

## EPICAH\_RESULTS OF THE SPANISH/PORTUGUESE ACTION PLAN A SUCCESS OVERCOMING COVID19 EFFECTS

The Spanish and Portuguese partners of the EPICAH project have already finished the implementation of its Action Plan. A Plan that was developed in spite of all difficulties coming from the COVID19 restrictions.

The challenges pre-COVID faced by Spain and Portugal were similar at the border territory: depopulation, lack of economic growth, unemployment and urgent need of improvement of education and training levels as well as of the increase in efficiency in the use of natural resources. In a few words: the establishment of local economic development strategies to promote and potentiate the competitiveness and fix population.

The Plan sought to analyse the situation of the territory in terms of protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the border as well as the effectiveness of the programme to promote it as an driver of territorial development.

It counted on two main strands:

- a) Support to the Managing Authority of the programme to improve the strategic.
- b) Organize a capitalization forum of cooperation projects/actions in the field of tourism for the POCTEP (Interreg VA Spain-Portugal programme) area.

Both activities were accomplished in the terms initially planned, even if the second one was a little bit postponed in order to ensure the possibility of an on-site meeting.

The activity A) result in a Manual to increase the effectiveness of projects funded by POCTEP in the area of tourism. This exercise was done in close cooperation with the Managing Authority of the programme so their benefits are not only the output itself (the manual) but also the fact of supporting the Managing Authority to be closer to the ground and to beneficiaries. At the same time, it also made possible for beneficiaries realize that not always we are able to take profit of the investments made by the program.

The process of drafting this manual was an exercise of self-assessment and let us develop a working methodology with Managing Authority based on cooperation. Because in the success of this action, the collaboration and openness of the Spanish-Portuguese Authorities has been a key factor.

The second activity was about organize a capitalization forum of projects in the field of tourism. This forum was postponed until July 2021 due to COVID situation, which did not let do it on-site before.

Therefore, in July 2021 the EPICAH partners in the POCTEP territory organized the referred forum. It counted with the highest institutional representation by the Managing Authority,



counting on the presence of the Deputy General Director for Territorial Cooperation of the Spanish Ministry of Finance (Managing Authority of POCTEP) and the National Coordinator for POCTEP in Portugal, as well as the Director of the policy instrument Joint Secretariat. Moreover, the forum

had also a very good backup from the Portuguese Government, counting on two Secretaries of State in Portugal: the one for the Valorization of the Inland of Portugal and the Secretary of State for Tourism.

On that occasion, and in spite of all restrictions imposed by the COVID19 situation in Portugal at that moment, around 50 people could take part of the open debate in which panellists presented the manual to increase the effectiveness of the projects in the area of tourism but also went through the main issues concerning next programming period 21-27, linking this closely with the need to revitalize border areas, keeping an eye in the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage as elements of economic development through sectors as tourism (highlighting the relevance of capitalizing the results of the current policy instrument) .

Summing up, the development of the phase 2 of the EPICAH project was an occasion of keeping alive cooperation spirit and the open exchange that always have characterized the relationship between the program authorities and the beneficiaries, in a very tricky moment, marked by the absence of personal contact; something really important in our cultures and in keeping our border territories acting as always: as a single one.