



EXperiential **T**Ourism for sustainable **R**ural development

WP2: Success stories and needs mapping for VET renewal in rural tourism

A2.1: EU collection of success stories and analysis of national trends



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Analysis of the current national status of rural tourism and related VET offers

Focus Group National Report Olympic Training and Consulting

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION

Please add the main information about your focus group(s).

COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Greece

CITY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Pyrgos

NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS: 3

DATES OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S): 3/5/2024 & 9/5/2024

VENUES OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S): online via zoom and in person in Krestena

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (per focus group if more than one): 2

TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDERS: The focus group targeted VET providers and trainers with experience in the provision of training services related with the rural tourism industry.

FOCUS GROUP DESCRIPTION

Please provide a detailed description of the focus group(s).

- **Number of focus groups implementers and description of their background:**

The focus group was implemented by two staff members of OTC, with background in economic studies and professional experience as researchers. The one was the moderator of the conversation while the other had the role of the observer and also kept the notes.

- **Number and description of the participants' background:**

The participants to the focus group were adult trainers with extensive experience in the development and provision of vocational training services. Three have additionally previous experience as researchers and training content developers, two have experience in the provision of trainings both in vocational and tertiary education and two are higher executives in an organisation that manages EU funding for rural development and functions as DPO in Elis prefecture. All participants have experience as professionals in both the public and private sector but in terms of training services provision the majority 4/6 work in the private sector. All have an expertise in sustainable tourism and 4/6 in agricultural entrepreneurship. 4/6 have also expertise in ecotourism, sports & adventure tourism and cultural tourism.

- **Duration of the focus group(s):**

Each focus group meeting had a duration that lasted between two and three hours

- **Main structure and agenda of the focus group(s):**

- Welcoming and introductions/icebreakers;
- Introduction to the focus group principals and rules of confidentiality;
- Short introduction to the EXTOR Project aim and objectives;
- Introduction of the process to be followed and aim of the focus group meeting;
- Discussion on potential queries and issues that require clarifications;
- Initiation of discussion on the identified topics and exchange of views and opinions.
- Wrap up of the meeting and information about the timeline of final results sharing

- **Description of any group and/or interactive activities:**

The format of the meeting was that of an open moderated discussion

- **Level of engagement of the participants:**

All participants were highly engaged and willing to interact and exchange views and opinions to the extent that they had formed opinion on the subjects that were discussed/ reviewed.

- **Main comments and evaluation points from participants (the most important suggestions and recommendations, improvement points etc.):**

1. Trends and opportunities:

So far, rural tourism is rather considered an eclectic rather than a popular choice. In addition, all trainers and VET representatives agree that in the past, the development of rural tourism in Greece was limited to the creation of a multitude of "agrotourism" accommodations, concentrated in the coastal zones or scattered in the mainland of the country, with prevailing characteristic the limited or scattered connection with very specific parts of agricultural production and without being accompanied by the development of a local net with the capacity to place the focus on the local rural element and its unique characteristics. Therefore, the services offered, were not as connected with the creation of goods or the provision of services or activities to the extent that would be expected from such accommodations.

However, the current trend has changed and is to provide integrated agri-tourism services and other rural activities and alternative forms of tourism. The global shock of the pandemic crisis coupled with climate change are also shaping a new situation in the tourism landscape and changing the thinking and preferences of travellers. They now desire a shift and a change in their lifestyle. They are abandoning consumer patterns and adopting the new rules of sustainable behaviour and healthy eating habits.

Hence, besides the positive trend in conventional/ massive tourism in Greece which is expected to boost the activities in rural tourism this new approach and demand of tourists themselves is also an opportunity for rural tourism.

When the focus is placed in the region of Western Greece the available assets, infrastructure and characteristics highlight the opportunity especially for cultural and seaside tourism to have good growth

potentials. However, worth mentioning are also the initiatives related to experiential tourism, sports tourism and agrotourism too; provided that entrepreneurs will further believe and invest in these forms of tourism.

2. VET offers/programs available:

The VET training offers that are available on a regular basis are basically in EQF level 5 – post secondary educational level- typical education. Since 2013, it is included in the official programmes of the tourism sector of Vocational Training Institutes a course with specialisation in RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND PROSECUTIVE TOURS. In 2021, a new specialisation was introduced in the Vocational Training Institutes, this of Agricultural Technician. Other specialties that contain relevant to rural tourism courses in their curricula are those of COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY - V.I.C.T. TRAVEL, TECHNICIAN OF TOURIST UNITS AND HOTEL. Those all have a duration of two years (4 semesters) of training followed by WBL activity and provide a certification on the profession upon success in exams executed at national level every year.

In addition, there were identified courses included in other trainings in the tourism sector that concern the following subjects

- Marketing and Communication,
- Sustainable practices in rural tourism,
- Green Practices in rural tourism,

which are relevant to rural tourism but are rather linked with more general VET programmes.

Finally, the University of Athens offers two relevant VET courses of shorter duration

- Cultural Tourism Marketing (60h)
- Religious tourism: Art, Monuments, Routs (96h)

Those courses are self-funded and may be attended by graduates of schools of art; cultural management or tourism as well as by professionals in the tourism industry.

3. Engagement of the authorities/community:

Authorities

When asked about the engagement of authorities in activities or plans for the promotion of rural tourism, the participants agreed that local authorities and chambers of commerce develop from time-to-time informative materials or publish articles so as to promote rural tourism activities. In addition, it is recognized that the last 5 years, there is a shift in the activities implemented by municipalities – they use fundings for cultural activities and organize events that promote /reveal the character of each region with special focus on locally produced food products.

In the region of Elis, the Developmental Company of Olympia (ANOL) has recently undertaken the role of DMMO (Destination Management and Marketing Organisation). The objectives of the ANOL as DMMO

are the scientific, advisory and technical support of municipalities on issues of promotion and marketing of a destination in the tourism market, information on the entire tourism product for the destination, the creation, support and implementation of the development and tourism policy of the destination, the study and monitoring of the upgrading and modernization of infrastructure and utilities, the preparation and implementation of a strategic plan for sustainable tourism development and management. Given that ANOL has extensive experience as the authority managing the Leader programme for the region it is expected that through the active engagement of ANOL at strategic level, rural tourism will be enhanced. Another intervention that is expected to have positive impact on rural development in the region of Elis is the development of infrastructures that are expected to be delivered by 2025 and will increase the accessibility of the region from the capital of Athens.

4. Suggestions/Recommendations

- i. To implement training programmes that
 - ✓ are focused on new forms of rural tourism
 - ✓ promote specific and alternative forms of tourism according to the tourist resources of each destination
 - ✓ move the focus from the perception that Greece is exclusively a summer destination and promote forms of tourism that cater for twelve-month demand
- ii. Offering thematic products according to the motivation of each traveler and the specific characteristics of each destination with an emphasis on creating personalisation and added value
- iii. Link with the concepts of ecological awareness and responsible tourism
- iv. Use of new e-marketing & e-branding technologies
- v. Ministries of Tourism, Rural development, Economics, etc to cooperate in support of rural youth entrepreneurship

● Any challenges faced during the focus group(s):

The most challenging thing was to find a common date for the focus group meeting which finally was decided to be managed with flexibility- arrange two meetings.

● Main conclusions of the focus group(s):

All participants agree that though there are good improvement potentials for the development of rural tourism in Greece and especially in the region of Western Greece there are specific drawbacks that need to be taken into consideration by social partners and stakeholders that plan the future initiatives such as

- The limited training opportunities
- Technology and digital skills gap when considering digital skills for use in professional contexts that is an indisputable reality in rural population
- Insufficient focus on sustainable practices