



***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**

*Bulgaria*

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## 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.

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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 testing of innovations in experiential tourism,
- Mapping and presentation of heritage and culture-based activities and events in the Black Sea Basin (BSB),
- Maintaining a cross-border network and a community of practice of entrepreneurs and professionals engaged in experiential tourism by facilitating international projects, contact meetings and collaborations,
- Designing and implementing local programs for networking, building entrepreneurial skills, generating ideas, mentoring (e.g. workshops, meetings and trainings).

In Bulgaria, the Black Sea Hub (the Hub) will be located at the headquarters of the Varna University of Management in the city of Varna, while the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association will host a representative office in the town of Dobrich.

This Portfolio describes the structure, management, facilities, resources and services that the Hub provides for the different categories of stakeholders in experiential tourism as well as the general vision and philosophy it shall follow in its work.

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## MISSION, AIMS AND SUBJECT OF ACTIVITY OF THE HUBS

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Bulgaria 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 Bulgaria 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 and civic society organizations, local, regional and national authorities of the Varna University of Management and the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association.

In particular, the Hub aims to:

- Elaborate tools and services for promoting the value-generation potential of experiential tourism for the BSB,
- Increase knowledge and awareness on the new development trends in tourism as well as their implications for the BSB,
- 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,
- Apply innovative solutions enhancing cross-border opportunities in experiential tourism.

The **Activities** or the **Subject of operation** of the Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Bulgaria 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. Gathering and sustaining a pilot inventory and on-line repository of resources and tools that can be used in the creation of cross-border culture- and heritage-based activities in experiential tourism
- 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;
- d. Counselling and mentorship services and fostering the adoption of the mentorship practice within and among companies;
- e. Provision of individual consultations to enterprises (both start-up and established) and non-business entities (CSOs, cultural institutions, public organizations and authorities) about the new trends and opportunities provided by experiential tourism focusing on sustainability and innovations;

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- f. Development and implementation of pilot projects, demonstrations, initiatives, programmes and strategies promoting experiential tourism, particularly when based on heritage and culture;
- g. Establishment of cross-regional and cross- sectoral partnerships amongst researchers, innovators, business and branch organizations for expert support of the hospitality sector in the Black Sea Basin;
- h. 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;
- i. Other activities that are compatible with the goals, aims and objectives specified above.

## MANAGERIAL PRINCIPLES

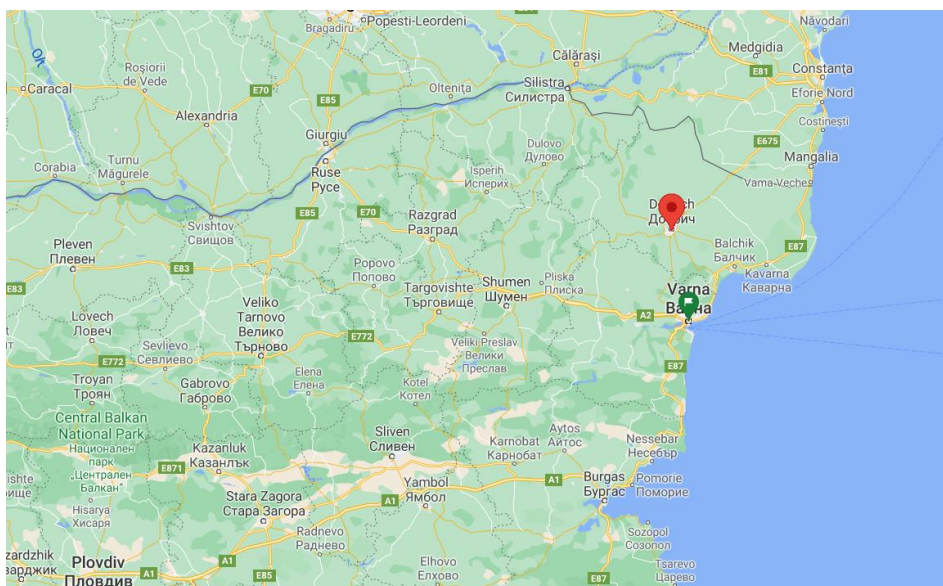
The **main principles** that govern the activities of the Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Bulgaria are as follows:

- **Openness** - providing opportunities for communication, networking and co-working within a wider community outside the organizations that host the Hub,
- **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,

- **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,
- **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,
- **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,
- Abiding the **Rule of Law** in all terms.

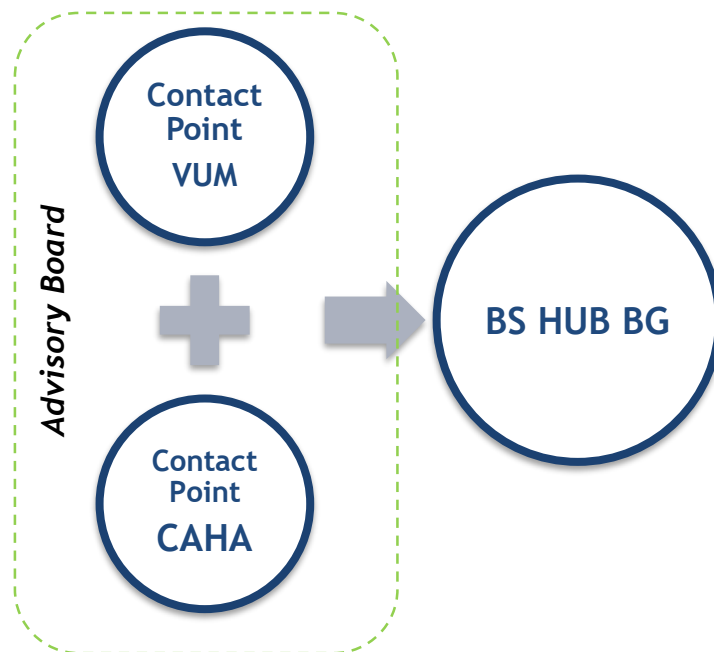
## SEAT. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE. MANAGEMENT. DECISION-MAKING

The physical premises of the Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Bulgaria shall be located at the seats of the Varna University of Management in Varna and the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association in Dobrich.



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The main office of the Hub shall be located in room 415 at 13a Oborishte Street in Varna, while the branch office shall be located in room 206 at 3 Bulgaria Street in Dobrich. Both offices will be **contact points** for the Hub with equal standing, however the coordination is taken over by the Varna University of Management through its School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. The two offices shall be digitally connected to each other and use a common data-server while the two geographically physically distant premises will provide for more opportunities for physical access for the Hub's beneficiaries.



The **overall management** of the Hub is done jointly by the two partner organization. The functioning of the Hub is supervised by a Joint Advisory Board, where each partner organization is represented by 2 experts. Each of representatives is entitled to one vote in decisions, concerning the Hub's activity as all decisions must be made with a consensus between the representatives. At the highest managerial level, the Hub is accountable to the legal representatives of the two partner organizations. As the Hub is an organization unit and not a legal person, each partner organization takes the ultimate responsibility for the Hub's office (contact point) that is has created.



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.

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The **operational activity** of each office (contact point) is managed by the relative responsible partner. Each one of the contact points functions in accordance with the present Portfolio and the established institutional plans for diversification of the activities adopted by the Advisory Board.

## TEAM AND EXPERTISE

The Hub performs its activities via a team of 4 members:

- Hub Coordinator (1 position, nominated by the Varna University of Management)

The Hub Coordinator will be responsible for the overall management and coordination of the activities in line 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', sustain the relations with the target groups and beneficiaries, manage the Hub's facilities and report to the Advisory Board and the management of both partner organizations.

- Experts (3 positions- 1 position with the contact point in Varna and 2 positions with the contact point in Dobrich)

The experts are researchers with established experience in applied projects and in working at business and/or policy-making level besides in academia. They provide the services of the Hub and contribute actively to networking, visibility, attraction of co-workers and contributors and impact.

The team is initially employed within the PRO EXTOUR project. Upon the completion of the project they shall support the activities within as part of their regular activities and shall integrate them within other applied research, education, training and counselling activities.

## SERVICES

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

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### Applied research and experimentation

Experiential tourism is a new theme for both tourist business and policy-makers in the Black Sea Basin. Therefore, its establishment as a market niche must be accompanied by a up-to-date research of the how the potential of the area develops in this regard.

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 Hub steps on the research, performed in PRO EXTOUR project regarding the regional needs about the development of experiential tourism, and performs other related research activities related and not limited to:

- analyses, surveys, studies about state of art of experiential tourism and related sectors,
- identification of new activities and services that are associated with experiential tourism,

<sup>1</sup> This graph has been designed using using resources from Freepik.com and Pixabay.com





- identification and promotion of technological and non-technological innovations that can improve the viability and sustainability of the businesses and activities in experiential tourism,
- other relevant research activities implemented in an open-laboratory environment.

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. 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 the service providers in marketing their products and will also allow the travellers to prepare for and live through their travel experiences in the Black Sea area.

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

Experiential tourism is associated with an individualised approach to tourists (different people perceive differently the same place). Both travellers and service-providers need to invest time and resources in the pre-departure/pre-arrival trip planning and post-trip follow-up as relatively new phenomena in the tourism and travel industry, greatly enhanced by the Internet and advancing global telecommunications technology. 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 Hub refer to:

- involvement in the cross-border of Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism, together with the other hubs, created in PRO EXTOUR project,

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- organization of an International Fair on Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism in the BSB and facilitation the contacts among the participants;
- gathering and coordinating an informal group of professionals who are involved in the different aspects experiential tourism (community of practice). This group will involve the researchers who have worked in PRO EXTOUR project as well as other like-minded professionals who we involved in the project events, field research, provided feedback and comments on the project outputs, contributed with ideas and proposals.

The community of practice is bound to support the process of knowledge management and in the creation of the so-called “open innovations” e.g. innovations created across the boundaries of individual companies and research entities. Communities of practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance the domain of professional practice i.e. experiential tourism.

- organisation and facilitation of discussions, demonstrations, exhibitions, etc. at its premises and within the mainstream research and training activities of the organisations that host the Hub.

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

### Training and mentoring

Building of knowledge, skill and competences that are relevant for the development and valorisation 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 Hus is a place where established and start-up entrepreneurs in tourism can use expert consulting and mentoring, can meet other entrepreneurs as well as cooperate in applied research projects in experiential tourism.

In concrete terms, the Hub organises

- Mentoring and coaching for young entrepreneurs or entrepreneur-to-be for businesses and project in experiential tourism,
- Public presentations of the generated business ideas
- Entrepreneurial camps
- Webinars and on-site training events
- Consultation sessions and mentoring (upon request)

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- Elaboration of open educational resources and training materials - within other projects, upon request and within the main activities of the organisations that host the Hub.

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

## TARGET GROUPS

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

a. Higher education and research

The identification and localisation of resources for heritage and culture based experiential tourism in the BSB will be a result of joint research work, performed by the experts and applied scientists nominated by the project partner organisations. However, these results shall be of use for the academic community in general, especially regarding the very limited research on the issues of experiential tourism and the cultural and creative industries in the BSB area. 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.

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, through 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.

Providing the students with the opportunity to work on applied project together with peers and like-minded professionals from other intuitions will increase the practicality and quality of the education and improve the entrepreneurial culture in the long run.

As an open laboratory, the Hub is to provide a point of partnership and collaboration among universities, their students and faculty members, and the business in the tourism, hospitality and all related sectors.

b. SMEs, business support (branch) organisations

The SMEs and business branch organisations are the main users of the Pilot Inventories and the On-line Repository. They will also participate as cases in the research activities, since the business, service and activity models in the inventories shall be developed through studying the existing entrepreneurial ventures. The Repository shall function as an advertising and networking channel for the undertaking that are engaged or interested to engage in experiential

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tourism. The established opportunities for cooperation among organisations with similar profiles will increase the cross-fertilisation of ideas and generation of business practices and models that are adapted to the needs of the BSB region.

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.

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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. Closely aligned with quality experiences is the consideration of the environment and the increasing consumer consciousness about sustainable, responsible travel.

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.

Interest groups have a vital stake in non-formal and informal learning as well as vocational education and as such can not only benefit from the education and training activities of the Hub but in turn add to their quality and focus.

d. Local and regional public authorities

Local and regional public authorities are indirect users of the results from the activities of the 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.



## 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 EXTOUR) and the* the Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin 2014-2020.

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The contact point at the Varna University of Management avails of:

- 5 in-office work stations, equipped with notebooks for desk and field research
- 2 multifunctional devices
- A data server that is used by both contact points
- A service robot - used for demonstration and experimentation projects
- On-line inventory and repository
- Telecommunications and internet connectivity

The contact point at the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association avails of

- 5 in-office work stations, equipped with notebooks for desk and field research
- 2 multifunctional devices
- 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
- On-line inventory and repository
- Telecommunications and internet connectivity

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, corresponding with those of the partner organizations or multiplying the results and the effects of the PRO EXTOUR project, by each partner institution in its capacity of owner of the assts.

Each partner has the right to acquire additional tangible and intangible assets, which they can provide for the purposes of the Hubs, but the ownership on them remains at the institution which have actually acquired the relevant assets and in whose balance sheet they are recorded.

## 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.

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- 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.

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- Projects and initiatives compliant with the state aid rules of the European Union<sup>2</sup>.

The Hub shall report its activities at two levels. First, to the Advisory Board, composed of four experts nominated by the Varna University of Management and the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association. 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.

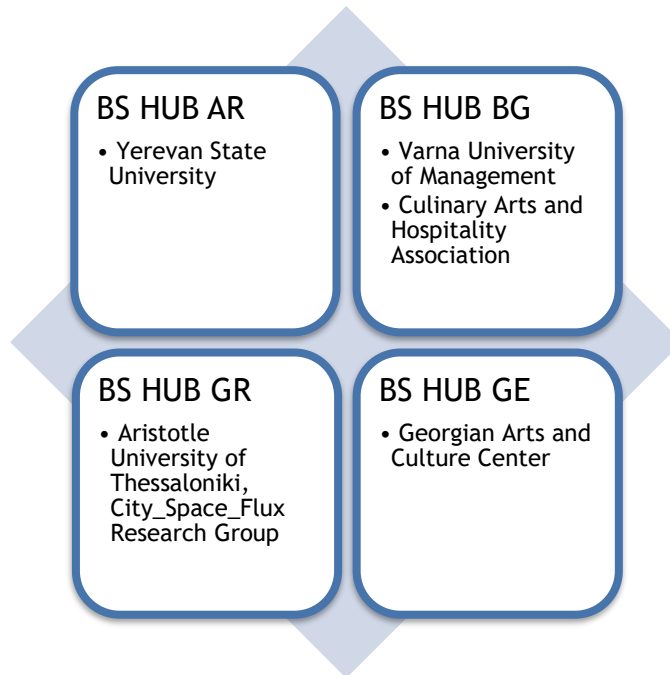
## GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR NETWORKING

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Bulgaria 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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](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.