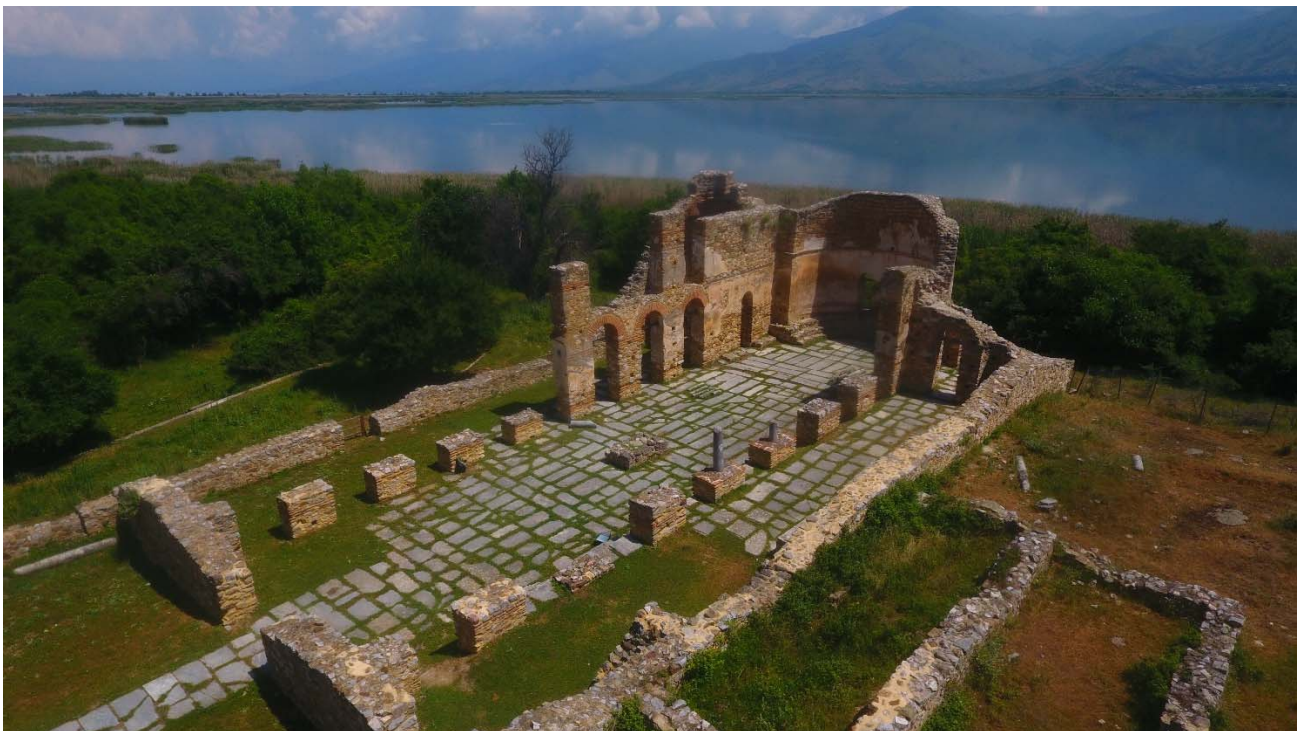




Regional Action Plan of the Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia



FINAL VERSION

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1 Introduction

The present document is the final version of the Regional Action Plan of the Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia, developed in the framework of Epicah project, financed within Interreg Europe Programme.

Being one of the 9 partner beneficiaries of Epicah project and within the 1st phase of its implementation, **the Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia has as main task the drafting of a regional action plan aiming to improve** a specific policy instrument, namely **the Investment Priority 6c “Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage” of the Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia 2014-2020**, focusing on specific actions for the development of thematic networks of cultural routes, events, festivals and the creation and promotion of accessible destinations networks (routes, infrastructures and means) of tourist interest for disabled individuals.

The Regional Action Plan was developed through **a very participatory process involving the most relevant and active stakeholders** in the sectors of the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage as well as the tourism growth at regional level, while **the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia had also a very active and substantial role** within this process. Nevertheless, Epicah partners’ good practices were apparently in the epicentre of this process, since the whole Regional Action Plan was built on the good practices visited and the lessons learnt through these practices in partners’ territories.

2 Methodological approach

The Regional Action Plan has been developed in full compliance with the guidelines of the Interreg Europe Programme, having also adapted the more analytical structure proposed by Epicah project. As far as the main sources that provided input for its development, these were two:

1. **The good practices identified and presented by the partners during the transnational visits.** Seven (7) study visits have taken place within the 1st phase of Epicah project implementation and these were located in
 - the Italian-French maritime area
 - the Spanish-Portuguese borders
 - the Hungarian-Slovakian borders
 - the Czech-Bavarian borders
 - the Greek border area in Western Macedonia
 - the Estonian-Latvian borders
 - Romanian-Hungarian borders
2. **The outcomes of the meetings of the local stakeholders’ group.** Seven (7) meetings were organized within the 1st phase of Epicah project implementation (approx. 1-2 per semester). During the 6th one the draft version of the action plan

was validated, while a revised version of the action plan was discussed within the 7th Local Stakeholders Meeting in late October 2019.

The two sources above are strongly interconnected, since the analysis, the evaluation and the potential valorization of the transnational good practices is one of the main topics in the agenda of every local stakeholders' group meeting.

Finally, the main working documents used during the drafting of the Regional Action Plan were:

1. The State of the Art Report for the Region of the Western Macedonia
2. The presentation and the evaluation fiches of the good practices visited in partners' territories
3. The minutes of the meetings of the Local Stakeholder Group
4. The main outcomes and conclusions of the Epicah Online Survey about Natural and Cultural Cross Border Heritage and Tourism
5. The main Interreg Europe Programme documents
6. The main documents of the Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia
7. The Plan for the Integrated Tourism Development in Western Macedonia

3 Policy Instrument Background

The policy instrument addressed by the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia within EPICAH project is the **Investment Priority 6c** as included within the **Regional Operational Plan of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014-2020** defined in detail as it follows:

Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage, focusing on specific actions for the development of thematic networks of cultural routes, events, festivals and the creation and promotion of accessible destinations networks (routes, infrastructures and means) of tourist interest for disabled individuals.

3.1 TERRITORIAL CHALLENGES

The Region of Western Macedonia is located in the north-western part of Greece with a total surface of 9.451 km² (7,16% of the Greek surface) and a total population of 283,689 habitants, neighboring with two non-EU countries: Albania and Republic of North Macedonia.

It is divided in four (4) administrative regional units - Grevena, Kastoria, Kozani and Florina - and a total number of thirteen (13) municipalities.

Western Macedonia is the only Greek enclosed region (with external borders to two non EU countries and until recently one of the most difficult in terms of accessibility, with

the most mountainous and semi-mountainous population, with a very small population size (around 2,7% of the country) and economic (around 2,3% of national GDP) and, at the same time, strong "single-activity" features, as the region's main producer of electricity thanks to energy sources (production of lignite).

Until recently, isolation often was considered as a protection for the local economy and as incentive to develop endogenous entrepreneurship or as a cause for development interventions by the State. However, currently, the isolation has only negative effects for local development due to the intensity of the international and inter-regional competition, the limitation of the state intervention and the changes occurred in the national and European energy market, the current limited range of sectoral specialization, the low interconnection between productive sectors, the dependency on conventional sectors, the small business size, the lag in modernization investments and the low performance in innovation activities.

To this extent, **the sustainable planning and development in the border area (as part of the Region of the Western Macedonia) with the promotion and valorisation of its local assets is a key priority.**

3.2 POLICY INSTRUMENT OVERVIEW

The Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia 2014-2020 is one of the thirteen (13) Regional Operational Programmes in Greece and its main goals are:

- The improvement of entrepreneurial activity with regards to competitiveness
- Support for the transition to a low carbon economy
- Strengthening sustainable transportation, and
- Reinforcing Social Cohesion

In particular, EPICAH is interested in the “Thematic Objective 6: Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency” and especially “Investment Priority 6.2(6c): Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage”. The Investment Priority is further specified as follows.

<i>Specific Objective</i>	<i>Strengthening the protection and prominence of the natural and cultural heritage and linking them with tourism development</i>
<i>Result Indicator</i>	T2011 Number of visitors in Cultural and Natural Resources of the region Baseline: 200,000 (2011) Target: 350,000 (2023)
<i>Budget</i>	19,375,000 €
<i>Output Indicators</i>	CO09: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural or natural heritage and attractions Target: 100,000 visits/year T2106: Actions for the capitalization and the promotion of natural and cultural heritage

Action o6.2.1.01 (3): Project for strengthening the competitiveness of tourist destinations

Implementation Scheme	Grant
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The action includes:

- Projects concerning the competitiveness of tourist destination that promote local advantages through specialized interventions in order to capitalize on these advantages
- Actions for the protection and promotion, as well as the discovery of the natural heritage of the region
- Development of networks of thematic routes and accessible destinations for accessible tourism
- Actions concerning events and festivals
- Actions for the tourist promotion of the region

The action is in accordance with the Integrated Tourist Development Plan of the Western Macedonia Region, which is harmonized with the national strategy for tourism.

The expected result concern the development and promotion of the tourism potential of the Western Macedonia Region and the capitalization of local advantages of the tourist destinations (urban and rural) through the development of tourism infrastructure, protection and promotion of natural heritage, action of development of thematic routes networks, event, festivals etc. as well as actions concerning the integrated promotion of the Region.

- Potential Beneficiaries
- Ministry of Tourism
- Region of Western Macedonia
- First Level Local Authorities (Municipalities) of the Western Macedonia Region
- Other public institutions

Action o6.2.1.02: Projects for the promotion of cultural heritage and their functional networking

Implementation Scheme	Grant
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The action concerns the completion of the phased projects of the Operational Programme Macedonia-Thrace 2007-2013 including the following:

- Library Building and Exhibition Space of the Municipal Library of Kozani

Action o6.2.1.02 (3): Projects for the promotion of cultural heritage and their functional networking

Implementation Scheme	Grant
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The action includes:

- Actions for the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage of the region
- Development of thematic cultural routes, cultural events, festivals and promotion of contemporary art

The actions 06.2.1.01 (3) & 06.2.1.02 (3) have to be in accordance with the Integrated Tourist Development Plan of the Western Macedonia Region, which is harmonized with the national strategy for tourism, while, synergy and complementarity with the other Thematic Objectives of the Programme and especially the Thematic Objectives 2, 3, 5, 7, 8¹ should be pursued.

Currently, the state of implementation of the current investment priority is the following:

- Three calls have been made so far under the investment priority with two of them still active and one closed.
- Out of a total budget of 23,375,000 €, 13,400,000 € have been included in calls, 5,620,984 € have been decided i.e. the 24.0%, and 2,559,683 € have been contracted.
- An amount of 4,000,000 € has not been still specified.

Taking into consideration the above there is a lot of fiscal space to implement the lessons learn from Phase I of Epicah project. In addition, based on the calls that have been published so far the goals concerning accessibility and the networking of cultural and natural heritage sites has not been yet met.

Therefore, the policy instrument can greatly benefit from the present regional action plan.

4 Justification of the need for improving the policy instrument

Based on the main conclusions of the Regional State of the Art for Western Macedonia, drafted in the beginning of the Epicah project, there is an untapped potential and underestimation of niche tourism prospects, such as agro, eco, wine-

¹ The thematic objectives 2, 3, 5, 7 & 8 are:

	Thematic objectives
2	Enhancing access to, and use and quality of ICT
3	Enhancing competitiveness of SMEs
5	Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management
7	Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures
8	Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility

tasting and mountain tourism, sport tourism, tourism for people with disabilities etc., **while the inadequate valorisation of natural and cultural heritage are both partly responsible for the decreased number of overnights**, especially for foreign travellers. Such a potential is significantly correlated with the urgent needs to use chances that the border region has.

Despite the numerous and rich cultural resources and the various policies, **the cross border area lacks an organized management plan for the development of mild tourist products** (such as eco-tourism, religious tourism, **accessible tourism** etc.).

Consequently, it is more than essential for the Region of Western Macedonia to identify and adopt alternative development models setting **the increase of its tourism attractiveness as a top - strategic priority**. Therefore, natural and cultural heritage related aspects, connected with tourism consist increasingly a key factor for sustained economic & tourism development for Region of Western Macedonia.

In conclusion, the main characteristics of **the present regional action plan** as an outcome of the Epicah project, **include activities to promote the tourism attractiveness of the region through its unique natural beauty & cultural heritage, focusing especially in the Greek border areas of the region.**

5 Lessons learnt within Epicah project

The Policy Instrument has several important ways that can improve if it incorporates the lessons learnt during the 1st phase of the Epicah project implementaion. During the first phase, the transnational meetings, study visits, and thematic seminars provided significant input. All this input was presented and elaborated within the local stakeholders' group meetings that finally selected specific good practices introduced by Epicah partners. This good practices (presented to the table below) were the basis for the development of the regional action plan aiming to the improvement of the regional policy instrument through the introduction of more sustainable, effective and efficient actions in the fields of cultural & natural heritage and tourism promotion, introducing also a “borders’ tourism development” approach.

The most important lessons learnt that the action plan aspires to incorporate are the following:

Good Practice	Lessons Learnt
<p><u>ACCESSIT: Itineraries of Accessible Heritage</u> (Good practice presented by ASEV (Italy-France Maritime Programme 2007-2013))</p>	<p>ACCESSIT project (http://www.accessit-git.eu) aimed at promoting the integrated management of cultural heritage in the Italian-French maritime (border) area. The idea was the creation of a “great” itinerary that would include the whole tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the territory, bringing all the maritime (border) regions’ institutions and various stakeholders together in a joint cooperation network.</p> <p>The main idea was to ensure the promotion and accessibility of the greatest number of people (including people with disabilities</p>

	<p>according to the facilities offered by the sites) in a sustainable way and by mobilizing all the technical and innovative but also institutional means available.</p> <p>This responds to the principle of equal access to culture in all its dimensions and contributes to a sustainable territorial development that makes the people and their local heritage the cornerstone of the territorial attractiveness.</p> <p>The project improved the accessibility of important open air sites and buildings and promoted social integration as far as culture is concerned.</p> <p>Moreover, the project contributed at the restoration of cultural heritage, the development of reception infrastructure as well as route and informational signage, while at the same time improved access and preserved the historical and architectural characteristics of the monuments.</p> <p>The idea of making very small interventions of low budget that could improve access and observation of the site and particular monuments within it, practically transformed simple historical, cultural and natural resources to the attractive visiting points.</p> <p>Within this approach, ACCESSIT project activities can be adopted within our Regional Action Plan, emphasising to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the improvement of accessibility and attractiveness, with the use of naturally friendly materials - the implementation of small complementary interventions totally harmonized with the territory - the efficient use of financial resources comparing to the expected impact of the interventions implemented in tourism (increased visitors' satisfaction thanks to better accessibility and vision)
<p><u>Castellum - Organization of interactive exhibitions in the castle of Carei and the mansion of Szabolcs</u></p> <p>Good Practice presented by Satu Mare County Interreg (Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013)</p>	<p>The project Castellum (www.e-castellum.eu) could be considered as the result of a long-lasting cooperation between the Satu Mare County Museum in Romania and the Jósa András Museum, Nyíregyháza in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County of Hungary. The project was financed within the Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013.</p> <p>Within the project, the rehabilitation and sustainable use of the cross-border cultural heritage was achieved through the set-up of exhibitions of historical interiors in two architectural monuments of great importance. The two monuments were: the Mudrány mansion of Szabolcs (Hungary) and the Károlyi castle of Carei (Romania).</p> <p>Within this approach, Castellum project activities can be adopted within our Regional Action Plan, emphasising to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the encouragement of small scale infrastructure and purchase of necessary equipment for the rehabilitation and/ or the improvement of historical and cultural sites, monuments and spaces, increasing their attractiveness, as a mean to enhance the interest of the potential visitors

<p>CB DESTINATION Good Practice presented by Satu Mare County Interreg (Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Co- operation Programme 2007-2013)</p>	<p>This project was implemented by the Municipality of Nyirbator and Municipality of Carei with two main activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nyirbator - Construction of Visitor Centre, Construction of Riding Hall, Reconstruction of Greek Catholic Church. • Carei - Reconstruction of Riding Hall, Establishment of silicon sculpture museum. <p>The general objective of the project was to improve the tourist attractiveness of the border region and to enhance cross-border tourism and cohesion as well as to diversify the regional economy. CB DESTINATION project has a strong transfer potential due to the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It received great support from the local population and their appreciation for this project. • It transformed abandoned structures with historical value to key tourism points for the involved cities. • It offered new possibilities and diversification for border territory tourism, as well as added value and improved brand for the cities and their citizens.
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6 Stakeholders' analysis

From the very beginning of Epicah project, **a very consistent and relevant local stakeholders' group was formed** and most of its members were present in the seven (7) meetings organised up to now with a very active and supporting role for the development of the regional action plan.

The membership of the stakeholders consists of:

No	Stakeholders
1	Region of Western Macedonia
2	Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Plan of Western Macedonia
2	Regional Union of Western Macedonia
3	Municipality of Kastoria
4	Municipality of Nestorio
5	Municipality of Florina
6	Municipality of Prespes
7	Technical Chamber of Greece – Department of Western Macedonia
8	Geotechnical Chamber of Greece - Department of Western Macedonia
9	University of Western Macedonia
10	Technical Institute of Western Macedonia
11	Environmental Centre of the Region of Western Macedonia
12	Tourism Agency of Western Macedonia
13	Organisation of Cultural Events of Prespas
14	Antiquities Ephorate of Kozani

15	Antiquities Ephorate of Kastoria
16	Antiquities Ephorate of Florina
17	Antiquities Ephorate of Grevena
18	Regional Federation of Disabled People of Western Macedonia
19	Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes - Joint Secretariats of the IPA CBC Programmes “Greece-Albania 2014-2020” and “Greece-Republic of North Macedonia 2014-2020”

To be noted that **the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Plan of Western Macedonia had a principal role within the Local Stakeholders’ Group of Epicah project since its very beginning.**

They were represented in all the LSG meetings discussing and exchanging ideas with the other LSG members in an effort to define and shape the actions to be included in the Regional Action Plan, where during the 6th LSG meeting they agreed on the main actions to be developed within the action plan. Moreover, they also participated in the 7th LSG meeting where a new revised version of the action plan was discussed.

In addition, Mrs Foto Zagoritou – one of their executive staff members – presented the planning and the progress so far for the policy instrument – Investment Priority 6.c. in the framework of the Regional Operational Plan of Western Macedonia within the open events organised in the Region of Western Macedonia for Epicah project. Namely:

- The Transnational Thematic Seminar held at Kastoria in June 2018 with all partners’ participation
- The Annual Cross-border Workshop held also at Kastoria in November 2018
- The Final Interregional Forum for the presentation of the Regional Action Plan held at Kozani in November 2019

Finally, she also participated on behalf of the Managing Authority in the 1st Forum for Tourism in border regions that was organized at Braga in late May 2019 in the session “alignment with the European Programs of Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Nature”.

7 Improvement actions

The Background

Cultural heritage has traditionally been the basis for cross-border cooperation. Nowadays cross-border cooperation concentrates in the Greek-Roman and Byzantine heritage sites, as well as aspects of intangible common heritage (such as folk art, folk music, etc.). The cross-border region combines favorable natural resources (as cited above), favorable climate conditions, as well as cultural assets such as existing cultural manifestations, festivals, carnivals, churches and monasteries, crafts and authentic local characteristics.

In terms of culture the basic needs of the border areas of Western Macedonia are:

- Protection and utilisation of cultural heritage
- Horizontal and vertical networking among sectors and stakeholders that upgrade the tourist product (local products, gastronomy, cultural events, religious routes etc.)

While the main priorities are:

- Planning and development of interventions for the protection and promotion of architectural and cultural heritage, forming the conditions for a significant increase in culture-driven thematic tourism

Apart from the tangible architectural and cultural heritage, the Region of Western Macedonia is also well known for its rich intangible heritage, reflected up today to various festivals, events (carnivals, customs & traditions revitalisation etc.), while various artistic and cultural groups organise performances (theatre, music, dance) during the whole year.

Some of the most famous events attracting visitors all over Greece and abroad are the carnival of Kastoria (Ragoutsaria 6-8 January), the “boubounes” (carnival fires in the neighbourhoods accompanied by festivities and traditional dances), the “Orestia”, the week of the emigrant of Kastoria and the cultural August while in the first weekend of August, on the riverbanks of Aliakmonas organised the “River Party” a great, manifestation, in open air with the participation of famous artists, which concentrates a great number of visitors from throughout Greece. Respectively, in the area of Florina one of the greatest customs is the Christmas “fires” of December 23, when all the locals start street fires in every neighbor, offering wine and local delicacies to hundreds of visitors, while traditional dances are held until dawn. Other very important cultural events also take place in the area, many of which are realised in the so called “Cultural” August of Florina such as the “Prespia” organised in late summer in the areas of Prespa and Florina with cultural events, traditional dances, theatrical schemes, singers, exhibitions etc.

Finally, the region is characterized by a very remarkable natural environment with important tourism opportunities, which, however, are partially exploited. The natural environment of the Region of Western Macedonia is characterized by rich fauna and flora and has greatest potential of surface water in the country. The ecological and environmental resources, of the Region are spatially concentrated in three main zones:

- the mountain terrain of Pindos at the western end
- the central axis of Prespes-Vitsi, Sinatsiko, Vourino and in the South West a small part of Pieria Mountains.

In the Region there are 13 protected areas, included in the European Network of protected areas NATURA 2000, 9 of which are within the cross-border Regional Units of Florina and Kastoria:

- Six (6) in the Regional Unit of Florina

- Three (3) in the Regional Unit of Kastoria

Taking into consideration all this above and the work done during the LSG meetings (open discussions, exchange of ideas and experiences between participants etc.), there are two important challenges for the Region of Western Macedonia in order its further sustainable tourism development to be achieved:

1. To increase accessibility to the cultural and natural heritage sites and monuments for people with disabilities (given that today an important part of them is not accessible or provides very limited access). Nevertheless, the development of networks of accessible sites (either cultural or natural) would benefit the region and could render it an accessible tourism destination in the Region.
2. To enhance the attractiveness and the sustainability of the cultural events happening every year in the region (being a very strong expression of its rich intangible heritage), encouraging also the organisation of even a greater number of events and/ or their prolongation.

To this extent and after having studied carefully, the good practices presented by Epicah project partners, with regards to the accessibility improvement,

the good practice identified within ACCESSIT project (Italy-France Maritime Programme 2007-2013) was selected as the most inspirational for the development of accessible cultural and natural sites in the Region of Western Macedonia, as well as for enhancing their interconnection.

ACCESSIT project activities resulted to:

- the improvement of accessibility and attractiveness of sites and monuments, with the use of naturally friendly materials
- the implementation of small complementary interventions totally harmonized with the territory
- the efficient use of financial resources comparing to the expected impact of the interventions implemented in tourism (increased visitors' satisfaction thanks to better accessibility and vision)

The ACCESSIT project idea to ensure the promotion and accessibility of the greatest number of people (including people with disabilities according to the facilities offered by the sites) in a sustainable way by mobilizing all the technical and innovative but also institutional means available and by making very small interventions of low budget that could improve access and observation of the sites and particular monuments constitutes the basis of the 1st action presented below.

At the same time, good practices identified within Castellum and CB Destination projects related to the encouragement of small scale infrastructure and purchase of necessary equipment for the rehabilitation and/ or the improvement of historical and cultural sites, monuments and spaces, increasing their

attractiveness, as a mean to enhance the interest of the potential visitors constitute the basis for the 2nd action of the Regional Action Plan. Renovation and rehabilitation of buildings and spaces of cultural interest could offer permanent solutions for the hosting and the technical support of the numerous events organised in the region. And this could be an answer to the challenge described above for the Region of Western Macedonia, thus to increase the attractiveness and the sustainability of the cultural events in the region, including the enhancement of new ones as well as the possible prorogation of the existing ones, attracting a greater number of visitors in the area.

7.1 ACTION 1

The proposed action

Support of the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Programme of the Western Macedonia to finance projects for the development / improvement of accessibility for people with disabilities in cultural and environmental monuments and attractions (improvement of physical accessibility for wheelchair users, marking / braille maps for visually impaired people, etc.) under one Call for Project Proposals within the Investment Priority 6c with indicative / potential beneficiaries the Ministry of Culture & the Ephorates of Antiquities, Local Authorities and other competent authorities/entities.

More in particular, the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will support the Managing Authority of the Regional Operation Programme of Western Macedonia in the following ways:

- 1. Consultation with the potential beneficiaries** aiming to the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument (Investment priority 6.c.).

During this stage, the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will conduct a targeted survey (questionnaire filling in) among potential beneficiaries for the identification of their needs, actions and projects proposals related to the policy instrument (I.P. 6.c.), while at least two focus groups or one interactive workshop will be organized (involving potential beneficiaries as well) towards the same purpose.

- 2. Preparation of a detailed presentation for the Managing Authority, emphasizing on the needs expressed and the projects proposed by the potential beneficiaries within the consultation process,** combining them with the lessons learnt through ACCESSIT project (improvement of monuments and sites accessibility, aiming to increase their tourist attractiveness). This is expected to be used as the basis for the design of the Call for Proposals by the Managing Authority.

The Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will analyse both information and data collected through questionnaires (survey) as well as focus

groups’/ workshop’s outcomes in order to prepare a detailed presentation for the Managing Authority, emphasizing on the needs expressed and the projects proposed by the potential beneficiaries, combining them with the lessons learnt through ACCESSIT project (Epicah good practice) and the “cross-border approach” of Epicah project. Thus, **the proposal of the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will further justify the need for support of projects to be developed and implemented in the border areas of the Region** (Florina and Kastoria). The proposal will also refer to the specialization/ further specification (as a suggestion) of specific evaluation criteria with territorial and thematic character (e.g. interventions in border areas or actions with cross-border potential etc.).

3. **Horizontal support of the process related to the Call’s publication & proposals’ submission** (e.g. provision of open access to anyone interested to the good practices analysed and evaluated within Epicah project, participation in open events related to the Call promotion etc.).
4. **Horizontal monitoring and follow-up of the selected projects’ (under the Call) implementation progress**, in relation with the progress and the achievement of the indicators set by the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia within Epicah project. For this purpose, the organisation of working sessions involving Managing Authority and beneficiaries and organization of 2 LSG meetings per year is planned.
5. **Support of the beneficiaries to understand the indicators’ calculation methodology and to report them properly at periodical basis** within the implementation of their projects.

Players Involved

- **Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014-2020**

The Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014-2020 will design and finance the proposed call (related to Action 1) including its publication, evaluation, contracting, implementation monitoring, closure etc.

- **Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia**

The Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia will implement the proposed action as it is described above (the proposed action).

- **Members of the LSG**

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They will participate in the consultation phase (Task 1), while in case they are eligible as potential beneficiaries they will also be involved in/ benefited from the other tasks of the action plan.

- **Regional Federation of People with Disabilities of Western Macedonia will provide expertise**

They will provide special expertise and know-how within the two first tasks, as well as advisory role during the whole implementation and monitoring of the action plan.

- **Potential beneficiaries of the Call (Ministry of Culture, Ephorates of Antiquities, Managing Authorities of Protected Areas, Local Authorities etc.)**

They will participate in the consultation phase (Task 1) , while in case they are eligible as potential beneficiaries they will also be involved in/ benefited from the other tasks of the action plan.

Timeframe (to be updated upon the final approval of the Action Plan by the Programme Structures)

Tasks	Start date	End date
TASK 1. Consultation with the potential beneficiaries aiming to the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument (Investment priority 6.c.). ²	October 2019	December 2019
TASK 2. Preparation of a detailed presentation for the Managing Authority, emphasizing on the needs expressed and the projects proposed by the potential beneficiaries within the consultation process, combining them with the lessons learnt through ACCESSIT project (improvement of monuments and sites accessibility, aiming to increase their tourist attractiveness). This is expected to be used as the basis for the design of the Call for Proposals by the Managing Authority.	January 2020	March 2020

² The Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Macedonia intends to implement this task (Consultation with the potential beneficiaries aiming to the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument) in parallel with the open consultation for the Regional Action Plan, aiming to attract the highest possible interest and participation by the local stakeholders and potential beneficiaries.

TASK 3. Horizontal support of the process related to the Call's publication & proposals' submission.	April 2020	June 2020
TASK 4. Horizontal monitoring and follow-up of the selected projects' (under the Call) implementation progress.	September 2020	December 2021
TASK 5. Support of the potential beneficiaries to understand the indicators' calculation methodology and to report them properly at periodical basis.	January 2020	December 2021

Costs - Funding sources

With regards to the tasks described above (Tasks 1 to 5) to be performed by the Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Macedonia, no additional budget will be required since the tasks will be performed by the RDF-RWM staff members within their regular working programme. For the reporting of the tasks progress, they will be further supported by a technical consultant within Epicah project budget for Phase 2 (already contracted).

In addition, the Call for Project Proposals described within Action 1 will be financed by the Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia. The total amount dedicated to the Action will be 500.000,00€ approximately.

7.2 ACTION 2

The proposed action

Support of the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Programme of the Western Macedonia to finance projects for the creation of permanent infrastructures and equipment to support cultural events and activities (e.g. audiovisual installations, platforms, lighting, etc.) under one Call for Project Proposals within the Investment Priority 6c with indicative / potential beneficiaries the Ministry of Culture & the Ephorates of Antiquities, Regional & Local Authorities, Municipal Companies and other competent authorities/ entities.

More in particular, the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will support the Managing Authority of the Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia in the following ways:

1. Consultation with the potential beneficiaries aiming to the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument (Investment priority 6.c.).

During this stage, the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will conduct a targeted survey (questionnaire filling-in) among potential beneficiaries for the identification of their needs, actions and projects proposals related to the policy instrument (I.P. 6.c.), while at least two focus groups or one interactive workshop will be organized (involving potential beneficiaries as well) towards the same purpose.

2. Preparation of a detailed presentation for the Managing Authority, emphasizing on the needs expressed and the projects proposed by the potential beneficiaries within the consultation process, combining them with the lessons learnt through Castellum & CB Destination projects (rehabilitation of cultural monuments and spaces aiming to increase their tourist attractiveness). This is expected to be used as the basis for the design of the Call for Proposals by the Managing Authority.

The Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will analyse both information and data collected through questionnaires (survey) as well as focus groups'/ workshop's outcomes in order to prepare a detailed presentation for the Managing Authority, emphasizing on the needs expressed and the projects proposed by the potential beneficiaries, combining them with the lessons learnt through Castellum & CB Destination projects (Epicah good practices) and the "cross-border approach" of Epicah project. Thus, the proposal of the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia will further justify the need for support of projects to be developed and implemented in the border areas of the Region (Florina and Kastoria). The proposal will also refer to the specialization/ further specification (as a suggestion) of specific evaluation criteria with territorial and thematic character (e.g. interventions in border areas or actions with cross-border potential etc.).

3. **Horizontal support of the process related to the Call's publication & proposals' submission** (e.g. provision of open access to anyone interested to the good practices analysed and evaluated within Epicah project, participation in open events related to the Call promotion etc.).
4. **Horizontal monitoring and follow-up of the selected projects' (under the Call) implementation progress**, in relation with the progress and the achievement of the indicators set by the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia within Epicah project. For this purpose, the organisation of working sessions involving Managing Authority and beneficiaries and organization of 2 LSG meetings per year is planned.
5. **Support of the beneficiaries to understand the indicators' calculation methodology and to report them properly at periodical basis** within the implementation of their projects.

Players Involved

▪ **Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014-2020**

The Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014-2020 will design and finance the proposed call (related to Action 2) including its publication, evaluation, contracting, implementation monitoring, closure etc.

▪ **Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia**

The Regional Development Fund on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia will implement the proposed action as it is described above (the proposed action).

▪ **Members of the LSG**

They will participate in the consultation phase (Task 1), while in case they are eligible as potential beneficiaries they will also be involved in/ benefited from the other tasks of the action plan.

▪ **Potential beneficiaries of the Call Potential beneficiaries of the Call (Ministry of Culture, Ephorates of Antiquities, Local Authorities, Municipal Companies etc.)**

They will participate in the consultation phase (Task 1) , while in case they are eligible as potential beneficiaries they will also be involved in/ benefited from the other tasks of the action plan.

▪ **University of Western Macedonia - Department of Fine and Applied Arts**

They will provide special expertise and know-how for the design –content and criteria- of the Call, while they will have an advisory role within the action plan’s implementation monitoring.

Timeframe Timeframe (to be updated upon the final approval of the Action Plan by the Programme Structures)

Tasks	Start date	End date
TASK 1. Consultation with the potential beneficiaries aiming to the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument (Investment priority 6.c.). ³	October 2019	December 2019

³ The Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Macedonia intends to implement this task (Consultation with the potential beneficiaries aiming to the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument) in parallel with the open

TASK 2. Preparation of a detailed presentation for the Managing Authority, emphasizing on the needs expressed and the projects proposed by the potential beneficiaries within the consultation process, combining them with the lessons learnt through Castellum & CB Destination projects (rehabilitation of cultural monuments and spaces aiming to increase their tourist attractiveness). This is expected to be used as the basis for the design of the Call for Proposals by the Managing Authority.	January 2020	March 2020
TASK 3. Horizontal support of the process related to the Call's publication & proposals' submission	April 2020	June 2020
TASK 4. Horizontal monitoring and follow-up of the selected projects' (under the Call) implementation progress	September 2020	December 2021
TASK 5. Support of the potential beneficiaries to understand the indicators' calculation methodology and to report them properly at periodical basis.	January 2020	December 2021

Costs Funding sources

With regards to the tasks described above (Tasks 1 to 5) to be performed by the Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Macedonia, no additional budget will be required since the tasks will be performed by the RDF-RWM staff members within their regular working programme. For the reporting of the tasks progress, they will be further supported by a technical consultant within Epicah project budget for Phase 2 (already contracted).

In addition, the Call for Project Proposals described within Action 2 will be financed by the Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia. The total amount dedicated to the Action will be 1.000.000,00€ approximately.

8 Indicators

In order to assess the implementation of the action plan the following indicators are proposed:

consultation for the Regional Action Plan, aiming to attract the highest possible interest and participation by the local stakeholders and potential beneficiaries.

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Action	Type of Indicator	Indicator	Baseline	Target	Source
Action I	Output	No of Calls Issued	0	1	ROP
	Performance	No of Cultural or natural Sites with improved accessibility	0	2	ROP MIS
Action II	Output	No of Calls Issued	0	1	ROP
	Performance	No of Projects contracted that support events and/or Festivals	0	1	ROP MIS
	Result Indicators	T2011 Number of visitors in Cultural and Natural Resources of the region	200,000 (2011)	350,000 (2023)	Hellenic Statistical Authority/Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises
Common for Actions 1 & 2	Performance	Number of stakeholders & potential beneficiaries involved in the consultation phase (Task 1)	0	10	RDF/RWM

9 Risk Assessment Plan

Risk Impact	Probability of Occurrence	Risk Map	Risk Description	Project Impact	Risk Area	Symptoms	Triggers	Risk Response Strategy	Response Strategy	Contingency Plan
High	Low	Yellow	Not satisfying participation of potential beneficiaries in the consultation process for the identification, the prioritization and evaluation of the maturity of their proposals/ projects related to the policy instrument (I.P. 6.c.).	If the number of the potential beneficiaries that will participate in the consultation is limited, then the call to ToRs of the Calls to be issued may not meet the needs of the potential beneficiaries.	Action Plan Implementation.	Limited input by the potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders.	Feedback about the questionnaires collection progress will be provided every 15 days.	Mitigation	Intense publicity and promotion of the consultation process to attract more potential beneficiaries to participate.	Face-2-face meetings will potential beneficiaries and interviews with them.
Very High	Low	Yellow	Limited number of project proposals' submitted within the calls/ submission of irrelevant project proposals/ submission of non-mature project proposals.	In the case of this risk, no project proposals or limited project proposals will be submitted.	Action Plan Implementation.	Limited use of funds allocated by the ROP for the two actions.	Very attentive and insisting support of the potential beneficiaries by RDF/ RWM about their project proposals' preparation.	Accept	Provision of very precise information for the call requirements and disposal of an average time of 3 months from the launch of the Call to the project proposals' submission.	Support of Managing Authority of ROP to publish targeted calls.

10 Monitoring the Implementation of the Action Plan

Internal monitoring and evaluation is an important part of the implementation process of the Action Plan. Project monitoring and evaluation refer to the process of devising the necessary metrics that will allow the evaluation of several factors, including the team performance, task duration problems, etc.

Aspects of the internal monitoring and evaluation include:

- Are tasks being carried out as planned?
- Are there any unforeseen consequences that arise as a result of these tasks?
- How is the team performing at a given period of time?
- What are the elements of the tasks that need changing?
- What is the impact of these changes?
- Will these actions lead you to your expected results?

In particular, the following table summarizes the proposed internal monitoring and evaluation scheme.

Aspect	Monitoring points	Evidence
Implementation	Tasks completed Tasks in progress (% of completion) Expected completion date Status of activity (qualitative assessment) Output & Performance Indicators' achievement (see Paragraph 8 above)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action Plan Status Report (every 6 months) to be prepared by the Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Macedonia - Input from the Managing Authority of ROP of Western Macedonia - Questionnaires to be completed by stakeholders and potential beneficiaries/ final beneficiaries involved in the tasks performed by Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Macedonia within the implementation of the action plan.
Issues	Description of issue Impact to project implementation Action taken	
Risk	Probability of Occurrence Impact summary Proposed response	
Internal Communication	Responsiveness Clarity of communication Availability	
Cooperation & Support	Adequacy of Initial Information Support in queries and troubleshooting Commenting and Editing of deliverables	

11 Main conclusions & recommendations for the Managing Authority

The Regional Action Plan of Western Macedonia was developed through a participatory procedure involving numerous local stakeholders especially located in border areas of the Region, while the Managing Authority was also actively involved in all this process.

Improvement of accessibility (both physical and digital) in sites and monuments of cultural and natural interest was a need expressed unanimous from the very first LSG meetings, together with the need for improvement of cultural infrastructures/ structures supporting cultural events in the region.

To this extent, the regional action plan development resulted to the two actions proposed above consisted to the support of the MA for the preparation, publication and implementation of one single or two distinctive calls for project proposals as described in detail within actions' presentation.

Nevertheless, based on the main objective of Epicah project for the improvement of policy instruments towards the effective and efficient sustainable valorization of cross-border cultural and natural heritage, **it is recommended a further elaboration of the specific call/ calls' selection criteria focusing in particular on the location of the projects/ interventions to be implemented in border areas of the region.**

Mr Georgios Kasapidis

**President of the Regional Development Fund
of the Region of Western Macedonia**