

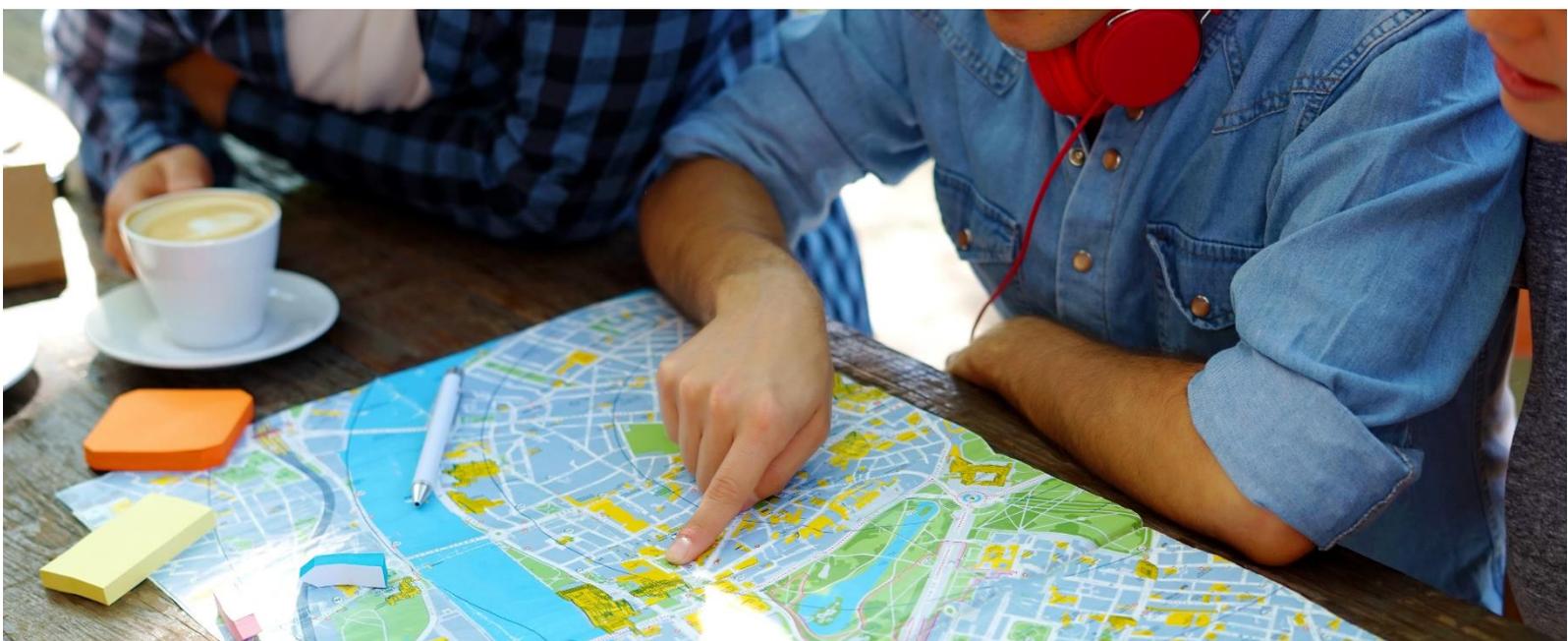


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## *PROMOTING HERITAGE - AND CULTURE - BASED EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM IN THE BLACK SEA BASIN*

Project No BSB-1145



### REGIONAL ACTION PLANS

For encouraging the heritage and culture-based experiential tourism in the BSB

**COMMON BORDERS. COMMON SOLUTIONS.**



**PROMOTING HERITAGE - AND CULTURE - BASED EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM IN  
THE BLACK SEA BASIN**

Project No BSB-1145

**Regional Action Plans**

for encouraging the heritage and culture-based experiential tourism in the BSB

March 2021



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EUROPEAN UNION



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## ACRONYMS

BSB	Black Sea Basin
DMO	Destination Management Organization
GACC	Georgian Art and Culture Centre
GNTA	Georgian National Tourism Administration
HC BET	Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism
MEPA	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia
NAR	Need Assessment Report
NGO	Non-government Organizations
PPP	Public, Private Partnerships
RA	Republic of Armenia
RAP	Regional Action Plan
STE	Small Tourism Enterprise
SWOT	Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TO	Tour Operators
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTWO	World Tourism Organisation



## FOREWORDS

This document unites five Regional Action Plans (RAPs) for encouraging the heritage and culture-based experiential tourism in Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia and Greece (as countries represented in PRO EXTOUR project) as well as in the whole Black Sea Basin in general. The action plans follow common structure and focus on a set of integrated elements such as overview of the state-of-art situation in the development and regulative regimes of the Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism, SWOT-analyses, outlined of policy options and directions for reform as well as visions for future development.

The RAPs build on the extensive regional needs assessment that was performed in 2020-2021 by the experts, involved in PRO EXTOUR, and take into consideration the relevant findings and conclusions that come from targeted primary and secondary research as well as policy analyses. The needs assessment revealed many common development challenges, similar difficulties faced by stakeholders and resembling deficiencies in policy-making and strategic planning regarding HCBET. Still to formulate feasible reform proposals, the expert team decided to elaborate the action plans on a country-by-country basis and then take out the possible regional operation in a separate chapter. When elaborating the regional action plans, the opportunities and prospects for cross-border and intraregional cooperation among the studied countries were considered as well.

The final chapter of the document includes summary conclusions and recommendations that correspond to the specifics of all varied areas and regions in the Black Sea Basin as well as policy proposals for coordinated actions favouring the development of HCBET.

This document is available in in English, Armenian, Bulgarian, Georgian and Greek.

### *PRO EXTOUR and Heritage- and Culture-based Experiential Tourism*

Heritage- and Culture-based Experiential Tourism (HCBET) is a socially and environmentally responsible set of travel activities and services that offer a memorable experience and interpretation of heritage and cultures that lead travellers to self-discovery, new insights, and inspiration.

HCBET promotes an understanding of history, people and culture among travellers, but also generates appreciation among the local people for their cultural values. Therefore, it contributes to the preservation of heritage and living culture, the sustainable use of resources, has regional added value, and benefits the host community.

PRO EXTOUR project is designed to promote experiential tourism as a sustainable development pathway for tourism business in the BSB by valorising the potential of the indigenous heritage and culture, innovative solutions and cross-border cooperation.





## REGIONAL ACTION PLAN: ARMENIA

### *Necessity, vision and goals of Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism (HCBET) in the Republic of Armenia*

In recent years, as research has shown, HCBET has begun to develop rapidly. Such development is conditioned by a number of objective factors, in particular, by the increase of international tourism interests towards Armenia, by the investments of international organizations in this sphere, by declaring tourism a priority branch of the RA economy, by the values of RA rich tangible and intangible historical and cultural heritage.

In general, HCBET is of strategic importance for Armenia, as in case of its development based on the principles of sustainable tourism, the intangible cultural heritage of the RA will be preserved, at the same time becoming a tourism resource and a precondition for the globalization of Armenian culture. As a result, the RA can "export" its culture without spatially cutting it from its own location and ensure the balanced spatial development of tourism in Armenia.

In other words, the **vision** for the development of HCBET is as follows: raising the level of internationalization and publicization of the intangible cultural heritage of the RA and creating a culture-based international tourism image for the RA.

Within the framework of this vision, the **goals** of development of HCBET are: promoting

- The usage of intangible cultural heritage of the RA based on the principles of sustainable tourism,
- The increase of the number of self-employed in the sphere of tourism of the RA,
- The spatial balanced development of RA tourism,
- The formation and development of tourism culture in the RA.

### *SWOT analysis of the RA Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism development*

Based on the research conducted to identify the development needs of HCBET in the RA the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of its development are presented.

#### **Strengths**

- The leading development of tourism in Armenia over the last 20 years,
- Being a priority branch of the RA economy by law,
- Existence of a separate law for tourism,
- Bordering on Georgia and Iran and having a transit transport-geographical position,
- Existence of fixed inbound tourism target destinations,
- Existence of a strong Armenian Diaspora in leading countries with inbound tourist visits,
- The predominance of inbound and outbound tourist visits motivated by Armenian cultural heritage, food, and hospitality,



- Millennial history of the RA and having rich tangible and intangible (national traditions, customs, rituals, music, dances, writing and literature, cuisine, Armenian hospitality, Armenian family and family relations) cultural heritage,
- Being the first state to adopt Christianity as a state religion,
- Having tangible and intangible cultural heritage values included in the UNESCO World Heritage List,
- Becoming famous in the international tourism market on the basis of RA cultural heritage,
- Already established and relatively developed religious (historical-cultural), wine and cuisine tourism,
- The diverse climatic conditions of the RA and the local changes of the intangible cultural heritage of the RA under their influence,
- Existence of a state structure coordinating the management of the tourism sector in the RA,
- Existence of national and local tourism public organizations,
- Quantitative and qualitative positive changes in the tourism industry of the RA, expressed in the form of development of tour operators/agencies, overnight and catering enterprises, tourism transport and other infrastructure,
- Increasing the number of accommodation and food enterprises outside Yerevan,
- Implementation of investment programs for the development of HCBET by international organizations,
- Offerings of HCBET services by about 60 enterprises outside Yerevan,
- Development of festival tourism, also based on the values of intangible cultural heritage,
- Relevant legislative regulations for the preservation of cultural heritage and historical-cultural reserves and reserve-museums,
- The fact that the enterprises involved in this tourism are also family-based (ensuring long-term business activity),
- The development of HCBET somehow already based on the principles of sustainable tourism.

### **Weaknesses**

- Absence of both state and public structures (associations, unions, etc.) coordinating the development of HCBET,
- Unequal distribution of overnight enterprises, most of which are located in Yerevan,
- Absence of a unified management system of the RA tourism sector as such,
- Absence of a bottom-up model for the management of the RA tourism sector,
- Lack of cooperation between the tourism sector of the RA and HCBET stakeholders (state, private, education/science),
- Non-compliance of the current RA Law on Tourism and Tourism Activities with the current requirements of tourism,
- Absence of licensing the entities operating in the tourism sector of the RA,
- Absence of tourism development strategy in Armenia,

- Weak foreign marketing policy of the RA tourism sector,
- Low inclusion of Armenian national traditional games among the intangible cultural heritage elements currently offered by HCBET,
- No common understanding of the meaning of HCBET in Armenia for experts and practitioners,
- Lack of skills and abilities of locals to organize and provide relevant HCBET services
- Absence of business standards and licensing related to HCBET,
- Absence of a unified marketing policy for HCBET at the state level,
- Absence of systematic state statistics on HCBET,
- Often discrepancy between price and quality of services offered by HCBET enterprises,
- Incomplete inclusion or absence of HCBET offers in the tour packages of local tour operators/agents,
- Absence of educational programs for HCBET in RA universities,
- Often insufficient language knowledge and skills of employees of HCBET enterprises,
- Weak cooperation between the enterprises offering HCBET offers, as well as with the RA tour operator/agency enterprises,
- Poor digital representation of enterprises providing HCBET offers,
- Absence of state standards and guidelines for enterprises operating in the tourism industry providing HCBET offers,
- Absence of state concept, strategy and programs for the development of HCBET,
- Needs and characteristics of domestic tourists are almost not taken into consideration in HCBET offers,
- Absence of specialized training centres/educational programs for those involved in HCBET,
- Lack or absence of offering services for children by enterprises providing HCBET offers.

### *Opportunities*

- Prevalence of overnight stays in friends', relatives' houses or rented apartments compared to overnight stays in hotel facilities (hotels, resorts, rest homes, etc.) in inbound tourism,
- Existence of the Armenian Diaspora bearing Armenian culture,
- Those Armenian intangible cultural values which are not yet included in HCBET activities,
- Construction of small hotels, especially in the regions, also in rural communities or rural areas rich in intangible cultural heritage,
- Development of gastronomic tourism offers in HCBET, conditioned not only by rich cuisine, but also by ecologically clean food,
- Scientific and educational institutions of the RA operating in the field of cultural heritage and tourism,
- Traditional Armenian hospitality,
- Collaboration of locals with their own tourism products and with human, material and technical resources with enterprises providing relevant HCBET services,



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- New inbound tourism destinations for the RA,
- Needs of master classes and national performances by domestic tourists of the RA,
- Innovative approaches by HCBET enterprises,
- Development of regional experiential tourism offers,
- Development of modern information and digital technologies.

### *Threats*

- The situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, in the form of cessation or reduction of inbound tourism flows, which is considered to be the main market for HCBET, as well as the existing restrictions,
- Transport and economic blockade of Armenia by two neighbouring countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the war unleashed by them and the tension on the interstate borders,
- Possible commercialization, commodification and colonization of local culture,
- Misrepresentation and misinterpretation of cultural values (due to the lack of relevant knowledge and skills),
- The change of cultural preferences of tourists over time,
- The likelihood of conflicts due to cultural differences between locals and visitors,
- The likelihood of food poisoning and physical injury while participating in specific experiences,
- Likelihood of inconsistencies in marketing policy pursued by HCBET enterprises,
- Possible unfair market competition within HCBET enterprises.



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*Possible strategic actions to ensure development policy of Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism of the RA*

No	Strategic action	Goal(s) of strategic action	Possible outcome(s) of strategic action	Possible responsible stakeholder(s)/resources of strategic action
1.	Develop a state policy for the development of HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify the state policy for the development of HCBET</li> <li>Ensure clarity of state approach for HCBET stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed state concept, strategy and program for HCBET</li> </ul>	RA Government RA Tourism Committee
2.	Addition of Articles on HCBET in the New Draft Law of the RA on Tourism and Tourism Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of legal regulation of HCBET and develop a legal basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established more regulated legal-market relations for companies engaged in HCBET</li> </ul>	RA Government RA National Assembly RA Tourism Committee
3.	Development/implementation of national standards and licenses for enterprises engaged in HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the quality of HCBET offers and services</li> <li>Ensure sustainable use and preservation of intangible cultural heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved quality of HCBET</li> <li>Systematized statistics on HCBET</li> </ul>	RA Government RA National Assembly RA Tourism Committee RA National Body of Standards and Metrology RA HEIs
4.	Development and implementation of HCBET educational programs in RA HIEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance systematic learning of existing knowledge about HCBET</li> <li>Create educational and scientific bases for the development of HCBET</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened scientific basis of HCBET</li> <li>Developed and disseminated universally accepted perceptions of HCBET</li> <li>Written textbook on HCBET "Fundamentals of Experiential Tourism" in Armenian</li> </ul>	RA Government RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport RA HEIs

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An established HCBET training centre</li> </ul>	
5.	Development of an Experiential Tourism Risk Management Guide for Enterprises Involved in HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of safety of HCBET</li> <li>Contribute to the long-term operation of HCBET enterprises</li> <li>To promote the stability of the activities of HCBET enterprises in force majeure conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed specialized guidelines for various risk situations for HCBET</li> <li>Improved sustainability of HCBET enterprises</li> </ul>	RA Government RA Tourism Committee RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport RA HEIs
6.	Creation of regional HCBET proposals and projects in the bordering regions of Armenia and Georgia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of interregional cooperation in the field of tourism</li> <li>Create interregional HCBET packages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established Armenian-Georgian HCBET joint ventures/organizations</li> <li>Increased interregional tourism flows</li> </ul>	RA and Georgian Governments RA and Georgian Tourism State Committees RA and Georgian tourism operators
7.	Internationalization of HCBET offers with the help of the Armenian Diaspora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of awareness of HCBET offers outside of the RA</li> <li>To diversify the cooperation between the RA and the Armenian Diaspora</li> <li>Regularly link Armenians living outside the RA to their cultural roots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased tourism image of the RA in the target tourism markets (countries) and increased inbound tourism flows</li> <li>Revalued Armenian cultural values in Armenian Diaspora</li> </ul>	RA Government RA Tourism Committee RA Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Organizations of Armenian Diaspora RA Embassies
8.	Creating HCBET offers based on Christian cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the role of the RA in the Christian world</li> <li>Increase the involvement of Christian intangible cultural</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deep cooperation with Christian countries in the</li> </ul>	RA Government Armenian Apostolic Church RA Tourism Committee

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		values in the tourism offers of the RA	form of new tourism-based proposals	RA Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs Organizations of Armenian Diaspora RA Embassies
9.	Adaptation of HCBET offers and services to the needs of domestic tourists as well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the development of domestic tourism</li> <li>Contribute to reducing the dependence of HCBET on inbound tourism flows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created new tourism offerings taking into account the peculiarities of domestic tourists</li> </ul>	RA Tourism Committee HCBET enterprises
10.	Organizing a "walking" festival of HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to the diversification of Armenian tourism products</li> <li>Promote cooperation between HCBET enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased inbound and outbound tourism flows and geographical redistribution of tourism revenues</li> <li>Created new HCBET offers</li> </ul>	RA Government RA Tourism Committee Reginal Governments Local self-government bodies Private / public organizations organizing festivals
11.	Establishment of the "Armenian Experiential Tourism Association"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of cooperation between companies engaged in HCBET</li> <li>Increase the level of internationalization of HCBET enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New qualities and platforms for national and international cooperation</li> </ul>	RA Tourism Committee HCBET enterprises
12.	Organization of "Innovative Experiential Tourism" annual seminar/ workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of cooperation between stakeholders engaged in HCBET (state, private, international, educational, scientific, public)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created and developed new directions and levels of cooperation</li> </ul>	RA Tourism Committee

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the problems and perspectives of HCBET development</li> </ul>		
13.	Creation and development of experiences based on Armenian national-traditional games, songs and music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the level of complex involvement of the intangible cultural heritage of the RA in HCBET</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created new HCBET offers</li> </ul>	RA Tourism Committee HCBET enterprises RA HEIs and NAS
14.	Preparation of programs on Armenian HCBET offerings in foreign languages on TV or other communication channels with a shared economy approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the international tourism image of the RA</li> <li>Increase the internationalization of RA HCBET offers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created foreign language TV and other communication channel programs about Armenian cuisine, song, music, crafts, arts, etc.</li> </ul>	RA Government RA Tourism Committee RA State and private TVs Non-governmental organizations, unions, associations operating in the field of intangible heritage RA HEIs Bloggers in Armenia
15.	Organizing the "Best Experiential Tourism Offer" annual award ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the development of HCBET in the RA</li> <li>Motivate those involved in HCBET</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivated HCBET environment</li> <li>New cooperation between the stakeholders of HCBET</li> </ul>	RA Tourism Committee

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## Conclusions

HCBET can be considered as one of the strategic directions for the development of tourism with innovative approaches for Armenia. On the basis of its sustainable development, it will be possible to ensure the balanced territorial development of tourism in particular.

At present, the steps of key strategic importance for the development of HCBET in the RA should be aimed at:

- ✓ Developing and clarifying HCBET state policy,
- ✓ Organizing activities to promote cooperation between HCBET stakeholders,
- ✓ Sustainable use and preservation of Armenian cultural values included in HCBET,
- ✓ Regional and international cooperation and implementation of investment programs within the framework of HCBET,
- ✓ Developing relevant professional qualities of the stakeholders involved in HCBET,
- ✓ Establishing a systematized educational and scientific basis for HCBET.



## REGIONAL ACTION PLAN: BULGARIA

### *Heritage- and culture-based experiential tourism in Bulgaria. State-of-art and pathways for development*

Bulgaria has established traditions in tourism and hospitality and the travel sector has been recognized as a priority in the policy-making agenda. The country has a wealth of resources and a rich cultural heritage. Moreover, Bulgaria ranks third in Europe for the number of cultural and historical monuments and is home of 10 UNESCO heritage sites. It is evident that the country has unleashed potential for the development of cultural and heritage-based experiential tourism.

On national level, the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry in Bulgaria is governed by the Ministry of Tourism with the National Tourist Council as a consultative body. On a local level, the county municipalities implement tourism policy. A number of professional, regional, citizen and non-government organizations are also involved in the decision-making process such as Bulgarian Tourism Chamber, regional tourist chambers, Bulgarian Hotel Association, Bulgarian Association for Alternative tourism, etc. The most important legislative document on tourism management is the Tourism Act (Ivanov & Dimitrova, 2013).

The HCBET is part of the sustainable tourism offering, which has been outlined as a priority in the work of the Ministry of Tourism and as a result, the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development for 2014-2030 has been prepared and proposed for a public debate.

Though HCBET is not conceptualized and defined as a specific term, some HCBET-similar products have been developed and introduced on the market a long time ago. For example, cultural, rural, folklore, culinary, events, and other so-called “alternative” forms of tourism can be included as examples of HCBET practices since they high-light similar resources and aims at common goals.

Many private tour-operators are producing and offering culture - and heritage - based tourism products. The municipalities and the regional authorities are also putting efforts towards HCBET development, mainly as part of the project-based activities. On a national level, the Ministry of Tourism has designed and developed 22 routes for culture and heritage tourism. Examples include the “The Bulgarian Sea Fortresses” route which spans from North to South Black sea coast and includes over twenty heritage sites and places of interests or “Capitals and cities of Bulgarian kings and patriarchs” which is deployed in the central-north part of the country. “The rose valley and the Thracian kings” route situated mainly in the South East is another example (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2021).

Despite the genuine efforts made by the government to promote the development of HCBET activities, there is, however, insufficient cooperation between the stakeholders and the various management bodies to implement a consistent and uniform policy regarding the quality and sustainability of tourism. Moreover, the dialog and interaction between the NGO’s and the public administration is often ineffective.

## *SWOT analysis of the heritage- and culture-based experiential tourism in the country*

### **Strengths**

Bulgaria has a number of advantages for developing HCBET tourism as a part of its tourist offering (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2015). Those include:

- A wealth of heritage and culture-based tourism resources such as historical, archaeological, and religious monuments, remnants and artefacts as well as purpose-built contemporary attractions and parks; intangible cultural heritage as traditions, rites, folk dances, and cuisine; events, festivals and exhibitions and many others.
- A number of the HCBET sites are of an international importance, including several unique ones protected by UNESCO.
- Membership in the European Union.
- High price competitiveness. Bulgaria is one of the cheapest European country which provides for great ratio between cost and value for the visitors.
- Political stability and steady economic growth with hopeful outlooks for quick post-COVID-19 recovery.
- Favourable climate conditions suitable for practicing of HCBET tourism all year long: mild winters, the rarity of severe weather and temperature extremes.
- A plethora of other recreational resources can be combined in wholesome and attractive tourist packages. For example, HCBET tourism offering can be enhanced with SPA, sport or eco-tourism activities.
- Advantageous geographic situation: being on the crossroad between West and East and North and South, Bulgaria is relatively close to most of the generating markets.
- A great diversity of various sites on a relatively small territory which allows for their easy grouping in attractive thematic trips (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2020).
- Well-developed tourism infra- and super-structure, including lodging establishments, roads, resorts, museums, galleries, tourist information centres, etc.
- In some areas, there are active local communities which are working towards enhancing the attractiveness of their region as a tourist destination and are motivated to interact closely with tourists for the creation of more experiential tourism products.
- Access to a number of financial stimuli and institutional support for HCBET development, including governmental grants, EU projects and other international resources.
- Transport infrastructure is relatively well-developed and functional. There are several international airports that covers most of the territory of the country within radii of 200 km.
- Supporting sectors are well established, including health care, police, banking, utilities, communications, etc.
- High level of technical provisions and IT development, reliable and fast speed internet connections, good coverage of various cellular providers throughout the country.
- A growing number of local providers of hospitality services, including rural guest houses, small family hotels, hostels, etc.

- High level of foreign language literacy. Most of the population speaks at least one foreign language.
- Education in tourism is developed on both secondary and university level which guarantees the availability of skilful and competent human resources.

### **Weaknesses**

The main challenges before the heritage- and culture-based tourism development in Bulgaria are as follows:

- The offering is mainly focused on mass, coastal, leisure tourism. This brings many issues concerning the image of the country, the sustainable use of resources, and the low-price level which hinders the development of other alternative forms of tourism (including HCBET).
- Lack of working mechanism for the valorisation of the heritage and cultural-based resources, especially the intangible ones.
- The national marketing and branding strategy of the country needs urgent revision. Bulgaria should be repositioned on the international market which requires a series of planned interventions.
- The seasonality of the demand is clearly outlined. Opportunities for year-long tourism exist, but in practice, most of the tourism activities are happening during the summer months which contributes to imbalances in the usage of the hospitality superstructure,
- Lodging establishments are mainly concentrated around the seacoast (more than 2/3 of the hospitality sector is situated there). This leads to regional imbalances.
- Insufficient institutional capacity, including lack of relevant local, regional or national authorities in the field of HCBET tourism.
- Scarcity of legislation fundamentals. Lack of laws and regulations on vital issues such as cultural heritage protection and enhancement.
- Lack of strategic planning in the area of HCBET.
- Low level of monitoring, supervision, and control over the tourism sector. This leads to a great share of “shadow” (unregulated or illegal) tourism activity, lack of quality control, and possible image-related issues.
- Territorial planning is still in its initial stage. Despite the number of proposals for various forms of divisions and forming of several theme destinations, no agreement was reached which hinders significantly the regional management and promotion.
- Local businesses are fragmented and rarely interact between themselves or with the authorities.
- Branch-, product-, and regional associations exist but they are not very active and the benefits they provide for their members are limited.
- Inter-institutional interaction and collaboration are weak. This poses many problems especially in the case of HCBET, since most of the resources and related activities need joint intervention on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Tourism.
- Local communities are mostly inert and lack motivation to interact with tourists.
- Tourist information centres exist only in the major cities but their functions are limited, and the support (in terms of printed materials, information, booking and other services) they provide to the tourists is insufficient.



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- Lack of synergy between various stakeholders such as businesses, consumers, local authorities, cultural, educational, and research institutions, tourism providers etc.
- Sustainability and ecological concepts are a priority mostly on paper and have a low level of practical implications: just a few hotels have invested in renewable energy sources or other low-impact and environmentally friendly solutions and technologies; eco-innovations, zero-waste or circular economy is almost non-existing in the tourism sector.
- Reliable tourism statistics is an issue impacting negatively the investment opportunities in the sector.
- Business activity is hindered by the high level of bureaucracy and the lack of flexibility in the approach of the authorities and institutions,
- Corruption is an issue on every level of tourism management. Unfortunately, some of the funds dedicated to tourism development (in particular - rural tourism) are subject to embezzlement or financial fraud.
- Tourism industry is becoming less attractive as a job provider for younger people, due to low payment, hard labour, irregular employment, etc. This trend is expected to aggravate during or post COVID-19 pandemics, since tourism and hospitality sectors are ones of the most impacted.
- HCBET demands for highly qualified employees with a specific set of competencies and the provision of those could be an issue.
- High turnover of the personnel (due to various factors such as seasonality, low-motivation) which impacts negatively the quality of the provided services.
- The share of companies certified under some label for quality or sustainability (such as “Green House” label) is very low.
- Insufficient governmental support for tourism start-ups (incubators, funding instruments, mentoring, etc.) which suppress the business entrepreneurship initiative including in the field of HCBET.
- Poor road infrastructure in some remote areas. The more authentic and “off-the-beaten-tracks”, the site is, the less accessible it is.
- Limited access and provisions for disabled people, including lack of trained servicing personnel.
- Low level of digitalization of the cultural and heritage-based resources.
- On-line distribution and sales channels are just gaining popularity, but e-payments are at their initial stage of development.
- Some financial instruments such as checks, vouchers and credit cards are not common and largely used.
- Education in tourism is mainly theoretical. Practical training, work-based and hands-on training is underdeveloped which compromises the quality of the human resources, especially of those who lacks professional experience in the field.
- Signalling and marking of tourist paths, sites and tracks are underdeveloped and often not provided in a foreign language.
- Resources and attractions are often poorly managed. Maintenance of historic and cultural sites is often an issue. There are very few strategies developed and

implemented for visitors' capacity management or raising awareness among tourists for site protection and enhancement.

- Lack of investments for improvement and modernization of the museums and galleries. Very low level of digitalization and usage of high-tech solutions such as virtual tours, digital tour guides, etc.
- The events calendar is incomplete and not accessible. Many events have limited coverage and advertisement which hinders higher visitation (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2020).
- Camping and caravan sites are in decline. Their management is often neglected and sometimes there arise safety and health concerns. Lack of modern camp or RV parks with proper utilities, hook-ups and installations.
- The national advertisement is rather obsolete and needs refreshment. Branding is too general and does not reflect the full potential of the country as a tourist destination.
- High level of dependency on the large international tour operators which suppress the local businesses and lead to prioritization of a mass, standardized offering instead of unique, alternative products. This also translates into financial leakages, since most of the revenues generated by the tourist are not staying within the destination (or the country).
- Lack of reliable centralized National tourism register to gather information for tourism resources, sites, and attractions, providers, events, investment opportunities, and other relevant information.

### Opportunities

- Changing of the tourism paradigm on a global level: from consumption-focused to experienced-driven; from ego-centric to social benefitting; from comfort and fun-seeking to meaningful and enriching experiences. HCBET as a concept is in line with the new trends.
- Re-direction of tourist flows, including the growth of domestic tourism or increased demand on behalf of the neighbouring and near-by markets. This trend will be particularly evident in terms of the global pandemic situation.
- Alleviation of visa requirements will ease the access of some markets to our country.
- The country may enhance its participation in various international organization in HCBET in order to increase its competitive advantages on the global market.
- The sustainability agenda calls for more conscious consumption, including in tourism products. Mass tourism offerings have to step down and green forms of tourism will be given a priority.
- More investment (including governmental and project-based support) for socially beneficial business initiatives, including HCBET.
- Global pandemic calls for new forms of consumption of tourism products: more individualized, less crowded, more personalized, using alternative lodgings etc.
- Cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries for common tourism products (example: theme routs) and combined marketing efforts.

### Threats

- Global Covid-19 pandemic which leads to lock-downs of entire markets, an unprecedented drop of tourism demand, rigid travel restrictions and regulations and urge for social isolation (the opposite of social interaction - which is one of the staples in HCBT),
- The global economic crisis which follows the COVID-19 pandemics. Decreased income, high unemployment rate, high levels of perceived risks and urge for cut off luxury consumption, including tourism products.
- Global climate change which may lead to inclement conditions, severe weather occurrence and natural disasters.
- Strong competitors especially concerning our neighbouring countries with which we share similar tourist resources.
- Tourism markets become increasingly dynamic and difficult to predict and adapt,
- Changes in consumers' attitudes, perceptions, purchasing behaviour and preference which could be difficult to predict for a longer period of time.
- Dependence of the tourism industry on other sectors such as food and agriculture, transportation, culture, economic, foreign affairs, education and others.
- Global migration of population often leading to depopulation of rural areas that lack human resources for tourism development.

### Outlining possible policy options

Based on the Needs assessment report the study of the stakeholders' opinion and the results of the SWOT analysis provided in the previous section, some needed interventions aiming to promote the growth of the HCBET development are outlined.

The Table below summarizes possible strategic actions in this regard, outcomes and stakeholders involved

No	Strategic action	Aim(s) of strategic action	Possible outcome(s) of strategic action	Possible responsible stakeholder(s)
1.	Positioning of the country on the global market as a HCBET destination	Bulgaria should be known for its rich culture and heritage-based resources, and as a destination which offers unique and memorable experiences	Improvements of the marketing and management of Bulgaria as a tourist destination.  Enhanced product portfolio, including a	Government  Ministry of Tourism  Tourist businesses



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		<p>Increasing the revenues from tourism</p> <p>Promoting sustainable tourism development</p>	<p>number of experienced-focused packages.</p> <p>Improvements of the work and effectiveness of the Tourist Information Centres</p> <p>Design and implementation of a Branding strategy and a new brand of HCBET</p> <p>More and better planned promotion activities, including participation in international fairs and exhibitions</p>	
2.	Increasing the competitiveness of the HCBET sector	<p>Offering attractive HCBET products and activities</p> <p>Providing strong value proposition on competitive price</p> <p>Enhancing and protecting the HCBET resources</p>	<p>Creation of attractive culture-and heritage-based routes and packages</p> <p>Valorisation of the resources</p> <p>Digitalization of the products and offering</p> <p>Ensuring high quality services including monitoring and control</p> <p>Encouraging certification and labelling for quality assurance purposes</p> <p>Creating more purpose-build cultural attractions</p> <p>Design, promotion and staging of cultural events</p> <p>Enhancing cooperation and synergy between</p>	<p>Ministry of Tourism</p> <p>Ministry of Culture</p> <p>Tourism associations</p> <p>Businesses</p>



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			businesses and institutions.	
3.	Supporting HCBET development by creating favourable conditions and business environment	<p>Encouraging business initiatives in the field of HCBET</p> <p>Improvements of technical and infrastructural provisions</p> <p>Improvements in tourism regulation</p> <p>Strategic planning for HCBET development</p> <p>Human resource management</p> <p>Financial stimuli and investment opportunities</p> <p>Encouraging more active participation of the local communities in the creation of the HCBET product</p>	<p>Maintaining good transport infrastructure, enhancing sites accessibilities</p> <p>Practicing visitors' management control</p> <p>Improvements in legal regulations concerning HCBET</p> <p>Elaborating strategic documents for HCBET</p> <p>Development of the institutional capacity</p> <p>Establishing partnerships with relevant international organizations</p> <p>Cross- border cooperation for common tourism products</p> <p>More focus on the practical training of the future experts.</p> <p>Funding and technical support for start-ups</p> <p>Stimulating investments in tourism</p> <p>Making grants and other funding instruments available for smaller providers</p> <p>Encouraging innovations</p>	<p>Government</p> <p>Ministry of Tourism</p> <p>National Tourism Council</p> <p>Local authorities</p> <p>Educational institutions</p> <p>Financial institutions</p> <p>Local communities</p>



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			<p>Tax alleviations and exemptions</p> <p>Regulation and control of the business activities and monitoring on the potential “shadowy” economic activities</p> <p>Information and awareness campaign to promote HCBT among the hosting population</p> <p>Encouraging volunteer participation of local residents in festival, events and other tourists’ activities</p>	
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### Conclusions

The analysis confirms that HCBET in Bulgaria has huge potential for future development and should be considered as a priority in the policy-making on local, regional and national level. A roadmap of actions or a strategic policy framework towards more sustainable, niche tourist offering has to be elaborated by the relevant institutions in collaboration with the tourism providers and the local communities. Joint efforts of all stakeholders are needed to:

- improve the country’s image on the global tourism market and successfully position Bulgaria as an attractive and recognizable HCBT destination;
- diversify of the offering by the inclusion of special interest tourism products in the national portfolio;
- preserve, protect and enhance the cultural heritage, including valorisation of the tourism resources;
- enhance the quality of the services, thus leading to increased competitiveness;
- obtain governmental stimuli for HCBT development;
- provide for intense usage of Hi Tech and web-based solutions such as virtual tours, digitalization of the products; more intense use of on-line platforms and social media for promotion and distribution.

## REGIONAL ACTION PLAN: GEORGIA

This document represents the basic guide of the Region's action plan which defines the practice and processes of improving more experiential offers of Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism (HCBET) of the Black Sea Basin (BSB) Region. It includes actions defined by recommendations for the purpose of facilitating sustainability and business opportunities by stakeholders acting in the field of HCBET.

Development of the action plan was preceded by SWOT analysis of HCBET, which identified the main problematic issues and difficulties of development. It represents fundamental information for identification of strategic goals and actions and improvement of the situation at the business level.

Development of this document was also preceded by understanding the existing concept of HCBET in the context of cultural tourism, where focus is made on heritage and culture as the elements of cognition, learning and gaining experience in general and are common for all countries participating in PRO EXTOUR project.

### *Development of Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism in Georgia*

Georgia as the ancient country with rich culture traditionally represents the area of cultural tourism for those interested in authentic and unique places of interest and a living culture. In the country's tourism development strategy cultural resources together with the Georgian wine and cuisine, elements of traditional hospitality are viewed as touristic values which attract modern travellers most of all. HCBET as a new (alternative) direction of the traditional (massive) forms of cultural tourism first appeared in the "National Strategy of Georgian Culture" (page 40). This is a new wave with its innovations, co-participatory planning, individual approaches, creativity etc. where sustainable development principles are integrated. Therefore, traditional cultural tourism in Georgia at the stage of transformation requires adequate planning, knowledge and interdisciplinary approach, cooperation between agencies at various levels and consolidation of workforce.

### *SWOT analysis of Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism in Georgia*

On the basis of SWOT analysis, the work group discussed the main challenges of HCBET seeking for methods of reduction of the existing threats and joint resolution of problems. In particular, 4 directions, 9 strategic goals and 24 strategic actions were identified. The results are provided in the form of a logical framework of the action plan.

#### **Strengths**

- Rich and diverse heritage and culture

The ancient and diverse culture of Georgia is a strength of the tourism development in the country. There are many unique cultural sites, which create places of interest at the international and regional touristic market, for example, the ancient civilization - remnants of megalithic structures, prehistoric cave painting, brilliant examples of the Christian architecture

of the early and middle ages. In addition to it, there is diverse and unique nature of intangible resources in the country which is expressed in their continuity. Examples of living culture, such as folk dances, Georgian polyphony, culinary and gastronomy, heritage crafts and visual arts, social practices etc. are the authentic part of Georgia and some of them are inscribed on the Representative List by The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO (UNESCO.org.2019). History of the country, particularly, traces of the Caucasian adventure of empires in peripheral regions of Georgia etc. are also interesting.

→ State support

For the purpose of development of cultural routes in Georgia and effective engagement in the Cultural Routes Program of the European Council, the Cultural Routes Office under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport coordinates functioning of the interagency council for strategic development and certification of cultural routes of Georgia. The council consists of 13 representatives (Cultural Routes of Georgia, 2017).

The alternative tourism in Georgia, as the supportive industry, has become a part of many sectors. Therefore, programs are being implemented in support of small and medium-sized businesses. Principles of sustainable development, such as introduction of co-participatory practice of self-governance for the purpose of sustainable use of resources, creation of destination management organizations (DMO) and local action groups (LAG) are actively discussed.

→ Use of local resources and talents

For the purpose of creating a diverse and market-oriented product, it is required to organize integrated touristic routes based on resources available on the local market.

→ Integration into Cultural Routes Program

Georgia has been engaged in "Europe's Cultural Routes Certification Program"<sup>1</sup> since 2016, which facilitates introduction of guiding instructions for organizing cultural routes and their integration in the international network. In this regard, certification of routes based on surveys and their integration in Europe's cultural routes are interesting (Cultural Routes of Georgia, 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Five cultural tours were developed within the framework of the Program: "Wine route", "European route of Jewish heritage", "European route of historic thermal cities", "Prehistoric cave painting" and "European route of historic gardens".

<sup>2</sup> At this stage, certified routes are: "German settlements and archaeological heritage", "In the footsteps of Alexandre Dumas in Georgia". Surveys have been conducted on the following topics: "Known and unknown cultural routes in the Western Georgia", "Research of modern style architectural heritage in Georgia", "In the footsteps of ancient civilizations", "I am going to Guria, but", "The route of the Georgian ceramics", "The Georgian route of historic heritage", "Route of prehistoric cave painting in Georgia", "Fortresses - Guards of the Future".

## Weaknesses

- Less diversified and quality touristic product

These days, tourists are looking for novelties, new emotions, knowledge which will allow them to gain unforgettable experience. Apart from authentic places of interest, there is a demand on close interaction between hosts and visitors which is unique means of understanding local traditions. At the same time, SWOT analysis showed that despite diverse and high interest in experience and adventure, more than 30% of respondents request comfortable travel but are willing to sacrifice their own comfort for gaining unforgettable experience. Here, it is desirable to create professional and amateur tour offers.

Study of the existing situation showed that looking for adventures, new emotions, inspiration and gaining experience are not achieved only by offering one product and comfort. In addition to authentic environment, customers request physical activity, such as walking, equestrian, cycling tours around their destination, walking in the cultural landscape setting, as well as in the natural pristine environment, tour offers to agro-touristic farms etc.

- Inadequate/insufficient qualification and knowledge of the staff

SWOT analysis identified lack of qualification and relevant knowledge of the human resources available at the labour market. A list of topics was prepared based on discussion with experts and hotel/restaurant managers.

- Growing trend of migration of working-age population

Unfortunately, young people are not interested in legends narrated by their parents and do not want to learn the things that the past has preserved for them. The analysis showed that emotions and excitement of tourists have enhanced motivation of Georgian hosts, feeling of identity, distinctiveness, pride in respect to the culture and national values of their country, recognition of their own creative skills/talents and their role in transfer of knowledge and preservation of resources.

- Weak cooperation and the regional and state level

Tourist facilities - the main infrastructure providing equipment and conveniences of the travel destination - are important at the tourism market. Water and gas supply are still a problem in regions. There are insufficient tourist site and road signs, which cannot be provided without support of the local government.

- Weak network cooperation between service providers (which hinders engagement of masters in the tourism market)

These days, visitors cannot be surprised only by comfortable accommodation and monotonous offers. Creative approach and inclusion of creative elements are possible only by cooperation of various providers and creation of an integrated touristic product.

→ Insufficient interpretation and marketing of HCBET tour product

Tourists are often more interested in specific stories and legends rather than facts. For emotional contact, a tourist needs a story narrated live. It is recommended to popularize local events, such as ethno festivals, community festivals etc. It is necessary to actively apply the so-called "narration" technique to share practice and have such competences for the process description which will show visitors the ancient traditions of the country.

Presentation of unique experiences of Georgian traditions requires a more flexible approach and innovative platforms, such as Airbnb.com portal about transformational travel experience. Online platforms existing in Georgia require activation of suppliers, relevant knowledge/skills in digital marketing and administration of social networks, high quality communication with potential customers.

### **Opportunities**

→ Advantageous location in the Caucasian region

Georgia is a competitive country in terms of receiving international and regional tourists. The tours of all three countries are presented on international markets by the Georgian tour operators.

→ Support from the Council of Europe and international organizations

In 2021, the city of Kutaisi will host the 10<sup>th</sup> Consultation Forum of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (on September 29 - October 2).

→ Development of international thematic tours

In terms of creation of a thematic touristic product, Georgia has a potential of development of topics related to the Silk Road and the European Cultural Routes. Renewal of the Silk (Trade) Road program is supported by the UN World Tourism Organization and its goal is to popularize intangible cultural heritage through tourism<sup>3</sup>.

Popularization of the route of ceramics in Georgia is also interesting and will contribute to production onsite (Associazione Strada Europea della Ceramica, 2018)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Silk Road topic is successfully used by Uzbekistan, where Silk and Spices Festival is held in Bukhara annually. A show program is presented at the festival, showing traditional products and customs from the culture of Uzbekistan and the neighbor countries. Visitors taste sweets such as halva, attend performances, participate in production of handmade items. They also have an opportunity to participate in preparation and tasting of a significant Uzbek dish - Plov.

<sup>4</sup> The European Route of Ceramics (the cultural route recognized by the Council of Europe since 2012) envisages granting a cultural heritage value, which is related to production of ceramics and its old tradition, creates a sustainable and competitive touristic offer, not only examples and collections, but also the entire living culture, preserved by this industry during many years.

→ Regulations and copyright protection

Traditional products require protection from the part of the government in development of regulations, maintaining identity of products, their labelling and branding. Another mechanism of popularization and protection of traditional products is copyright protection which provides assistance to communities holding these rights and creates a precondition for protection of their products. It is also important to understand the entire system and elements participating in the value chain of this process.

### Threats

- Unstable political situation in the region
- Post-COVID-19 pandemic period

According to experts and the sector specialists, new opportunities have appeared against the background of challenges at the tourism market. In this regard, three issues are identified:

- Transition of educational tourism experience to online practice of remote sharing of specific experiences;
- Creation of potential for domestic tourism development;
- Setting short-term goals and making changes to the existing tourism strategy.

### Possible Policy Options

For analysis of all the above results what can be done for the use of strengths/opportunities and reduction of weaknesses/threats, the TOWS method is used, which is an effective method for identification of challenges/areas of intervention and strategic goals.

**Table 1. TOWS**

Identified areas		Challenge/areas of intervention
Strengths and Opportunities		Possible measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich and diverse heritage and culture, preserved social practices and other traditions</li> </ul>	⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of a competitive, authentic product at the tourism market</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local knowledge, resources and talents</li> </ul>	⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing and interpretation of integrated thematic touristic routes.</li> <li>• Creation of thematic routes and connecting them to the European cultural routes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of Cultural Route Division, Consultation Forum scheduled for 2021</li> </ul>	⇒	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of DMOs and LAGs</li> </ul>	⇒	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of signs denominating traditionality and place of origin, regulations and copyright protection</li> </ul>	⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancement of self-government participatory practice - community-based activities</li> <li>• Integration of guiding instructions of traditionality and intellectual property in HCBET touristic product</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advantageous location in the Caucasian region</li> </ul>	⇒	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of combined, trans-border touristic products</li> <li>• Organizing thematic festivals and other events and their inclusion in the international festival program</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizing transborder and international thematic HCBET routes</li> <li>Increasing local demand on travel to regions</li> </ul>	⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Popularization of thematic routes and their integration in international and European thematic paths</li> <li>Development of offers for the local market</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weaknesses and Threats</li> </ul>		Possible measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less diversified quality product</li> <li>Novelty and less awareness of the field</li> <li>Inadequate tourist infrastructure</li> <li>Inadequate/insufficient qualification and knowledge of the staff</li> <li>Lack of financial resources to increase the quality of services</li> <li>Insufficient interpretation and marketing of tour products</li> <li>Growing trend of migration of working-age population and loss of local knowledge</li> <li>Weak cooperation at the regional and state level</li> <li>Post-COVID 19 pandemic period</li> <li>Unstable environment</li> </ul>	⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of a target, quality tour product, including development of walking and cycling tours</li> <li>Development of clarifications, integration of guiding principles for protection of resources and diversity in the tour product; organizing HCBET seminars, workshops, creation of hubs for establishment of professional associations, sharing knowledge and practice.</li> <li>Improvement of infrastructure required for HCBET tour product, including facilitation of arrangement of souvenir and heritage crafts studios.</li> <li>Organizing trainings</li> <li>Introduce new incentives, make recommendations for the next programs of "Produce Georgia" and "Creative Georgia"</li> <li>Offering a creative tour product on innovative platforms; enhancement of producer skills/knowledge in digital marketing and social network administration.</li> <li>Supporting community projects for the improvement of touristic conditions and provision of amenities</li> <li>Facilitation of transition to online practice of remote sharing of specific experiences</li> <li>Engagement of young people in tourism activities and preservation of local knowledge</li> <li>Enhancement of multi-sectoral cooperation</li> </ul>

### Strategic vision, goals and action plan

By 2030 Georgia will be a competitive destination of **Heritage and Culture-Based Experiential Tourism in the Black Sea Region**, on the basis of a rich living culture and **high-quality services**. The country creates conditions for **participation in practice** and **gaining authentic experiences** by tourists and for increasing social and economic benefit by local communities. At the same time, it ensures **preservation of cultural heritage**, **raising awareness** of tourists and local population and increase of **tourism revenues** in the country.

### Strategic directions



Goals of the Strategy:

- ➔ **Authentic, competitive HCBET touristic products and services** are developed on the basis of the country's diverse and rich living culture.
- ➔ The country's **heritage and living culture** are preserved in the long run **Marketing and communication** meet the target market requirements and represent the country on the **international creative and experiential tourism market**.
- ➔ **HCBET touristic products and services** are developed on the basis of the country's diverse and rich living culture.
- ➔ **HCBET management** corresponds to **multi-sectoral and co-participatory development** approaches, where the engagement of local community and cooperation at various levels are envisaged.

**Table 2. HCBET Development Action Plan**

Strategic action	Aim(s) of strategic action	Possible outcome(s) of strategic action	Possible responsible stakeholder(s)	
<b>1. Development of authentic, competitive HCBET touristic products and services</b> on the basis of the country's diverse and rich living culture	1.1 Creation of high quality, <b>HCBET</b> tour product where local resources and elements of living culture are integrated	1.1.1. Inventory of tangible and intangible cultural resources on the territory of municipalities	GNTA, Cultural Routes Office, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, National Museum, local municipalities, DMOs, LAGs, Tourism Alliance member organizations, University research centers, EU, USAID Economic Security Program	
		1.1.2. Select and promote costumed improvisation of at least one folk game/ritual or folkloric event		
		1.1.3. Seasonality was reduced - winter offers and onsite short touristic programs were created		
	1.2. Creation and management of touristic infrastructure tailored to cultural values;	1.2.1 Introduction of guiding principles for development, organization and management of new HCBET routes on the basis of agreement between stakeholders, including with DMOs		GNTA, Cultural Routes Office, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia, National Museum, local municipalities, DMOs, LAGs, Tourism Alliance member organizations, event management organizations
		1.2.2 Develop and mark educational thematic routes in touristic areas		
		1.2.3 Improvement of product/services with required inventory of spaces/places for receiving visitors and product demonstration		
	1.3 Increasing opportunities locally and in the region for the purpose of	1.3.1 Development of academic materials and conduct training courses for gaining practical skills of HCBET product development, interpretation and management		GNTA, local municipalities, DMOs, LAGs, Tourism Alliance member organizations, event management



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	making innovative and profitable offers	<p>1.3.2 Develop and implement a heritage and culture learning module with vocational schools.</p> <p>1.3.3 Improvement of producers' skills in terms of visitor receipt, product and service quality standards, food safety and management, marketing and social network administration</p> <p>1.3.4 Improving the qualifications of guides in terms of leading a cultural tour, interpreting the topic</p>	organizations, airbnb.com, Expogo.ge
2. Sustainable use and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural resources	2.1 Increase awareness of heritage and cultural resources	<p>2.1.1. Definition of HCBET, conduct surveys and demonstrate results at seminars, workshops and forums</p> <p>1.1.3 Touristic (trans-border) programs connecting regions, including Europe to BSB countries were created and are functioning.</p>	Local municipalities, DMOs, LAGs, Tourism Alliance member organizations, EU, USAID Economic Security Program
		<p>2.1.2. Create a modern platform and hubs for enhancement of cultural identity, efficiency of knowledge sharing and transfer of information from generation to generation, as well as professional contacts;</p>	
	2.2 Avoidance of loss of cultural resources	<p>2.2.1 Motivation of young people to engage in HCBET activities by their engagement in organization of events</p>	
		<p>2.2.2 Integration of Tradition and Intellectual Property Guidelines and Appropriate Quality Mark into HCBET Product</p>	
3. Enhancement of HCBET product visibility and access to the tourism market and increase of popularization of the country's HCBET at the international market	3.1. Development and implementation of effective target organizational and marketing measures	<p>3.1.1. Innovative platforms Quality and competitive HCBET product / offer market access through the use of applications and online platforms</p>	Local municipalities, DMOs, LAGs, Creative Georgia, Tourism Alliance member organizations, EU, USAID Economic Security Program
		<p>3.1.2 Popularization of thematic routes, integration with European cultural routes, including the creation of tourism (transboundary) tourism programs related to the Black Sea countries</p>	
		<p>3.1.3. Preparation of advertising materials for DMO/TIC and for dissemination at events</p>	
	<p>3.1.4. Organize advertising events of HCBET products (for example, creative host award) and introduce to be presented at various events, including Tourism Award;</p>		
3.2 Enhancement of network	<p>3.2.1 Increasing the involvement and popularity of masters in the tourism</p>		

	cooperation at the local, national and international level	market (organizing info tours, integrating them into tour programs)	
		3.2.2. Introduce voucher system (for example, a free ticket to the museum with a hotel stay), to increase the duration of visits to sites and local cooperation;	
		3.2.3. Organizing thematic festivals and other events and including them in the program of international festival	
4. Effective management of the sector - enhancement of multi-sectoral cooperation, effective HCBET systems and co-participatory approaches.	4.1. Enhancement of self-government co-participatory practice - community-based activities	4.1.1. Implement community projects and promote on-site resilience, diversity and collaboration practices.	Creative Georgia, Cultural Routes Office, GNTA, Local municipalities, DMOs, Tourism Alliance member organizations EU, USAID Economic Security Program
	4.2. Coordination of Advisory Council/Platform	4.2.2. Monitoring the action plan through interdisciplinary and multisectoral cooperation	

### Conclusions

Implementation of the action plan for achievement of the common goal of sustainable development in Georgia requires cooperation of several institutions and persons. Despite this necessary joint attempt, the main responsibility for the tourism sector lies with the Georgian National Tourism Administration and therefore, it ensures cooperation of activities. At the same time, for the purpose of effective implementation of the strategy, close cooperation with the Cultural Routes Office and the Creative Georgia Department under the Ministry of Culture is desirable.

For implementation of the strategy, it is also important to develop an integrated approach which ensures engagement of stakeholders in the decision-making process (especially, using "bottom-top" approach). For this purpose, the Georgian National Tourism Administration will cooperate with local government, Destination Management Organizations (DMO), civil sector, local action groups (LAG), local associations of active citizens and other stakeholders.

For evaluation of the strategy, measurable indicators should be identified for assessment of the strategy impact on them. For monitoring of implementation of the set goal it is recommended to establish the Advisory Council for the purpose of permanent, simultaneous monitoring of the implementation stage by the parties. The Advisory Council shall hold meetings twice a year, physically or virtually.



## REGIONAL ACTION PLAN: GREECE

The Regional Action Plan (RAP) serves as a foundational document that identifies practices and processes to advance heritage and culture-based experiential tourism services on the two Greek Black Sea Basin Regions, Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (from now on BSB-GR region). It focuses on a set of recommendations to be implemented by the main private and public sector stakeholders in tourism in order to promote opportunities provided by experience tourism.

### *State-of-art: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats*

The entire BSB-GR region has a rich and diverse stock of both tangible and intangible heritage from the pre-historic era to the modern years. Both administrative regions of the BSB-GR area, the regions of Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, have an already well-developed touristic profile.

Regarding the tangible cultural resources, BSB-GR region incorporates most of the territories of ancient Macedonia and is home to 4 of UNESCO's 18 World Heritage sites in Greece and to important ancient cities. Thessaloniki, the capital of the region, is an important pole of attraction with specific potential for growth of experiential tourism. Other smaller cities, such as Veroia with significant monuments from the Byzantine era, and Xanhti, with its distinctive architecture, also have potential for experiential tourism growth. Major natural resources such as Mount Olympus, Greece's tallest mountain, known worldwide as the home of the Greek gods, and Mount Athos, the third UNESCO heritage site are also distinct locations for experiential tourism.

Regarding the intangible resources, BSB-GR has a very rich variety of customs and traditions that construct a remarkable and diverse local culture. Some well-known rituals also survive in their original form in certain villages similar to those surviving in areas of Bulgaria. The well-known local cuisine of various places in both BSB-GR regions and the growth potential of gastronomic destinations could further contribute to experiential tourism transformation.

As revealed by the consumer's survey, the majority of consumers mainly travel to discover new areas and to explore the living culture of a place and there is also a considerable interest in visiting heritage and cultural sites. Travelers seem to be willing to pay more for meaningful and enriching touristic experiences and to sacrifice their comfort or convenience in order to acquire memorable and enriching experiences.

Research has revealed a lack of clear content definition of experiential tourism which is either confronted as a 'general term' or not fully understood. Furthermore, a gap has been observed between existing and conventional categorization of tourism enterprises and experiences as some of the existing businesses in the experiential sector could not be classified in the existing tourism categories. This can be translated as a need for the revision of the existing touristic model, context and content definition by modernizing the legislation related to tourism and its alternative forms.

A review of the legislative framework to facilitate the development of experiential tourism appears as a crucial necessity. Important factors that would contribute to the development of



experiential tourism is the collaboration between touristic companies and local producers in order to support the local community and cross-border cooperation. Digital technologies enable new areas for experiential tourism, allow for differentiation of the tourism product and enrich the visitors' experience using virtual tools. The COVID-19 pandemic, although typically seen as a problem, could also turn into an opportunity for development of experiential tourism.

An integrated policy for the promotion and implementation of strategies for experiential cultural tourism at all levels is necessary. The inadequate and insufficient tourism legislation in combination with the lack of strategic planning and clear content definition inhibits the development of experiential tourism activities and businesses. This is partly due to the fact that mass tourism is still dominant in the tourism sector all over Greece including the two BSP-GR regions. National government should develop an integrated action plan for alternative forms of tourism, including experiential tourism.

Regional government of both BSB-GR regions also lack a strategic planning for cultural and transportation infrastructures with implications in functional problems as well as problems related to accessibility. There is a need for sufficient interoperability between different modes of transport and connection between distant geographical areas with central ones. A long-term strategic framework and planning that defines responsibilities, management and marketing practices, cooperation between the public and private sector is crucial for the development of experiential tourism. A different approach and management of geographical areas, depending on their distinctive particularities and their specific characteristics is also important. This could be succeeded by alternative operational bodies, such as a Destination Management Organization (DMO), with deep knowledge of the advantages and special features of each destination. In this way, areas and destinations that may not have been so interesting, would develop their comparative advantages and create a high-quality experiential product.

Lack of cooperation in the field of experiential tourism at all levels (national, regional and local) is recorded as a crucial problem. High-quality experiential products and services require efficient cooperation of all stakeholders involved in tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to invest a lot of effort and to mobilize several public and private players in order to achieve an efficient cooperation and solidarity between essential participants in the sector and build an attractive, high quality experiential tourist product.

Experiential tourism businesses and products should be sustainable. This means that the touristic product requires a constant feedback and adaptation to unforeseen or urgent conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to become sustainable and face all challenges. Creativity is a necessary ingredient, to enhance tourism experience and provide tourist destinations with a unique atmosphere. Thus, it is crucial to enhance the innovative behaviour of tourism companies by implementing creative ideas or incorporating new technologies in the experiential activities. Finally, in order to reduce business defamation risk due to low quality, it is necessary to impose a quality control or quality certification of the offered product in tourism enterprises.

The following table presents a SWOT analysis focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment (resources, consumers and local people, tourism product and enterprises, policy and governance) and on the opportunities and threats of the external environment.



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## Strengths

## Weaknesses

### Resources: Tangible and Intangible Heritage

- Long history / many historical monuments/World Heritage
- Thessaloniki (capital of the region): heritage resources of high value / well developed urban tourism
- Other important cities with significant architecture and monuments
- Variety of customs and traditions
- Cultural profile of the people
- Well-known cuisine, mosaic of tastes, gastronomic destination
- Rich natural resources with links to heritage (Mount Olympus, Mount Athos)

### Consumers and local people

- Active tourist participation
- Local community positive to experiential activities
- Experiential touristic flows channelled not only in historical landmarks or basic historical places, but also in points with a hidden history.

### Product/enterprises

- Well-developed touristic profile/identity (sea tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, wine, sports, cultural, gastronomy, religious-pilgrimage, thermal - therapeutic)
- Anthropocentric approach
- Integration of multidimensional parameters
- Destination as an overall and integrated experience
- High quality product
- Well-developed digital marketing strategy
- Well-developed experiential activities: cultural (alternative guided tours, themed walks, wine trails), agricultural (wine production and beekeeping process, essential oils distillery, mushroom and traditional herb hunting), adventurous (canoe-kayak, rafting, mountain biking)
- Specifically, designed tours for the disabled, the elderly and people with less opportunities
- Awards for innovative experiential activities

### Policy/Governance

- Lack of legislative - legal framework
- Lack of long - term strategic framework and planning
- Lack of cooperation (national, regional, local level)
- Unsuccessful management of cultural and transportation infrastructures / Functional cultural infrastructure and transportation problems
- Insufficient touristic model and context

### Product/enterprises

- Lack of funding
- Lack of local trained staff
- Different pricing policy within experiential tourism businesses and travel agencies
- Lack of cooperation at public and private sector
- Seasonal and geographical concentrations of tourists
- Pressures on coastal resources due to mass tourism
- Lack of involvement of the restaurant industry in the experiential tourism sector
- Different philosophy between stakeholders
- Few businesses related to tourism have developed experiential activities
- Limited understanding of the definition and dimensions of experiential tourism

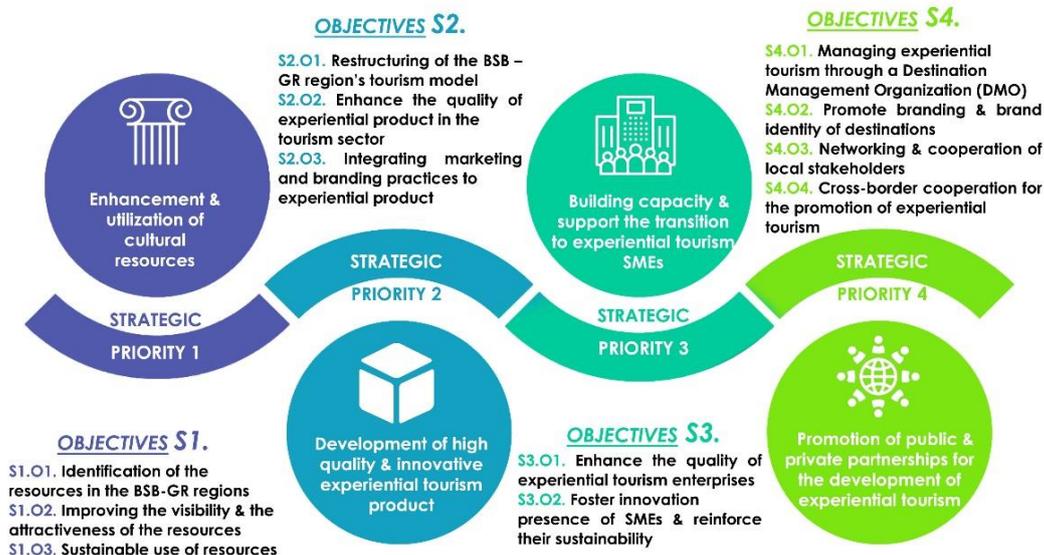
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19 (lessons learned)</li> <li>• Cross-border cooperation</li> <li>• Designation of Cultural resources of the joint European tourism policies and funding instruments</li> <li>• New Special Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development.</li> <li>• New digital technologies</li> <li>• Adoption of environmentally friendly policies and strategies in tourism</li> <li>• Collaboration between touristic companies and local producers</li> <li>• Implementation of innovative technological practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19 (effect on travel)</li> <li>• Global crises (economic)</li> <li>• Dominance of mass tourism</li> <li>• Competitive tourism markets</li> <li>• Constant change of needs and trends of tourist demand</li> <li>• Overexploitation of natural and cultural resources</li> </ul>

### Strategic priorities, objectives and actions

The Regional Action Plan for encouraging heritage and culture-based experiential tourism in the BSB-GR region is structured along 4 Strategic Priorities (S):

- S.1. Enhancement and utilization of cultural resources
- S.2. Development of high quality and innovative experiential tourism product
- S.3. Building capacity and support the transition to experiential tourism SMEs
- S.4. Promotion of public and private partnerships for the development of experiential tourism

Each Strategic Priority embodies specific objectives (Figure below), which are specified into actions of strategic nature.



*Strategic Priority S.1. Enhancement and utilization of cultural resources*

The BSB-GR region is well known for its tangible and intangible resources and it could become a valued destination for experiential tourism. Local culture provides an overview of different practices, influenced by the Greek and wider Balkan and Mediterranean culture, including some coming from the ancient, byzantine or ottoman past. The BSB-GR region combines a strong history and a high number of various historical monuments while it is inhabited by people with a deep cultural background. Considering the rich natural resources, the region could play an important role in the development of experiential tourism both in the country and in the wider Black Sea Basin area. Three main objectives are identified, that could serve in improving the utilization of the resources of the BSB-GR regions, cultural (both tangible and intangible) and natural, while a number of possible actions and relevant outcomes are listed.

*Objective S1.01. Identification of the resources in the BSB-GR regions*

The detailed identification of the resources of the regions should be the main objective upon which proposals for experiential tourism could be further developed. It is important to note that resources that are not used cannot be preserved. Another target of this objective would be the machining of the tangible and intangible resources in space that would allow the offering of localist and informed products through the combination of resources that would allow the mobilizing the cultural, natural and environmental resources in general.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
Mapping and categorization of the available resources (tangible / intangible, cultural / natural, urban / rural etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Overview of the availability and type of resources / protection of resources</li> <li>– Develop linkages with regional/local economies and local communities</li> <li>– Mobilization of local resources for sustainable regional and local development</li> </ul>
Illustration (vision board) of spatial identities (spatial concentration of resources, possible routes, types of resources that construct the character and the physiognomy of a place)	
Integration of different types of resources into experiential tourism strategies	

*Objective S1.02. Improving the visibility and the attractiveness of the resources*

Improving the visibility and the attractiveness of the resources is a fundamental element in creating a destination profile that would encourage visitors to choose the specific regions.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
Accessibility and transportation infrastructures of tourism destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improvement of the resources' and the experiential products' quality and attractiveness / widen their accessibility to those with special access needs</li> </ul>
Restoration / repair / protection of the resources in need	
Creation of a visitor information online platform with the allocation of resources	

from a multi-thematic perspective using innovative methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improvement of the resources' visibility / Increase experiential tourism demand</li> <li>– Improve visibility and access to local cultural activities utilizing existing tourism demand</li> </ul>
Promotion and utilization of the archaeological sites and the museums and creation of integrated archaeological routes	
Interconnection of existing tourism products with the experience of local cultural activities	

**Objective S1.03. Sustainable use of resources**

The sustainable use of resources is essential for both current and future preservation of the resources of the regions. Of utmost importance is especially the preservation of the intangible resources as, due to their often-performative character, these resources will need to be used (performed) in order to be conserved. Thus, contrary to the main belief, experiential tourism can assist a lot towards their preservation instead of their consumption. All these need to be subjects of a sustainable development approach so that the local conditions, communities and customs are respected and that the numbers of tourists that pay visits will not exceed the caring capacity of the local places and communities.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
Enhancement of the potential of small / local / family-owned firms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Disseminate growth to support local economy and society</li> <li>– Safeguard the sustainable use of the environment</li> <li>– Protect local culture, knowledge and practices</li> <li>– Allocate tourism supply throughout the year, tackle seasonality and safeguard sustainable development.</li> <li>– Secure the sustainable use of resources</li> </ul>
Promotion of the use of local products made from sustainable nature resources	
Support and develop the innovative use of local resources / products using local knowledge and practices	
Elaboration of proposals for a round year visits	
Development of a system of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor the sustainable management of the resources	

**Strategic Priority S.2. Development of high quality and innovative experiential tourism product**

Today's challenges in tourism are increasingly linked to high quality, sustainability and innovation that become key factors in the development of unique tourist experiences. The experiential touristic product in the BSB - GR region is a dynamic combination of various complex elements. At the same time, the innovation of tourism service or product is, by definition, multidimensional. Tourism product innovation is mainly a process, which includes two components:

- A non-technological component, dependent on the tangible and intangible human resources, organizational structure and factors that can add value to customer service (marketing etc.);
- A technological component, that depends on technology, especially Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

**Objective S2.01. Restructuring of the BSB - GR region’s tourism model**

The answer to the traditional approach of tourism development from the “sun and sea” model aspect is toward the concept of destination as an integrated experience through sustainability and innovation, with new forms and services outside the dominant and with the central axis of strategy the enhancement of existing tourism products’ quality. Although mass tourism seemingly continues to be of indubitably great importance for the development of tourism industry in Greece, the current tourist demand and model is undergoing a great transformation, with experience becoming an essential part of a journey, by integrating multidimensional parameters such as the environment, culture, gastronomy and overall sustainability. When integrating aspects such as culture and local traditions with natural resources and sports, tourists feel immersed in the local way of life, in an experiential way, and receive a positive image of the visited destination. The diversification of tourism product is essential, by encouraging synergies among different modes of tourism such as cultural, gastronomic, sport, religious tourism, agri-tourism, rural tourism etc. In all cases, activation and participation of all parts of local community is crucial. In addition, one of the better ways to create integrated tourism packages, with emphasis on specific forms of tourism, is by encouraging clusters or networks. Networks may be geographically or thematically based and strengthen the ability of the tourism product to address sustainability issues.

Actions	Possible outcomes
Encourage the integration into tourism strategies of different modes of tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create multidimensional tourism experiences</li> <li>– Improve the range of experiential tourism products and services</li> <li>– Mitigate tourism seasonality</li> </ul>
Interconnect existing tourism products with the experience of local productive activities, mainly in the primary sector	
Establishment and operation of tourism networks (clusters)	

**Objective S2.02. Enhance the quality of experiential product in the tourism sector**

Providing a friendly, high-quality and diverse tourism product and experience is an essential part of creating a deep, enjoyable and memorable experience that ultimately affects visitor satisfaction and encourages repeat visits. By definition, tourism requires the movement of people into and around both the BSB - GR regions. The journey - by rail, plane, ferry, bus, bike or vehicle - can be a highlight of tourists’ (and residents’) experiences. So, infrastructure improvements directed at local residents and commuters, enable travellers to visit less prominent areas and to utilize alternative transportation modes. To accommodate growing demand by domestic and international travellers, transportation infrastructure must be

Common borders. Common solutions.

dependable, safe, and efficient. Innovative information platforms and a system of sustainability indicators in tourism product are crucial for improving both customer satisfaction and service quality, in a sustainable way. In terms of sustainability, it is important to strengthen the quality and capacity of the tourism product by modernizing tourism procedures and engaging in quality certification schemes.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
Improve access and infrastructure with regular and safe transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthen the quality of experiential product</li> <li>- Mitigate tourism seasonality</li> </ul>
Create a visitor information platform that provides high quality information and utilizes innovative methods	
Modernization of procedures and specifications for certification of tourist services	
Develop a system of indicators for the sustainable management of experiential product	

**Objective S2.03. Integrating marketing and branding practices to experiential product**

It is important to create a consistent experiential identity and increase awareness of the potential of BSB-GR region in tourism experiences. Coordinated marketing and branding efforts are necessary to ensure that competitive advantages are sustained and expanded, in a way that BSB-GR region distinguishes from other national and international destinations. The purpose of experiential branding and marketing is not only to focus on a product, but also on what the experience represents for a customer.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
Implement a true experiential BSB GR - region brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a strong experiential identity</li> <li>- Distinguish BSB - GR region from other national and international destinations</li> </ul>
Enhance marketing presence across digital channels	

**Strategic Priority S.3. Building capacity and support the transition to experiential tourism SMEs**

Despite the growing attention to experiential tourism internationally, only a small percentage of enterprises related to tourism have developed experiential activities in BSB-GR region. Therefore, this strategic priority intends to considerably increase the number of SMEs engaging

in sustainable business practices related to experiential tourism, by encouraging coordinated innovative initiatives.

**Objective S3.01. Enhance the quality of experiential tourism enterprises**

Important factors to improve the quality of experiential tourism enterprises and stimulate repeat visits are a combination of diverse activities available within a wide variety of settings, a friendly and professional workforce, and networks between local and national partners. All these elements assist businesses to deliver a high-quality experiential tourism product and become more sustainable and competitive on a global scale. A cooperation network among the various small-size tourism enterprises would improve their sustainability through horizontal integration in a coordinated, cohesive and profitable tourism industry. Potential quality and sustainability standards help companies to grow, scale up, and be competitive, resilient, and sustainable. Encouraging tourism enterprises to focus on certain key groups such as elderly people, people with reduced mobility and low-income families widens accessibility to tourism and address seasonality issues. A friendly, high-quality service, and enjoyable personal interactions are essential to the success of a tourism business or destination.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
Develop networks between local agricultural producers and hotels and restaurants for the use of quality locally produced products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase benefits from horizontal integration of tourism enterprises and cooperation between tourism businesses</li> <li>- Improve the quality of enterprises in order to stimulate repeat visits</li> <li>- Ensure a strong, viable, efficient and well -educated tourism workforce</li> <li>- Improve accessibility</li> <li>- Address seasonality issues</li> </ul>
Define minimum standards and promote only tourism enterprises which meets minimum standards	
Develop innovative training programs to enhance workforce’s education and skills	
Encourage tourism businesses to become more accessible to special social groups and people with special access needs	

**Objective S3.02. Foster innovation presence of SMEs and reinforce their sustainability**

Improving the competitiveness of experiential tourism in the BSB - GR region plays a crucial role in strengthening the sector with a view to dynamic and sustainable growth. Encouraging innovation and reinforcing sustainability dimensions of small and medium - sized tourism enterprises is of great essence. Innovation and new information technologies have become determining factors for the competitiveness of the tourism industry and for strengthening exchanges with other sectors linked to it. Expanding the use of new technology and new media in tourism businesses in order to provide customized visitor information and foster dialogue, in combination with the digitization of tourism procedures is necessary for the BSB-GR region to have an innovative, flexible and comprehensive tourism industry. To ensure the environmentally sustainable growth of tourism enterprises and meet high standards of

environmental stewardship, it is important to establish and develop green certifications for tourism businesses that meet established standards for environmental responsibility in tourism operations.

Actions	Possible outcomes
Modernization of the Tourism Enterprises Register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Developing innovation in the tourism industry</li> <li>– Improve the sustainability and environmental performance of tourism enterprises</li> </ul>
Digitization of procedures for the service of tourist enterprises & investors	
Embrace new technology and new media in experiential activities of SMEs	
Establish and develop green and innovative certification and/or awards programs for tourism businesses	
Advice toolkits on how tourism businesses can improve their environmental performance	

*Strategic Priority S.4. Promotion of public and private partnerships for the development of experiential tourism*

The need to provide sustainable and innovative solutions to tourism triggers the formation of participatory governance schemes. Partnerships can mobilize more effectively experiential tourism strategies as they operate as platforms upon which each stakeholder is engaged into a coordinated multi-stakeholder process and a framework for sharing the costs and benefits of the implementation of a strategy.

*Objective S4.01. Managing experiential tourism through a Destination Management Organization (DMO)*

The establishment of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) as a public private partnership could be a central element for making sure that the right decisions are taken in respect to the development, management and implementation of experiential tourism strategies. For this purpose, regionally based DMOs could be developed with the participation of major local stakeholders that would include service (representatives of cultural tour operators, hotels, the food sector, etc.) and content providers (representatives of cultural bodies, like museums, sites and local cultural associations). A regionally based DMO will operate as a platform for the cooperation of local stakeholders in transforming them into partners in a tourism strategy. In these boards, regional government should play a coordinative role linking regional and local strategies with the national considerations.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
<p><b>Establish DMOs as a public private partnership at the regional level</b></p> <p><b>Promote other private public partnerships as horizontal platforms for the implementation of locally based experiential tourism strategies</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mobilize local institutional capital /increase cooperation for the management of experiential tourism</li> <li>– Share the costs and benefits from the implementation experiential tourism strategies</li> </ul>

*Objective S4.02. Promote branding and brand identity of destinations*

Branding could be seen as an ongoing and perhaps as a never-ending process of trying to achieve a collective idea that authentically represents the interests of the people that make it happen. It should be based on the notion of creating a unifying identity that represents individual interests and fosters each member’s activities.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
<p><b>Create a brand identity for the destinations of the region and an experiential BSB GR-region brand</b></p> <p><b>Use of technology to market / promote the brand of the BSB GR-region</b></p> <p><b>Launch a web platform as a marketing tool for end-users / visitors with information on the products, the resources, including maps.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increase destination visibility and experiential tourism opportunities</li> <li>– Coordinated marketing efforts to ensure that competitive advantages are sustained and expanded.</li> </ul>

*Objective S4.03. Networking and cooperation of local stakeholders*

Broad and lasting innovations with the potential for tourism industry to develop strong niches requires the engagement of a variety of stakeholders that can over time make a substantial contribution to new tourism products. Local collaboration is essential to create sufficient critical mass, while global collaboration contributes to i) gaining access to complementary knowledge and resources; ii) accessing and penetrating international markets; iii) offering a touristic product attractive to visitors. Additionally, new parties and competencies should be encouraged to engage in innovation projects. This will introduce new ideas, different worldviews, complementary knowledge and resources, and thus increase the chance that highly novel innovations are created. The objective is to extend learning and innovation processes beyond the tourism industry’s narrowly defined ones and add other relevant competences, for instance in the fields of IT, new media, culture and arts, archaeology, marine biology, medicine, etc.



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Actions	Possible Outcomes
<b>Establishment and operation of local tourism networks (clusters)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create a local ecosystem in the field of experiential tourism</li> <li>– Improve the innovativeness of the local ecosystem</li> <li>– Improve the visibility of the destinations.</li> </ul>
<b>Encourage new “players” and competencies to be engaged in innovation projects.</b>	
<b>Creation of a joint branding for the promotion of specific thematic routes (e.g. Wine routes Cherry routes, Gastronomy routes, etc)</b>	

**Objective S4.04. Cross-border cooperation for the promotion of experiential tourism**

Cross-border collaboration between the private and public sectors, between business and research, as well as involvement of civil society fosters innovation in tourism generally, either in a specific region or in relation to a specific thematic area. This will fundamentally contribute to the impact and sustainability of the interventions.

Actions	Possible Outcomes
<b>Develop bilateral agreements that will create the necessary synergies for the joint development of the cross-border’s regions.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create the necessary platform to allow the development of economic relations, the flow of tourists across borders and the offering of joint touristic products.</li> <li>– Improve the interaction between stakeholders across the borders and offer a platform for regular interactions</li> </ul>
<b>Establish regular stakeholders networking events</b>	

**Possible financial resources and stakeholders**

**Financial Resources**

The two major resources for financing actions included in the present Regional Action Plan are a) the new Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework, 2021-2027 and the Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) 2021-27 and b) the Greek Recovery and Sustainability Plan. The Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework constitutes the main strategic plan for growth in Greece with the contribution of significant resources originating from the European Structural and Investment Funds. At present, the PA has not been finalized. ROPs are the basic financial programs for regional and local scale actions and interventions. ROPs of the two concerned regions, Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, are under consultation and their policy options have not been published yet. The Greek Recovery and Sustainability Plan consists of four pillars: Green Transition, Digital Transformation, Employment, Skills and Social Cohesion, Private Investment and Economic and Institutional Transformation. Policy options and actions relevant to the Regional Action Plan under consideration are described below.



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### Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework, 2021-2027

Policy Objectives	Policy options
PO 1 “A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting the development / adoption of non-technological innovations (e.g. in tourism and culture), establishing mechanisms to support innovative entrepreneurship (Innovation Agency)</li> <li>Supporting the tourism sector in the new conditions created by digital technology,</li> <li>Encouraging partnerships between SMEs (e.g. clusters) and / or larger companies to facilitate access to global markets and value chains (internationalization)</li> </ul>
PO 5 “A Europe closer to its citizens, by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas, and by supporting local initiatives”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated strategies for sustainable urban development</li> <li>Integrated strategies for the development of coastal, rural, island, mountainous areas: a) interventions that promote sustainable development, accessibility and promotion of cultural heritage; b) intervention in areas exhibiting spatial and thematic continuity, with the possibility of utilizing local characteristics, such as cultural and tourism activity</li> <li>Integrated spatial strategies will be implemented by utilizing the spatial tools Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Local Development with Local Initiative Communities (TAPTOK).</li> </ul>

### Greek Recovery and Sustainability Plan

Axis	Actions
Axis 1.4 “Sustainable resource use, resilience to climate change and biodiversity conservation” (Pillar 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the prosperity/well-being and resilience of the Greek economy and society.</li> <li>Improvement of infrastructure related to the protection of the environment and biodiversity.</li> <li>The proposed investments are expected to create a significant number of new jobs and promote sustainable development in rural areas through, among others, the promotion of ecotourism</li> </ul>
Axis 2.2 “Digital transformation of the state” & Axis 2.3 “Digital business transformation”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitization of key sectors such as tourism and culture.</li> <li>Increase the adoption of digital technologies by companies, reducing the digital gap between Greek and European SMEs.</li> </ul>
Axis 4.6 “Modernization and improvement of the resilience of the country's main economic sectors” (Pillar 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the competitiveness, productivity and resilience of key economic sectors, in which Greece has a competitive advantage and which have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, such as tourism and culture.</li> <li>Promotion of links between culture and tourism and “silver” tourism</li> </ul>



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- Promotion of thematic and alternative forms of tourism, such as mountain, religious and maritime tourism, will be promoted in order to diversify the Greek tourism, to reduce seasonality and increase revenues.

### Main Stakeholders

The table below provides an overview of the stakeholders involved in the broader fields of tourism and cultural heritage alike. These are presented in relation to their special level of reference (national, regional, local) and their ownership status (public, private).

	Public	Private
<b>National level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Organization for Tourism (EOT)</li> <li>• Ministry of Tourism</li> <li>• Ministry of Culture</li> <li>• Hellenic folklore research Centre, Academy of Athens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hellenic Hoteliers Federation</li> <li>• Hellenic Chamber of Hotels / Research Institute for Tourism</li> <li>• Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE)</li> <li>• NGOs active in the field of conservation of cultural heritage and preservation of the environment</li> <li>• Association Agritourism of Greece</li> <li>• Association of Tourist and Travel Agencies of Greece</li> </ul>
<b>Regional level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Region of Central Macedonia, Tourism Directorate</li> <li>• Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Tourism Directorate</li> <li>• Folklife &amp; Ethnological Museum of Macedonia - Thrace</li> <li>• Local Ephorates of Antiquities</li> <li>• Tourism Offices of the Regional Districts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society for Macedonian Studies</li> </ul>
<b>Local level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Municipalities</li> <li>• Local Ephorates of Antiquities, of Byzantine antiquities and of Contemporary and Modern Monuments</li> <li>• Local Archaeological and other local thematic museums (incl. city museums, ethnographic, folklife museums, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local cultural associations</li> <li>• Private enterprises active in the field of tourism related to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Accommodation</li> <li>○ Experience</li> <li>○ Bike tours</li> <li>○ Thematic tours and tour operators in general</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protected areas Management Bodies</li><li>• Tourism Offices of the local authorities</li><li>• Local centres for culture</li><li>• Local universities and other education providers</li><li>• Local tourist offices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Restaurants / gastronomy</li><li>• Local NGOs, active in the field of conservation of cultural heritage and preservation of the environment</li><li>• Local business support organizations</li><li>• Local festivals organizing authorities</li></ul>
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## REGIONAL ACTION PLAN: BLACK SEA BASIN

### *Heritage- and culture-based experiential tourism in the BSB region*

The BSB region is known for its remarkable cultural and historical heritage which pairs with ethnic diversity, and unique communities with their distinctive outlook, rites, and traditions (ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020, 2020). This wealth, combined with the beautiful landscapes and the mild, pleasant weather offers numerous opportunities for tourism activities and makes the region one of the world's finest tourist destinations.

As the Needs Assessment Report reveals, Tourism and Hospitality are key sectors for most of the BSB countries, contributing to their economic prosperity and employment. The Tourism Industry in the 12 BSB countries (including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Albania, Greece, Serbia and Turkey) accounted for USD 78.39M in 2019 or 13,6% of Europe's receipts (UNWTO, 2020) and registered steady growth in the recent years (UNWTO, 2018). Unfortunately, 2020 posed many challenges for the region. The numbers of arrivals plummeted drastically (with a drop of 70% for Europe and 74% globally) and the sector is still enduring the hardships of travel restrictions and limited mobility (UNWTO, 2021). Naturally, one of the certain focuses for the BSB region will be the recuperation measurements following COVID19 Pandemic. Other important goals on the decision makers' agenda are the pursuit of sustainability and regional development.

Experiential tourism as an innovative, inclusive and eco-friendly concept aligns naturally with the strategic pathways of BSB tourism policy. It provides an opportunity for developing new types of offering and repositioning of the region on the tourist market. Experiential tourism provokes international visitors to rediscover new resources and cultural treasures that are little known globally. It has the potential to bring a number of benefits for the tourists and the host communities, thus ensuring the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the region.

The Heritage - and culture-based experiential tourism (HCBET) is in the initial state of conceptualization and introduction in the BSB region, and on the global scale. Hence, it is not identified as a distinctive thematic direction in the EU policy-making or the national authorities' agenda. The development of the sector is further challenged by the lack of consistent and synchronized tourism policy on a European level since each BSB state has different regulations. There are, however various incentive instruments available to the operators in regard to the conservation, protection, and promotion of the cultural tangible and intangible heritage. Moreover, the EU, and the national development programs welcome business and service innovations, and allocate substantial funding which can be utilized also for the needs of the HCBET.

## SWOT analysis of the heritage- and culture-based experiential tourism in the BSB region

### Strengths

Experiential tourism in the BSB region has a high potential for development due to the following factors:

- BSB is a major holiday destination with strong brand position on the tourism market suitable for visitation and activities all year long.
- Plentiful historical and archaeological sites and artefacts, vast, and diverse cultural resources. Multi-coloured intangible ethnic heritage such as folklore, cuisine, rites, and traditions etc.
- A significant share of the world's major heritage treasures is situated in this region (UNESCO, 1992-2021) (75 cultural UNESCO sites in the BSB countries (19 in the eligible area)),
- Unexploited underwater archaeological heritage (HERAS, 2014) (156 underwater sites) (ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020, 2020). Potential for construction of sub-aquatic museums as the one in Enez (Turkey) (TESIM, 2018),
- Tourist routes focused on cultural heritage are already developed in most of the BSB countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, and Turkey) (Aliyeva & Rzayeva, 2020),
- Rich cultural calendar. Most of the countries stage flagship festivals and cultural events (example: DescOpera in (USAID, 2018)),
- The excellent ratio between price and quality of services; high price competitiveness
- Tourism is an important sector for the economies of most of the BSB countries. The Black sea region has traditions in hospitality and services.
- Favourable climate conditions (mild weather with low temperature amplitudes), low natural disasters propensity
- Variable relief and beautiful sceneries contributing to rich and diverse tourism product and the opportunity of combining various recreational activities
- The strategic geographic situation of the BSB region on the cross-road of two continents and on major transport routes. Close proximity and convenient access from most of the generating markets.
- The region is specialized in tourism offering. It has built over time a considerable tourist superstructure (hotels, restaurants, tourist information centres, galleries, museums, and other attractions). Most of the countries have well developed air transport and railroad systems.
- Istanbul airport is successfully positioned as a global transportation hub with flight connections to almost any world destination.
- Tourism as a sector is strongly supported by the government in most of the BSB countries (Akova & Baynazoğlu, 2012). There are many funding options for entrepreneurship in experiential tourism, including EU funds and tourism development programs initiated by the national tourism authorities.

- Special interest tourism (including cultural tourism) is in priorities of the tourism policies of the BSB countries (examples: Moldova (Ecological Counseling Center Cahul, 2012), Bulgaria, Romania, Azerbaijan (Strategic Roadmap for the Development of Specialized Tourism Industry in the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016),
- Satisfactory technological advancement level, including internet provision and on-line commerce in most of the BSB countries (Adrian, 2017),
- Advantageous labour market and good prospects for high employability in the sector. For example, Turkey reports a high youth population rate to be directed to the sector (Ozdemir & Demirel, 2018).

### Weaknesses

Some of the major challenges before the growth of the BSB region as experiential tourism are as follows:

- Lack of common understanding of the concept of “experiential” or “heritage and culture-based experiential tourism”,
- Lack or scarcity of tourism planning and strategic roadmaps for future development of the HCBET,
- Lack of effective marketing policy (in the case of Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan and Ukraine),
- Strong focus on sea-side leisure tourism (examples: Turkey and Bulgaria), which hampers the development of alternative forms of tourism (including HCBET),
- The region might provoke unfavourable image association of a cheap and low- quality tourism destination. Some of the countries bears post-communist -(Ukraine, Bulgaria, Moldova), or post-war burden (Ukraine, Serbia, Armenia), or brings health risk concerns because of possible high radioactivity level (Ukraine) (Karabaza, Kozhukhova, & Ivanova, 2020),
- High share of the unobserved economy in the tourism and hospitality sectors and
- Disturbing corruption amidst the decision-making authorities (Ozdemir & Demirel, 2018) which compromise the quality of the offer,
- Underdeveloped services sector in the case of the countries like Moldova, Ukraine, Albania, Romania (Muresan & Popa, 2019),
- Shortage of skilful hospitality employees (the problem is persistent in the case of Romania and Bulgaria),
- Infrastructural shortcomings. Lack of high-quality roads to some of the less-known tourist sites (Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine),
- Some countries, such as Romania and Moldova report low investment in the tourism sector (Adrian, 2017),
- Insufficient institutional capacity, absence of state and public structures including local, regional, or national authorities in the field of HCB tourism,
- Lack of effective interaction between service providers, authorities, local communities, and other stakeholders for joint action towards successful HCBET development,
- Low level of digitalization of the cultural and heritage-based resources,

- Education in HCBET requires a multidisciplinary approach combined with competencies in services which might be an issue in most of the BSB countries. Moreover, the existing hospitality and tourism training lacks practical focus (in the cases of Bulgaria, Romania, Armenia),
- Seasonality of the tourism offering in most of the BSB countries,
- Ineffective transfer of knowledge to business innovations and practical solutions,
- Visa restrictions which restrains the growth of intra-regional demand (mostly valid for the non-EU countries),
- High level of dependency on the large international tour operators which suppress the local businesses and results in financial leakages, (the revenues from tourism does not benefit the local economies),
- Lack of reliable and up-to-date information and statistical data on HCBET and the Tourism sector in general.

### *Opportunities*

- Cross-border cooperation between the BSB countries for creating common cultural heritage tourist routes and products,
- Common regional brand strategy and joint marketing efforts. Possibility of creating a regional HCBET alliance to promote BSB as a distinctive and recognizable destination,
- Increase of public interest and eased access to on-line resources of cultural heritage repositories,
- New trends in tourism focusing on enriching, unique and meaningful experiences, increased interaction with local communities and sustainable consumption,
- Increased intra-region demand as a consequence of decrease in international travels provoked by the COVID19 pandemic,
- Growth of share economy enabling smaller, private provider of accommodation and other services to enter the market,
- Regional and international investments in HCBET related business activities,
- Technological advancement gives way for the creation of new interactive, virtual, and digital products, increased effectiveness of the online marketing and sales.
- Growth popularity of social entrepreneurship and community engaging initiatives, including those related to HCBET,
- Existing large diaspora abroad with strong connections to the home country (Armenia, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey). Motivation for a visit could be visiting friends and relatives, “return to the roots”, and nostalgia.
- Potential enlargement of the European Union, including countries like Turkey, Serbia, and Albania (European Commission, 2021) leading to alleviation of visa restriction and greater travel mobility,
- Possible affiliation with international HCBET organization.

### *Threats*

- COVID19 pandemic as a global threat for the health and safety of the host population and visitors to the region.

Common borders. Common solutions.

- Limited international mobility as a consequence of COVID19 pandemic, rigid travel restrictions, and imposing additional contingencies for visitation such as mandatory PCR testing, quarantines, and vaccination.
- Impending global economic crises,
- Unprecedented decrease in global tourism demand (with 74% average for the world in 2020 (UNTWO, 2021) leading to unemployment in the sector, low occupancy rate, low income, possible bankruptcies and loss of popularity of the industry as a career choice for the youth,
- Lack of identification of HCBET as a thematic objective in the strategic documents on a European level,
- Climate changes associated with more frequent natural disasters and severe weather
- Environmental pollution, global warming, water and aquatic pollution threatening the extinction of BSB flora and fauna,
- Political and economic instability, including the presence of regional conflicts and tensions,
- Strong competition on behalf of the nearby Mediterranean countries and other Southern European and Northern African countries.
- Tourism development threatens the natural habitats in the environmentally fragile zones. This problem exists in most of the BSB countries, including Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece.
- Changes in the visitors' perceptions, preferences, needs, tastes, and purchasing behaviours which could be difficult to predict.
- Migration of skilled labour force to the western EU countries,
- Terrorism threat and the susceptibility of the tourism sector.
- Taxation on the tourism products and services (such as VAT, sales tax, accommodation taxes, alcohol excise duty, etc.) which can damage the price competitiveness of the regional tourism offering,
- Commercialization and loss of authenticity of the cultural and ethnic resources. The heritage is perceived as commodity for sale and is altered to suit the tourists' needs and expectations. In the worst-case scenario, loss of national cultural identity may occur,
- Local communities might be hostile towards visitors. Clash of culture may occur in the cases of noticeable background differences between host population and tourists.

### *Possible strategic actions for development and growth of the Heritage and Cultural-based Experiential Tourism in the BSB region*

The analysis presented in the Needs Assessment Report and summarized in the SWOT section above identifies the main joint challenges and issues of the Black Sea Basin area, from the political, economic, social, legislative, technology and environmental perspective as well as current trends and priorities for the BSB countries (ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020, 2020) such as:

- ✓ post crisis recovery;

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- ✓ focus on sustainability,
- ✓ blue economy,
- ✓ smart innovations and digitalization
- ✓ global climate change

Taking into an account the broader strategic framework and relevant policy context such as:

- ✓ Europe 2020: European strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth
- ✓ The European Territorial Cooperation strategy and the role of the cross-border cooperation
- ✓ Eastern partnership initiatives
- ✓ Blue Growth strategy
- ✓ Black Sea Economic Cooperation
- ✓ EU Strategy for the Danube Region

A proposal for Action Plan for development of heritage- and cultural based experiential tourism in the Black Sea Basin is drafted below.



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A roadmap of indicative policy actions and interventions aimed at promoting sustainable HCBET growth within the BSB region.

No	Strategic action	Aim(s) of strategic action	Possible outcome(s) of strategic action	Possible responsible stakeholder(s)
<b>At regional level</b>				
1.	Joint efforts for sustainable HCBET development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Developing a regional policy for HCBET</li> <li>➤ Improving connectivity and regional cooperation</li> <li>➤ Enhancing the offer and supply of HCBET products</li> <li>➤ Increasing the competitiveness of the region on the global tourism market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Design and implementation of HCBET Strategy.</li> <li>➤ Identifying stakeholders and their involvement as well as a plan for actions and timetable</li> <li>➤ Dissemination of good practices among the BSB countries, transfer of knowledge and innovations</li> <li>➤ Design of trans-border cultural theme routes, examples: wine, culinary, ancient civilizations, old fortress etc.</li> <li>➤ Tax exemptions and other alleviation tools to ensure the price competitiveness of the regional HCBET products</li> <li>➤ Compilation of digital repository of regional cultural resources, including intangible assets such as recipes, folklore, arts, crafts, etc.</li> <li>➤ Joint management of cultural heritage with regional and international importance</li> <li>➤ Cross-border joint ventures, including social initiatives and spin-offs</li> <li>➤ Development of innovative joint products and services to promote synergies between HCBET and other coastal and</li> </ul>	<p>Governments and national authorities</p> <p>Regional and national associations</p> <p>Cultural institutions</p> <p>Service providers</p> <p>Educational and research centres</p>



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			<p>maritime activities (underwater archaeology, aquaculture, and pesca-tourism, SPA, sports and leisure, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Networking events and matchmaking activities for connecting businesses from different countries.</li> <li>➤ Planning and staging of HCBET regional tradeshow</li> </ul>	
2.	<p>Joint promotion of BSB region as a HCBET destination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Raising awareness to the cultural resources and heritage of the BSB region</li> <li>➤ Improved brand image</li> <li>➤ Growth of revenues and number of arrivals</li> <li>➤ Promotion of trans-border cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Creation of alliance or a regional network for joint marketing efforts on regional level</li> <li>➤ Design and implementation of regional branding strategy for HCBET</li> <li>➤ National and International informational and promotional campaign through various media, including on-line channels, social media, mass media, academic journals,</li> <li>➤ Participation in international tourism trade shows and exhibitions</li> <li>➤ Design and staging of series of events, workshops, and happenings in all BSB countries for HCBET promotion</li> <li>➤ Encouraging intraregional tourism by special promotional campaigns aimed at presenting the BSB partners' cultural attractions and offering</li> <li>➤ Design and maintenance of web site dedicated to the HCBET in the Black Sea region</li> </ul>	<p>National authorities/ ministries in Tourism and Culture</p> <p>National HCBET product associations</p> <p>Business operators</p> <p>Research institutions</p> <p>Advertising agencies</p>



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3.	Joint research, education and training initiatives in the field of HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Encouraging research and regional studies of the BSB cultural heritage</li> <li>➤ Improving qualifications in HCBET</li> <li>➤ Transfer of knowledge and dissemination of good practices</li> <li>➤ Enhanced labour market with improved employability, expertise, soft skills and competences related to HCBET</li> <li>➤ Cross cultural exchange between the BSB countries</li> <li>➤ Improved foreign language literacy, including in native tongues of the BSB countries</li> <li>➤ Providing opportunity for international working experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Cooperation between research and academic institutions in the BSB countries for joint projects and studies of cultural, ethnographic and culinary heritage, art and practices</li> <li>➤ Creation of joint research infrastructure. Creation of cross-border living lab and technology centres to support R&amp;D related to HCBET</li> <li>➤ Series of workshops and events in the BSB countries for discussions, knowledge dissemination and transfer of good practices related to HCBET activities and products with the participation of international guest lecturers and practitioners.</li> <li>➤ Study exchange initiatives and internships between the BSB countries in the field of HCBET</li> <li>➤ Language courses and language vacations with the possibility of practice in native speaking environment</li> <li>➤ Exchange of culinary practices, folklore, arts, and crafts of the BSB nations in specially designed web-based platforms, organized training courses and short-term study trips.</li> <li>➤ Organizing a research regional HCBET conference</li> <li>➤ Design of professional qualification for HCBET experts</li> </ul>	<p>Academic and research institutions</p> <p>Governments, national and local authorities</p> <p>Vocational training centres</p> <p>Human resource agencies</p> <p>Business operators</p>
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At national level

1.	Strategic planning and national policy on HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identification, recognition and prioritization of the HCBET as a tool for sustainable development</li> <li>➤ Ensuring involvement of the stakeholders, actions to be taken and scope of responsibilities</li> <li>➤ Engaging relevant institutions and governmental bodies in the policy planning and development of HCBET</li> <li>➤ Harmonizing national regulatory framework with international norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Design and development of strategies, action plans, corresponding regulations and legislative instruments for implementation of the HCBET related policies</li> <li>➤ Specification of the stakeholders, their responsibilities, and involvement in the HCBET development</li> <li>➤ Inclusion and identification of HCBET in the respective legislation (example: in the Tourism Law)</li> <li>➤ Harmonization of the national legislation with the EU norms and regulations</li> </ul>	<p>National governments</p> <p>Tourism councils or advisory boards with representative of all relevant stakeholders</p>
2.	Supporting HCBT development by creating favourable business and social environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Encouraging business activity in the field of HCBET</li> <li>➤ Encouraging community participation in creation of experiential tourism product</li> <li>➤ Infrastructural and institutional provisions for HCBET development</li> <li>➤ Stimulating R&amp;D, innovations and smart solutions related to HCBET</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Funding, technical support and consultations for start-ups</li> <li>➤ Ensuring funds availability such as grants, awards, loans, and other financing instruments. Stimulating investments in HCBET.</li> <li>➤ Tax alleviations for HCBET products and services</li> <li>➤ Encouraging innovations</li> <li>➤ Construction and maintenance of transport, utility, and communication infrastructure. Ensuring cultural sites accessibilities, electricity and water supply, high-speed internet, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>National governments/ Relevant authorities</p> <p>Service providers</p> <p>Product associations</p>



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increasing employability and the qualification of the HCBET employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Development of the institutional capacity (tourism informational centres, local authorities, product associations etc.)</li> <li>➤ Establishing partnerships with relevant international organizations</li> <li>➤ More rigid monitoring and control of the business activities as a remedy against the “shadowy”, unobserved economy</li> <li>➤ Training and information for HCBT practitioners</li> <li>➤ Awareness campaign to promote HCBT among the local communities and motivating volunteer participation in cultural exchange and personal interaction with visitors</li> </ul>	
3	Towards strong HCBET offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ensuring growth and economic sustainability of the HCBET</li> <li>➤ Enhancing competitiveness of the HCBET</li> <li>➤ Protection and preservation of the cultural heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Enhanced product portfolio, including a number of experienced-focused packages.</li> <li>➤ Ensuring high-quality services. Providing for monitoring and control</li> <li>➤ Construction of necessary tourist infra-and super-structure such as accommodation and F&amp;B establishments, museums, galleries, theatres, art and cultural centres etc.</li> <li>➤ Creating more purpose-build cultural attractions and events</li> <li>➤ Encouraging product innovations and transfer of best practices</li> <li>➤ Digitalization of the HCBET products and creation of on-line offering of virtual experiences</li> <li>➤ Encouraging certification and labelling for quality assurance purposes</li> <li>➤ Enhancing cooperation and synergy between HCBET providers, suppliers, institutions and local communities.</li> </ul>	<p>National authorities/ Ministry of Tourism/ Ministry of Culture</p> <p>Tourism associations/ other non-profits</p> <p>Businesses and service providers</p> <p>Local communities</p>



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Valorisation of the cultural and heritage-based tangible and intangible assets</li> <li>➤ Organizing cultural events</li> </ul>	
4	Promoting HCBET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increasing the level of awareness for HCBET</li> <li>➤ Enhancing international image of the BSB countries as destinations for HCBET</li> <li>➤ Promotion of domestic HCBET</li> <li>➤ Marketing and management of the HCBET destinations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Creation of national product HCBET association. Membership represents various stakeholders who takes part in the production, promotion, distribution, or management of the HCBET products</li> <li>➤ Advertising and promotional national campaign with a focus on HCBET targeting international, and domestic markets</li> <li>➤ Visitors control of the HCBET sites ensuring their sustainable usage, and preservation.</li> <li>➤ Distribution of HCBET packages through on-line direct sales and through intermediaries (local and international)</li> </ul>	<p>National governments and authorities/ Ministry of Tourism Local authorities National HCBET associations</p>



## Conclusions

The HCBET has huge potential for future development and should be considered as a priority sector for the BSB region. It ensures sustainable tourism development, economic growth and community inclusion. The countries in the BSB area should join forces to promote HCBET on a regional level and adopt a coordinated policy towards its development. Some of the key areas of strategic importance include:

- Promotion of BSB region as a common destination for heritage - and cultural- based experiential tourism,
- Creating strong HCBET offering, including cross-border theme routes and cultural products,
- Enhancing competitiveness of the sector by providing an excellent ratio between price and value proposition,
- Protection, preservation and valorisation of the cultural and heritage-based assets,
- Ensuring financial stimuli, technical assistance, and support for entrepreneurial social and business initiatives,
- Encouraging smart tech solutions, web-based application, and digitalization of HCBET offering, sales, and promotion,
- Promoting cross-border cooperation, including joint business ventures, research, development, educational, and training activities.



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