

DIAZOMA

FOR THE PROJECT

**“PROPOSAL FOR THE DRAFTING OF A
BUSINESS PLAN**

**FOR THE INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENT
OF THE ITINERARY OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN THESSALY”**

November 2014

This document is a proposal for the drafting of a Business Plan of an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) for the creation of a cultural tourism itinerary in the region of Thessaly, focusing at prehistoric settlements, ancient theaters and fortifications (castles). This paper presents the concept of ITI with the conditions and facilities it provides, the prediction for the ITI of a cultural itinerary in the OP of Thessaly, and a brief overview of the approach and the contents of the Operational Plan for the ITI.

This document has been prepared by the association's volunteer, Mr. Constantine Kokkinoplitis, an expert in Strategic Research and Innovation, and although it refers to the region of Thessaly, it serves as a model and guide for similar programs for all of the country's Regions.

2 Integrated Territorial Investment

Each action included in an Operational Program must serve a thematic objective. This constraint often excludes the holistic approach for the creation of an investment that has multiple effects and serves a set of strategic priorities that do not necessarily fit into a single program. After concluding this the Commission created the financial tool of the Integrated Territorial Investments so as to allow for the creation of investment with a holistic approach to growth support in a region.

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) is a tool that supports innovative growth in a geographical area based on the common element of territory. Integrated Territorial Investment raises resources from more than one European fund and more than one Operational Program (Regional and Sectoral) creating thus a flexible funding mechanism that exceeds the funding limitations and restrictions set by individual thematic objectives and financial priorities of each fund and each Operational Program. Thus, this is a funding tool which is essentially leading to the selection of investments in activities with territorial criteria.

The ITI use results to the creation of a comprehensive set of innovative actions having as common denominator the servicing of the development strategy within a designated area. The main advantage of using ITI is the simplification of the aim of the investment and its correlation with the territorial element, regardless of the funding mechanisms used.

The key elements of ITI are:

- Specified region and integrated Territorial Development Strategy
- Set of actions to be implemented and
- Governance arrangements for the ITI management.

Therefore the design of an ITI, although geographically limited, overcomes the limitations of the OPs and of European funds and pursues a holistic approach which finances, in a synchronized and coordinated way, innovative actions in order to achieve the development of a thematic purpose. Thereby this creates a multiplier effect with a positive influence on a superset of activities.

While the purpose of ITI is simple, its design is proved complicated since:

- it involves the understanding of both the Territorial Development Strategy of the Region, and of the national strategy as set out in the sectoral programs,
- it requires the possibility of promoting innovation and managing the innovation strategy,
- it requires composed action by more than one Business Programs, as well as

relative knowledge,

- it requires the coordination and synchronization of the Managing Authorities of all involved Operational Programs for the implementation of these actions, and
- it imposes the design of a management mechanism for ITI.

3 ITI of the Operational Program for Thessaly

The proposal of the Operational Program for the Region of Thessaly provides for the use of ITI as a tool for "*creating growth engines and addressing common challenges of a multi-sectoral nature, with the maximum possible efficiency of the available public resources at territorial level.*" Among other things proposed, there is an "itinerary of *culture-tourism in Thessaly focusing at the development of the cultural or natural heritage, in order to leverage growth both for the respective areas and for the whole region. The itinerary covers important monuments of Thessaly and incorporates the four ancient theaters and the most important monuments of other historical periods, namely the Neolithic settlements of Sesklo and Diminio, the Cave of Theopetra, the area of the Meteora monasteries. Thus, the itinerary covers an area from Magnesia to Trikala-Meteora.*"

*"The selection of the sites that will be included in the itinerary, as well as the actions that will be part of the plan, will result from the **business plan** to be developed through collaboration with culture and tourism institutions."*

4 Proposal

Given that the OP Thessaly will include the ITI for Thessaly's cultural tourism itinerary and that there is expressed need to draft a business plan for the final form of the investment, it is proposed to present a business plan aiming at identifying, recording and accelerating the maturation of actions that make the investment.

The pillars which will support the development of the project are: Enrichment of the idea of the **thematic itinerary** to act as a compensated set that will ensure:

- The creation of a critical mass, which may significantly affect the touristic product offered in Thessaly, enriching it with activities of tourism of special interest, namely cultural tourism, and giving it the necessary unique identity in order to make Thessaly a very attractive tourist destination of distinct character.
- The involvement of existing tourist infrastructure and in particular the existing hotel infrastructure and complementary services.
- Linking local businesses and producers of local products with the itinerary, providing thus a great opportunity for their promotion and establishment, as well as for the increase of their exports.
- **The improvement of the quality of offered tourism products** targeting at groups of special requirements and higher incomes.

Following this line of reasoning, it is proposed that the Itinerary consists of three distinct parts, in parallel to the three kinds of cultural resources which is intended to highlight: Neolithic settlements, ancient theaters, castles and possibly other monuments of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine era.

In a first approach, throughout the entire Itinerary, some **indicative categories of interventions** can be grouped as follows:

1. Public access, security and visitors' service infrastructure, such as transportation infrastructure, electromechanical infrastructure (electricity supply, fire protection, lightning protection), IT and telecommunications, public service infrastructure (shops, ticket offices, WC) in the archaeological sites and monuments.
2. Interventions for the protection and promotion of the monuments and all accessible locations.
3. Organization of the Itinerary as a tourist package. Creating ICT applications for the organization of tours. Other actions of networking for stakeholders.

The set of actions that aim at improving the quality of the offered touristic products of Thessaly, includes:

1. Enhancement of the visited monuments and sites and accessibility improvement
2. Scientifically documented marketing of the Itinerary, promotion and public relations activities
3. Organizing events in the line of annual happenings
4. ICT use to create applications for visitors' information and virtual tours,
5. Collection and completion of digital and other materials,
6. Education/training for organized tours for entrepreneurs, employees etc.

A. Methodological Approach

The methodological approach for the implementation of the Business Plan includes the following elements:

Wide involvement of local actors

The first concern in the formation of the Business Plan for ITI is the involvement of local actors in the cultural and tourism market, in order to ensure that the Plan has taken into account all the points and actions that may be part of the itinerary.

Funding means

The recognition of funding means and the determination of conditions for the coordination of the involved organizational units of Public Administration is a critical success factor of the Plan.

Success criteria

Determining success criteria and evaluation indicators of actions is the starting point for the planning of activities of ITI.

Timetable

The initial timetable includes all the actions to be part of ITI. The timing of actions unfolds within the entire period of 2014-2020 based on the expected outcome of each action, their complementarity, the creation of an initial attraction core etc. For each action we must take into account its total life cycle in order to guarantee the adequacy of the resources required (especially human resources) for its successful development. Also, a chart with **step-by-step** Itinerary actions will be delivered to the Intermediate Managing Authority of Thessaly ROP in order to have them coordinated. Finally, stakeholders will receive a complete proposal of the actions that must be implemented.

B. Governance arrangements

An essential element of ITI is to determine its governance arrangements. The Business

Plan will describe the necessary organizational structure to meet the requirements of the Regulation and to ensure the success of the investment.

The ITI management arrangement (combination of a Special Managing Service of Thessaly ROP and regional development tools) and the creation of the Committee for the specialization and updating of the strategy will be determined through local consultation on the initiative of the Region and the participation of stakeholders.

The ITI can be managed by a **distinct unit/group within the Special Managing Service**, which will be in charge of the ITI management responsibilities. This group will be staffed by existing SMS members and it could be enriched through the SMS recruitment process by selected officers of the Management Organization Unit of Development Programs as well as the Regional or Municipal authorities, following a call for interest.

At the same time, a Thessaly Itinerary management organization can be set up under the auspices of the Region. The organization will include key stakeholders and local tourism businesses and will be taking the key management decisions regarding the management of the Itinerary. That body may have the form of a Commission and be supported operationally by the organizational structure of the Regional development agencies.