



Action Plan for supporting rural retail SMEs towards survival, innovation and overall competitiveness in the Region of Western Macedonia

**Επίσημη δήλωση και δομή του
περιφερειακού σχεδίου δράσης**

Σχέδιο δράσης για την ΕΛΛΑΔΑ (SARURE)

Προτάσεις για ανάπτυξη λιανικού εμπορίου σε απομακρυσμένες περιοχές

Στο πλαίσιο του Ευρωπαϊκού Προγράμματος Interreg Europe 2014-2020 και στο Θέμα Ανταγωνιστικότητας των Μικρομεσαίων Επιχειρήσεων, στον Ειδικό Στόχο 2.1: Βελτιώνοντας τις πολιτικές ενίσχυσης της ανταγωνιστικότητας των Μικρομεσαίων Επιχειρήσεων εγκρίθηκε πρόταση με τίτλο **“Save Rural Retail”** με ακρωνύμιο **SARURE** και κωδικό PGI04926, με στόχο την επιβίωση, την ενίσχυση και την καινοτομία των επιχειρήσεων λιανικής σε απομακρυσμένες από τα αστικά κέντρα περιοχές.

Στο έργο συμμετέχουν η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας και το Πανεπιστήμιο Δυτικής Μακεδονίας.

Βασικό αντικείμενο του έργου είναι η εκπόνηση και υλοποίηση σχεδίου δράσης για την ανάπτυξη του λιανικού εμπορίου στις απομακρυσμένες περιοχές της Περιφέρειας Δυτικής Μακεδονίας. Το σχέδιο δράσης καλείται να αξιοποιήσει και να διαμορφώσει τα χρηματοδοτικά εργαλεία της Περιφέρειας προκειμένου να υλοποιηθούν δράσεις που συμβάλουν στην προώθηση και ανάπτυξη του λιανικού εμπορίου στις απομακρυσμένες περιοχές της Περιφέρειας Δυτικής Μακεδονίας.

Η Περιφέρεια και το Πανεπιστήμιο αναγνωρίζουν την προστιθέμενη αξία του έργου SARURE για την ανάπτυξη της περιοχής, καθώς και τη συμβολή του στο Περιφερειακό Επιχειρησιακό Πρόγραμμα 2014 -2020 στον άξονα 3 του τρέχοντος ΠΕΠ Δυτικής Μακεδονίας 2014-2020 και στο υπό διαμόρφωση ΠΕΠ 2021-2027.

Κατά τη διάρκεια της 1^{ης} φάσης υλοποίησης του έργου SARURE, οι δύο φορείς, συμμετείχαν σε διαπεριφερειακές συναντήσεις ανταλλαγής καλών πρακτικών μεταξύ των εταίρων του έργου, έχουν διενεργήσει χαρτογράφηση της κατάστασης του λιανικού εμπορίου σε πιλοτικές περιοχές της περιφέρειας και συμμετείχαν σε εκτενείς συζητήσεις με φορείς και επιχειρήσεις που σχετίζονται με το λιανικό εμπόριο.

Σε συνέχεια όλων αυτών των δράσεων και μεταφέροντας τεχνογνωσία από άλλες περιοχές η Περιφέρεια, το Πανεπιστήμιο και η Διαχειριστική Αρχή του ΠΕΠ Δυτικής Μακεδονίας συναποφάσισαν να εντάξουν τις ακόλουθες τέσσερις (4) δράσεις στο ειδικό επιχειρησιακό σχέδιο για την ανάπτυξη του Λιανικού Εμπορίου, ώστε να παρακολουθήσουν την πορεία υλοποίησή τους κατά τη δεύτερη φάση του προγράμματος SARURE.

Δράση 1η. Μηχανισμός διάγνωσης επιχειρησιακών αναγκών των Επιχειρήσεων

Στην Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας, είναι μεγάλο ζητούμενο η αναγκαιότητα της διάγνωσης, μέσω διερεύνησης και καταγραφής των αναγκών των επιχειρήσεων των αγροτικών περιοχών.

Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας καλείται, από τον θεσμικό της ρόλο, να εντοπίζει και αντιμετωπίζει προβλήματα που επηρεάζουν την επιχειρηματικότητα. Ο ρόλος αυτός αποκτά μεγαλύτερη βαρύτητα την τρέχουσα περίοδο, καθώς η προβλεπόμενη απολιγνιτοποίηση απαιτεί άμεσα τον οικονομικό μετασχηματισμό ώστε να γίνει γρήγορη και ομαλή προσαρμογή όλων των οικονομικών δραστηριοτήτων στις νέες συνθήκες. Σε συνεργασία λοιπόν με το Πανεπιστήμιο Δυτικής Μακεδονίας, στοχεύει να προχωρήσει στο σχεδιασμό και τη λειτουργία ενός Μηχανισμού διάγνωσης των αναγκών των επιχειρήσεων. Ο μηχανισμός διάγνωσης έχει εμπνευστεί από την εφαρμογή ανάλογης δράσης στην περιοχή του Σλίγκο στην Ιρλανδία. Οι Ιρλανδοί έχουν αναπτύξει δράση υποστήριξης του λιανικού εμπορίου μέσω στοχευμένων επιχειρησιακών διαγνώσεων και ελέγχων και σε 2ο στάδιο στοχευμένων χρηματοδοτήσεων με βάση τις διαγνωστικές εκθέσεις.

Η στόχευση αφορά στη δημιουργία ενός μηχανισμού που μέσα από μια δυναμική διαδικασία εξέτασης του τρόπου λειτουργίας των επιχειρήσεων, θα εντοπίζει και θα προτείνει τρόπους επίλυσης των προβλημάτων ώστε να υπάρξει βελτίωση του τρόπου λειτουργίας και του κέρδους τους. Ο Μηχανισμός πρέπει να είναι ενεργός ώστε να αναπτύσσει τη διαδικασία συλλογής και επεξεργασίας των σχετικών δεδομένων και να προτείνει άμεσες λύσεις για τεχνολογικές και οικονομικές παρεμβάσεις/ενισχύσεις. Σε αυτή τη διαδικασία, ο ρόλος της ομάδας των εμπειρογνομόνων της ακαδημαϊκής και επιχειρηματικής κοινότητας είναι απόλυτα αναγκαίος.

Ο επιχειρησιακός έλεγχος, είναι μια μέθοδος έρευνας που στοχεύει στην αξιολόγηση της επιχειρηματικής ικανότητας, των διαδικασιών, των αναγκών μιας μικρομεσαίας επιχείρησης (ΜΜΕ). Επιπλέον, είναι μια μέθοδος διερεύνησης των ισχυρών και αδύναμων σημείων μέσω του προσδιορισμού και της γενικής αξιολόγησης της τεχνογνωσίας της επιχείρησης (μάρκετινγκ, διαχείριση, χρηματοδότηση, ανθρώπινοι πόροι κ.λπ.). Είναι μια διαδικασία ανάλυσης που οδηγεί σε συγκεκριμένες προτάσεις. Μέσω του επιχειρησιακού ελέγχου της επιχείρησης, εξάγονται τα συμπεράσματα σε στενή συνεργασία με τη διεύθυνση και το προσωπικό της επιχείρησης στη βάση της αλληλουχίας των σταδίων της συλλογής των δεδομένων, της ανάλυσης τους, της σύνθεσης τους και τελικά της εκπόνησης μιας τελικής έκθεσης.

Μια γενική δομή του Μηχανισμού για τη διάγνωση των επιχειρηματικών αναγκών αποτελείται από:

- Τη συλλογή των βασικών πληροφοριών της επιχείρησης, του τομέα, των διασυνδέσεων της με τις άλλες εταιρείες.
- Μια γενική πρώτη διάγνωση μέσω της συλλογής των δεδομένων και της ανάλυσης και μια σύντομη παρουσίαση στους επικεφαλής των επιχειρήσεων, διατηρώντας στενή επικοινωνία μαζί τους.
- Την περαιτέρω συλλογή πληροφοριών αναλύοντας περισσότερα από τα επιλεγμένα θέματα που πρέπει να εξεταστούν (εργασίες παραγωγής, θέματα ενδιαφέροντος, ανθρώπινοι πόροι, μάρκετινγκ /πωλήσεις).
- Την διαμόρφωση και παρουσίαση της έκθεσης στους επικεφαλής της επιχείρησης και η οριστικοποίηση των συμπερασμάτων.
- Την οριστικοποίηση του σχεδίου δράσης της επιχείρησης.

Η δράση 1 θα υλοποιηθεί παράλληλα με τη δράση 4. Ο σχεδιασμός των διαγνώσεων να γίνει από τη δράση 4 (κριτήρια, προτεραιότητες), τα δε αποτελέσματα των διαγνώσεων θα αξιοποιηθούν στη διαμόρφωση του ΠΕΠ 2021-2027.

Δράση 2η. Προώθηση δικτύωσης επιχειρήσεων λιανικού εμπορίου που δραστηριοποιούνται σε αγροτικές περιοχές

Η δικτύωση, ομοειδών και μη, Μικρομεσαίων επιχειρήσεων (ΜΜΕ) λιανικού εμπορίου σε αγροτικές περιοχές, ώστε να δημιουργηθεί ένας ισχυρός δεσμός και σύνδεση που θα διασφαλίσει την καλύτερη λειτουργία τους αποτελεί μεγάλη πρόκληση για την Περιφέρεια, καθώς η δικτύωση αυτή θα συμβάλει στην περιφερειακή ανάπτυξη λόγω του θετικού αντίκτυπου των συνεργιών και των κοινών δράσεων που θα αναπτυχθούν από τα μέλη των δικτύων. Η δικτύωση είναι μια κοινωνικοοικονομική επιχειρηματική δραστηριότητα κατά την οποία οι επιχειρηματίες συναντιούνται προκειμένου να σχηματίσουν επιχειρηματικές σχέσεις και να αναγνωρίσουν, να δημιουργήσουν ή να λειτουργήσουν με τη συνδρομή επιχειρηματικών ευκαιριών, να μοιραστούν τις σχετικές πληροφορίες και να αναζητήσουν δυνητικούς συνεργάτες για τις επιχειρήσεις τους.

Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τις καλές πρακτικές δικτύωσης της Πολωνίας (Wimlandia) αλλά της πλατφόρμας δικτύωσης του Tegucl της Ισπανίας καθώς τις ομοιότητες των προκλήσεων που πολλές από τις επιχειρήσεις μας στις αγροτικές περιοχές αντιμετωπίζουν στις προσπάθειές τους για δικτύωση, αναγνωρίζουμε τη μεγάλη σημασία που αυτή έχει για την επίτευξη της επιχειρηματικής οργάνωσης σε όλο τον κόσμο.

Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας στοχεύει στην υποστήριξη του προφίλ και της κατάστασης των τοπικών επιχειρήσεων, αυξάνοντας την αφοσίωση τους στο εμπορικό σήμα της περιοχής, την προώθηση της σημασίας της αγοράς των τοπικών προϊόντων από τοπικούς

καταναλωτές, την ανάπτυξη της συνεργασίας μεταξύ των τοπικών επιχειρήσεων και την προώθηση των επιχειρήσεων στις αγροτικές περιοχές μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και των μέσων επικοινωνίας.

Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας και το Πανεπιστήμιο της, επιθυμούν να δώσουν μεγάλη έμφαση στην ενίσχυση της επιχειρηματικής δικτύωσης της επιχειρηματικότητας στις αγροτικές περιοχές και της προώθησης της παραγωγής του «τοπικού προϊόντος» ξεκινώντας τα εξής:

- Μέτρα για τη δημιουργία αποτελεσματικών ομάδων δικτύωσης της Περιφέρειας
- Επιχειρησιακά διαδραστικά σεμινάρια όπου θα αναπτυχθούν νέες εργασιακές σχέσεις (ή δικτύωση) με άλλους συνεργάτες και στη συνέχεια με τακτική μεταξύ τους επικοινωνία.
- Οργάνωση εκδηλώσεων όπως είναι οι επιχειρηματικές συναντήσεις και οι εκδηλώσεις με επιτυχημένους επιχειρηματίες του κλάδου ως βασικούς ομιλητές.
- Παροχή κουπονιών πώλησης λιανικού εμπορίου τοπικής εμβέλειας
- Προώθηση επιτυχημένων παραδειγμάτων συνεργασίας όπως των ανοιχτών αγορών (openMalls) και των ενοποιημένων τοπικών αγορών των κωμοπόλεων.

Δράση 3η. Ενημέρωση των αγροτικών λιανικών ΜΜΕ σχετικά με τους πόρους χρηματοδότησης

Ένα σημαντικό ζήτημα που καλείται να αντιμετωπίσει η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας και αφορά τις ΜΜΕ, είναι η αδυναμία ενημέρωσης των επιχειρηματιών του λιανικού εμπορίου, σχετικά με τα διαθέσιμα χρηματοδοτικά εργαλεία και για τον τρόπο που μπορούν να χρησιμοποιηθούν για την προώθηση/ανάπτυξη της επιχείρησης.

Το παράδειγμα της καλής πρακτικής της Φινλανδίας είναι χρήσιμο για την Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας, καθώς αφορά βελτιωμένη επικοινωνία για τις δυνατότητες χρηματοδότησης των ΜΜΕ. Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας στοχεύει στη βελτίωση της του τρόπου προώθησης των δυνατοτήτων χρηματοδότησης, στην ενθάρρυνση των επιχειρήσεων στις αγροτικές περιοχές να υποβάλουν αίτηση χρηματοδότησης, στην ενθάρρυνση της εξοικείωσης με τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και με τα ψηφιακά μέσα, σε σεμινάρια κατάρτισης και εργαστήρια ή ακόμη και διοργάνωση επισκέψεων των εμπειρογνομόνων και των στενών τους επαφών στις επιχειρήσεις.

Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας σε συνεργασία με το Πανεπιστήμιο της Δυτικής Μακεδονίας και τους εμπλεκόμενους φορείς, στοχεύει σε ένα δυναμικό σύστημα ενημέρωσης της κάθε επιχείρησης για τις πιθανές ευκαιρίες χρηματοδότησης με την επίσκεψη και με στενή συζήτηση σχετικά με την αναζήτηση οικονομικής ενίσχυσης και δέσμευση της επιχείρησης στους στόχους που τίθενται.

Τα βήματα λοιπόν είναι:

- Η προπαρασκευαστική εργασία από τους ειδικούς εμπειρογνώμονες για τη συλλογή των βασικών πληροφοριών σχετικά με τον τομέα της επιχείρησης και την ανάλογη χρήση αυτών σε πλατφόρμα συνδεδεμένη με όλες τις σχετικές περιφερειακές / τοπικές διαδικτυακές πλατφόρμες.
- Μια σύντομη συνέντευξη βασισμένη σε σύντομο ερωτηματολόγιο το οποίο στοχεύει στον εντοπισμό των ζητημάτων της χρηματοδότησης και της διερεύνησής τους.
- Μια λεπτομερής συζήτηση σχετικά με τις διαδικασίες και τα οφέλη από τις πιθανές διαθέσιμες πηγές χρηματοδότησης στην Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας με την αντιστοίχιση του επιδιωκόμενου στόχου της επιχείρησης ως προς αυτές. Παράλληλα, πραγματοποιείται παρουσίαση και ενημέρωση όλων των περιφερειακών / εθνικών χρηματοοικονομικών οργανισμών, των σχετικών πολιτικών και των προγραμμάτων έρευνας και ανάπτυξης.
- Η εκπόνηση τελικών εκθέσεων για κάθε επιχείρηση που λαμβάνει μέρος στη συγκεκριμένη διαδικασία.

Δράση 4η. Ανάλυση του πλαισίου ανάπτυξης λιανικού εμπορίου των αγροτικών περιοχών

Η εκπόνηση Ολοκληρωμένης Χωρικής Επένδυσης (ΟΧΕ) στις αγροτικές και ορεινές περιοχές της Περιφέρειας Δυτικής Μακεδονίας αποτελεί ένα πρότυπο χωρικής ανάπτυξης που ωφελεί τις αγροτικές περιοχές.

Κάθε Ολοκληρωμένη Χωρική Επένδυση είναι οργανωμένη σε 2 επίπεδα που περιλαμβάνουν περιοχές παρέμβασης, καθώς και ένα δίκτυο διασυνδεδεμένων τέτοιων περιοχών. Σε όλα αυτά η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας σχεδιάζει και υλοποιεί οριζόντιες δράσεις, καθώς και δράσεις που αναφέρονται σε καθεμία από αυτές.

Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας, η Διαχειριστική Αρχή των Περιφερειακών Επιχειρησιακών Προγραμμάτων Δυτικής Μακεδονίας 2014 - 2020 και 2021 – 2027 και το Πανεπιστήμιο Δυτικής Μακεδονίας θα σχεδιάσουν και θα πραγματοποιήσουν την ανάλυση, ώστε να αξιοποιηθεί για το σχεδιασμό και τη χρηματοδότηση συγκεκριμένων δράσεων χωρικής παρέμβασης που θα ωφελήσουν το λιανικό εμπόριο στις αγροτικές περιοχές.

Έτσι, θα διεξαχθεί μια λεπτομερής ανάλυση του πλαισίου βιώσιμης ανάπτυξης του λιανικού εμπορίου στις αγροτικές και ορεινές περιοχές, για ι) τον καθορισμό και τη συσχέτιση των βασικών παραμέτρων που επηρεάζουν την αιχμόρο ανάπτυξη της υπαίθρου και ιι) τη χρήση όλων των διαθέσιμων εργαλείων και την αξιοποίηση των αυξημένων πόρων που έχουν συμφωνηθεί (σε εθνικό και ευρωπαϊκό επίπεδο) στην Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας (Πράσινο Ταμείο, Ταμείο για δίκαιη μετάβαση στην μεταλιγνιτική εποχή, Περιφερειακό Επιχειρησιακό Πρόγραμμα 2021-2027 κ.λπ.).

Στην παρούσα δράση θα συμπεριληφθούν τα κριτήρια διάγνωσης που θα χρησιμοποιηθούν στη δράση 1, πρακτικά συναντήσεων κατά τις επιτόπιες επισκέψεις και έντυπα εκδήλωσης ενδιαφέροντος από τους επιχειρηματίες/κατοίκους των αγροτικών/ορεινών περιοχών καθώς και σχέδιο επικοινωνίας/Διαφοροποιημένα κανάλια επικοινωνίας όπου θα συνδεθούν με τη δράση 3.

Η δράση 1 θα υλοποιηθεί παράλληλα με τη δράση 4 ώστε ο σχεδιασμός των διαγνώσεων να γίνει από τη δράση 4 (κριτήρια, προτεραιότητες) και τα αποτελέσματα των διαγνώσεων της δράσης 1 να χρησιμοποιηθούν για τη διαμόρφωση προτεραιοτήτων/πολιτικών που θα προταθούν για το ΠΕΠ 2021-2027.

Η Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας έχοντας λάβει γνώση των παραπάνω, εκφράζει την βούλησή της ως προς την υλοποίηση των προαναφερόμενων δράσεων, και την εξασφάλιση της απαιτούμενης αντιστοίχισης στο πλαίσιο των συνολικών περιφερειακών δράσεων ώστε να υπάρξει ουσιαστική συμβολή στους στόχους της οικονομικής και κοινωνικής ανάπτυξης στην Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας και πολλαπλασιαστικά αποτελέσματα.

Επίσημα εκφράζουμε τη σύμφωνη γνώμη και δέσμευσή μας ως προς την εφαρμογή των προαναφερόμενων αυτών δράσεων, στο πλαίσιο του Περιφερειακού Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος Δυτική Μακεδονία 2014-2020, και συγκεκριμένα στον Άξονα προτεραιότητας 3, που αφορά στη βελτίωση της ανταγωνιστικότητας των ΜΜΕ, καθώς και του περιφερειακού επιχειρησιακού προγράμματος Δυτικής Μακεδονίας 2021 - 2027 σύμφωνα με το εγκεκριμένο Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης.

1^{ος} Φορέας:

Περιφέρεια Δυτικής Μακεδονίας _____

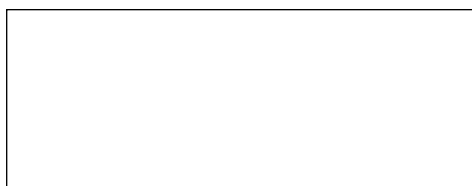
Εκπρόσωπος φορέα:

Ο Περιφερειάρχης Δυτικής Μακεδονίας, Γεώργιος Κασαπίδης

Υπογραφή: _____

Ημερομηνία: _____

Επίσημη σφραγίδα Περιφέρειας Δυτικής Μακεδονίας



2^{ος} Φορέας:

Πανεπιστήμιο Δυτικής Μακεδονίας _____

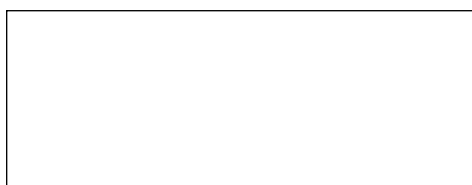
Εκπρόσωπος φορέα:

Ο Αντιπρύτανης Έρευνας και Δια Βίου Εκπαίδευσης κ. Στέργιος Μαρόπουλος

Υπογραφή: _____

Ημερομηνία: _____

Επίσημη σφραγίδα Πανεπιστημίου Δυτικής Μακεδονίας



WESTERN MACEDONIA ACTION PLAN FOR RURAL RETAIL

Contents

Introduction	10
Part I – General Information- Project background	11
1.European context:	11
2.SARURE Context:.....	13
3.Rural Retail and Region of Western Macedonia:.....	13
3.1 Concept of Rurality	13
3.2 Region of Western Macedonia in context	14
3.3 Swot Analysis of the Rural Environment.....	16
4 Conclusions	18
Part II – Policy Context	19
Part III - Actions in detail.....	21
Action 1 Business Needs Diagnoses Mechanism	21
Actions	21
Players Involved	22
Timeframe.....	22
Costs and funding sources	22
Action 2Promoting Rural Retail Businesses Networking	24
The Background	24
The Actions.....	24
The Players Involved	25
The Timeframe.....	25
The Costs and the funding sources.....	25
Action 3 Informing Rural Retail SMEs on Funding Resources.....	26
Background	26
Action	26
The Players Involved	27
Timeframe.....	27
Costs and the funding sources.....	28
Action 4: Analysis of Rural Areas Retail Development Framework.....	29
Background	29
Action	30

Players Involved	31
4. Timeframe.....	32
Costs and funding sources	33

Introduction

This document represents the action plan created from the Region of Western Macedonia in accordance with the subscription of University of Western Macedonia for the specific aims under the SARURE project. The project aims to analyse, initiate and implement policies favouring rural retail and to improve the partners' regional policies in force supporting retail Small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and Voluntary community and social enterprises (VSEs) towards survival, innovation and overall competitiveness. Through interregional policy learning, the most appropriate policies are transferred to rural areas, regions and partners' countries and implemented subsequently.

The action plan provides details on how the lessons learnt from the interregional cooperation come to fruition and will be implemented to improve the policy instrument tackled, the *Regional Operational Programme Western Macedonia 2014-2020. Priority Axis 3: Improvement of SMEs' competitiveness, as well as the Regional Operational Programme Western Macedonia 2021 – 2027 in the similar Priority Axis (currently under approval)*. The action plan describes the activities the partners and stakeholders wish to implement during the second phase of the project SARURE, in order to bring into life what they learnt from all the previous collaborative phase. The document specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented namely its link to the project, the description, their timeframe, the stakeholders involved, the costs and funding sources.

This action plan is a result of numerous activities between the project partners and their stakeholders. In order to develop the action plan, a lot of emphasis was placed on the interregional cooperation and exchange of experiences. The exchange of experiences was conducted via numerous activities: from mapping analyses which helped each partner country to measure key conditions before a project and provided a clear starting point to benchmark progress; questionnaires between project partners' stakeholders; study visits and stakeholders meetings; good practice selection; analyses of different regions as a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats); and intense discussions during local, regional, national and international events. If we want to summarize and bring forth the results of the mapping analysis of the first phase for the Region of Western Macedonia, it is that there is absolute need for a **special development framework for rural areas that will study the complex economic and social environment, provide a holistic view and a guide for focused interventions that will create synergies with other initiatives/ players**. Isolated efforts are not able to change the situation and provide solutions for short time periods with limited benefits. Therefore, we must look in Best Practices also for successful models of rural areas development Europe wide, besides the best practices of successful local examples.

The document is split into the following parts taking into consideration the Interreg Europe Action Plan Template:

- Part I – General information (contact and background information about Action Plan’s developers and project scope)
- Part II – Policy context (details about the policy instrument, state of the art and progress)
- Part III – Actions in detail (detailed information about actions, their relevance to the project, planned activities, stakeholders involved, timeframe, costs and funding sources, as well as indicators and sources of verification).

Part I – General Information- Project background

This section includes general information about the developers of this Action Plan and their contacts. Furthermore, it presents SARURE project in detail, both of which are important to understand the context of the proposed actions.

Project: SARURE

Partner organisations: Regional Authority of Western Macedonia and University of Western Macedonia

Country: Greece

NUTS2 Region: Region of Western Macedonia

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1. European context:

Local shops supply the population, are a social hub in rural areas and contribute to the quality of local life, encourage the population to stay and are a prerequisite for the development of other diversification activities. In addition, the role of Small and medium size enterprises(SMEs) and Voluntary community and social enterprises(VSEs)in terms of employment is very significant in demographically fragile rural areas. Retail shops provide basic services in sparsely populated areas; therefore, their existence is essential. Small villages need shops to survive but small rural shops need also a minimum number of customers to survive. When depopulation started to affect severely some European regions, different schemes to support rural retail appeared around the year 2000. It was the case of Rural Multiservice Shops in Aragon (Spain) but also for different attempts and formulas in many other European countries, many northern and western countries but not exclusively.

Even if these initiatives have undoubtedly contributed to cope with the situation in the past decade, the decline of retail in rural regions of Europe continues until today. Rural businesses face significant challenges in the marketplace leading to their unfeasibility and to dramatic consequences in terms of social and territorial cohesion. SARURE partnership intends not only to exchange on the models essayed during the past decade but also to open the possibilities for the new markets, the new mix of services, the new financing options and the new technologies to retail SMEs today. 99% of the SMEs in the retail sector in partner rural areas are indeed micro SMEs especially vulnerable to crisis and with many barriers to innovation. COVID19 worsen the situation due to limitations in flows of tourists, which are a primary source of income for many rural areas. In this context, the final aim of the project is to improve the partners' regional policies in force supporting retail SMEs towards survival, innovation and overall competitiveness.

However, since a big discussion is ongoing on rural areas in Europe focusing on the following points:

- European Commission and states will support the expansion of 5G networks to rural areas, since private companies that offer them are reluctant to invest much in that direction. The scope of such intervention is to ensure a quality of life in rural areas (within let us say 2 hours by car from big cities) that will allow people living and working there.
- There will be initiatives –following Germany's and Ireland's examples- to organize joint workplaces in rural areas where people working in different employers will work from there (joint working stations) and go to cities when necessary. That means that new services must be available to rural areas for working population, as well as for elderly and retired people. In addition, industrial activities can be located in rural areas (near transport networks) and not in the cities since technological advancements allow it.
- It seems that there is a thought especially from Germany and France, but also Spain (in the borders with France) to establish special economic zones near the borders that could attract investments, and therefore infrastructures and services will be provided. In that way rural area nearby will be revitalized.
- The previous point make clear the importance of accessibility and mobility for rural areas, New investments and interventions must be guided by the vision for rural areas and the support initiatives our societies / regions choose to implement there.
- There is a clear direction towards Integrated Local Development Plans of Rural Areas, in the sense that the new needed interaction between urban – rural areas must be acknowledged by the Policy makers in order to form a balanced development model.
- Innovation will play an important role for transforming rural areas and make them more attractive for working/living/ investing. The concept of “smart village” seems to be the future for rural areas.

2. SARURE Context:

The project "Save Rural Retail" with the acronym SARURE is implemented within the European Program Interreg Europe 2014-2020. The project involves partners from different parts of Europe (Spain, Ireland, Germany, Finland, Poland and Sweden). The duration of the project is 54 months (4.5 years) starting on July 1, 2018 and ending on December 31, 2022 with a total budget of €1,618,497.00. The SARURE project aims at the exchange of know-how and models that have already been successfully tested, but also at the exploitation of the possibilities presented by the market and the digital economy, the creation of new compositions of services offered, the utilization of the available financial tools and technologies.

In this context, the main goal of the project is to improve the regional policies that support SMEs in terms of their survival, innovation and overall competitiveness. The Interreg Europe initiative was chosen for the implementation of this project so that there is pan-European cooperation. The proposed actions of the program will take place in different remote areas of the Region of Western Macedonia with different conditions and problems regarding businesses in the retail sector.

3. Rural Retail and Region of Western Macedonia:

3.1 Concept of Rurality

Definition of rural areas is linked with one of the urban ones that contain population size and functionalities. For statistical purposes, rural areas and rural population are defined with criteria such as demographic density and population size. Employment in primary sector is not used as a criterion neither in Greece nor by international organizations. OECD (1994) definition defines three types of areas depending on values of rural density:

1. «Mainly rural» when over 50% of population lives in rural communities
2. «Rural» when percentage of population living in rural communities is between 15 and 50% and
3. «Mainly urban», where less of 15% of population can be considered living in rural communities

There are some typologies on rurality as defined by European Commission and other international organizations:

European Commission offered the first typology in 1988 in the study for "Future of Rural World", when it was clear that over 80% of European territory was rural based on the criteria of population density. Therefore, by the new typology, rural areas include small cities that are the centres of rural areas. The definition is such that includes urban rural areas interactions and interdependences, protection of environment and a series of issues that call for a holistic yet focused intervention.

We can distinguish between:

1. Rural areas in proximity with big cities
2. Declining rural areas (especially around Mediterranean) that face problems of development and economic differentiation
3. Isolated and difficult to reach areas where primary sector declines, there are lands abandoned or deserted and the economy differentiation is an extreme challenge.

In all cases, definitions and typologies proposed have purpose to formulate rural development policies. Different proposals for rural development are proposed for each type of rural areas. Protection of environment in the 1st case, economic differentiation on 2nd one and demographic stabilization policies in the 3rd one with the analogous combinations in all cases.

3.2 Region of Western Macedonia in context

The Region of Western Macedonia is a territorial unit with a population of 282,120 inhabitants (2.5% of the country) consisting of four Regional Units: Kozani, Grevena, Kastoria and Florina. The Region of Western Macedonia is located in the north-western part of Greece and borders with Albania and North Macedonia. Finally, it is the region with the highest unemployment rate in Greece. Regarding the demographic data of the Region of Western Macedonia, according to the 2015-2019 (Strategic Planning) Operational Program, since the last census of 2011 it is concluded that the main demographic trend is population aging and shrinking. The Region of Western Macedonia population is the third smallest figure after the Ionian islands and the islands of the North Aegean and is concentrated by 50% in the Regional Unit of Kozani, while higher rates are found in non-productive age groups (aging population) and small percentages in the most productive ages groups.

Another important element is the distribution of the population to the level of education. According to the same study, the Region of Western Macedonia lags behind the question of the level of education of the population in relation to the data on a national level. Also, because of the current situation, there is a special reason for employment, ranking the first time on unemployment rate, according to Eurostat. Specifically, in 2015, the rate reached 30.7%, with 18% in the North Aegean (Unemployment rate by NUTS 2 regions, EUROSTAT). All these elements combined with the expected decrease in the population force, which is a generalized phenomenon and due to the increasing immigration outflow, make the need to enhance employability, entrepreneurship and thus the regional development of the Region. On the other hand, the key role of the Region of Western Macedonia, as the gateway of Greece and the EU in the Western Balkans, strengthens its formation in a single Balkan area of cooperation and development and, more generally, its communication, energy and business position. Strengthening co-operation and exchanges with the Balkan region, highlight the new environment as an important option for the region's development perspective, while new dynamics are being developed in trade, investment and business networks.

Regarding the basic characteristics of the Region by sector of economic activity, the Region's productive model has traditionally been characterized by the emphasis on the primary sector and the exploitation of some of its natural advantages, and over time has evolved into the development of powerful mono-activities (such as circuits lignite-energy and fur), with spatial specificities of economic activity in specific enclaves (RIS3 2014-2020).

According to the most recent study on the competitiveness of EU regions, in all 262 EU-27 regions, the Region of Western Macedonia, like all Greek regions, is particularly low in all indicators (with the exception of the Attica Region).

More specifically, based on our competitiveness indicators, we have:

- In the main pillars, the Region of Western Macedonia is placed very low in the quality of the institutions (last rank in the Greek regions along with the regions of Central Macedonia and Thessaly) and infrastructure in 6th place out of the 13 Greek Regions.
- In the health index, almost all of the Greek regions are in a better position to rank at the European level, with Region of Western Macedonia being at 4th place on the level of Greece.
- In the efficacy pillars, in the indicator for higher education and lifelong learning, Region of Western Macedonia stands at 9th place out of 13, 10th in labour market efficiency and 6th in market size. In all three indicators of the efficiency pillar, Greek regions are very low in the ranking of European regions.
- In the innovation pillars and the technological readiness index, the Region of Western Macedonia is in 5th place with the Regions of Macedonia - Thrace, Central Macedonia, Thessaly and Epirus, while in the innovation index it is in 6th place.
- It is remarkable that the position of the Region of Western Macedonia in the business culture index, which occupies the last position in the Greek regions and two positions before the end in the European regions (260th place out of the 262 regions).
- In the sub-class indexes, the Region of Western Macedonia is in the last positions of the European regions while in the Greek regions it is 8th in the main pillars, 13th in the pillars of efficiency and 12th in the pillars of innovation.

The Region of Western Macedonia is ranked low in relation to the European averages in all indicators related to ICT, both at the level of public services to the citizen and at the level of enterprises. Greece, compared to the rest of the Member States, continues to be low on all Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2012 indicators. Of the few indicators available, it seems that the 2011 RWM is lagging considerably in relation to the European average of frequent use of the Internet (44%, EU27 68%) and online shopping (15%, EU27 45%). Despite the rapid growth in both categories in the last 2 years (to 54%, and 23% in 2013 respectively) the deviation from the European average remains.

The innovative image of the Region of Western Macedonia is reflected in the Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2016. Specifically, the RWM belongs to the third innovation class, moderate innovation, while its innovative performance declined significantly (-12%) compared to the last two years.

3.3 Swot Analysis of the Rural Environment

SWOT analysis as presented below is a synthesis derived from various reports regarding development challenges faced and steps to be made by the Region of Western Macedonia in the years to come:

STRENGTHS

Agro food sector of high quality that can support businesses in the secondary sector (process of primary products) and develop and provide focused high added value products and services addressing clients of high income and influence.

Presence of tourism resources, natural ecosystems and cultural monuments that can be combined in development plans and activities

Large University of Western Macedonia with many related to rural areas development activities.

WEAKNESSES

Main entrepreneurial activities and investments are located in limited areas of the region.

ICT, research and innovation are not spread among businesses in rural areas (and the whole region).

Low expresses interest in entrepreneurship.

Very small enterprises with lack of modern perception on management and new technologies. Absence of skilled personnel.

Entrepreneurship support structures do not effectively interact with businesses.

Very few businesses use website, software for e-commerce or e-learning.

Limited differentiation of economic activities / limited connection with University.

Rural areas transportation network and connections are limited and do not serve needs.

Logistic centres and combined transportation networks are absent.

High percentage of unemployment in rural areas due to complex reasoning that is not addresses and leads to depopulation.

Absence of social services and infrastructures in rural areas as well as ICT systems that would allow on line provision of services to people in rural areas.

Absence of regional system to regularly evaluate needs of rural areas and plan focused interventions

OPPORTUNITIES

Exploitation of post coal era for the Region of Western Macedonia to reorient productive activities in the direction of rural areas revitalization.

Establishment of a certification structure for agro food sector products in the Region of Western Macedonia.

Combination of natural beauties, cultural monuments with tourism and local market strengthening activities.

Elaboration of a focused training / employment enforcement programme based on special / specific characteristics of rural areas.

Reinforcement of structures and services in small towns that are centres of rural areas, including social services.

Efforts to link training / skills needs in businesses with offered education / training lessons/ courses in University of Western Macedonia.

Trends of young population returning to rural areas to work on tourism and agro food sectors due to economic crises.

THREATS

- Inability to improve entrepreneurship support framework due to limited potential to introduce research, innovation and ICT.
- Deep recession and long duration of economic crises makes any effort to improve the situation difficult to succeed.
- No direct foreign investment in the region / financing of entrepreneurship is very low.
- Slow progress on improvements of transportation and logistics network.
- Brain drain of skilful people to big Greek cities and abroad.
- Absence of knowledge, skills and experience among rural areas work force.
- Complex framework to open / launch businesses.
- Increase of unemployment due to decarbonisation of the region

Rural areas (can) receive funds from many sources; therefore, efforts to promote the concept of “smart rurality” should be integrated. Digitalization, innovation and bottom up consultation approach will play a vital role.

Following the previously mentioned outcomes that frame the discussion on rural areas development, Region and University of Western Macedonia propose activities that follow this bottom up approach and at the same time take into consideration the fact that many parameters shape the future of Rural Retail. This is the logic that shapes the selection of activities to be included in the Action Plan.

4 Conclusions

A disproportion between young population and middle-aged or elderly population exists in rural areas, which creates difficulties in opening new businesses or in succession of the existing ones (The challenge of next business generation). The deep economic crises in Greece and its long duration (over 10 years) has created an unfriendly environment for entrepreneurs (existing or potential) and the new investments must find a foreign company / partner in order to have chances in the international markets (in most cases). The incentives and opportunities on have young people return to rural areas –from the big cities- to open businesses in the agro-food sector, where not as positive as most people believed and the hidden difficulties (need for high initial capital, bureaucracy, absence of Greek state support, high taxation etc) left very few successful examples that could not change the employment / development situation in rural areas.

There is not a diversity of activities and businesses in rural areas that could potentially attract investments or entrepreneurial opportunities (i.e. tourism is not well developed in combination with agro food sector to seek for extra clients / new markets). In addition, there is absence of young workers in rural areas with willingness to work and learn even when offered working conditions are much better than the usual ones offered by businesses. It seems that rural areas –with few exceptions- follow the trend noticed in whole Greek economy / society: the absence of a culture to work and learn by young people that prefer either to try become public servants (very difficult with the crises) or do some black-market jobs that in combination with economic support from home (difficult also) and some state benefits will allow them not to actually work.

From the side of retailers, the situation so far does not look promising for an improved future unless interventions will be made in rural areas by regional authorities in a rural areas development framework (meaning: infrastructures / incentives to attract investments, joint sectors initiatives, cooperation with neighbouring regions etc). Technology is not being used to its fullest potential for the enhancement of the retail sector. It is a new business model that retailers are not used to and there is no support in technology use by chambers of commerce, development agencies and other supportive agencies.

Tax reliefs, promotional campaigns and governmental aid are among the important factors for the boosting of the retail in these areas. Consumers/inhabitants do prefer to support their local economy and try to make use of all the available services if they have access to what they need nearby. Especially, remoter places they wanted more access to services like information technology but also food supplies accessibility and commodities such as clothes. These reflect the essentials that a consumer wants and does not reflect the holistic market needs and the full potentials of the local economy. Also, consumers will choose to buy online from other shops outside their area if the prices and offers match their expectations and if it is more affordable.

The lack of young population from the consumer's side also plays a role on the type of market demand that we could have in rural areas in the future. The surveys that have been organized

in the framework of different initiatives are not repeated in order to map the situation at regular intervals. Together with absence of an initiative for rural areas sustainability and development allow only isolated efforts that cannot make a difference.

Part II – Policy Context

There is no holistic initiative on rural areas development in the region of western Macedonia, despite the fact that rural areas are the majority of regional territory. The Regional Operational Programme 2014 – 2020 has not been structured in a way that will support rural areas in a holistic way. Despite the fact, that projects such as SARURE, but also other, identify and underline the challenges in rural areas, the ROP 2014-2020 revision failed to address them. However, during planning for the next, 2021 – 2027 all lessons learned will be used for creating a coherent framework of interventions in rural areas.

The European Initiative on Coal Regions in Transition will further enhance the re-orientation in approach towards the rural areas in development:

<https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/coal-regions-in-transition>

Region of Western Macedonia is a leading and pilot region among the 41 European ones in 12 EU countries that face a big challenge in the dawn of post coal era (lignite in our case). Strengthening the entrepreneurship –which seems the most promising alternative-, brings rural areas in the scene and call for integrative, holistic approach. The initiative is in progress and within 2020 is expected to be detailed concerning the initiatives and projects that will be the catalyst for the transformation of economy (and subsequent society) in these regions.

The Leader CLLD initiative is also in place in the region of western Macedonia, coordinated by the Development Agencies in the region. However, its implementation does not offer an integrated approach to rural areas development and remains at the level of single investments / interventions that cannot offer permanent benefits to rural areas – as the SARURE survey also indicated-. Even though the development agencies fully understand, the need for holistic approach in rural areas does not have the autonomy to plan and act accordingly, as national government has full –official and unofficial- control of it, leaving space for limited interventions. The situation may change soon but yet this is something to be proven.

This Action Plan aims to impact directly on the Investment for Growth and Jobs programme and the main policy instrument to be addressed is the *Regional Operational Programme Western Macedonia 2014-2020. Priority Axis 3: Improvement of SMEs' competitiveness.*

This Regional Programme aims to boost economic development and create job opportunities in West Macedonia while achieving Europe 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The OP support will contribute, among other development priorities, to "Enhancing competitiveness of SMEs".

In this regard, SARURE will concern specifically the priority axis 3 addressing improvement of SMEs competitiveness. Thematic objective 03 concerns improvement of SMEs competitiveness including agricultural sector, fishery and aquaculture, all sectors being included indeed, those three being explicitly mentioned as they are usually financed through national operational programmes, having been in the past excluded from Regional Operational Programmes. However, every sector SMEs is object of the ROP in this period. More specifically, sub-objective 3a addresses the promotion of entrepreneurship, especially with facilitation of economic exploitation of new ideas and support of new businesses, with measures such as business incubators among others; also, the need for strengthening liquidity and access of new SMEs to financing, aiming at overall increase of SMEs competitiveness. The policy improvement should ideally address rural retail SMEs specifically or target calls to this sector given the criticality of the sector in the region.

The Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014 – 2020 does not focus on rural areas, addressing the whole territory in the same way! Specific axes and measures address also businesses in rural areas but there is no differentiation and specialization according to special socio-economic characteristics of rural areas. Even action plans of other Interreg Europe projects that have been already approved –as the one of BRIDGES- fail to distinguish on special needs of businesses in rural areas- as there is no such distinction made by the Managing Authority of ROP 2014-2020 of the Region of Western Macedonia.

There also exists a rural development programme at national level, that in theory includes actions that refer to specific Greek regions among which the region of western Macedonia. https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020_en

However, as rural areas have not been studied in detail, to understand their complexity and potential the interventions remained general, unfocused and with no significant impact in rural areas. Still, the autonomy each region must have to act (alone or in cooperation with neighbouring regions) does not exist. It is difficult to change the situation in the remaining implementation period of funds from 2014 -2020 European Supporting Framework as most of them have been committed (and will be spend until 2023), yet specific measures can pave the ground for a very different perception of rural areas in the 2021 -2027 period.

Finally, isolated projects financed by various sources (Interreg ones, Research and Innovation national schemes, Horizon 2020 etc.) produce added value for specific sectors in the Region of Western Macedonia but fail to create synergies, due to absence of a policy framework that would allow and force such synergies and integrations. Rural areas would have only benefited if such approach had been embedded in regional strategies and policies.

During the Open Days 2019 in Brussels–on Thursday October 10th- there was a deep discussion with Interreg Europe policy representative in Interreg Europe stand on good practices selection and upload to the platform. SARURE project has been encouraged to contact the Interreg Europe project RURAL SMEs (now being on its 2nd phase) for identifying good practices, synergies, complementarities and further cooperation. Lead partner is Spanish one and that can ease the cooperation. Moreover, in the Interreg Europe PLATFORM

a Platform event in 5th of December 2018 in Hamburg focused on Rural Areas and came to specific findings.

Part III - Actions in detail

Action 1 Business Needs Diagnoses Mechanism

Background

In the Region of Western Macedonia there has been a discussion about the necessity of business diagnoses for the inspection and identification of needs for each retailer in the rural areas. The practice of the Sligo Region in Ireland for their retail support programme was used as an inspiration. The particular good practice sought to challenge what retailers were currently doing within their business and looked at real ways to improve sales growth and profitability. The programme involved the carrying out of a 'business site audit' analysing all aspects of retail business from front of house to production/warehousing space.

The Region of Western Macedonia guided by its institutional role, taking into consideration the important issues that arise by the economic transformation due to the decline of coal-based energy production will cooperate with the University of Western Macedonia, for the design and operation of Business Needs Diagnosis Mechanism.

Objectives

The main challenge is to analyse the way that the retailers are currently working in their business and to examine the solutions as to manage to improve sales growth and profitability for each business. The target is this Mechanism to be active by developing the collection and processing of relevant data to reach to a conclusion about the emerging of technological, economic developments. In this procedure, the role of Expert Group of University of Western Macedonia will be essential. These groups include members of the academic community and business experts.

A business audit is a method of investigation aiming at the evaluation of the business capacity, procedures, and needs of an SME. Furthermore, it is a method of investigating the strong and weak points through the characterization and general assessment of the business basic know-how (marketing, management, finance, human resources etc). It is a process of analysis which leads to concrete proposals.

The business audit is carried out by external experts in close collaboration with the management and personnel of the business. It is based on the structure: data collection-analysis-synthesis-report.

Actions

A general structure of the Mechanism for the diagnosis of business needs to consist of:

- Collection of the basic information of the company, the sector, linkages with other firms,
- General diagnosis that consists the collection of the data and the analysis that leads to a first diagnosis and a short presentation to SMEs managers and by having a discussion with them

- Further information collection by analysing more of the chosen subjects that need to be examined (production operations, subjects of interest, human resources, marketing/ sales)
- Presentation of the report to the business management board, validation of conclusions
- Finalization of the action plan

Note: Action 1 will be implemented in parallel with action 4 so that the design of the diagnoses is done by action 4 (criteria, priorities), the results of the diagnoses to be used for the formulation of priorities / policies that will be proposed for ROP 2021-2027.

Players Involved

The design and planning of the diagnosis mechanism includes the exchange of views of the expert groups within the wider business and scientific community, the regional development agency, the public administration and other social and institutional bodies and the submission of views and proposals on their behalf by the overall examination of each business needs.

- The Region of Western Macedonia that is responsible of the general supervision of the operation of the Mechanism
- The University of Western Macedonia that will provide the knowledge and the specialized academic staff
- The four Chambers of Commerce one in each Regional Unit that are able to provide all necessary data and experience from their members
- The four Trade Associations, one in each Regional Unit that are able to provide the necessary information's and the demands of their members of SMEs
- The four Regional Development Agencies, one in each Regional Unit that can support the conduction of analysis by providing data and examining them by their empirical analysis.
- The Managing Authority of the RWM ROP that will provide financial resources for Experts compensation
- Last, but not least, the companies that will apply for support

Timeframe

Announcement: February 2021

Assignment: April 2021

First draft: October 2021

Completion: October 2022

Costs and funding sources

x% of companies in rural areas X (fee per audit)

100 companies 300 euros = 30.000 euros

Funding sources:

The Regional Operational Programme of the Region of Western Macedonia 2014 – 2020 and most possibly the Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027

ACTION 1:					
Indicator	Source of information for monitoring	Current Situation	Target Result	Costs	Timeframe
Number of audits	University of Western Macedonia	No audit initiative exists / each company may use consulting companies but this is a rear case in rural retail	100	30.000 Euros (100 audits X 300 Euros per audit), including training activities, before the audit, travel within the region (mentors also will come from outside region) informing mentors that will conduct the audits, evaluate then, final report.	6 months
Number of audited businesses that requested funding based	Managing Authority of Regional Programme of Western Macedonia	No audit initiative exists / each company may use consulting companies	20	No cost	1,5 years

on the audits' reports		but this is a rear case in rural retail			
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Action 2 Promoting Rural Retail Businesses Networking

The Background

An important issue has arisen for the commercial sector, regarding the problems of the SMEs businesses that has to do with the ability of networking of the rural retail business based on their homogeneity and interactions with other businesses in rural areas in the Region in order to create a strong bond and linkage for better operation and establishment of an advanced rural retail network. Networking is a socioeconomic business activity by which business people and entrepreneurs meet to form business relationships and to recognize, create or act upon business opportunities, share information and seek potential partners for ventures.

Taking into consideration the practice of Poland (Wimlandia) for establishing cooperation based on mutual knowledge of their products, mutual promotion and launching sales and the networking platform of Teruel for the improvement of the profitability of network stores by increasing the average purchase ticket, frequency and customer engagement, strengthening the common brand image and the partnership and improving customer shopping experience. Also, the good practice aimed in creating own means of communication direct to the client, relational marketing and optimize the use of Big Data. In line with the good practises and considering the similarities of the challenges that a lot of our businesses in rural areas have on their efforts to networking that is a matter of great importance for business organizations around the world. The Region of Western Macedonia aims to handle the need to improve Local Businesses recognisability and operation by increasing the loyalty on the rural areas stores brand, promoting the local trade concept and its importance for the local economy to both businesses and consumers, developing cooperation among local companies and promoting business in rural areas via social networks and other digital channels.

The Actions

The Region of Western Macedonia and its University will put a great emphasis to reinforce the rural areas business networking and "local product" promotion by initiating the following:

- Measures to establish effective regional networking groups
- Business interactive Seminars where new working (or networking) B2B cooperation will be cultivated and then communicated on a regular base.
- Networking events such as business meetings and luncheons with successful entrepreneurs as keynote speakers
- Local Retail Coupons
- Open Malls a Local Rural Cities Markets Promotion

The Players Involved

- The Region of Western Macedonia as a general supervisor of the procedure of networking
- The University of Western Macedonia that will support all the necessary actions
- The four Chambers of Commerce one in each Regional Unit that are able to provide all necessary data and experience from their members
- The four Trade Associations, one in each Regional Unit that are able to provide the necessary information's of their members of SMEs
- The four Regional Development Agencies, one in each Regional Unit that can support the conduction of analysis by providing their important experience.
- The Managing Authority of theRWM ROP.... that will provide financial resources for all necessary activities

The Timeframe

Networking and Clustering is mature in the midterm. Thus, the timeframe is set to 1,5 years with a possibility for 6 months' extension.

The Costs and the funding sources

In order to establish and operate a network, an amount of €200.000,00 is needed. Since, some actions are considered as state aid, the amount that should be provided by the ROP is estimated to ~50% (i.e. 100,000.00 euros)

Funding sources:

Action will commence in 2022 under the Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia 2021 – 2027.

Note that the budget and prices of the indicators will be formed after the completion of the study (action 4).

ACTION 2:					
Indicator	Source of information for monitoring	Current Situation	Target Result	Costs	Timeframe
Number of Networks/Clusters set	Region of Western Macedonia	No clusters exist in rural retail	4	400.000 Euros (4 networks / clusters)	1,5 year

				rs X 100.0 00 euros)	
Number of events	University of Western Macedonia	-	10	10000 Euros (10 X 1000 euros)	1 year
Number of companies participating in the events	Region of Western Macedonia / University of Western Macedonia	-	150	-	1 year

Action 3 Informing Rural Retail SMEs on Funding Resources

Background

An important issue for the Region of Western Macedonia regarding the SMEs is the provision of up-to-date information to Rural Entrepreneurs about all available financial tools and how these can be used for the advancement of their business. The inspiration of the Finnish good practice, which addressed the problem of public authority's, need for effective and influencing communication of funding options available for SME's. The need for developing new ways to promote funding in appealing way to encourage SMEs to apply more actively investing and business development funding will be a useful approach for the Region of Western Macedonia for improved communication of the funding possibilities for SMEs. The Region aims to promote Information activities on funding possibilities, encourage businesses on rural areas to apply for funding, improve familiarity with digital and social media platforms, training sessions and workshops and especially the visits of experts and their close contacts to the business.

Action

The Region of Western Macedonia in cooperation with the University of Western Macedonia and the players involved aims to a dynamic system of informing each business in retail areas

of the possible funding opportunities **by visiting and by a close discussion** with them and on the basis of their willingness on financial search and commitment.

- Preparation of Presentations/Publications
- Preparation work on the dominant sectors of the local area
- Organization of the events/Logistics
- A detailed discussion on the procedures and the benefits of the possible adequate funding sources in Region of Western Macedonia by matching of the scheduled goal of the business. Introduction of all the Regional/National financial organizations, policies and R&D programs.

The Players Involved

- The Region of Western Macedonia as having the main institutional role for the planning of the open calls of funding The University of Western Macedonia that will support all the necessary actions on the basis of the regional operational programmes (current and 2021 – 2027)
- The Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programmes 2014-2020 and 2021 – 2027 of Western Macedonia that can give useful information's about the funding on the basis of the regional operational programs (current and 2021 – 2027) and proceed with open calls to support rural retail.
- The four Chambers of Commerce one in each Regional Unit that are able to provide all necessary data and experience of some of their funding calls
- The four Trade Associations, one in each Regional Unit that are able to provide the necessary information's of their members of SMEs
- The four Regional Development Agencies, one in each Regional Unit that can fully support the invitation of companies to the events
- The Intermediate Managing Authorities for State Aid actions (EFEPAE) will be involved and contribute in all stages

Timeframe

1 year

Applications from businesses for financing after being informed will continue throughout 2021-2027 programming period since Calls will be issued during the whole period. However, we will monitor 2 years within which we estimate that 20% of the companies being informed will apply for funding.

Commencement from January 2021 the costs have already been included in the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 and also the ROP 2021-2027 and their duration will continue throughout the two programs.

Costs and the funding sources

Funding sources:

No current costs are allocated here since the organization will be done by the Managing Authority itself or by other intermediary bodies where the costs of the event have already been included in the Regional Operational Programme.

ACTION 3:					
Indicator	Source of information for monitoring	Current Situation	Target Result	Costs	Timeframe
Number of events organised	University of Western Macedonia	-	10	10000 ¹ (10 events X 1000 Euros per event) . If costs are kept lower more events will take place.	1 year
Number of businesses that participated to the events	Region of Western Macedonia / University of Western Macedonia	-	150	-	1 year
Number of businesses that applied for	Managing Authority of Regional	-	30 (20% of businesses)	-	2 years

¹ Real cost for the Action plan is 0 since relevant costs have already been included in dissemination budget of State aid actions

financing after being informed.	Operational Programme of Western Macedonia		being informed)		
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Action 4: Analysis of Rural Areas Retail Development Framework

Background

Organizing Integrated Intervention Areas (OXE-Integrated Territorial Investments Areas) – A spatial development model that benefits rural areas.

Each Integrated Intervention Area is organized in 2 levels that include Areas in Focus and a network of such areas. In all of them the Region of Western Macedonia plans and implements horizontal actions, as well as actions that refer only to each of them. **The total of areas in focus = OXE**

In areas in focus, actions are planned for their center as well as for the surrounding area if there is a justification that interventions in the broader area can significantly improve the development of area in focus.

Then, those areas, are being networked among them but also with others that studies and analysis has shown as necessary for the development of OXE. For example, some critical infrastructures in other areas (such as transportation and logistics hubs, are vital for OXE's development sustainability.

OXE and SARURE: So far, one (1) OXE exists in the Region of Western Macedonia covering the areas around the lakes located in the region. Most of them are RURAL AREAS and retail businesses play an important role in their economic and social development. Competitiveness of SMEs (the axis of ROP 2014-2020 SARURE influences) of OXE's rural retail businesses benefit by this tool of spatial development with the following ways:

1. Commitment of a high percentage of the budget of open calls for those businesses located within OXE (retail ones are included).
2. Increased incentives and benefits are included to the calls for supporting businesses in OXE – as OXE are considered areas that are lagging behind - in a region that is lagging behind from most Greek (and European regions) that also enters transition period to post lignite era.
3. Priority on synergies achieved with programs such as LEADER CDDL, European projects (i.e. Interreg) implemented in the region, Research and Innovation strategies for smart specialization (RIS) initiative. In the framework of SARURE the proposed good practice from Greek partners (Open Mall in small cities) is an example of an incentive that addresses OXE area and the various Open Malls established in towns of Western Macedonia have been considered as a complementary network.
4. Critical Infrastructures and investments in the region are also evaluated / planned taking into consideration their impact on OXE.

As rural retail is the backbone of any strategy to keep population in rural areas, the framework and the parameters within which rural retail will be strengthened should be defined. In SARURE project the main focus is on rural retail without taking into consideration the broader picture concerning rural areas. For example, SARURE does not examine the concept of “smart village”, the balance between rural and urban areas, the needed infrastructures to achieve sustainability of rural retail, the COVID19 impact (ban of transportation, reduction of tourism, increase of natives returning to village for the summer etc.).

Therefore, as it is described above, the Region of Western Macedonia needs a detailed analysis of rural retail sustainable development parameters in order to use all available tools and leverage the increased resources that are agreed (at National and European levels) to be given to the Region of Western Macedonia (green Fund, Just Transition Fund to Post Lignite Era, Regional Operational Programme 2021 -2027 etc.). The mapping analysis conducted in the framework of the SARURE helped underline the importance of rural retail to the Decision Makers of the Region. However, a more thorough and in-depth repetition of this mapping analysis is needed in order to understand the impact of COVID19 and the transition to post lignite era.

Action

Analysis of Rural Areas Retail Development Framework

Region of Western Macedonia, Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programmes Western Macedonia 2014 – 2020 and 2021 – 2027, University of Western Macedonia will plan and conduct the analysis, to use it for planning and funding specific intervention actions that will benefit rural retail.

Thus, a detailed analysis of rural retail sustainable development framework will be conducted to define and correlate the key parameters that affect rural retail sustainable development to use all available tools and leverage the increased resources that are agreed (at National and European levels) to be given to the Region of Western Macedonia (green Fund, Fund for Fair Transition to Post Lignite Era, Regional Operational Programme 2021 -2027 etc.)

- Diagnostic Criteria that will be used in Action 1.
- Minutes of meetings during on-site visits and expression of interest forms by entrepreneurs / residents of rural / mountainous areas.
- Communication plan / Differentiated communication channels (Different messages on the posters, identification of the need to create a site for information about actions in the areas, etc.). This will be linked also with Action 3.

Note: Action 4 will be implemented in parallel with action 1 so that the design of the diagnoses is done by action 4 (criteria, priorities), the results of the diagnoses to be used for the formulation of priorities / policies that will be proposed for Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027.

Players Involved

The organizations that will be involved are the following:

- Region of Western Macedonia (including regional council):The Region will supervise the analysis together with the Managing Authority, link it to the regional operational programmes (current and 2021 – 2027) as well as with other regional initiatives and will decide on the creation of a 2nd Integration Intervention Area (OXE) including rural areas. An OXE for rural areas will allow focused and horizontal interventions that will substantially benefit rural retail.
- Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programmes 2014-2020 and 2021 – 2027 Western Macedonia: It will assign the analysis, supervise its implementation and evaluate it, together with the Region of Western Macedonia. It will link it with the regional operational programmes (current and 2021 – 2027) and proceed with open calls to support rural retail.
- University of Western Macedonia: The University will conduct the analysis using all available sources and support scientifically all subsequent activities to support rural retail.
- Regional Council for Research and Development: The council will guide the regional authorities in actions that will support innovation in rural retail (to be included in some calls), since the mapping analysis showed clearly that there is a deficit in innovation in rural retail. Moreover, provision of data from projects implemented / being implemented will be made available for conduction of the analysis (all included in the projects/ studies repository).
- Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization managing structure: The newly created structure will link rural retail development activities with RIS3 priorities, since rural retail businesses belong to more than one sectors.
- Development Company of Western Macedonia (ANKO S.A.), as well as local Development companies: Support the conduction of analysis providing data from Leader CDDL and other rural areas related initiatives, as well as from various projects implemented/being implemented.
- National Association of Retail (and Western Macedonia regional department): To provide all data and experience from their members (also in rural areas of other regions in Greece) and suggest the right ways to conduct the analysis, taking into full consideration the opinion of their members. That will help follow the bottom up approach that is suggested by programmes such as LEADER CDDL and will be followed in our case.
- Chambers of Commerce in all regional units of Western Macedonia: To provide all data and experience from their members and suggest the right ways to conduct the analysis, taking into full consideration the opinion of their members. That will help follow the bottom up approach that is suggested by programmes such as LEADER CDDL and will be followed in our case.
- Retail Associations at regional, regional unit and cities' / towns' levels: The same applies for retail associations as for Chambers of Commerce and national Association of Retail.

- General Secretariat of Retail and Protection of Consumers: To provide data for rural retail from other rural areas | Greece and co-design with regional authorities programmes focused on rural retail. National Operational Programmes can be used for that, as well synergies with programmes from other ministries.
- Private Companies supporting Rural Retail Businesses / Entrepreneurship: As they deal with the SMEs and Voluntary community and social enterprise at rural areas will be able to reveal key parameters of rural retail entrepreneurship patterns and behavior that will allow analysis not to neglect any important details.
- Rural retail businesses: As they happily participated in the mapping analysis (120 questionnaires -one of the most detailed analysis of the SARURE project)- they will be contacted again (the 120 and more) in order to provide deep insight of the actual conditions rural retail faces and also to be able to measure the impact of COVID19 and TRANSITION TO POST LIGNITE ERA for rural areas entrepreneurship in the region of Western Macedonia.
- Others: If during the conduction of the analysis other entities appear to be necessary to involve, will be involved.

4. Timeframe

The expected time for completion of the analysis is six (6) months after assignment. The initiation of new OXE for rural areas is expected 1 year after the delivery of analysis.

Costs and funding sources

The estimated cost is 20000 euros. Funding will be provided by the Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme 2014 – 2020 Western Macedonia from the Technical Support axis.

ACTION 4:					
Indicator	Source of information for monitoring	Current Situation	Target Result	Costs	Timeframe
Completion of Analysis and Acceptance by Regional Authorities	Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia	No such existing analysis on rural retail	One (1) Analysis Completed and Adopted by Regional Authorities.	20000 Euros	6 months after assignment
Launch the procedure for creating an OXE for Rural Areas	Managing Authority of Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia	Only 1 OXE exists in the Region of Western Macedonia : lake areas	1 launch of the procedure for creating OXA for Rural Areas	-	1 year after the delivery of the analysis

The Region of Western Macedonia having been informed of the above, expresses the desire to implement the described actions and to ensure the required matching in the context of the overall regional actions in order to make a substantial contribution to the goals of economic and social development in the Region with multiplier effects.

We formally express our agreement and commitment regarding the implementation of the above-mentioned actions in the framework of the Regional Operational Programme of Western Macedonia 2014-2020 and specifically in Priority Axis 3 regarding the improvement of the competitiveness of SMEs, as well as the Regional Operational Programme 2021 - 2027 in accordance with the approved National Action Plan.

1st Body:

The Region of Western Macedonia _____

Representative of Region of Western Macedonia

The Regional Governor of Western Macedonia, Georgios Kasapidis

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Official Signature of the Region of Western Macedonia



2nd Body:

The University of Western Macedonia _____

Representative of the University of Western Macedonia

The Vice Rector for Research and Lifelong learning Mr. StergiosMaropoulos

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Official Signature of the University of Western Macedonia

