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

Project No BSB-1145

Page | 1

### **Service Portfolio of the Black Sea Hubs for Experiential Tourism**

#### **GREECE**

##### **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 Region (PRO EXTOUTR). The project is 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 Unit (Greece)*, *Georgian Arts and Culture Centre (Georgia)*, *Yerevan State University (Armenia)* and *Culinary Arts and Hospitality Association (Bulgaria)*. They are joined in the Network of Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism.

The Hubs will act as open and innovative laboratories for research, education, practice and collaboration in all the aspects of experiential tourism (social, economic, environmental, spatial etc.), endorsed by academics, scientists, educators, students, entrepreneurs, startups and all interested persons. Moreover, they will enable entrepreneurs involved in tourism to consult with tourism experts and receive mentoring and also to get acquainted with peers and establish cooperation in applied research projects in experiential tourism. The main purpose of the Hubs is to promote networking as well as to encourage stakeholders to take action that will support the sustainable development of the host communities and destinations.

Based on these, the Black Sea Hubs for Experiential Tourism are involved in:

- Carrying out research and encouraging innovations in experiential tourism.
- Identifying, mapping and promoting any activity and event that is related to heritage and culture 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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In Greece, the Hub will be established at the facilities of the interdepartmental City\_ Space\_Flux Research Unit that are located in the School of Spatial Planning and Development and the School of Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

The portfolio defines the structure, management, facilities, resources and services that the Hub implements and offers to the various stakeholders of the public and private sector related to experiential tourism. It also outlines the Hubs' vision and philosophy upon which it will function.

Page | 2

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

The Black Sea Hub on Experiential Tourism in Greece (from now on BSB - GR Hub) has the **mission** to act as a one-stop-shop and a catalyst in order to promote networking and encourage cooperation in the field of experiential tourism in general between a large number of stakeholders that are active in the experiential sector in the two BSB- GR regions (Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace). These local and regional stakeholders, the interplay of which the BSB - GR Hub aims to encourage, may include the academia, local communities, decision and policy makers, and enterprises of any size (very small, small, medium and large) that are active in the sector.

The **aims** of the BSB - GR Hub are in line with the specific objectives of the PRO EXTOUR project. They also comply with the goals of City\_ Space\_Flux Research Unit of AUTH for strategic cooperation with local, regional and national authorities, interest groups and civic society organizations, and business.

In particular, the BSB - GR Hub aims to:

- Design, develop and offer tools and services for promoting the added value potential of experiential tourism for the BSB and the region.
- 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.
- Identify opportunities and potential for synergies in respect to new tourism services and business models in the BSB.
- Bring together, support and emphasise on networking among education institutions and business for the operationalization of potential opportunities that may arise in the fields of experiential tourism.
- Promote innovative solutions to enhance cross-border opportunities in experiential tourism.

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

- a. Supporting graduate and postgraduate academic education and applied research in the field of spatial planning and tourism development (preparation of diploma and master's thesis and PhDs) and offering training regarding experiential tourism at the tertiary and the post-secondary and secondary vocational education (VET) levels.

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- 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- GR regions, as well as an inventory of relevant stakeholders and good practices.
- c. Providing counseling and mentorship services to non-business entities (cultural institutions, public organizations and authorities) and companies in the field of geographical and spatial analysis, tourism strategic planning and development, and action plans elaboration focusing on sustainability and innovation.
- d. Liaising the University with the labour market in the field of tourism, and local community organizations.
- e. Development and implementation of pilot projects, demos, initiatives, programmes and strategies promoting experiential tourism, particularly when based on heritage and culture;
- f. Establishment of cross-regional and cross-sectoral partnerships amongst researchers, innovators, business and branch organizations for expert support of the tourism sector in the Black Sea Basin.
- g. Research and dissemination of international, national and regional practices for encouraging experiential tourism as well as implementation and adoption of innovations and other novel technological and non-technological solutions in this regard.
- h. Any other activity that is in agreement with the goals, aims and objectives specified above.

Page | 3

## MANAGERIAL PRINCIPLES

The **main principles** that govern the activities of the BSB - GR Hub on Experiential Tourism are as follows:

- **Openness**  
Encouraging the development of an ecosystem of cooperation, communication and co-working within a wider community outside the organizations that host the Hub by providing easy access to the Hub's services through modern information and communication channels.
- **Interdisciplinarity**  
Facilitating interdisciplinary collaborations and providing an interdisciplinary perspective with multiple levels of analysis by combining spatial, social, economic, environmental, tourism etc fields.
- **Sustainability**  
Developing a sustainable approach by ensuring that research, training and seminars adhere environmental, social, responsible and circular values and practices.
- **Innovation**  
Fostering innovative practices, activities, solutions and research through enhancing cooperation in the tourism ecosystem and digital technologies for developing and improving experiential tourism product, services and skills in the BSB – GR regions.
- **Collaboration/networking**  
Providing a place for synergy by establishing and developing collaborations between academics, researchers, university students, organizations, institutions and stakeholders of the public and private sector related to experience economy, tourism and culture.

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- **Quality**  
Providing high quality training, research and services related to all the aspects of experiential tourism (social, economic, environmental, spatial etc.) by adhering to the highest ethical standards and professional best practices.
- **Equality**  
Ensuring equal access and consensus among the co-workers by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.
- **Accessibility**  
Empowering disability inclusion by creating an accessible, barrier-free facility that welcomes people with different abilities.
- **Sharing knowledge**  
Boosting skills and facilitating knowledge transfer between tourism companies, public and private organizations, academics and students.
- **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.
- **Transparency**  
All facts, information and contexts provided would be concise, easily accessible and easy to understand to gain the trust of stakeholders and organizations.
- **A healthy and safe workplace**  
Implementing all the general and specific hygiene measures in the Hub for protecting its members from exposure to various infections (such as SARS-CoV-2).
- **Efficiency**  
Optimal and professional management of shared resources.
- **Responsibility**  
Holding strong ethical standards, abiding the Rule of Law in all terms, and operating responsibly in all Hub's activities.

Page | 4

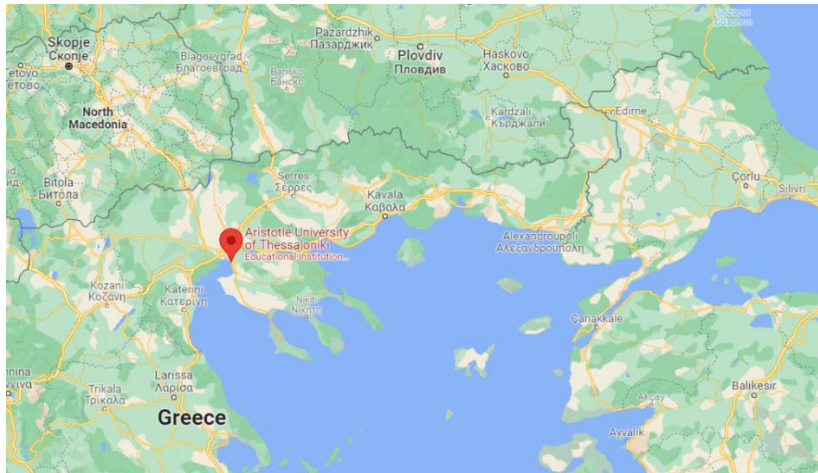
## **SEAT. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE. MANAGEMENT. DECISION-MAKING**

The physical premises of the BSB - GR Hub shall be established at the facilities of the interdepartmental City\_Space\_Flux Research Unit that are located in the School of Spatial Planning and Development and the School of Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering of AUTH.

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The Main Office of the BSB - GR Hub shall be located in a room of the School of Spatial Planning and Development, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Building A' of the Faculty of Engineering of AUTH, while the Ancillary Office will be located in a room of the School of Architecture, at the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of Building A' of the Faculty of Engineering of AUTH. The Main Office will be the contact point for the BSB - GR Hub and the coordination is taken over by the City\_Space\_Flux Research Unit of AUTH. The two offices shall be digitally connected to each other and use a common data-server.

Also, workshops and meetings will be conducted at the Room of Seminars at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the School of Spatial Planning and Development, while bigger events will be conducted at the classrooms and amphitheatres of the Faculty of Engineering of AUTH.



The BSB - GR Hub is an organization unit and not a legal person and the **overall management** of the Hub is undertaken jointly by the Advisory Board, which consists of 3 senior academic members of the City\_Space\_Flux Research Unit or of the two hosting Schools. Each of the 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. The **operational activity** of both offices (Main Office/

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Contact Point and Ancillary Office) is managed by the City\_Space\_Flux Research Unit. 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. Concerning the financial management and administration, the Hub is accountable to the legal representatives of the Special Account for Research Funds of AUTH.

## TEAM AND EXPERTISE

The BSB - GR Hub carries out its activities via a team of 4 members:

➤ **Hub Coordinator** (1 position, nominated by AUTH)

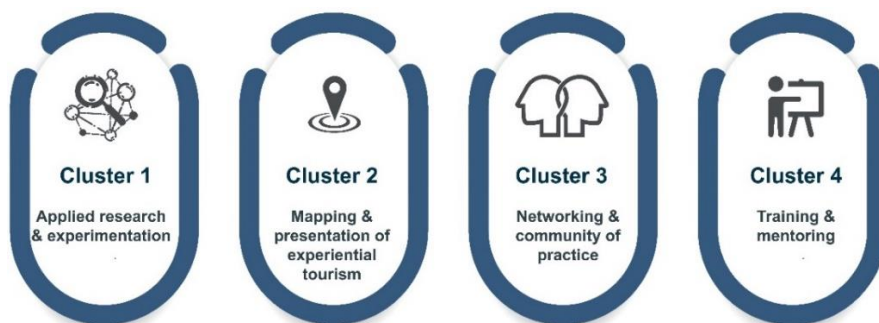
The Hub Coordinator will be in charge of the complete management and coordination of the activities in agreement with this Portfolio. S/he will organize and launch the starting activities of the Hub, plan and organize the post-project activities together with the Advisory Board, build stakeholders' network,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

➤ **Experts** (3 positions, nominated by AUTH)

The experts are researchers with at least a master's degree in the field of spatial planning and development or tourism development and experience in research projects and/or in working at business and/or policy-making level besides in academia. They provide the services of the Hub and contribute actively to training, networking, visibility, attraction of co-workers and contributors. The team is initially employed within the PRO EXTOUR project. Under the completion of the project, the academic staff and PhD researchers of the City\_Space\_Flux Research Unit shall support the Hub activities.

## SERVICES

The BSB - GR Hub is providing 4 (four) clusters of services that incorporate its main activities.



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### 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 extent the area could be developed in this field, by taking into consideration all the dimensions of experiential tourism (spatial, economic, social, environmental etc.).

There is a general perception that tourism as an industry is not mainly based on knowledge and technology. Nevertheless, despite the necessity of authenticity, experiential tourism is closely related to innovations and new technologies. Technologies are highly connected to the personalization of experiences by not only connecting people to locations, but, also, by keeping the experiential economy sustainable. New business models are critical for the vitality of businesses by emphasizing in the sustainable aspect of tourism.

The BSB - GR Hub is based on the research conducted within the PRO EXTOUR 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,
- 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.

### Mapping and presentation of experiential tourism

Mapping and networking the multiple resources, services providers and activities of experiential tourism offers additional added value and responds to the need of conscious travelers to savour a diverse range of experiences by following proposed touristic routes. 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 - GR regions. To this end, the BSB - GR 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 - GR regions. More specifically the BSB - GR Hub will maintain:

- the Inventory of relevant stakeholders (companies, local and/or regional authorities, relevant organizations, etc) and successful business models for experiential tourism,
- the Pilot Inventories of heritage and cultural activities and events,
- the On-line Repository of resources and tools for experiential tourism (the main documents and tools developed within the project, information and materials for promotion and

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communication etc) that will be available to the public online and could be used in the creation of cross-border culture- and heritage-based activities and routes in experiential tourism.

In addition to the above and as already highlighted, the Hub will also aim to further extend the contents of all the above mentioned resources with new information, case studies, materials and other resources that are created by the stakeholders or within other initiatives similar to PRO EXTOUR for the benefit of the end users, while at the same time promote and disseminate on the social media information on its function and of the resources it maintains.

Page | 8

The access to the digital resources will remain open to all interested stakeholders and the general public.

### 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 travelers 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 practice proved, experiential services are usually provided by small ventures (SMEs, interest groups), which cannot invest many resources in research and development of new activities. So, the aspects of interaction and network creation are important to overcome this problem and further develop experiential activities.

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

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- organisation and facilitation of discussions, exhibitions, seminars etc. at its premises and within the mainstream research and training activities of the institution hosting the Hub.

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

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## 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

Page | 9

The Hub can organize seminars on the subject of experiential tourism, which will be open and free to those who wish to participate (students, researchers, stakeholders). Occasionally, the seminars are going to be targeted at specific groups aiming at their specialized training (e.g., young entrepreneurs or entrepreneur-to-be). Given the pandemic, the seminars will be implemented with physical presence, based on a certain number of entries or online. The lecturers of the seminars will be academics, researchers, experts, and professionals with knowledge and experience in the fields of spatial planning and development and tourism development and management.

Within the seminars, the Hub can co-organize demonstration activities in cooperation with selected public and private stakeholders that are already active in the field, to disseminate good practices in experiential tourism and inspire and advise young professionals. Participation in these actions will be free, however the audience can be predetermined by the Hub team depending on the targeting of the specific action. These actions will be held mainly with physical presence, given their experiential nature, while the aim is to investigate whether innovative experiential actions could be implemented via the internet.

The Hub, as a research and training entity will also provide ad hoc informal and non-formal consulting services upon request by public organizations and entrepreneurs. In addition, consulting could be implemented in the context of training seminars in the form of workshops, where brainstorming and mentoring procedures could be provided by experts in the field and with an emphasis on innovation. Mentors will be experts and academics with knowledge and experience in the specific subject. Counseling activities could be provided either live or online.

## TARGET GROUPS

The BSB - GR Hub is going to address the following target groups:

### 1. 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 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.



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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 of AUTH or other academic institutions (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.

## **2. 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 - GR Hub. Initially, they shall use these results mainly as reference tools and information sources in the process of policy-making, strategic planning and action plan elaboration. In addition, the Hub could provide training through seminars and workshops for executives and employees of the public sector, aiming to stimulate a transfer of good practices on sustainable tourism development and experiential tourism in the public domain of the BSB GR regions. At the same time, as a meeting place, the Hub could provide the opportunity for collaborations and synergies of private and public stakeholders to achieve a common vision for a targeted development policy of experiential tourism. Finally, collaborating public organizations and bodies should be able to participate in applied research and provide practical knowledge that could be useful to the Hub's operation.

## **3. SMEs, business support organizations**

The SMEs and business branch organizations are the main users of the Pilot Inventories and the On-line Repository provided by the BSB - GR Hub. Especially, SMEs in tourism and hospitality are the primary target group of the PRO EXTOUR, 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 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.

#### 4. Interest groups, including NGOs

Interested groups, including NGOs, often act as cultural operators and heritage managers, organizing culture and heritage-based activities and events. Furthermore, they are engaged in the sustainable local tourism development that preserve the environment and the local communities' authenticity and promote a conscious, responsible and experiential travel. Thus, interest groups are also vital target group for PRO EXTOUR 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 - GR Hub and also provide their expertise in co-working with the policy-makers and businesses in favor of the sustainable local development.

### RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

The BSB - GR Hub Main Office at the School of Spatial Planning and Development avails of:

- 2 in-office workstations, equipped with 2 laptops for desk and field research
- 1 laptop and 2 tablets for field research
- 1 drone for video-recording of activities and events
- 1 professional camera for photo-shooting and video-recording of activities and events
- 1 laser projector and screen for the performance of presentations and demonstrations
- 1 interactive display for the performance of demonstrations and presentations
- 1 data server that is used by both Hub offices
- 1 led screen connected to the Hub server
- 1 multifunctional device that is used by both Hub offices
- On-line Inventory and Repository
- Telecommunications and internet connectivity

The BSB - GR Hub Ancillary Office at the School of Architecture avails of:

- 2 in-office workstations, equipped with 2 laptops for desk and field research
- 2 tablets for field research
- Telecommunications and internet connectivity

### FINANCING REPORTING

The financing of the activity of the BSB - GR 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 AUTH on the basis of the principles of legality, expediency and efficiency and in accordance with the national academic financial legislation.



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- Projects and initiatives compliant with the state aid rules of the European Union<sup>1</sup>.  
The Hub shall report its activities at two levels. First, to the Advisory Board. This reporting will be performed at once a year and will be focused on the activities of the Hub and their impact. Financial results will be reviewed only to evaluate the efficiency of the Hub and the value for money that it creates. Second, the contact point will report to the Special Account for Research Funds of AUTH, according to the internal financial and account policies and the national state accounting and financial regulations.

### GENERAL PROVISIONS AND NETWORKING

The BSB - GR Hub acts 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 organizations. It connects four (4) open-laboratory structures in Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia and focuses on the improvement of the entrepreneurial and business environment for experiential tourism in the BSB. It is not an independent legal entity but a supportive framework structure that reinforces the impact of the **Black Sea Hubs on Experiential Tourism**. Consequently, it does not have rights in starting or implementing activities other than those of the Hubs as specified in their portfolios.



<sup>1</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)).

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The diversified framework of the institutions that host the Black Sea Hubs and constitute the network guarantees the interdisciplinary profile of the applied researchers and staff that shall be involved in the management and activities 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.

Page | 13

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.