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SMEs and tourism: acting for a brighter future

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Destination SMEs is a project funded under the INTERREG EUROPE Programme (ERDF) which brings together seven regions from across the European Union – among which Gozo – with the aim of creating a better environment for the growth of SMEs working – or potentially getting involved – in the tourism industry. The ultimate aim of the project is to foster an environment where SMEs grow faster and create more and better jobs.

One novelty in the Interreg

Europe programme is the inclusion of stakeholders in the lifetime and actions of the project. Therefore, if you represent an SME that fits the description above, you can join the project and actively participate in it, drawing benefit from the networking opportunities and contributing directly by proposing improvement to policies related to your business.

Destination SMEs aims to assist European territories design effective destination management strategies and policies in order to provide tourist SMEs with a favourable environment that en-

courage improvement competi- tively. EU funding, national and regional policy instruments are



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seen as important tools in this regard. This will subsequently improve the chances for these tourist SMEs to offer a better product, grow, and generate employment opportunities.

As part of the project, each member region engaged in the project is planned to host project partner regions for a study visit, intended to showcase the respective partner's experiences, good practices and needs. These experiences also strive to bring together business owners and the partners and stakeholders participating in Destination SMEs.

The first study visit of the project was held in Gozo in October last year. The Ministry for Gozo welcomed a group of 15 partner representatives and stakeholders from France, Slovenia, Latvia, Italy, Finland and Ireland who followed an intensive three-day programme.

Joint Dissemination Workshop

As stated earlier, the project structure plans for an interaction among stakeholders, project partners and businesses which goes beyond a token gesture.

To this effect, a Joint Dissemination Workshop bringing together all the stakeholders mentioned above was organised. This workshop was chaired by the Minister for Gozo. The floor included representatives of a number of SMEs based in Gozo, Ministry for Gozo officials, the project partners, representatives of the business federations in Gozo, namely the Gozo Business Chamber and the Gozo Tourism Association, and regulatory bodies such as the Planning Authority, the Environment and Resources Authority, and the Malta Tourism Authority.

After brief overviews of the project and the institutions represented at the meeting, entrepreneurs from a good number of local SMEs took the floor in a frank discussion with legislators and policy makers. SMEs participating included Lampuki Arts, Lazuli Art, The Chocolate Experience, Il-Bejta Artisans and Il-Ha-

gar Museum and Cultural Centre. The dissemination workshop was concluded by Minister for Gozo Dr Refalo.

Stakeholders present for this workshop will continue to be involved in the course of the project through the setting up of a Stakeholders' Forum, which will be invited to participate actively throughout the lifetime of the project. Membership in this Forum is not exclusive, and new SMEs or umbrella organisations are invited to express their interest should they wish to be included in this group.

The project will now continue to explore best practices from the other regions participating in this venture. All this experience will be used to elicit policy development locally in order to foster a better environment for SME growth and development. Find us on Facebook: Destination SMEs

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