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

Project No BSB-1145

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Service Portfolio of the Black Sea Hubs for Experiential Tourism

Armenia

INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea Hubs for Experiential Tourism are established within the project BSB-1145 *Promoting Heritage - and Culture Based Experiential Tourism in the Black Sea Basin (PRO EXTOUR)*, supported by the Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin 2014-2020. They are in-house structures for the projects partner organizations - *Varna University of Management (Bulgaria)*, *Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, City_Space_Flux Research Group (Greece)*, *Georgian Arts and Culture Centre (Georgia)*, *Yerevan State University (Armenia)* and *Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association (Bulgaria)*. They are united together in the Network of Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism.

The Hubs will function as *open laboratories* that provide space and co-working facilities where scientists, educators, students and all interested persons besides academia (such as entrepreneurs, professionals, community activists and citizens) can join forces in the research, education and practice of experiential tourism. Moreover, these will be places, where entrepreneurs in tourism can use expert consulting and mentoring, meet peers as well as cooperate in applied research projects in experiential tourism. The ultimate goal is to create conditions for networking and mobilizing all stakeholders' capacity in favor of the sustainable development of the host communities and destinations.

Accordingly, the Black Sea Hubs for Experiential Tourism are engaged with

- ✓ Conducting of research and encouraging innovations in experiential tourism.
- ✓ Mapping and presentation of heritage and culture-based activities and events in the Black Sea Basin (BSB),
- ✓ Creating a network that goes beyond national borders and a community of practice for entrepreneurs, professionals, academics and students that are involved in experiential tourism by promoting international projects, meetings and collaborations.
- ✓ Planning and implementing national, regional and local programs that will boost networking, generation of ideas, development of entrepreneurial skills and mentoring (e.g., workshops, meetings and trainings).

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MISSION, AIMS AND SUBJECT OF ACTIVITY OF THE HUBS

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Armenia has the mission to incite cooperation and to promote networking among business, academia, local communities and decision-makers for the valorisation of BSB heritage and culture as experience-drivers and development of a sustainable hospitality sector.

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The aims of the Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Armenia are in line with the specific objectives of the PRO EXTOUR project. Meanwhile, they comply with the goals laid into the strategies for cooperation with business, interest groups, YSU and civic society organizations, local, regional and national authorities.

In particular, the Hub aims to:

- Improve the knowledge base of the stakeholders of the regions and extent the awareness of the tourism practitioners in regard to the new trends in tourism demand as well as their implications for the BSB.
- Apply innovative solutions enhancing cross-border opportunities in experiential tourism.
- Design, develop and offer tools and services for promoting the added value potential of experiential tourism for the BSB and the region.
- Identify opportunities for new tourism services and business models in the BSB,
- Sustain networking among education institutions and business for utilisation of the development opportunities of experiential economy,

The **Activities** or the **Subject of operation** of the BSB - RA Hub on Experiential Tourism are defined according to its mission and aims and include:

- a. Applied research, curriculum and training regarding experiential tourism at tertiary and secondary vocational education level;
- b. Mapping of natural and cultural heritage resources and maintaining an on-line repository of culture- and heritage-based activities and events in experiential tourism in the BSB-RA, as well as an inventory of relevant stakeholders and good practices.
- c. Organization of seminars, workshops, conferences, fairs, exchange of good practices and knowledge in the field of experiential tourism and with a focus on the Black Sea Basin; Liaising the University with the labour market in the field of tourism, and local community organizations.
- d. Development and implementation of pilot projects, demos, initiatives, programmes and strategies promoting experiential tourism, particularly when based on heritage and culture;
- e. Provision of individual consultations to enterprises (both startup and established) and non-business entities (CSOs, cultural institutions, public organizations and authorities)

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- about the new trends and opportunities provided by experiential tourism focusing on sustainability and innovations;
- f. Establishment of cross-regional and cross-sectoral Research and dissemination of international, national and regional practices for encouraging experiential tourism as well as the implementation and adoption of innovations and other novel technological and non-technological solutions in this regard;
 - g. Other activities that are compatible with the goals, aims and objectives specified above.

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MANAGERIAL PRINCIPLES

The **main principles** that govern the activities of the Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Armenia are as follows:

- **Openness** - providing opportunities for communication, networking and co-working within a wider community outside the organizations that host the Hub,
- **Sustainability** - building a sustainable economic system for education and utilizing technological tools in research, training and dissemination that allow of resource efficiency, circular use and raising the sustainability culture of all beneficiaries,
- **Free sharing of the results** - using open licenses to share data, research, products and processes with the world as well as providing unrestricted access to the results of the Hub's initiatives,
- **Accessibility** - providing easy and free access to the Hub's services through modern information and communication channels,
- **Transparency** - openness and transparency in the work of the Hub, including active work with the media to promote its achievements,
- **Partnership** - observing the principles of partnership with the other Hubs created within PRO EXTOUR project, initiating and maintaining partnerships with organizations and institutions in the fields of tourism, hospitality, heritage, culture, business, state, county, municipal and business organizations, NGOs and individuals, and others,
- **Entrepreneurship** - implementation of activities complying with the legal regulations in the Bulgaria and the European Union,
- **Innovation** - the introduction of innovative approaches in the implementation of the Hub's activities, promotion of innovative methods and tools of action,
- **Consensus** among the co-workers that implement together activities and projects at the Hub,

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- **Efficiency** - optimal organization and professional management of shared resources,
- **Quality** - offering high-standard services tailored to the needs of the target groups and stakeholders in the field of experiential tourism and the related sectors,
- **Learner-centred training** - providing for the generation of learner-driven outcomes that evolve with time and work and reliance on open educational resources,
- **Democracy and human rights** - providing equal opportunities and benefits to all stakeholders, promoting diversity and intercultural awareness at every level of implementation. All target groups and participants will work together and cooperate to achieve the project goals, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, national background, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status or on any other basis

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SEAT. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE. MANAGEMENT. DECISION-MAKING

The physical premises of the Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Armenia shall be located at the seats of the Yerevan State University.

The BSB - RA Hub is an organization unit and not a legal person and the overall management of the Hub is undertaken according to the regulations of RA laws and documentations of Yerevan State University.

For managerial and administration purposes and decision making process in-person and on-line meetings are organized, at which are reviewed and discussed common topics, related to the financing, development and diversification of the activities, accountability and visibility of the Hub, as well as other specialized issues, coming from the current work of the structure.

TEAM AND EXPERTISE

Hub Coordinator (1 position, nominated by YSU)

The Hub Coordinator will be in charge of the complete management and coordination of the activities in agreement with this Portfolio. S/he will organize and launch the starting activities of the Hub, plan and organize the post-project activities together with the Advisory Board, build stakeholders' network, sustain the relations with the target groups, manage the Hub's facilities and report to the Advisory Board.

Experts (3 positions) - Experts will be responsible for PR and marketing, educational and research activities conducted in the framework of the Hub

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SERVICES

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Armenia is offering 4 (four) clusters of services that integrate its main activities.



Applied research and experimentation

Experiential tourism is a new field for the regional and local development and the tourist sector in the Black Sea Basin. As a result, the establishment of such a specialized part of market should be followed by constant and up-to-date research which focuses on how and to what extend the area could be developed in this field.

Business in BS region suffers from the outdated perception that tourism is a knowledge- and technology non-intensive industry. However, besides with authenticity, experiential tourism has a lot to do with innovations and new technologies. Technologies play a main role in the personalisation of experiences, in connecting people to locations, but also in maintaining the sustainability aspect of the experiential economy. Novel business models are also important for the vitality of businesses.

The BSB - RA Hub is based on the research conducted within the PRO EXTOUTR project regarding the development of experiential tourism and performs other research activities related to:

- ✚ analyses, surveys, studies about all the contemporary experiential tourism trends and its pertinent sectors,

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- ✚ identification of new activities and services related to experiential tourism and its various dimensions,
 - ✚ encouraging technological and non-technological innovations that could keep the business and activities of experiential tourism viable and sustainable,
 - ✚ other pertinent research which is applied in an open-laboratory environment.
- The research results are fully accessible to any interested stakeholder.

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The access to the research results remains open to all interested stakeholders.

Mapping and presentation of experiential tourism

The change from active holidays to holidays as an experience incites a significant shift for the business and new models of service provision and operation. In that, heritage and culture come as excellent grounds due to their omnipresent value for the Black Sea Basin and spatially for the mountains countries. Networking among service providers offers additional added value and responds to the need of experiential travellers to savour a diverse range of experiences along their travel path. The efficient presentation and promotion of the cultural and heritage resources will benefit all the stakeholders involved and the companies active in the sector in marketing their products / services, while it will also allow potential customers to better plan and anticipate their travel experiences in the BSB - RA regions. To this end, the BSB - RA Hub will maintain and further develop during its operation the knowledge base and all the on-line resources created within PRO EXTOUR concerning the BSB - RA regions.

The Hub maintains the visual and on-line resources, created in PRO EXTOUR:

- the Inventory of Business Models for experiential tourism,
- the Pilot Inventories of heritage and culture activities and events,
- the On-line Repository of resources and tools for experiential tourism

In addition, it will seek for opportunities to enlarge the content of these resources with new information, case studies, video materials and other resources that are created by the stakeholders or within other initiatives similar to PRO EXTOUR. The Hub is also engaged with active digital promotion of these resources.

The access to the digital resources remains open to all interested stakeholders.

Networking and community of practice

The basis of experiential tourism in the anthropocentric approach. This means that experiential tourism development is customer - and local community based oriented, by focusing on the visitor's value and needs. So, both travellers and service - providers need to spend time and resources to find all the necessary factors and information that contribute to a fully designed, high - quality and authentic experiential tourism product.

As experiential services are usually provided by small undertakings (SMEs, NGOs, interest groups), which as a rule cannot allocate much resources for research and development of new activities, support measures are indispensable

The networking services of the BSB - RA Hub refer to:

1. active participation in the cross-border network of the Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism, in cooperation with the other Hubs, created within PRO EXTOUR project;

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2. organization/participation of an International Fair on Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism in the BSB and promotion of communication and cooperation among the participants;
3. gathering and coordinating an informal group of people who are involved in the various sectors of experiential tourism, aiming to share best practices and create new knowledge to further develop and support novel professional practices. This community of practice will involve the researchers who have worked in PRO EXTOUR project, other academics, experts and students, as well as like-minded professionals who are involved in the project events and actively contributed to the field research and workshops;
4. organization and facilitation of discussions, exhibitions, seminars etc. at its premises and within the mainstream research and training activities of the institution hosting the Hub.

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The access to the events and activities remains open to all interested stakeholders.

Training and mentoring

One of the main goals of the BSB - GR Hub is to be a place of education, training and consulting on issues related to experiential tourism. To achieve this, the following services shall be provided by the Hub:

1. Training seminars
2. Demonstration and promotion of experiential activities
3. Consulting

Building of knowledge, skill and competences that are relevant for the development and valorization of experiential tourism in the Black Sea Basin is a main task of the Hub. Four types of services are offered in this regard: (i) adjusting and adding content to the syllabuses in the majors related to tourism and hospitality at the tertiary level about the different aspects of experiential tourism, (ii) adjusting and adding contents to the syllabuses in vocational education and training (according to the existing state education standards), (iii) providing ad hoc informal and non-formal learning courses upon request by companies, interest groups and public authorities and (iv) company mentoring.

The access to the training and mentoring remains open to all interested stakeholders.

TARGET GROUPS

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Armenia shall serve the following main groups of stakeholders:

a. Higher education and research

Higher education and research institutions have a dual role in sustaining the Hub's impact. On the one hand, their applied research can lead to innovation, business and entrepreneurial solutions for the experiential economy and experiential tourism. On the other hand, through

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education and training these institutions supply the market with professionals and entrepreneurs who act in the real business environment and manage tourism and cultural sectors.

The principal aim of the BSB - GR Hub is to promote academic research on the subject of experiential tourism and sustainable development and support the research projects of graduate and post-graduate students and researchers (e.g. preparation of diploma and master's thesis and PhDs). The Hub will be open for supporting this target group, providing services such as data from the Hub database, advice from its academic staff, collaboration and networking with other academics, and public and private sector bodies that the Hub is going to cooperate with in the framework of its operation. The Pilot Inventories and On-line Repository are an excellent basis for case studies and problem-based learning activities in vocational education at all levels. The output from any research will be available to the Hub and enrich its database for future use by other researchers as well as the collaborating bodies of the Hub to provide them with the necessary data that will help them improve their services.

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b. Local and regional public authorities

Local and regional public authorities are the representatives of the local communities - that by definition provide the scene of the experiential activities - and they are indirect users of the results from the activities of the BSB - RA Hub. They shall use these results mainly as reference tools and information sources in the process of policy-making. Via conferences, seminars, workshops and other training and networking activities, they will be familiarised with the public instruments for boosting experiential, special-interest and sustainable tourism, which will stimulate a transfer of good practices in the public domain of the BSB region.

On the other, hand local public authorities are the representatives of the local communities - that by definition provide the scene of the experiential activities. In addition, they can act as cultural operators, managing museums, heritages sites (both natural and cultural), traditional celebrations, festivals and so on and the Hub will work to support them in this regard as well.

c. Interest groups, including NGOs

Interest groups and NGOs are very often the initiators and organisers of heritage culture-based activities and events. The localization of experiences and the preservation of the local communities' authenticity is performed by these organisations. In addition, they are often engaged in context-specific conservation and sustainability projects that integrate the mere philosophy of experiential travelling. Regarding sustainability and sustainable development, there is a lot of knowledge and capacity accumulated in the citizens' sector. This expertise should be made visible and better utilised by policy-makers and business in favour of local development, which is a goal of the Hub.

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Thus, interest groups are also vital target group for PRO EXTOUTR because they can express the citizens' knowledge and expectation and can influence public opinion. They can benefit from the education and training activities of the BSB - RA Hub and also provide their expertise in co-working with the policy-makers and businesses in favor of the sustainable local development.

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d. SMEs, business support (branch) organisations

The SMEs and business branch organizations are the main users of the Pilot Inventories and the On-line Repository provided by the BSB - RA Hub. Especially, SMEs in tourism and hospitality are the primary target group of the PRO EXTOUTR, as experiential tourism services are offered predominantly by small undertakings. Moreover, SMEs avail of limited resources for experimentation with new business models, as well as with the use of technological innovations. The SMEs and business branch organisations from the technologies sector shall be involved in initiatives and projects associated with the digitalisation of culture and heritage as well as for utilizing digital technologies for augmenting experiences beyond the already popular tools that are associated with hospitality and tourism.

The Hub shall operate as an advertising and networking channel. Through seminars and mentoring processes involving experts and academics in the field, the interested entrepreneurs and organizations could improve their business practices or generate new ideas and initiatives. Furthermore, the SMEs professionals will have the opportunity to display their experiential activities, whenever this becomes possible and feasible. This will enable the public to evaluate their services and improve them through brainstorming processes and presents opportunities for networking, synergies and collaboration with other companies and stakeholders.

RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

At the date of establishing the Hub uses current and non-current tangible and intangible assets, listed in the accounting reports of the partner institutions and acquired in the framework of project BSB-1145 *Promoting Heritage - and Culture Based Experiential Tourism in the Black Sea Basin (PRO EXTOUTR)* and the Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin 2014-2020.

The contact point at the Yerevan State University avails of:

- 1 in-office work stations, equipped with notebooks for desk and field research multifunctional devices
- Telecommunications and internet connectivity
- A drone for video-recording of activities and events
- A laser projector and screen for the performance of presentations and demonstrations
- An interactive display for the performance of demonstrations and presentations

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All of the above mentioned assets will be used with the aim to achieve the aims and the tasks of the Hub, and this does not exclude their usage for other non-profit purposes.

FINANCING. REPORTING

The financing of the activity of the Hub is done through the following financial resources:

- ❖ Own funds for implementation of planned activities and events, provided by partner institutions.
- ❖ Donations from sponsors and sponsorship.
The expenditure and reporting of the funds is done according to the rules of the applicable legislation or the regular policy of the partner institutions on the basis of the principles of legality, expediency and efficiency and in accordance with the financial legislation of both countries.
- ❖ Projects and initiatives compliant with the state aid rules of the European Union¹.

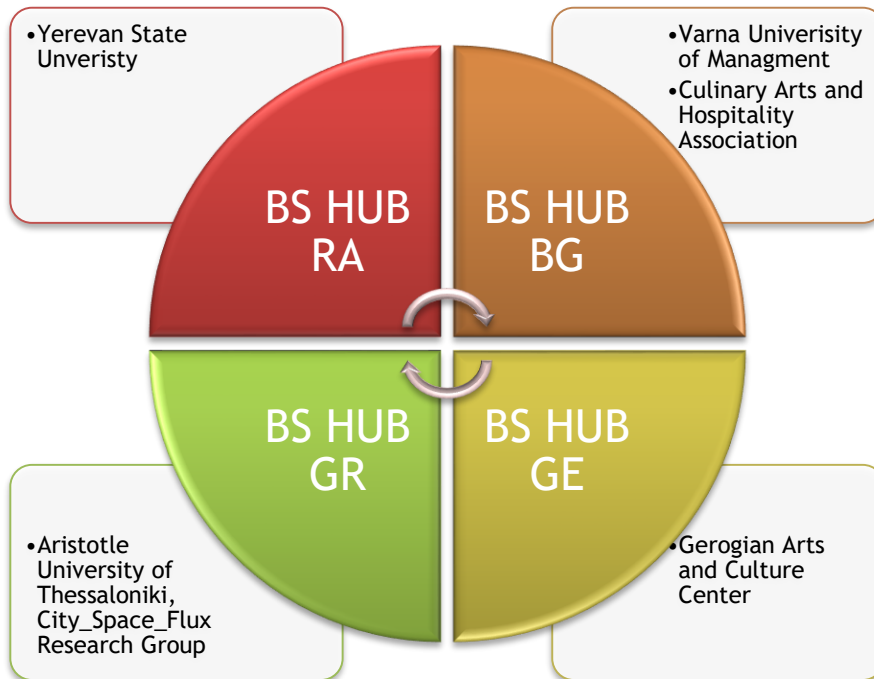
The Hub shall report its activities at two levels. **First**, to the Advisory Board, composed of four experts nominated by the Yerevan State University. This reporting will be performed at twice a year and will be focused on the activities of the Hub and their impact. Financial results will be reviewed only in order to evaluate the efficiency of the Hub and the value for money that it creates. **Second**, each of the contact points will report to the administrative and financial departments of the respective partners according to the internal financial and account policies and the national state accounting and financial regulations.

GENERAL PROVISIONS AND NETWORKING

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism Armenia functions as an integrated element of the cross-border **Network of Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism (the Network)**, created by the PRO EXTOUR project.

The Network is a non-formal, voluntary partnership among independent organisations. It unites four (4) open-laboratory structures in Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia and works for the improvement of the entrepreneurial and business environment for experiential tourism in the BSB. It is not an independent legal entity and is a supportive framework structure that reinforces the impact of the **Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism**. Therefore, it does not have rights in starting or implementing activities other than those of the Hubs as specified in their portfolios.

¹ Information on state aid can be found on the European Commission's DG Competition website (http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/overview/index_en.html) and in Commission Notice on the notion of State aid as referred to in Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ([http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016XC0719\(05\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016XC0719(05)&from=EN)).



The diverse profile of the institutions that host the Black Sea Hubs and sustain the network guarantees the interdisciplinary profile of the applied researchers and staff that shall be involved in the functioning and management of the Hubs. This is vital for the promotion of experiential tourism and the associated reconsideration of business models and competitiveness in tourism and hospitality.

The coordinators of the individual Hubs appointed by the partner organizations plan and coordinate the CP's activity within the Network as well as joint initiatives and events within it. Their work is supported by the other members of the Hubs' teams as well as by the hired and attracted personnel of PRO EXTOUR partner organizations. The coordinators meet at least once per year to streamline the activities of the network. The meetings can be done in one of the Contact points with physical presence, by telephone, video conference or any other on-line communication channel.

The decisions within the Network follow the principles of operation and management that are valid for the Hubs and shall be consensus-based.