

FOR A CULTURAL ITINERARY

I. INTRODUCTION

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and is a model and guide for programs of Cultural Itineraries in all Regions of the country.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION ON CULTURAL ITINERARIES

1. What is an Itinerary

A cultural itinerary is a **branded tourism product**, a product of cultural tourism which takes form on the basis of a specific connecting element.

Therefore:

- it has a central theme/connecting element
- it covers a predetermined area
- it acquires a “tourism identity” with a brand name.

It aims to become a driving force for the development of a given area. A development that is sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.

Aims of an Itinerary are:

- To attract visitors to a given area.
- To create opportunities for businesses and producers of goods and services that are operating in the specific region in order to help them increase their revenues.
- To attract new investment.
- To prolong the tourist season.
- If possible to secure resources for the maintenance of archaeological sites and monuments.

Conditions for the success of a cultural itinerary¹:

- i. Sights and related infrastructure: monuments, museums, tour facilities and support

¹ Points i & ii are subjected to local administration and central government, while point iii is a matter of private sector

infrastructure², accessible and maintained, etc.

- ii. Infrastructure for connecting accessible spaces & touring: road network, hiking trails, bike paths, transportation, walkways, paths through the settlements, accessible and maintained,
- iii. Businesses that offer quality services, provide innovative services and participate in a network for the management of the itinerary.

The above have been proposed by many researchers who have dealt with Greek tourism³, and have been included in the new approved text of the Partnership Agreement/NSRF 2014-2020, as well as in the proposal of the Operational Program “Competitiveness-Entrepreneurship-Innovation” (OPECI). They are also included in the priorities of the Ministry of Tourism for the new period 2014-2020. The use of new funding tools for such actions has been identified, as provided by the regulations for the new period⁴, which will facilitate the channeling of resources from sectoral OPs and Regional Operational Programs (ROPs) for their funding.

However, the itinerary creation project as a tourism product, in regions and urban centers, as well as in the islands, engulfs some challenges that will be mentioned below.

2. Challenges of the project

The successful planning and the subsequent implementation of an integrated action of a cultural itinerary requires the active participation of many "players" who will work together, will agree upon and adopt the whole project, acquiring thus its “ownership.” Thus, effective **synergies** are required.

These players are primarily **local actors** -elected officials at all levels of the local administration and **regional entrepreneurs** with their local partners (e.g. Tour operators - TOs) if any. In other words, the local community. Then, players also are the several central government agencies that have a role and responsibility in individual projects, as provided by the itinerary planning: Ministry of Tourism (business requirements, promotion, ...), Ministry of Culture (archaeological sites and museums, product specifications for models, Archaeological Resources Fund, photography rights, ...), Ministry of Energy and Climate Change (protected areas, forests and trails), Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (highways, ports, airports), etc. Players can also be other agencies, like the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises, NGOs with nationwide activity etc.

Coordinating all these bodies to work together on low-budget projects (extravagant structures that may affect the sustainability of the project should be avoided) is not self-evident, especially in a society that is not renowned for smooth cooperation between different groups.

Therefore, the proposed solution is to present elaborated proposals to local communities, which they should process, submit their observations and adopt them, in order for each institution -Region, Local Administration, business entities, individual enterprises, NGOs-

2 Ticket offices, toilets, museum shops, wifi, parking, guidance and information signs, canopies, cleaning, etc.

3 Market Study of Greek Tourism 1999, PRC□MRB & THR 2007, McKinsey 2010, BCS 2013

4 Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), Community-Led Local Development (CLLD).

to take the actions provided.

To ensure the satisfactory operation and maintenance of the itinerary as a thematic tourism product, the outset selection and installment of an effective **Management Agency** is required.

The line of reasoning behind the Itineraries is that by organizing a thematic “destination” we attract visitors, thus we "open" sites in an organized manner to Tourism, which is the main sector with regard to the recognition of cultural and environmental resources, the dissemination of their value and the securing not only revenues for their protection and survival in the future, but also substantial revenues for the local economies. Furthermore, the Itineraries are inextricably connecting tourism with the local production of goods and services, i.e. the primary sector -local products, manufacturing, tourism businesses, local cultural production.

Obviously, itineraries can and should be designed based on **restrictions imposed by the protection of resources and with the scientific seriousness** required both by nature and by their potential tourist clientele.

3. Drafting a primary Report on a cultural itinerary

Following the above, we conclude that a small Planning Group is required in order to draft a primary report on each itinerary. This group will document the various attractions to be included in the itinerary (archaeological sites and monuments from all historical periods, historical events, etc. depending on the coherent theme that is going to be chosen), as well as issues concerning local products and businesses, in order to allow the connection between the Itinerary and local entrepreneurship, primary sector production, manufacturing, media, etc. The group will also record coarsely the various actions/projects that should be included in the Itinerary Program.

II. THE CONTENT OF THE ITINERARY PROGRAM - PROJECTS AND ACTIONS

1. Content of the Itinerary Program

The itinerary, as described herein, is **a complete and branded tourism product**, consisting of visits to cultural attractions and a range of tourist and complementary services. The visits should provide tours (in person or online) in all cultural sights-stops of the Itinerary. They should ensure any relevant specialized and detailed interpretation/information (printed and online), which potential tourists could access **before, during and after** their visit.

Studies and projects

The technical studies and projects required:

- a) for the restoration and promotion of monuments and the improvement of visits to archaeological sites and
 - b) the creation or improvement of infrastructure,
- should be recorded in detail.

More specifically: **DIAZOMA studies and mature projects.**

Apart from works of clearly archaeological nature, there should be provision for infrastructure works at the archaeological sites where such works are required (e.g. fire protection, lightning protection, rainwater drainage, etc.) and for improvements in accessibility and parking at the premises.

Organizational (soft) actions

In addition to the infrastructure of archaeological interest and the works of general infrastructure required by the Itinerary, there should be provision for the following (not necessarily in chronological order).

- 1. Drafting of an initial marketing plan with a branding proposal, designing the logo and the creative part of the itinerary. The marketing plan should be implemented and the logo should be strictly complied, while the creative part of the itinerary should be kept for at least 3 to 5 years.** After that period there should be an evaluation of the results in order to decide possible alterations or renewals. The marketing plan will indicate markets, market segments and ways to approach-attract audiences of special interests. The Itinerary's "identity" will be established through the branding.
- 2. Media planning** for advertising and public relations, based on the recommendations of the marketing plan
- 3. Planning and implementing a "launching event"** for the Itinerary that will be widely publicized
- 4. Revision-updating of the marketing plan** by the middle of the programming period (around 2007-2008) and correlation with the communication planning of the Regional Authority (without being part of it).
- 5. Promotion actions** (advertising campaigns and public relations) throughout the programming period, according to the marketing plan. Part of the public relations is the production or purchase of collectible gifts relevant to the itinerary that will be given to media representatives and public opinion makers. PR also includes the creation of printing and online material on the Itinerary. There should also be provision for reprinting material on the Itinerary around the middle of the programming period, after any update, and for their publication in additional languages (not just Greek and English, but also French, Italian, German, Russian).
- 6. Study on how local communities can benefit from the Itinerary.** This study will indicate the specifications by sector of health-related venues (restaurants, cafes etc.), retail souvenir shops and stores selling items of touristic interest, as well as by local product/producer etc., that may be associated with the Itinerary. It will also draft a **formal agreement** (specimen) and the statutes of the Local Quality Agreement, will identify and record these shops and local producers, and will make a list of all the actions that are necessary for the **connection of the Itinerary** to these shops and producers, including any existing incentives to improve the premises, possible certifications, where possible etc.
- 7. Application of the study of the preceding paragraph.** Note that the costs for the promotion of the referred businesses, as part of the itinerary, will be included in the above points 4 and 5.
- 8. Maintenance and continuous updating of the Itinerary's website** and possible revision by the middle of the programming period (adding languages, new content, etc.)
- 9. Developing of a digital communication strategy** (through special study). The content

and works that will be required for the digital support and completion of the Itinerary are analyzed separately below.

10. **Transportation-related approach of signage and small improvements** of access to the premises included in the Itinerary (short study by transportation expert)

11.- **Defining the specifications** for the selection of a travel agency or agencies that will be performing the Itinerary (and will be distributing printed material, also displayed on the Itinerary's website) and drafting a Call for Interest for Travel Agencies.

12. Lastly, there must be provision for a **visitors management system** in the busiest sites and museums and potentially in every venue throughout the Itinerary.

13. **Digital tools of the Itinerary – digital actions**

- **Digitalization** (according to Good Practice, see <http://digitization.hpvlab.ceid.upatras.gr>) and posting photographs, videos and documentation texts related to Itinerary's sites of interest and the sights of the broader area (**Digitalization - Documentation**).
- **Creation of a special website of cultural-touristic content** with responsive design for smart mobile devices. For example: digital maps will present the Itinerary and the other multidisciplinary attractions in the area. Special internet applications will enable the preparation of the visit (accommodation, catering, walks, other attractions, **νοητικός προσανατολισμός**, proposals for full exploitation of the visit). Furthermore, the **introduction of the Itinerary as a destination** in famous web travel platforms (e.g. tripadvisor, lonely planet), will significantly increase their online visibility. (**Updating**)
- **Introducing the Itinerary to social media** (facebook, pinterest, twitter) in order to create a digital community with large expansion possibilities.
- **Development of digital applications and creating installations and exhibits.** These will operate as interpretive means for the decoding of information that is provided to visitors online and in situ (at selected Itinerary points). Audio tours, complex narrative applications, applications for mobile phones and interactive installations-exhibits highlight the “stories” associated with the sites of the Itinerary in different ways (audio, image, video) and from different perspectives (scientists, local community, visitors). The establishment of communication relations through these networks will enhance the online presence of the Itinerary's sites and will enforce the momentum towards broadening their audience. Developing communication strategies will prescribe the specific actions to be implemented in order to optimize results. (**Networking-broadening of audience**).

Only if cultural Itineraries are seen through this particular concept, as a complete and branded tourism product, there will be success in attracting cultural tourists and in maximizing benefits for local economies and societies.