



PROGRESS REPORT – MOUNTAIN TOURISM

EVENT DETAILS:

1. Title: *The Entrepreneurial Discovery Process in Albania: Partnership with the quadruple helix Actors for developing the country “Smart Specialization Strategy” – The Mountain Tourism*

2. Location and Venue: The roundtable for the mountain tourism sector was held on the same day as the event for the agritourism industry, which was *November 3rd, 2022*. This decision was made due to the limited time available for organizing EDP activities as well as the similarities that exist between these two sectors. Regarding the location, this event was held at the premises of *Xheko Imperial Hotel*.

3. Panel Members and A Brief Description of Their Professional Commitments

- ✓ **Mr. Arben Shkodra:** Secretary General of Albania Manufacturing Union (AMU), Member of the Inter - Institutional Working Group, and moderator of the event.
- ✓ **Mrs. Matilda Naco:** Executive Director of the Albanian Tourism Association (ATA)
- ✓ **Mrs. Albana Tole:** Deputy Minister for Education and Sports and Head Member of the Inter-Institutional Working Group.

4. Event Organizers:

With the support of the European Commission's Joint Research Center (JRC) and the Policy Answer Project (Horizon Europe GA 10105887), Future Center organized this activity in collaboration with Inter-Institution Working Group, particularly Mrs. Albania Tole, who has played a pivotal role in identifying and engaging strategic actors from the public sector and academia; and the Albanian Tourism Associations (ATA) which was selected by Future Center to assist in reviewing the contact lists prepared for the business helix and to urge the representatives from this helix to participate at the event.

5. Event Participants

In the mountain tourism roundtable, the business helix was represented by 13 different actors, primarily consisting of representatives from small and medium-sized enterprises, which dominate this sector, as well as business organizations including the Albanian Manufacturing Union (AMU) and the Albanian Tourism Association. The academia on the other hand was represented by 6 actors from 5 different universities located in 3 different cities being University “Aleksander Moisiu” in Durres, University “FanS. Noli” in Korca, and “Agriculture University,” “Barleti University” and “University College Business” in Tirana. The government helix was well represented as well, with representatives from the Municipality of Tirana (DPZHT), the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Ministry of Education and Sports participating. As from the Civil Society we had the representation of two actors from two different organizations being GIZ and CSR. Furthermore, as a result of the shared characteristics of the agrotourism and mountain tourism sectors, a portion of the representatives from the quadruple helix in this event were also present in the agrotourism event.

Businesses: 13 Participants; Academia: 6 Participants; Government :5 Participants; Civil Society: 2 Participant

ACTIVITIES & OUTPUT

1. Planning

The Future Center's first step in the activity's planning phase, which ran concurrently with the other activities, was to identify relevant stakeholders for this working group based on criteria agreed upon with the inter-institution working group for monitoring the Albanian Entrepreneurial Discovery Process. During this process, it was discovered that a significant number of important stakeholders for this sector also belonged to the agritourism industry, which might be



referred together as strategic actors from the Albanian rural tourism sector. This feature, in turn, highlighted the need to schedule the activities for these two sectors on the same day in two separate sessions, to make it easier for strategic stakeholders to participate in these events.

Regarding the design of the methodology for the EDP process, the preparation of promotional materials, and the identification of relevant business organizations in the country to collaborate with for the organization of this activity, these activities were conducted concurrently for all anticipated EDP activities for the agriculture, energy and tourism sector. Some other aspects discussed and agreed with the interinstitutional working group during the planning phase were also the format of the activity, the approximate number of the participants as well as the key topics to be discussed during the mountain tourism roundtable.

2. Coordination & Promotion

As for the logistics aspect, we initially reconfirmed the date of the event with the panel members, who in this case were Mrs. Albana Tole, the deputy minister of education and sports, and Mrs. Matilda Naco, the executive director of the Albanian Tourism Association, to then proceed with the booking of the venue, the coordination of the catering and other details required for the proper preparation of the activity. From there we then distributed the invitations, confirmed the availability of the strategic actors invited to participate, as well as sent a final reminder with the key activity details.

3. Execution

As previously indicated, this activity was held on 3 November 2022, immediately following the agrotourism roundtable which was organized on the same date. During this event, Future Center staff was responsible for the registration of participants, the note-taking, the organization of participants in the conference room, as well as the facilitation of the discussions among the participants. In particular, the approach implemented for moderation of the activity was an in-depth explanation of the purpose of the smart specialization strategy and the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process, followed by the facilitation of the participant discussions on the following two topics:

- A. The opportunities, obstacles, progress, and outlook for enhancing the sector's performance
- B. The identification of strategic objectives and relevant measures for boosting the sector's performance.

Moreover, given the high level of interest demonstrated by the attendees to express their opinion on the aforementioned topics, an email was drafted and sent to everyone who attended the mountain tourist and agrotourism roundtable, requesting them to provide additional comments and suggestions on the matters discussed during this event.

4. Summary Of Comments and Suggestions

- The government reported a significant growth in the mountain tourist sector in recent years, thanks to increased interest from both domestic and international visitors. Despite their progress, the civil society indicated that the surrounding countries' mountain tourism experience tends to be significantly superior to that of Albania, which can hamper in return the country's competitiveness in this sector.
- Another concern expressed by all actors from the quadruple helix was also the ability that Albania has to guarantee a sustainable development of this sector taking into account the following factors:
 - ✓ The unfavorable demographic trends in rural areas
 - ✓ The overpopulation of this sector and the inability of the private sector to properly manage it. Regarding this matter, tour operators indicated that the majority of the business within this sector do not properly understand the concept of "value," so they tend to respond to overcrowding by simply increasing their prices without making any additional efforts to improve their market offering. To address this matter, they advise for the



business helix to be more properly informed, trained, and assisted in diversifying and strengthening their market offer in light of the authentic values that their region has to offer.

- The representatives of GIZ, who are particularly active in the development of the mountain tourism sector in Albania, also emphasized 1) the significant difficulty they face in identifying the key actors in this sector 2) severe lack of innovative ideas among the representatives of the business helix, for which they claim that the civil society organizations in Albania have been the primary source of innovative ideas in this sector and last but not the least 3) the inability of the private sector to properly articulate their needs which has hindered the capacity of the civil society to comprehend how it may further contribute to the growth of this sector. To address these matters, the following suggestion were made:
 1. The establishment and revitalization of local action groups in Albania which have become inactive as a result of the lack of funds required to sustain their activity, as well as the guarantee of a more active engagement of them in the policy making process.
 2. The creation of Destination Management organizations (DMOs), as well as the guarantee of their sustainable development by collecting the tourism development tax, also known as the “Bed Tax” and directing a sizable portion of these funds toward funding DMOs' operations.
 3. Strengthen the role and guarantee the proper structuring of the Albanian chambers of commerce and professional associations by taking measures such as: The application of the principle of CVO (Compulsory Voluntary Quotation), Implement the best EU practices on public consultation and lobbying, amend the existing law on public consultation, present a standard model for the interest groups to submit their proposals to the local and central government, and the presentation of some criteria of “Representation”(what are the criteria that these organization must fulfill to operate)
- The civil society actors also stressed that the key obstacle to the growth of this sector is not a shortage of investment resources, but rather the capacities and knowledge of the private sector to improve their market offering. Regarding the role that academia must play in addressing this issue, representatives from the commercial sector highlighted that the academic staff in Albanian universities is not well equipped to teach young people to better respond to market demands and global innovation trends. When asked what concrete steps should be taken to strengthen the role of academia, quadruple helix actors indicated the necessity for the publications of more high-quality analysis, statistics, and other data that allows for more in-depth information on this sector, the modification of educational programs to better respond to market needs, and the establishment of centers of excellence and knowledge for the rural tourism sector in Albania.
- Another matter pointed was also the necessity for the current legal framework on education to be revised for the following reasons:
 1. The absence of effective law enforcement due to lack of sound institutional framework
 2. The current legal framework has significantly slowed the development of scientific research in Albania since it prevents departments in Albanian universities from applying and administering their own scientific research funds.
- The proper planning of the development of the tourism sector on a regional or local level was also highlighted by the quadruple helix actors , who requested that this document include more in-depth information on aspects such as forecasts on the development of the mountain tourism sector in specific areas, the identification of the



**SPECIALIZIMI
INTELIGJENT**



- Among the other recommendations made for improving the performance of this sector in Albania were the following:
- ✓ Use of ER, VR, and other digital tools to promote Albanian tourism (such as turning the museum of Berat into a virtual tour)
 - ✓ Develop the country's eco-tourism.
 - ✓ Present concepts such as a short supply chain, slow food, and community-based tourism.
 - ✓ Create regional or local economic development offices.
 - ✓ Create regional or local tourism information centers
 - ✓ Promote local products
 - ✓ Present mechanisms that encourage the participation of key actors within this sector in international tourism exhibitions.
 - ✓ Foster growth in rural areas
 - ✓ Guarantee a better follow up on projected implement for the development of the mountain tourism sector in Albania.