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TOURAL

Multidimensional model of tourism verticals driving the sustainable balanced growth among rural & remote grids and urban clusters of rural regions, fostering macro-regional cooperation

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BHF – FONDATSIYA BALKANSKO NASLEDSTVO – Bulgaria

BRTA – BURGASKA REGIONALNA TURISTICHESKA ASOTSIATSIA – Bulgaria

GALDD – ASOCIATIA GAL DELTA DUNARII – Romania

KIN – CIVIL ORGANIZATION KINBURN – Ukraine

NECU – NATIONAL ECOLOGICAL CENTRE OF UKRAINE – Ukraine

BSEC – ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION – Türkiye

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MoA – DIMOS ALONNISOU – Greece

MoS – DIMOS SKOPELOU – Greece

ZDRN – AGENCIJA ZA RAZVOJ ZADARSKE ZUPANIJE ZADRA NOVA – Croatia

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Deliverable D2.5: Short Description
The Deliverable 2.5 "Preliminary Analysis of TOURAL Co-"Work" Processes" presents a preliminary analysis of the work that has already been completed during the first year of the project, with regards to the Living Labs methodology as a result-oriented co-work process. The Living Labs will be designed and implemented using diverse, tailor-made tools, aiming at raising awareness, knowledge transfer and the co-creation of business models that respond to actual needs and priorities of local communities in relation to the TOURAL objectives.
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Table of Contents

1 Introduction....9
1.1 Deliverable Scope and Structure....9
1.2 Methodology....9
2 Definition of the co-work processes and the Regional Living Labs setup....10
2.1 Context....10
2.2 Proposed activities for Co-Work: Living Labs....10
2.2.1. What is a Living Lab?....10
2.2.2. What are the necessary characteristics for a successful Living Lab?....10
2.2.3. What are the basic steps for setting up a Living Lab?....11
2.3. The TOURAL Living Labs....11
3. Setting up the TOURAL Living Labs....12
3.1. Phase 1: Preparation....12
3.1.1. Step 1: Identify the need....12
3.1.2. Step 2: Identify the stakeholders....21
3.1.3. Step 3: Design the Living Lab....21
3.2. Phase 2: Implementation....22
3.2.1. Co-creation, Exploration and Co-design....22
3.2.2. Test and Co-validation....23
4. Conclusions....24
5. References....25

List of Figures

Figure 1: The basic steps for setting up a Living Lab.....11
Figure 2: The basic steps for setting up a Living Lab - Phase 1.....12
Figure 3: The basic steps for setting up a Living Lab - Phase 2.....22

List of Tables

Table 1: TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus.....15
Table 2: Pilot Sites' Main Needs and Cross-cutting Priorities.....16
Table 3: Updated Table - TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus.....18
Table 4: Updated Table - Pilot Sites' Main Needs and Cross-cutting Priorities.....19

Executive Summary

In response to the need to promote rural and remote areas through alternative tourism, the **TOURAL project** aims to foster UCCST **(Underwater Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism, Cultural & Creative Tourism, Cultural Science Tourism, Silver Tourism)** as enablers of sustainable development. To this end, a participatory model is being proposed, which includes the co-design, co-creation and co-validation of policy pathways, business models and tourism products and services.

In line with this, the **Living Labs (LLs) methodology** has been selected as a co-working method. Each pilot region of TOURAL will have one LL, with the objective of reflecting the actual needs and priorities of the local communities. This will contribute to raising awareness, knowledge transfer and the co-creation of business models.

In this context, this paper presents **a preliminary analysis** of the work that has been conducted during the first year of the project, with the aim to design the LLs and ensure their successful implementation.

The preparation phase of the LLs is currently underway, following desk research and consultations with local partners. The following steps have been undertaken a) the identification of the need, b) the identification of the stakeholders and c) the design of the LL.

As a first step, the **identification of the needs** in each pilot region defines the content of the LLs and sets the basis for their result-oriented development. In parallel with the needs, the TOURAL Tourism Verticals (Underwater Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism, Cultural & Creative Tourism, Cultural Science Tourism, Silver Tourism) have also been identified to be included in the discussions of the LLs.

Regarding the **identification of stakeholders**, it is recommended that they represent the four groups of key stakeholders, namely Policy, Industry, Academia and Society (Quadruple Helix), that are involved in the sector, have an interest in, or will be affected by, the outcomes of TOURAL.

In terms of the **design of the LLs** and the logistical details, a) the working language will be the national language of each Pilot Site to ensure better engagement and input from local stakeholders, b) the LLs should last at least one full working day, c) the format will be on-site, except for the Ukrainian LL, which may be hybrid, and d) the LLs should be completed by May 2025.

After the completion of this first phase of preparation, the **co-creation process** will be launched in the first semester of 2025 with the implementation of the LLs. Until then, online meetings will be organized with the local partners to exchange on, and develop all the necessary information and tools to prepare the LLs.

As the LLs will have been carried out, the last two steps of the Living Lab methodology, i.e. the **test** and the **co-validation** of the implemented UCCST services, will be undertaken by WP3 ("UCCST Models, Pilot Planning & Small-Scale Implementations") and WP4 ("Business Modelling, Design of Tourism Products & Small-Scale Validation"). These WPs will build on the co-working method, communication channels and results of the LLs to advance the development of pilot services and business models.

List of Symbols and Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CCT	Cultural & Creative Tourism
CH	Cultural Heritage
CST	Cultural Science Tourism
KAC	Knowledge Awareness Centre
MDM	Multidimensional Model
MRC	Macro-Regional Cooperation
RRG	Rural and Remote Grids
SBG	Sustainable Balanced Growth
SLT	Silver Tourism
TV	Tourism Verticals
UCCST	UCNHT-CCT-CST-SLT
UCH	Underwater Cultural Heritage
UCNHT	Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism
UCRR	Urban Clusters of Rural Regions
UW	Underwater
VR	Virtual Reality
WP	Work Package

1 Introduction

1.1 Deliverable Scope and Structure

Rural and remote areas offer significant potential for tourism development, given their numerous opportunities. Alternative forms of tourism that are environmentally friendly and respectful of local communities can be dynamic drivers of social and economic growth.

However, these areas must overcome a wide range of challenges. In this context, the European Commission has put forward a “Long Term Vision for Rural Areas”[1], which identifies both challenges and opportunities and proposes a Rural Action Plan[2].

In response to the need to promote rural and remote areas through alternative tourism, the **TOURAL project**[3] was launched in 2024 with the objective of fostering UCCST as enablers of sustainable development. The project's geographic scope encompasses three regions from the **Adriatic-Ionian macro-region** (Italy, Croatia, Greece) and three regions from the **Black Sea Basin** (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine).

In this framework, the project proposes a model to support the tourism development across these regions. The model includes the co-design, co-creation and co-validation of policy pathways, business models and tourism products and services.

In line with this, under WP2 (“CCT Analysis & Policy Pathways”) and Task 2.3 (“Co – Work Method & Processes”), the **Living Labs (LLs) process** will be implemented as a co-working method. This innovative and participatory method will contribute to raising awareness, knowledge transfer and the co-creation of business models that respond to actual local needs and priorities.

In this context, the present paper (Deliverable 2.5 “Preliminary Analysis of TOURAL Co-“Work” Processes”) presents **a preliminary analysis** of the work that has already been completed to organise the LLs and ensure their successful implementation.

The first part provides information about the definition of the Living Labs, basic steps, and methodology. The second part elaborates on the design and development process of the TOURAL Living Labs and outlines the next steps for their implementation and results.

1.2 Methodology

Methodologically this paper was elaborated based on a) desk research and b) consultations with the project partners. Through **desk research,** the Living Labs methodology was assessed as a tailor-made process to use within the TOURAL project to get the optimum results through co-work, in order to support the design of the business models that will cover the needs of the six pilot regions. Desk analysis included online research on how a LL is set up (e.g. content, logistical details), the profile of potential stakeholders, and the dissemination material and knowledge-transfer tools that could be used prior to and during the LLs. Additionally, online resources were used to identify the cross-cutting priorities of the pilot sites, pertaining from the need for sustainability, preservation of resources and environmental protection.

Desk research was complemented with the input from Task 2.1 (“Regional/Macro-Regional Research on Policy Instruments, Strategies & Funded Projects”) and its relevant Deliverable 2.1 (“Identified Good CCT Practices & Stakeholders Cooperation Level in Adrion & Black Sea”). D2.1 identifies good CCT practices from the TOURAL geographic area and analyses stakeholders' engagement level in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region and the Black Sea Basin.

Consultations were conducted between the T2.3 Leader, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) and the project partners from each pilot region, with the aim to identify the TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus and the Main Needs in each pilot region. The consultations took place at) the two TOURAL on-site meetings in Greece (Thessaloniki, 22-23 February 2024) and (Alonnisos, 30 September-2 October 2024) and b) two online meetings on 3 and 16 December 2024. The online consultations aimed at creating the knowledge baseline for the LLs, and discussed basic technicalities for the organization of each living labs.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3162

[2] https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan_en

[3] https://toural-project.eu/

2 Definition of the co-work processes and the Regional Living Labs setup

2.1 Context

Under Task 2.3 ("Co – Work Method & Processes"), the ICBSS is responsible to develop **processes to facilitate co-work** with the relevant stakeholders. The **aim** of the co-work processes is to raise awareness and engage the stakeholders to co-design, co-create and co-validate pertinent approaches for the sustainable development of UCCST at both policy and operational levels.

The **duration** of the Task is twenty-one months, from April 2024 to December 2025. The **geographic scope** targets the six Pilot Sites (PS) of TOURAL, with the aim of expanding from local to national (country level) to regional (Adriatic-Ionian and Black Sea).

A preliminary concept note for the co-work process was prepared by the Task Leader (ICBSS) and presented at the 1st General Assembly (Alonnisos, 30 September-2 October 2024). The concept note was revised and finalised as per the feedback received from the project partners. The concept note outlined the basic steps and actions to support the co-work processes envisaged under the TOURAL project, and specifically WP2: CCT Analysis & Policy Pathways.

2.2 Proposed activities for Co-Work: Living Labs

To enable and support result-oriented interaction with the target stakeholders, the **Living Labs (LLs) process** has been proposed as a primary means of co-work. To ensure stakeholders' engagement and knowledge exchange, LLs will be supported by additional activities, such as online surveys, brief online interviews and multilateral online meetings.

2.2.1. What is a Living Lab?

As defined by the European Network of Living Labs[4], *"LLs is **a process of engaging stakeholders in a systematic way**. They are user-centred, open innovation ecosystems based on systematic user co-creation approach, integrating research and innovation processes in real life communities and settings. They operate as intermediaries among citizens, research organisations, companies, cities and regions for joint value co-creation, rapid prototyping, or validation to scale up innovation and businesses"*.

2.2.2. What are the necessary characteristics for a successful Living Lab?

To ensure the successful implementation of result-oriented LLs, it is essential to address the following:

- **Co-creation with, for and by end-users:** interactive & participatory approach from idea generation to building prototypes, from design to commercialization.
- **Active user involvement:** work with users with real needs who generate ideas and make them concrete.
- **Orchestration:** LL is an orchestrator, matchmaker, and facilitator to effectively bridge the innovation, skills, and investment gap.
- **Real-life setting:** study of real life-test environments and infrastructures/real use cases (Pilot Sites).
- **Multi-method approach:** a large choice of tools & techniques that can be used for end-user involvement (e.g. brainstorming, surveys, foresight exercises etc.).
- **Multi-stakeholder participation:** Policy-Industry-Academia-Society (Quadruple Helix).

2.2.3. What are the basic steps for setting up a Living Lab?

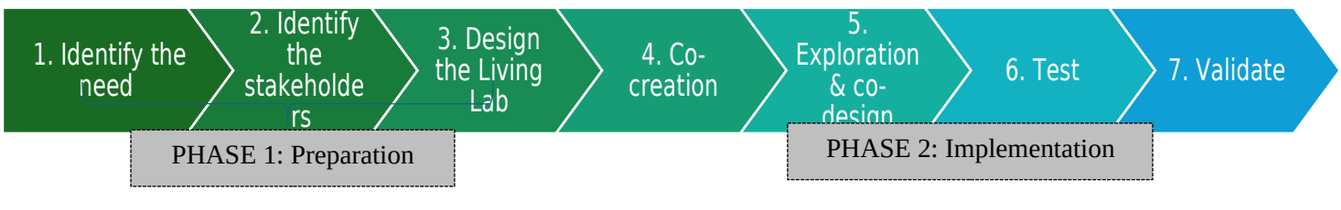

Figure 1: The basic steps for setting up a Living Lab

Setting up a LL could be divided into two phases. In the **phase 1**, the **preparation**, serves to identify the need that will be addressed through the LL; the identification of the relevant stakeholders that will be participating at the LL; the design of the LL based on the need to be addressed, incl. relevant dialogue tools, dissemination materials etc.

Phase 2, the **implementation**, is about co-work, namely the dialogue with the stakeholders, the knowledge exchange, and outputs that will feed the design of the pilot services for testing and co-validation. As a final step following the validation process, a set of recommendations (policy and operational) is envisaged to be published, for the use of all relevant stakeholders.

For better results, it is advised that the four steps of phase 2 are implemented in different rounds of living labs, allowing time between each step to assess the results and provide input to the next round. However, in cases of budget and/or time limitations, certain steps of the process can be merged.

2.3. The TOURAL Living Labs

Based on the preliminary identification of pilot regions’ needs and priorities, and in response to TOURAL’s objectives, it is proposed to organise at least **one round of one living lab per each pilot region** of TOURAL, based on available budget and the timeline of the project. A **second round** of LLs, one per pilot region, or two regional LLs, one per macro-region/sea basin, is highly recommended.

The LLs will be organized at each pilot region by the local project partners:

- **Nessebar (Bulgaria):** Municipality of Nessebar (MoN), Balkan Heritage Foundation (BHF), Bourgas Regional Tourist Association (BRTA)
- **Danube Delta, Tulcea (Romania):** Association Local Action Group Danube Delta (GALDD)
- **Kutsurub (Ukraine):** Civil Organization Kinburn (KIN), National Ecological Centre of Ukraine (NECU)
- **North Sporades (Greece):** Municipality of Skopelos (MoS), Municipality of Alonnisos (MoA)
- **Teramo Province (Italy):** Province of Teramo (PoT), Abruzzo Region (ABR), ITACA (ITACA)
- **Šimuni, Island of Pag (Croatia):** ZADRA NOVA Agency (ZDRN)

3. Setting up the TOURAL Living Labs

3.1. Phase 1: Preparation

The implementation of the Living Lab methodology is divided into two phases. Phase 1 includes the necessary steps for setting up the LLs, as follows: **1. Identify the need, 2. Identify the stakeholders, 3. Desing the Living Lab**.

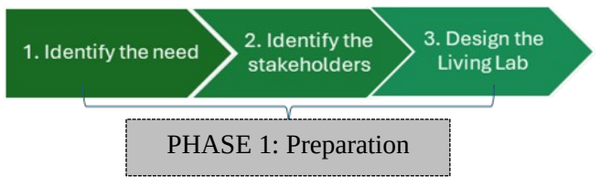

Figure 2: The basic steps for setting up a Living Lab - Phase 1

3.1.1. Step 1: Identify the need

Prior to the Living Labs, and well before approaching the relevant local stakeholders, it is important to **identify the need**, meaning what is the goal the project aims to support (scope), how this goal will be achieved, and more importantly, what are the current barriers hindering its achievement (problem).

Scope: For TOURAL, the goal has been identified as "[supporting] the sustainable development of niche tourism sectors (UCCST) in rural and remote areas of the Adriatic – Ionian and the Black Sea".

How: With the development of new business models responding to actual local needs and priorities.

Problem: The LLs will build on the findings of D2.1 – Identified Good CCT Practices & Stakeholders Cooperation Level in Adrion & Black Sea and will be further specified based on the input provided by the pilot regions' local partners, considering that each pilot region has different needs and challenges.

Considering that each pilot site has different needs and faces different challenges, the Task leader (ICBSS) conducted **a preliminary assessment for each PS**, based on two key sources of information: a) the findings of **Task 2.1 and Deliverable 2.1** and b) the **input provided by the PS leaders** through their PowerPoint presentations and discussions during the two TOURAL on-site meetings in Thessaloniki (22-23 February 2024) and Alonnisos (30 September - 2 October 2024).

The preliminary assessment identified the pilot sites' priorities on the four **TOURAL Tourism Verticals** (Underwater Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism, Cultural & Creative Tourism, Cultural Science Tourism, Silver Tourism), as well as the main needs of the pilot sites.

3.1.1.1. DEFINITIONS OF UCCST

According to Deliverable 2.1 – Identified Good CCT Practices & Stakeholders Cooperation Level in Adrion & Black Sea, the four TOURAL Tourism Verticals (UCCST) definitions are as follows:

- **Underwater Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism (UCNHT).** Focuses on the exploration and preservation of underwater archaeological sites, marine biodiversity, and coastal ecosystems, combining diving experiences with heritage interpretation.
- **Cultural & Creative Tourism (CCT).** Encourages visitor engagement in local traditions, cultural heritage, crafts, and creative industries, fostering cultural exchange, sustainability and protection of cultural heritage and supporting creative economies.
- **Cultural Science Tourism (CST).** Promotes science-based experiences (e.g., citizen science, archaeology, marine biology) where tourists participate in learning and research activities.
- **Silver Tourism (SLT).** Targets the senior/retired population, providing inclusive, accessible, and wellness-oriented tourism options tailored to their needs.

With regard to the acronym **UCCST**, this was created by combining the aforementioned abbreviations (i.e. UCNHT, CCT, CST, SLT).

3.1.1.2. MAIN NEEDS

Regarding the **main needs** that were identified, they are as follows:

- **Extension of the tourist season /year-round tourism**. Some PS are already experiencing overtourism, which threatens cultural and natural heritage, while others are at risk of doing so. In addition, the lack of off-season tourism limits the economic independence of local communities.
- **Improvement of transport connections-accessibility.** Inadequate transport infrastructure and services, as well as long distances from urban areas, hinder people from visiting the PS. Adverse weather conditions can often make the journey more precarious.
- **Raising residents' awareness of the rich, undervalued heritage of their place.** Members of the local communities are often not well-informed about the cultural and natural heritage of their PS. Consequently, they are not aware of the need to protect them.
- **Development of skills relevant to the tourism sector through training.** Employers and employees have more experience in traditional tourism sectors than niche tourism sectors. They also often lack the necessary skills for adopting more sustainable practices in their workplace.
- **Tourism infrastructure interventions.** Inadequate tourism infrastructure, such as accommodation, food and beverage services, and entertainment amenities, can negatively impact not only the visitor experience, but also the quality of life for locals and the cultural and natural heritage of the PS.
- **Affordable healthcare provision.** As rural and remote areas, the PS face the issue of limited access to healthcare services. Apart from decreasing the quality of life for locals, this situation often discourages people from visiting the PS.
- **Adoption of strategic documents for the development of tourism.** The lack of specific documents, such as strategies, plans and roadmaps for the strategic management of tourism development, slows down the socio-economic benefits of the sector and increases the vulnerability of cultural and natural heritage.
- **Financial support for SMEs.** Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), particularly those in rural and remote areas, require tailored financial assistance to become resilient, profitable businesses that can also give back to their communities.
- **Tourism services digitalisation.** In the PS, the limited access to digital services, such as data spaces, restricts the ability of tourist operators to develop a targeted plan for their products/services. Furthermore, technologies, such as mobile applications and online platforms that could improve the visitor experience are not being utilised.
- **Protection of natural resources from the influx of tourists.** Across the PS, there are highly sensitive natural areas, many of which are home to cultural sites, that are increasingly threatened by the mass influx of tourists. The absence of effective measures to protect these areas is contributing to their environmental degradation.
- **Development of cooperation networks between the different levels of decision-making.** The absence of permanent, transparent and inclusive networks where all the tourism stakeholders from policy, industry, academia and civil society could efficiently cooperate restricts the quality of the visitor experience, reduces the socio-economic benefits of the local communities and puts the cultural and natural heritage at risk.
- **Development of cooperation networks between private and public stakeholders in tourism.** The absence of permanent, transparent and inclusive networks where all the relevant private and public stakeholders could efficiently cooperate has resulted in conflicting interests, fragmented funding allocation and, consequently, missed opportunities for the sustainable development of tourism, with socio-economic and environmental negative impacts.

3.1.1.3. CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES

The Task leader (ICBSS) conducted **online desk research to identify cross-cutting priorities** that are common to, and of high importance for, all the pilot sites, as well as interconnected with their main needs. Two overarching priorities have been identified: a) **raising awareness of the preservation of the pilot sites' cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible,** and b)

adopting a gender mainstreaming[5] **approach to successfully meet the needs of the pilot sites**. These priorities are fundamental to ensure development of the niche tourism sectors and resilience in the local communities, particularly in relation to sustainability, preservation of resources and environmental protection.

Tourism development is often profit-based, disregarding fundamental priorities like the protection of the cultural heritage, both **tangible and intangible**. For instance, monuments are susceptible to degradation from pollution and damage from overcrowding of visitors. Local traditions may become commercialised and lose their authenticity. Furthermore, the experience of visitors will be adversely affected, and the quality of life of the local communities will be negatively impacted.

Any new community-based tourism models require that all relevant stakeholders (quadruple helix) and visitors **are well-informed and sensitised/vigilant to the importance of cultural preservation**.

The importance of cultural preservation interrelates with the already identified needs of the six pilot sites, as their effective resolution requires the protection of cultural heritage. In this framework, the stakeholders to be involved in the TOURAL tourism verticals across the six pilot sites should collaborate closely to take effective measures for raising awareness of the preservation of the pilot sites' tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Local communities must play an integral role in this process to ensure the attainment of meaningful results.

In parallel, **gender dimension** is identified as a cross-cutting priority for the **pilot sites.** Women have a long-standing connection with both tourism and cultural heritage[6], but despite the significant potential, they often lack access to tourism entrepreneurship, tourism education and training, while they are underrepresented in decision-making processes related to the tourism industry[7]. In view of the vital role women play in local communities, the absence of gender-responsive measures is not only an obstacle to women's economic empowerment, but also threatens the resilience of their communities, and should therefore be taken into consideration by the pilot sites’ stakeholders.

The results of the entire identification assessment of the pilot sites’ needs and priorities are presented in the following **two tables**. The first table outlines the **TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus**, indicating each pilot site’s priority on the four TOURAL tourism verticals. The second table provides information on **the main needs of each PS**, as well as on **the two overarching priorities** common to all the PS and interconnected with the main needs.

[5] The official website of the European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender mainstreaming as *“the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination”*, https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming

[6] https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284420384

[7] https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284420384

Pilot Sites	Underwater Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism	Cultural & Creative Tourism	Cultural Science Tourism	Silver Tourism
North Sporades (Greece)	✓	✓		
Teramo Province (Italy)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Šimuni, Island of Pag (Croatia)	✓			✓
Nessebar (Bulgaria)	✓	✓		
Danube Delta, Tulcea (Romania)	✓	✓		
Kutsurub (Ukraine)	✓	✓	✓	

Table 1: TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus

****Teramo Province, Danube Delta-Tulcea and Kutsurub:** As identified, these Pilot Sites will focus on the first Tourism Vertical, excluding Underwater Cultural Heritage Tourism.

Pilot Sites	Extension of the tourist season /year-round tourism	Improvement of transport connections-accessibility	Raising residents' awareness of the rich, undervalued heritage of their place	Development of skills relevant to the tourism sector through training	Tourism infrastructure interventions	Affordable healthcare provision	Adoption of strategic documents for the development of tourism	Financial support for SMEs	Tourism services digitalisation	Protection of natural resources from the influx of tourists	Development of cooperation networks between the different levels of decision-making	Development of cooperation networks between private and public stakeholders in tourism		
North Sporades (Greece)	√	√		√	√	√				√	√		CULTURAL PRESERVATION	GENDER MAINSTREAMING
Teramo Province (Italy)	√	√		√		√		√	√			√		
Šimuni, Island of Pag (Croatia)	√		√	√	√		√	√	√		√	√		
Nessebar (Bulgaria)	√		√	√		√				√				
Danube Delta, Tulcea (Romania)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√			
Kutsurub (Ukraine)	√	√	√	√	√	√								

Table 2: Pilot Sites' Main Needs and Cross-cutting Priorities

This identification assessment of the TOURAL Tourism Verticals in focus and the main needs at each Pilot Site **is based on a) the input from T2.1 and D2.1 and b) the presentations and discussions of the Pilot Sites leaders during the two TOURAL on-site meetings in Thessaloniki (22-23 February 2024) and Alonnisos (30 September-2 October 2024). The identification assessment of the Pilot Sites’ cross-cutting priorities **is based on** online desk research.

According to these **initial results**, most PS focus on two of the four Tourism Verticals, while Underwater Cultural and Nature Heritage Tourism is the type of tourism that all PS prioritize. In terms of the main needs, the extension of the tourist season / year-round tourism and the development of skills relevant to the tourism sector through training are identified in all regions.

The tables were presented and discussed with the pilot site partners in two online meetings held on 4 December and 16 December respectively.

The **updated results** are included in the Tables 3 and 4. The orange marks represent new additions by the PS leaders. The red marks indicate those that have been removed by them.

In addition, raising awareness of cultural preservation and adopting a gender mainstreaming approach remain the two cross-cutting priorities necessary to effectively meet the priorities of the PS.

The process of further identifying the TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus, as well as prioritising the main needs of each region through the input of the PS leaders, is of high importance as it has provided a clearer framework for the content of the LLs.

Pilot Sites	Underwater Cultural & Nature Heritage Tourism	Cultural & Creative Tourism	Cultural Science Tourism	Silver Tourism
North Sporades (Greece)	√	√		
Teramo Province (Italy)	√	√	√	√
Šimuni, Island of Pag (Croatia)	√		√	√
Nessebar (Bulgaria)	√	√	√	√
Danube Delta, Tulcea (Romania)	√	√	√	
Kutsurub (Ukraine)	√	√	√	

Table 3: Updated Table - TOURAL Tourism Verticals in Focus

****Teramo Province, Danube Delta-Tulcea and Kutsurub:** As identified, these Pilot Sites will focus on the first Tourism Vertical, excluding Underwater Cultural Heritage Tourism.

Table 4: Updated Table - Pilot Sites' Main Needs and Cross-cutting Priorities

Pilot Sites	Extension of the tourist season /year-round tourism	Improvement of transport connections-accessibility	Raising residents' awareness of the rich, undervalued heritage of their place	Development of skills relevant to the tourism sector through training	Tourism infrastructure interventions	Affordable healthcare provision	Adoption of strategic documents for the development of tourism	Financial support for SMEs	Tourism services digitalisation	Protection of natural resources from the influx of tourists	Development of cooperation networks between the different levels of decision-making	Development of cooperation networks between private and public stakeholders in tourism		
North Sporades (Greece)	√	√		√	√	√				√	√		CULTURAL PRESERVATION	GENDER MAINSTREAMING
Teramo Province (Italy)	√	√	√	√		~~√~~		√	√			√		
Šimuni, Island of Pag (Croatia)	√		√	√	√		√	~~√~~	√	√	√	√		
Nessebar (Bulgaria)	√		√	√		~~√~~		√		√	√	√		
Danube Delta, Tulcea (Romania)	√	~~√~~	√	√	~~√~~	√	√	~~√~~		√	~~√~~	√		

Kutsurub (Ukraine)	√	√	√	√	√	√								

This identification assessment of the TOURAL Tourism Verticals in focus and the main needs at each Pilot Site **is based on a) the input from T2.1 and D2.1, b) the presentations and discussions of the Pilot Sites leaders during the two TOURAL on-site meetings in Thessaloniki (22-23 February 2024) and Alonnisos (30 September-2 October 2024) and c) the input of the Pilot Sites leaders at the 2nd online meeting for setting up the LLs. The identification assessment of the Pilot Sites’ cross-cutting priorities **is based on** online desk research.

3.1.2. Step 2: Identify the stakeholders

As the process of LLs is based on a user-centered approach, focusing on co-work, co-creation and engagement of multiple participants, the targeted **identification of stakeholders** is essential for the success of the LLs and of the project as a whole. Therefore, the identified relevant stakeholders should be involved from the beginning and throughout the duration of the project.

Although the emphasis should be placed on **local (pilot regions)** stakeholders, it is also important to involve **regional (Adriatic- Ionian and Black Sea)** and **national (country level)** representatives, provided they meet all other criteria.

The main selection criteria are that they are **involved in the sector, have an interest in or affected by the outcomes of TOURAL**. The stakeholders should represent the four groups of core players, i.e. Policy-Industry-Academia-Society (Quadruple Helix).

Indicatively:

- **Policy:** National authorities (ministries of tourism, culture, finance, environment, etc), policy implementation national agencies, regional and local authorities, development agencies, sector related national and local authorities.
- **Industry:** Businesses (including Small & Medium Enterprises and start-ups) related to the target sectors, associations, regional agencies, tourism service providers and tour operators.
- **Academia:** Research centres, universities, working groups and training institutions in fields related to the target sectors, as well as cultural associations, museums.
- **Society:** Representatives of relevant NGOs, travellers' associations or working groups, young and adult travellers (divers included), silver tourists, representatives of the local community who live in the Pilot regions local communities.
- Representatives from local, national or regional related initiatives and/or projects for the knowledge exchange.

In addition, the importance of stakeholders' consistency throughout the life of the project is essential and needs to be clarified by the PS leaders prior to the start of the LLs.

A first approach relevant to stakeholders was conducted in the pilot region of Greece, and specifically on the island of Alonnisos, where an **awareness workshop** was held in the sidelines of the 1st General Assembly of the project (Alonnisos, 30 September-2 October 2024). Project Partners presented the TOURAL project to local stakeholders and outlined the subsequent co-work processes. The initial discussions were taken into consideration for the elaboration of the tables of needs and priorities (Tables 3 and 4).

In accordance with the aforementioned criteria, the process of identifying relevant stakeholders is currently underway. Over the coming weeks, invitations with all relevant information will be extended to potential stakeholders.

3.1.3. Step 3: Design the Living Lab

In addition to content, in the **two online meetings** held in December 2024, partners discussed the various technical aspects of the LLs.

The following points have been taken into account:

Date: The first round of LLs should be organised in the period **February – May 2025**, considering the tourist season, accessibility, provisional costs, as well as the necessary time needed to process the outcomes, draft and finalise the related Deliverable (D2.7).

Duration: Each LL should be at least a **one-day event**. If possible, a day and a half would be better.

Location: Each LL will be hosted by the local partners at each pilot region. Participation will be onsite only. Only for the **Ukrainian Pilot Site**, it is envisaged to consider hybrid or online participation.

Number of participants: Each Living Lab should have approximately 20 – 25 persons, excluding Project Partners, to ensure active participation and make the optimum of discussions.

Target audience: Local, national, regional stakeholders from Policy-Industry-Academia-Society that are involved in UCCST and have an interest in, or are affected by, the outcomes of TOURAL.

Working Language: Each LL will be conducted in the **national language** of each pilot region to facilitate the participation of local stakeholders and ensure good results.

A **third online coordination meeting** will be held in January 2025. The meeting will provide further information on the design of the LLs, including setting the dates, the dissemination materials to be used, such as the invitation letter, and the dialogue tools that will be employed in the LLs.

3.2. Phase 2: Implementation

The **second phase of implementation** will be launched in the first semester of 2025. The implementation phase foresees the organization of the Living Labs through tailor-made and result-oriented processes, using diverse knowledge and dialogue tools, based on the following stages: **4. Co-creation, 5. Exploration & co-design, 6. Test**, **7. Validate**.

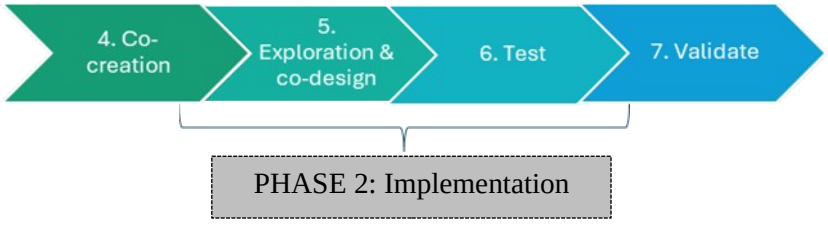

Figure 3: The basic steps for setting up a Living Lab - Phase 2

3.2.1. Co-creation, Exploration and Co-design

The first part of the implementation phase will be completed with the organization of the LLs, i.e. one per each pilot region. During each LL, **co-creation** will be achieved by inviting stakeholders to structured discussions using various dialogue and knowledge transfer tools prepared in advance by the Task Leader in collaboration with the PS partners.

The purpose of these interactive discussions will be to validate the pre-defined needs in relation to local needs and priorities, and subsequently to identify bottlenecks, facilitators and policy and market needs that will help to achieve the identified TOURAL scope, i.e. "[supporting] the

sustainable development of niche tourism sectors (UCCST) in rural and remote areas of the Adriatic – Ionian and the Black Sea”.

By exploring and co-designing scenarios, the LLs will produce a set of recommendations at both the operational and policy levels. These recommendations will feed the development of policy pathways, pilot services and business models.

Moreover, the findings of the LLs will be included in D2.7, entitled “TOURAL Co-“Work” Processes & Funding Support for Tourism Value-Chains”.

3.2.2. Test and Co-validation

The second part of the implementation phase, **the testing, and the co-validation of the implemented UCCST services**, will be implemented under WP3 (“UCCST Models, Pilot Planning & Small-Scale Implementations”) and WP4 (“Business Modelling, Design of Tourism Products & Small-Scale Validation”).

These WPs will build on the co-working method, the communication channels, and the results of the LLs to proceed with the design and development of pilot services and business models.

As the WPs are interrelated, coordination and communication with the relevant Task leaders is ensured throughout the process of the LLs. In this regard, during the 2nd online coordination meeting for the LLs, the WP4 Leader (ITACA) presented the main objectives and tasks of WP4 indicating the clear links of LLs discussions with the design of business models, marketing strategies and tourism products envisaged under WP4. The results of the LLs will feed the design of the models and services under WP4 based on actual needs and priorities.

To ensure the effective testing and co-validation of business models and services, it is recommended that a second round of LLs, one per macro-region/sea basin, be carried out, if feasible in terms of budget and time availability.

4. Conclusions

The present paper is **a preliminary analysis** of TOURAL Co-"Work" processes aimed at engaging stakeholders to co-design, co-create and co-validate pertinent approaches for the sustainable development of UCCST at both policy and operational levels. To enable and support result-oriented interaction with the target stakeholders, the **Living Labs methodology** has been proposed as a primary means of co-work.

In this context, **desk research and consultations** with the TOURAL pilot regions partners were conducted during the first year of the project, to define the LLs methodology to be followed, to set up the TOURAL LLs, and to identify the real needs and priorities of each pilot site for the successful development of business models.

The **main conclusions** of this preliminary analysis can be summarized as follows:

- The Living labs are an innovative and interactive process through which diverse stakeholders co-create and stay engaged, while their solutions reflect the real needs and opportunities of communities.
- The establishment of a LL can be divided into two phases. Phase 1 includes the preparation, serves to identify the need that will be addressed through the LL; the identification of the relevant stakeholders that will be participating at the LL; the design of the LL based on the need to be addressed, incl. relevant dialogue tools, dissemination materials etc.
- Phase 2 includes the implementation stage, namely the co-work, dialogue and co-design with the stakeholders, the knowledge exchange, and outputs that will feed the design of the pilot services for the subsequent stages of testing and co-validation. The process is concluded with the elaboration of recommendations (policy and operational) for the use of all relevant stakeholders.
- The TOURAL LLs will aim to co-design, co-create, and co-validate pertinent approaches for the sustainable development of UCCST at both policy and operational levels.
- During the preparation phase of the TOURAL Living Labs, the identification of needs and priorities highlights the importance of the TOURAL Tourism verticals for the pilot regions, while Underwater Cultural and Nature Heritage Tourism is prioritized by all pilot regions.
- Further needs are identified in the extension of the tourist season / year-round tourism and the development of skills relevant to the tourism sector through training are identified in all regions.
- Raising awareness of cultural preservation and adopting a gender mainstreaming approach remain the two horizontal priorities necessary to effectively meet the priorities and address the needs of the PS.
- In view of the launch of the TOURAL Living Labs, a quadruple helix approach has been decided for the engagement of the key stakeholders, i.e. representatives from Policy, Industry, Academia, and Society that are involved in the sector, have an interest in or be affected by the outcomes of TOURAL.

Going forward, the design of the LLs will be finalized in collaboration with the PS leaders through online coordination meetings and bilateral consultations in order to facilitate the subsequent implementation phase.

The development and implementation process of the TOURAL Living Labs, along with the results of the co-work processes will be included in the D2.7 (“TOURAL Co-“Work” Processes & Funding Support for Tourism Value-Chains”) to be published in December 2025.

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