



This project is funded by the EU

DISCOVERING HIDDEN ATTRACTIONS

The regions of **Pelagonija in North Macedonia and Diber in Albania** possess some of the greatest potential for the development of a dynamic and sustainable tourism offer in their cross-border (CB) area.

The possibility to capitalise on these CB assets is provided within the frame of the Cross-border Cooperation Programme between the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania, co-funded by the European Union, IPA 2 instrument, and the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Both Demir Hisar (MK) and Klos (AL) municipalities are rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes that are favourable for a variety of outdoor experiences for visitors, especially since they are located within an hour's drive from the main destination hubs of Bitola and Tirana (along the newly built Rruga Arberit highway).

The **problem addressed by the Discovering hidden attractions project** is the under-utilised man-made and natural potential of the CB region as a means of increasing the number of traveller arrivals into the territory of the municipalities, and their length of stay and spending on various activities, thus engaging the local population in business activities, resulting in an increase in their incomes and reducing youth unemployment.



Discovering hidden attractions focuses on developing a consolidated travel package across the border. Developing similar destination attractiveness factors in the two municipalities, and developing products of active tourism—hiking, cycling and local experiences delivered by locals—culminates in a joint cross-border travel package motivating visitors to go beyond borders and explore untouched places that offer a unique single thematic destination to a two-country travel experience.

The **project objectives** are:

1. **To increase the touristic attractiveness of the CB target destination.**

The project will introduce a point of interest through the adaptation of the existing Cooperative Centre in v. Sloestica (MK) into a Multi-functional Cultural Centre encompassing: a new attraction as a motivation to visit the location by establishing a Memorial Room for the renowned writer P.M. Andreevski, featuring original personal furniture and inventory in partnership with the co-applicant ART Point Gumno, (www.artpoint-gumno.org.mk), an NGO dealing with the preservation and promotion of culture in the area of Demir Hisar for the past ten years; organising annual cultural events attracting active travellers from all over the world; introduction of a souvenir and traditional products shop; and increase of the attractiveness of the wider region by upgrading the natural area of Valavicite (natural river whirlpools) into a touristic site offering a unique visitor experience. Added value will include an increased number of beds in the destination (set on the upper floor of the Centre), thus contributing towards the upgrading of the accommodation possibilities both in quality

and quantity. Hiking and cycling (mount biking) trails introducing natural and cultural heritage will be developed in the rural surroundings of DH and Klos.

A main cultural motivator will be established in Klos (AL) through the construction of a new Historical and Ethnographic Museum for the area. In conjunction with this infrastructural development, capacity development of the staff will be provided by the partner FLAG (www.flag-al.org), a NGO from Tirana with extensive experience in developing local communities. Also in the area of Klos, the project envisages renovation of the hiking trails to the glacial lakes at Balgjat, the canyon of Gryke e Xhabes and Gurra Kaculit, as well as the installation of signage for all 21 cultural monuments in Klos Municipality, particularly for the new Museum, the ancient bridge of Ura Vashes, and the above-mentioned hiking trails to Balgjat, Gryke e Xhabes and Gurra Kaculit.

2. To develop joint CB cultural and tourism products.

The project will develop at least two CB tourism products, namely one-day and multi-day trips to the CB area that will introduce visitor packages of an activity and cultural content, linking the area of Klos and Demir Hisar by the similar activities offered. Online targeted campaigns for promotion of the joint tourism products will present the attractiveness and innovative adventure offered by the area.

3. To diversify the CB target area tourism offer by SME innovations.

Businesses will be heavily involved in the process of CB destination plan development (supply and demand assessment) and knowledge sharing, contributing thus to the development of new marketable products and participation in the testing of new tourism services and products (FAM tours).

4. To uplift the skills of persons engaged in rural and active tourism.

Building capacities for the local people in the CB target area for marketing their own traditional products and for the services and activity providers regarding the expectations of travellers will be introduced by the project.

The project specifically works towards developing rural and eco-tourism business while at the same time preserving traditional ways of life, the quality of the natural surroundings and quality of life, as preconditions for a scaled-up tourist offer in rural areas.

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Project overall budget: EUR 455 633

Co-financing from EU: EUR 387 288

Project duration: 20 months

Project partners:

1. Municipality of Demir Hisar, lead partner
2. Municipality of Klos
3. NGO ART POINT-GUMNO, v. Sloeshtica
4. NGO FLAG, Tirana

