed at raising awareness and informing tourists about the cultural, environmental and food and wine potential of all the territories involved in the project. The idea is to encourage mutual promotion on a cross-border level and to support the movement of tourists in the cooperation area Italy, Albania and Montenegro.

The OT Kit includes:

- the sticker of the Open Tourism Circuit, a sticker to be applied outside the shop or structure as a sign of participation in the Circuit and recognition for tourists;
- thematic itineraries, with which to promote the gastronomy, culture and natural themes of one's own territory;
- a USB key that presents videos, photos and itineraries of the Italian, Albanian and Montenegrin territories that are partners of the project. Inside the key there are in particular: 15 itineraries of which 6 in Italy (Union of the Municipalities Terre del Mare and del Sole, Union of the Municipalities Sorgenti del Biferno and MPA of Porto Cesareo), 6 in Albania (Fier and Tirana) and 3 in Montenegro (Cetinje). The key also contains 12 videos (2 for each of the 6 project partners involved), hundreds of photographs of the territories and other promotional tools; 6 brochures presenting the partner territories of the project:
- a gadget with the QR code of the Open Tourism App, where you can enter your data and promote your business.
- the Open Tourism flyer, which contains information on the objectives, purposes and tools of the project, as well as the Open Tourism Modules with which it is possible to integrate with the Open Tourism Circuit and the Open Tourism App.

7. Implementation of an advanced territorial marketing strategy

The project implements a real evolved territorial marketing strategy based on innovative tools and digital promotion.

First of all, the Circuit has 15 new thematic itineraries linked to the themes of Culture, Nature and Food, of which: n. 3 Union of Municipalities Terre del Mare e del Sole; n. 1 of the Union of

Municipalities Sorgenti del Biferno; n. 2 of the Area Marina Protetta Porto Cesareo; n. 3 of the Municipality of Cetinje, n. 3 of the Municipality of Fier and n. 3 Cedir.

The Itineraries are present in all the project digital tools (USB key, Website, Social, ...) and have been printed in 20,000 (in English and in the program languages).
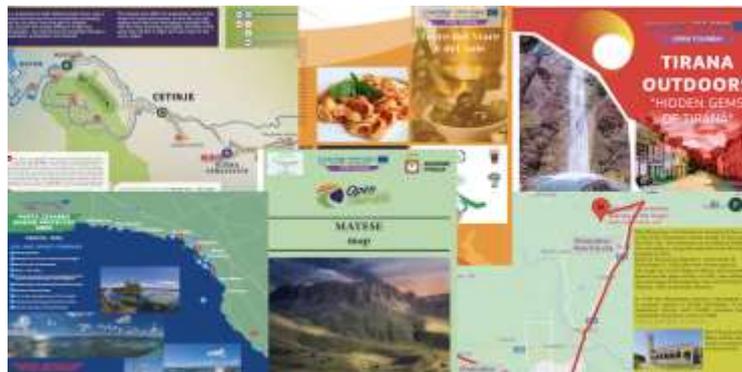
The characteristic of the itineraries is to have a coordinated image and therefore to refer to each other in a cross-border traffic perspective. Furthermore, along the itineraries it will be possible to get in touch with the operators who have joined the Open Tourism Circuit.

These in particular will be present on the Open Tourism APP where they can upload: (i) their logo; (ii) photos of your business; (iii) the opening hours; (iv) a description of their business; (v) georeferencing.

Furthermore, the design, study and planning of the brand is particularly interesting for the development of the Circuit. The brand and the brand promotion strategy developed during the project will, in fact, make it possible to spread the value of the Circuit in all the territories of the area, favouring an ever-greater adhesion to the Circuit itself by operators and stakeholders.

8. Created the conditions for the growth and dissemination of the OT Service and the Circuit

Finally, the project raised awareness among stakeholders and citizens of the territories concerned through a widespread communication action.

- 2 events of the project were carried out (initial and final)
- 3 organized infodays were created (Italy, Albania, Montenegro)
- 140,000 potential visitors were detected via social networks
- the program website was fed with news content and multimedia images
- 20,000 project brochures were printed and distributed
- the facebook page was created and animated: https://www.facebook.com/opentourism21
- the project website (https://opentourism.italy-albania-montenegro.eu/) was fed with news content and multimedia images