

LANDS

NEXT DESTINATIONS BALKANS:
AGRITOURISM LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT
585833-EPP-1-2017-1-RS-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Abbreviations

AUA	Agricultural University of Athens
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CB	Capacity building
CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education
DPD	Detailed Project Description
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
IPARD	Instrument for Preaccession Assistance in Rural Development
NGO	Non governmental organization/association
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QA	Quality assurance
RDA	Regional Development Agency
REDAH	Regional Development Agency for Hercegovina
RS	Republic of Serbia
SERDA	Sarajevo Regional Development Agency
SUA	Slovak University of Agriculture
SWG RRD	Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group
TO	Tourism Organization
TOT	Training of Trainers
UNMO	University of Mostar
UNIBL	University of Banja Luka
WEBIN	Western Balkans Institute



Executive summary

The LANDS project arose as a need for greater affirmation of HEIs in the Western Balkans in creating educational content and cooperation with relevant actors at all levels in the field of agritourism. The whole project lasted from 15.10.2017. to 14.02.2021, ie. a total of 40 months. The overall quality of the project implementation is assessed as good.

The LANDS project proved to be extremely relevant in the context of the specific situation in higher (vocational) education in the field of agriculture and rural development in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, because its goals and purpose are in full compliance with the needs of the sector and tourism (as set out in EU documents and national legal frameworks).

The activities within the LANDS project have, despite certain obstacles and shortcomings, been implemented in a fairly efficient manner. The main obstacles, in terms of efficiency, were the situation with Kovid 19 and the reform process 3 of the partner institution, due to which certain activities were delayed. Nevertheless, the team members were very satisfied with the quality of cooperation, especially at the informal level, and in the end the differences in profiles and attitudes proved to be an advantage, not just a challenge.

Generally speaking, the activities realized within the LANDS project significantly contributed to the fulfillment of the Specific Objectives of the project, although with slight differences in the degree of effectiveness. As far as the first and third specific objectives are concerned, the results achieved are more than satisfactory. Special mention should be made of the ability of project management to follow the recommendations of the Tempus Office and to adjust / improve project activities in accordance with them, as well as the exceedance of certain highly relevant performance indicators (trainings held in communities outside the consortium). partners.)

Although it is too early to provide a detailed assessment of the impact of the reformed curricula and teaching methodology on the educational and professional communities that were the target group of the LANDS project, team members have the impression that the project will change the social and professional context in an extremely positive way. in which it is implemented and.

The benefits and changes achieved by the LANDS project are likely to be sustained and continue to develop in the future thanks to the establishment of common frameworks for future cooperation (see Agreement below) and the intensive transfer of knowledge and skills provided during the project. Moreover, the project has laid a solid foundation for future interventions in the field of agriculture and tourism, both in terms of education and in terms of professional / business aspect. Cooperation with NGOs and RDAs is seen as an additional factor that strengthens sustainability and replicability.



1. Introduction

The Report represents a systemic outlook of the independent external end of the Next Destination Balkans: Agritourism Landscape Development (hereinafter referred to as LANDS) project evaluation. The Report is one of the envisaged project results under the work package related to the project quality assurance framework. The evaluation process and findings presented are prepared by the externally engaged independent expert in the field.

In terms of the Report content, evaluation process and findings are designed and presented to primarily reflect on the following project dimensions: i) **relevance**; ii) **efficiency** of project partnership and conducted activities; iii) **effectiveness** of the planned intervention logic; iv) **impact** of the project on the targeted communities and wider environment; v) **sustainability** and replication potential of the produced results.

In addition, the document sheds the light on some of the most relevant identified **good practices** and enlists **lessons learnt** during the inception, implementation and closure project phase.

Based on the evaluation process findings, **general conclusions and specific recommendations** have been designed to support incoming developmental interventions in the field of agritourism (sectors of agriculture and rural development and tourism) in the Western Balkans region.

In terms of the Report structure, apart from the brief Introduction (part 1), the document contains the following sections: LANDS project overview (part 2) with explained relevance and project background, partnership composition and specific objectives to be attained; scope and methodology of the applied evaluation process and its core findings (part 3); specific recommendations and suggestions are defined with regards to project management, coordination, implementation and alignment with wider project context along with some general notifications on the project sector-specific (agricultural and tourism education and training) relevance in the targeted region (part 4).

The evaluation team looked in particular into the extent to which the LANDS project:

- included concrete and logical steps to integrate the project results in the regular work of participating organizations;
- explored the potential to positively impact direct and indirect participants and participating organizations, as well as the wider communities in targeted countries;
- expected results have the potential to be used outside the participating organizations during and after the project lifetime, and at local, regional, or national level;
- created concrete and effective steps to disseminate the results within participating organizations, with other organizations of interest and the public;
- produced materials, documents and media are made freely available and promoted through open licenses;



- defined concrete steps towards ensuring sustainability in terms of impact continuation and producing results after the project budget is used up.

2. LANDS project: an overview

This part of the Report provides the reader with an outline of the LANDS project focusing on the targeted assessment elements such as the project contextual relevance (section 2.1.) and the project consortium composition, objectives and implementation process (section 2.2.).

2.1 Relevance and background

LANDS project was built on the previously funded AGRIVOC Tempus project, also led by the VPPS coordinator, whereby modernisation of agricultural studies curricula (in particular through increase of practical education contents) in line with the labour market needs was the primary goal of the action delivered by the participating HEIs in the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina over the course of 3 academic years. As continuation of the HEIs modernisation and quality education provision, LANDS was designed with the view to support HEIs engagement and collaboration within local communities and national and regional counterparts as well as non-academic institutions in promoting agritourism as important part of rural development and economic diversification strategy in the Western Balkans region. The project was initially planned to be implemented over the course of 3 academic years (36 months), but it has received a 4 month long non cost extension from the funding agency EACEA following the consortium request for approval of total duration of 40 months. Thus total project implementation period lasted from 15 October 2017 until 14 February 2021.

As defined in Detailed Project Description (DPD) document (part F), LANDS was developed to acknowledge the full potential and credibility of HEIs in creating and sharing of local knowledge and upholding to relevant regional cultural and ethic traditions in addressing current European and global tendencies in rural development. LANDS thus contributes to learning culture in the field whereby HEIs in agriculture and tourism become more directly and effectively involved in partnerships and dialogue with different actors in the field – including policy stakeholders, NGOs, professional associations, extension services providers, etc.

Eventually, LANDS strengthens collaboration among HEIs partners also participating in AGRIVOC, while it develops strategic partnership with other sector relevant institutions involved in the consortium including 4 RDAs and a regional NGO. Tackling interdisciplinary field of agritourism, the project sets the ground for profound rural development from the ground up based on strong networking and outreach actions.

2.2. Objectives, partnership and implementation set up

The overall, **impact level objective** of the LANDS project was defined as a contribution to HEIs capacity building in creating their active role in societal development leading to better quality of

living in rural areas through diversification of its economy (understanding and creating opportunities in agritourism development).

The impact level objective is assessed on the bases of fulfilment of the 3 **specific objectives** set out to:

- i. Develop and conduct accreditation process of professional courses in agritourism sector enabling professional development of newcomers and households already working in the field;
- ii. Strengthen teaching and pedagogical competences of academic staff to train educators in the agritourism field and rural economy with the use of ICT; professional development of HEIs academic staff is a key area of intervention enabling further adult education of professionals and beginners working in the sector;
- iii. Strengthening competences of agritourism educators for successful delivery of professional courses developed in the field, also through e-learning opportunities and thereby increased access to non formal education in the field;

The intervention logic of the project closely followed the overall CBHE setup with EU/program countries partners chosen to support the knowledge share and transfer onto the beneficiary/partner countries in the Western Balkans region.

The **partnership composition**¹ of 15 organizations seems to highly reflect on the project relevance and design during implementation stage given that interdisciplinarity of the agritourism concept was presented from both agricultural and tourism point of views, combining the formal and non-formal knowledge and skills to intertwine in the implementation process.

Type of institutions	Program country/EU	Partner country/ Bosnia and Hercegovina	Partner country/ Republic of Serbia
HEIs – Universities (EU and Bosnia and Hercegovina) and Colleges/Academies (Republic of Serbia)	Agricultural University Athens (GREECE) University of Transylvania - Brasov (ROMANIA) Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SLOVAKIA) Turistica – Faculty of Tourism Studies	Agricultural Faculty, University in Banja Luka Agricultural Faculty, University in Sarajevo Agro-Meditarenean Faculty, University of Džemal Bijedić, Mostar	Academy of Applied Studies South Serbia Leskovac (ex Visoka poljoprivredno-prehrambena škola strukovnih studija Prokuplje) Academy for Applied Studies Belgrade (ex Visoka turistička škola strukovnih studija, Belgrade) Akademy of Applied Studies Western Serbia - Užice (ex Visoko poslovno-tehnicka skola Uzice)

¹ The partnership composition statutory changes during the project implementation cycle were introduced as a result of the reforming (integrational) process of HEI educational colleges in the Republic of Serbia as per Government Decisions throughout 2019 on establishment of Academies of Applied Sciences.



	Portoroz, University of Primorska (SLOVENIA)		
RDA		Regional Development Agency for Hercegovina (Canton) REDAH, Mostar Sarajevo (Canton) Regional Development Agency -SERDA, Sarajevo	Regional Development Agency JUG Niš Regional Development Agency Zlatibor Užice
NGO			Western Balkans Institute, Belgrade

Initial implementation set up assumed partners roles given in coordination of particular work packages (WPs). WP1 under UNIBL leadership enabled proper implementation tools development including conducting of research on agritourism potentials in Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina and needs assessment on agritourism professionals competences and training in the beneficiary countries. WP2 under AUA leadership was to support development of agritourism relevant courses for educators through upgrading of competences in line with WP1 findings. WP3 was planned as HEI academic staff institutional capacity building for delivery of training for educators in agritourism and was introduced under the auspices of SUA. In the scope of WP4 the project partners were planning accreditation process and (test) delivery of developed courses in agritourism as well as the HEIs relevant equipment purchase and installation process. WP5 was planned as a project QA framework, WP6 was to support dissemination and exploitation of project results in different media, while WP7 focused on project management and implementation tools and procedures organized around both national legislation and donor contractual obligations.

Intervention logic is presented relatively clearly in a form of Logical Framework Matrix within DPD and this report findings are closely assessing its operationalization in the following chapter.

3. Evaluation: scope, methodology and findings

In this subsection of the Report, the assessment scope and methodology are outlined.

3.1. Scope and methodology

The purpose of the (end project) evaluation process is a general assessment of the expected (and possibly also unexpected) quality and impact of the LANDS project in desired field/s and given geographic area. The assessment is focused on the following project (interrelated) aspects:

- 1) **Relevance**, i.e. project alignment with the final beneficiaries and target groups needs; specific country based contexts in which the Action is carried out; priorities and politics of



partner institutions as well as that of donor agencies, existing regional and global trends in relevant sectors.

- 2) **Efficiency**, i.e. degree to which the project envisaged activities are successfully carried out, especially with regards to partnership quality, readiness of the project team to follow the set objectives, and overcoming the obstacles faced in order to be accountable to their tasks delivery;
- 3) **Effectiveness**, i.e. the degree in which specific project objectives are reached (see above). Effectiveness represents a qualitative measurement of immediate and visible change that the project brought about with reference to the specified target groups (beneficiaries) and which is a direct result of the implementation of the project activities, whereby both intangible and tangible project outcomes are taken into account;
- 4) **Impact**, i.e. wider and long term effects produced as a result of project developmental activities (implemented under developmental WPs 1-4), be it positive or negative, direct or indirect, emerging intentionally or accidentally. In a broader sense, the project impact is assessed as a strategic change emerged from the developmental action and within the defined socio-economic and political context. It showcases the level of fulfilment of the overall project objective (see above).
- 5) **Sustainability & replication**, i.e. probability that positive changes introduced as a result of project implementation will be continuously available also after the project closure, The key aspect of this dimension is related to the knowledge transfer among key stakeholders, and its access to the existing and incoming stakeholders. Replication potential is dependent on sustainability framework set, and shall take the form of the assessment of both structural and soft measures possibilities to be replicated in communities outside the beneficiary ones.

Based on the assessment findings under each of the afore mentioned project implementation aspect, **good practices and lessons learnt** shall be formed in order to support future initiatives in the field in terms of scope, structure and/or objectives.

Methodology used for LANDS project end of the project evaluation of the afore mentioned aspects, represents a hybrid model of assessment based on the analyses of the available documentation and field research (direct in situ and online data collection through interviews and focus groups).

With respect to desk analysis of the documentation, the assessment conducted was a result of detailed review of the available written project documents that were developed by the partners in the consortium (as single institutional products or jointly developed documents). The reviewed and analyzed documentations included the following sources:

- Initial project documents: original project proposal consisting of DPD document with LFM, Workplan and the initial project budget
- Interim narrative and financial report
- Project created tangible and intangible outputs (including training courses, competences developed, etc.)
- Legal documents, e.g. institutional accreditation decisions, program related contracts signed, relevant referral laws



- Other relevant documents, e.g. activity reports from seminars and training, QA documents, events agendas, presentations, attendance lists, etc.
- EACEA monitoring visits reports

The (original) documentation be it technical and/or program relevant was made available by the lead project coordinator in Leskovac. Most of the documents were accessed through the project official webpage as (www.landsproject.net). Some documentation is attained also through the websites of project partners. Also, the access to the created Moodle platform was granted.

With reference to field research (in situ and online collection of data due to Covid19 restrictions in place), the assessment was based on a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups protocols devised for the selected number of partners institutions and stakeholders outside the partnership

A total of 15 interviews (including 5 agritourism households, 5 policy/decision makers, and 5 ToT members) were conducted on the basis of a general protocol adjusted to the specific situation of each stakeholder as per his/her official function, and the related results of the project. Separate focus groups were conducted with project partners PSC members and QA team members. Eight of the interviews were conducted in situ at the occasion of the Final Conference taking place in Leskovac on 11-12 February 2021 while others were conducted online with earmarked stakeholders.²

Additional interviews were conducted over the skype during the following weeks. The interviews lasted on average for 45 minutes. The interview notes were compared to the information gathered through a review process of project documents, for possible challenging of different perceptions of the achieved outcomes.

Focus groups and interviews produced a series of conclusions and recommendations, good practices and lessons learnt worth sharing.

The evaluation process takes account of both quantitative and qualitative assessment with regards to data collected, aiming at providing as precise as possible and as credible as possible data collected through different means, while also looking into deepening the insights and knowledge base of both contexts/sector/program and process/management expertise.

Limitations. Evaluating the effectiveness of the programs (courses) introduced is based on the inputs provided from the beneficiaries, some of which may not be objective in their assessments – biases referred to their institutional affiliation, etc.

Long term impact assessment without introduction of control groups (measuring success of economic diversification in rural areas among households participating and those out of the courses programs) represents an important evaluation deficiency.

² The list of interview participants/interviewed stakeholders and the interview protocol is presented in Annex 1 and 2 of this Report.



Measuring project performance remains just an aspect of organizational management with straightforward objectives and outcomes identified under LFM and tracked in the project monitoring and reporting system provided by the project institutional coordinators.

Some technical limitations to the study approach may be reported as a result of the Covid19 situation that prevented live interviews and planned on site visits of the beneficiaries.

Also, given the scope of the Action and program specifics including the number of participating organizations, absence of formative evaluation (implementation-related evaluation) assessing the extent to which project design is successfully implemented by the consortium organizations, should be considered as a form of weakness for the summative assessment since it may be seen as a necessary precondition to being able to evaluate the extent to which a project has achieved its intended outcomes (focus of summative evaluation), or in other words whether outcomes can clearly be attributed to the project taking into account the ways that existing organizational structures, processes and cultures may either facilitate or impede project implementation.

Cost effectiveness and cost benefit analysis is beyond this assessment approach and the author acknowledges this as an important limitation to overall efficiency and effectiveness remarks.

3.2 Core findings

In this subsection, core assessment findings are presented under each of the observed aspect as per the above mentioned scope. Some good practices in different implementation aspects are acknowledged as well as key lessons learnt to be shared.

3.2.1 Relevantnost

As indicated in subsection 2.1, agriculture is deeply rooted in the history of communities across the European regions, playing a significant economic and cultural role in local (rural) development. Creating attractive tourism offer in rural areas gains pace whereby agritourism is perceived for the past decade as one of the pivotal segments in development of rural areas, especially with regards to diversification of income for the inhabitants. Tons of evidence may be drawn from different world regions in the use of culinary and agricultural experiences for development of some of the most prominent tourism products.

Agritourism stands at the interface between two economic sectors - agriculture and tourism and thus necessitates the interdisciplinary approach to any intervention and collaboration of different actors taking part in numerous rural development processes.

Country/region/sector relevance. Western Balkans region and therefore both beneficiary countries remain firmly devoted to their EU membership status, acknowledging the agricultural sector as one of the key community level policy segments negotiated under the EU negotiation framework



process chapter 11 for agriculture and rural development of which agritourism forms an important part.

Coinciding with the LANDS project implementation period in the Republic of Serbia EU IPARD program (Instrument for Preaccession Assistance in Rural Development) was opened in 2017 to support rural development actions of the registered agricultural households. In 2020, the specific funding call for project proposals was open under the IPARD measure 7 on agritourism development supporting initiatives in the field that on a wider scale contribute to rural and cultural landscapes protection while economically contributing to local inhabitants motivation to stay on their households.

In line with this overall countries/regional framework, and the complexity of the fields of agriculture and tourism, a set of national strategies and legislation framework was approved to support the sectors importance in both countries including:

- Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2014-2024 (Official Gazette RS, no. 85/2014) which prioritizes rural and agritourism development, vertical and horizontal networking and coordination among the actors in the field and increase of services provided by the rural households, all of which may be attributed to the LANDS project as a contribution in targeted regions across the country.
- Strategy for Tourism Development of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette RS, no.91/2006) recognizes agritourism as a key field of rural development with underdeveloped potentials.
- Strategic Plan for Rural Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2018-2021) is intended to provide a broad framework to guide the gradual alignment of BA agriculture and rural development with EU best practices including in agritourism field.

Also, the project relevance falls under 2 priority goals of the newly devised Strategy for Development of Education and Upbringing in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 that remain high on the policy agenda – further modernization and innovation in HE and interdisciplinary continuous (lifelong) education of academic HEIs staff. Similar HE developmental priorities are defined in the legal framework applicable to BA, namely in all 3 referral laws on HE of the Republika Srpska, Canton of Sarajevo and Canton of Hercegovina-Neretva.

Despite all this, projects tackling agritourism field have not been implemented nor recognized as the area of donor funding priority/opportunity neither in terms of international donors funding nor within public funding frameworks available in the beneficiary countries that LANDS project seems to alter (see subsection on impact).

The overall regional relevance of the sector of agritourism is further evidenced in the analysis of increased referenced HEIs research papers covering the topic and its surrounding issues (compared to the situation at the beginning of project where scarcity of data and sector relevant operations were



reported) which adds to the straightforward statements on the matter collected from the interview respondents.

Institutional relevance. Highly relevant exchange of knowledge in between formal and non formal sector educators working with adults (including students as young adults) was reported by the beneficiaries from RDAs and HEIs. TOT for adult educators methodology was unfamiliar to the HEIs representatives and also most of the RDA participants on the training. Co-creation and inter-institutional delivery of training sessions and staff collaboration of this kind was tested at institutional level. Regional interdisciplinary team increased single institutional relevance in training courses delivery and strenghted the sector relevant ties among HEIs, companies, and associations and enabled their reframed approach to educational and training delivery at local level and across the regional communities. CP was also highly assessed in terms of Moodle platform use as a support educational and training tool (initially used only by 2 institutions in the beneficiary countries – UNIBL and Acadamy in Uzice). Initial relevance of extension services was overlooked as the interdisciplinary nature of the agritourism field goes beyond their services provided in agricultural sector alone.

Participation of EU/program partners was assesed as satisfactory overall by the beneficiary country institutions, acknowledging the Covid19 inability of travelling and their full contribution. Regardless, of this, the EU partners demontrated high profesionalism in knowledge transfer activities focused of assistance in training courses design (AUA) and Moodle platform use (SUA).

Equipment purchased on the project by Serbian and Bosnian HEIs was delivered in the first part of the implementation period and was prioritized with the PSC as per inputs from the initial donor monitoring visit. As HEIs strongly value this source of funding and put this project activity high on hteir agendas, some introduced changes in the original project budget were enabled to reflect real time needs of the beneficiaries. The equipment (focused on general computer equipment) was used in training and communication and dissemination activities, enabling a more professional approach to services delivery for both staff and students as well as stakeholders outside the HEIs.

Target group relevance. Evidence based approach to the real needs and situation in the sector was adhered to in the project core outputs – trainign courses are developed in line with the needs assessment findings (from agritourism potential and existing households) especially in terms of course lengts, structure, and topics covered.

In order to play an active and constructive role in rural development, agricultural HEIs need to adapt programs to adapt to new topics as well as teaching and learning models; create new partnerships with rural actors; expand its representation in management; and maintain an ongoing dialogue with policy makers. Counseling services may include support for rural education that includes adult education in response to community development problems.

In order to maximize the available resources and ensure sustainable development of rural areas, the existing structure of the knowledge transfer system was seen as insufficiently engaged to meet the needs of increasingly dynamic technical and technological restructuring of the agricultural and



tourism and business sectors. The need to connect knowledge creators with end users was neglected in various systemic solutions (HEIs are foreseen as research and innovation institutions without delivering of community applied knowledge), from the legal framework to non-existent incentives to strengthen this cooperation. Unavailable credible education and training in the field was missing.

Having this in mind, a more systemic approach to knowledge transfer and information exchange among key stakeholders may be attributed to the LANDS project in a number of local communities including, apart from those of the project partners, the following: Belgrade, Dimitrovgrad, Pirot, Svrlijig, Ražanj, Užice, Gadžin Han, Leskovac, Jagodina, Raška, Jazak, Priboj, Kosjerić (RS), and Mostar, Sarajevo, Trebinje, Šipovo, Gradiška, Petrovo, Ljubuški, Livno, Mrkonjić Grad (BA)

In terms of CP, HEIs teaching staff participating in training on professional courses and transversal skills and ICT improved their skills while professionals, newcomers to the agritourism sector improved their knowledge and professional competencies by attending accredited courses that were developed. Agrotourism educators reported to had been able to improve their knowledge and competencies in providing training, especially with regards to IPARD funded project proposals in agriculture (6 training on IPARD and 4 on business plans development with over 170 participants attending).

HEIs students involvement in the project is found to be relatively modest.

The relevance of the LANDS project for the needs of users and its compliance with existing strategies and policies at the European level is convincingly shown by interviews conducted with the project coordinator and representatives of partner organizations, both from the Western Balkans and those with the EU. There is a broad consensus among respondents that the LANDS project has tackled issues and topics that are considered very important within the target professional communities.

Complementarity and synergy achieved with other ongoing initiatives. LANDS project obtained significant collaboration level with 2 other initiatives in the field:

- Erasmus + CBHE project led by the UNSA – Western Balkans Urban Agriculture Initiative³ attested by the BUGI representatives involvement in structuring 2 modular training courses in LANDS courses offer, i.e. Fruit picking and Alternative Methods of Vegetables Growing in Agritourism, while LANDS developed course Introduction to Agritourism was included as a separate subject in UNSA Lifelong learning program Gardener of Urban Agriculture; and
- GIZ funded Initiative for Inclusion Program stage 2 led by WEBIN and the Municipality of Raska whereby after the training courses delivered for local households, the Municipal local government decided to earmark 3,5 million of RSD as a funding support to individual households interested in developing their agritourism potential.

³ <https://www.bugi.unsa.ba/>



Representatives of local community in Raska stated their understanding of the economic benefit potential stemming from activation of local households in the field of agritourism linking this also to strong cultural heritage of the local community that is expected to boost tourists visits.

Intervention logic. No significant changes are reported in terms of intervention logic design whose objectives, activities, results, indicators, verification sources, remained the same during the implementation period. In terms of project core outputs – training courses, the initial proposal defined topics that were adjusted in terms of both scope and topics in accordance to the conducted needs analysis of the beneficiaries. Methods of project activities delivery (introduction of online instead of in situ meetings) were amended in accordance with the ongoing pandemic of Covid19 in the partnership countries. Most relevant project training activities, however, all took place in situ, including in the open air where possible as documented by the organizers/project partners.

All project assumptions can be reported as valid throughout the implementation period including:

- Appropriate number and type of stakeholders targeted in RS/BA
- Consortium members teams consisting of motivated members
- HEIs involving sufficient number of teaching staff in project activities
- Equipment purchased was available on the market

In terms of project **risks**, 2 are prevalent in the assessment of the overall intervention logic delivery -

- *Change in partner institutions governing bodies may delay certain outcomes and*
- *political and socio-economic instabilities in the region caused by Covid 19 pandemics.*

With regards to the former, the 3 RS partners colleges transformation into academies of applied studies, partners indicate on the delays caused in activities delivery over the course of several months in 2019 as no legal person or bank accounts were set for the new legal entities participating on the project. With regards to the later, due to Covid 19, travelling on the project was unable towards or from EU partners, so the majority of activities were taking place in line with active pandemic prevention measures with beneficiary partners. EU partners took active part as online support as per agreed agendas under different WPs, but the project coordinators report that inability of actual working together somewhat lessened the relevance of the project staff inputs.

On the program side, **COVID19** effects are closely examined in the last year of project implementation. The outbreak of pandemic took place just before the organization of the knowledge transfer training sessions with the communities stakeholders causing their slight delays. Nonetheless, another seemingly optimal effect emerged with reference to increased interest in agritourism potential for leisure time during pandemic. Rural tourism (and agritourism) boosted as a result of mass tourists visits often resulting in an uncontrolled and/or overcapacitated facilities or underdeveloped services created to cater for these forms of tourism. smaller facilities that combine tourist services with agriculture or craft-based activities also gained importance not only for tourists but for households as well in terms of better quality offer. This side effect showcased that representations of the basic farming rituals is not enough reason for a come back, and that offering opportunities to share the lifestyles of families or host communities is gaining pace which is the existing gap LANDS contributed to close.



Conclusion: The overall project relevance is assessed as very good. The evidence undoubtedly suggest the countries increased focus on the field of agritourism development, given the legal frameworks and IPARD funding tendencies and interest for the open measure 7 in the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia (piloted FARM program funded by the EU through the UNDP as preparatory phase for IPARD). HEIs increased horizontal and vertical alignment with field relevant stakeholders seems to have been building trust in the knowledge transfer framework across local communities in the Western Balkans. Complementarity and synergy with other projects in the field showcased additional relevance of the implemented program, and could be seen as relevant for the attained impact. LANDS outcomes may be seen as innovative in the targeted sectors.

Greater involvement of HEIs students could have been envisaged, while EU partners contributions were affected by Covid19. No Baseline has been planned in the initial project intervention logic and no indication on LFM is given in terms of the expected gender segregated data. However, some of the most relevant data were covered under WP1 research outputs, while the overall measured participation in project core activities between men and women is similar with 51% of men and 49% of women outreach testifying not only to the efficiency in balanced approach of the implementing partners but most likely also to the extent of relevance of topics covered for both sexes.

3.3.2 Efficiency

In order to assess the efficiency of the project and the implemented activities, i.e. the extent to which they have been successfully implemented with the optimal use of available funds, the evaluation focused on three main elements:

1. **Quality of the partnership** established within the project, in terms of cooperation, coordination and communication; willingness of the people involved in the project to commit to the reform efforts envisaged by the project; obstacles they faced in carrying out the project activities.

When asked to rate the quality of the partnership established by this project, respondents unanimously agreed that the cooperation and communication between the partner institutions was excellent.

Most respondents pointed out that cooperation and coordination went extremely smoothly and efficiently despite the heterogeneous nature of the partnership, which included people with different professional backgrounds, educational institutions with their specific status, position and tradition, as well as partners from the Western Balkans and the EU.

Most respondents believe that such heterogeneity of partners has its advantages and disadvantages, but that the advantages of working in different environments where different people have different views on the same thing, in principle, outweigh the disadvantages of difficulties and challenges of adjusting and reconciling existing differences. In addition, there is a broad consensus that continuous teamwork leads to better mutual acquaintance of team members and often the establishment of friendly relations based on trust. In particular, study visits to partner institutions were positively evaluated for the exchange of knowledge and building relationships. Moreover, many presented the informal side of the partnership as an added value of the project and as an incentive to continue working together in the future.



Willingness of all partners to contribute to the co-creation of project outputs was assessed high by all the project coordinators. The results obtained indicate that the implementation team understood well the engagement level and expected outputs and outcomes of the Action.

No severe conflicts within partnership were reported. Instead, in the events of disagreement the project coordinator reports on the approach used as being soft mediation through tacit knowledge transfer among partners and rather cultivating the attitude of assistance to specific partner with issues, then acting judgemental. Previous collaboration history of a number of partners in similar actions was indicated as highly relevant in this matter.

Shared and balanced responsibilities (planning, implementation of activities, monitoring of results) among partners is clearly documented with continuous participation of at min 2 institutional representatives in most of the project activities (apart from EU partners due to inability to travel in the third implementation year).

The main obstacles faced by the people involved in the implementation of project activities based on the data from the interview, were identified as follows:

- a. COVID 19 - pandemic
- b. complex bureaucratic requirements and terminology
- c. some ambiguity about the implementation procedures and overall project objectives

The interviews identified complex bureaucratic requirements regarding the project and initial ambiguity about procedures and objectives as the other two main obstacles. Regarding the former, some of the interviewed participants stated that it was difficult for them to understand and fulfill all the formal bureaucratic requirements within the project, especially in the initial stages when everything was still unknown to them. Regarding the above second obstacle, some respondents stated that the first months of project implementation were particularly difficult because not all participants had a clear idea of their role in the LANDS project and / or specific project objectives.

More frequent contacts among delegated staff coming from similar institutions was reported at the beginning of the implementation period in order to further consult on the (unified) implementation practices. The overall flow of information between the beneficiaries and the donor agency delegated Grant officer in Brussels was depicted by the project coordinator as *'constructive and timely and patient given all the changes taking place during the implementation period.'*

2. Technical efficiency (productivity between inputs and outputs in terms of resources actually used and earmarked); With no identified severe deviations from the workplan (also due to high relevance of the project thematic focus) and the overachievement in the core outputs produced (a total of 32 instead of 20 training courses planned as per LFM; 40 instead of 20 training courses delivered outside of the consortium) is found to be good, despite the approved prolongation of the



implementation period for 4 months and the reported underspending in the amount of about EUR 8000 of the grant funding.

The delays in implementation were due to leading institution and 2 project partners undergoing of structural and statutory reforming merging processes (from single colleges to applied studies academies with multiple colleges integration) in the Republic of Serbia that lasted for over 6 months in 2019 and caused difficulties stemming from prolonged new institutional legal persons selection process and changes of the bank accounts.

In 2020, Covid19 influenced the prolongation of delivering training activities in situ (which all project partners considered as highly relevant given the specific topics covered – agritourism courses delivery), and also due to the fact that some partners reported getting sick from Covid 19 which mildly influenced their capacities to deliver contributions and reports timely to other partners/coordinator institutions. On the positive note, Covid19 was used as an opportunity to test moodle based training materials use during the training preparation and follow up attested with WEBIN and Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice documentation.

The funding savings emerged from non spent travelling related costs. Final vs. initial distribution of budget per project partner indicates on the stated project partners shifts in actual workload and flexibility and fairness of the consortium to absorb these – increased spending amounts are reported by 2 partners UNIBL in Bosnia and Hercegovina which assumed larger workload in terms of the number of courses developed and training sessions delivered, and WEBIN in the Republic of Serbia in terms of the engagement around sustainability of the action.

Even though cost benefit analysis is not performed as part of this assesment it is noted that the overall use of funding was efficient given the scope of the action actually implemented, the scale of partnership and other stakeholders actual involvement and the quality of produced outputs.

In order to address efficacy in delivery and reflect on the core staff delegated for the project by the EU partners, WP2 and WP3 swithced the leads (AUA eventually led on the WP2 and SUA on the WP3).

3. Project managment and internal monitoring and evaluation. Regular project PSC meetings were attended by all project partners. Perseverance, due diligence and friendly atmosphere is used by the PSC members in description of their work. Some indications on the reluctance of elderly staff to attend online PSC meetings can be observed from the members statements. Highly operational, PSC was composed from directors/leading personnel from non academic partners in the consortium, while academic partners delegated staff below the level of directors/leading managers. This can be observed as a good practice especially effective in times of crises such is Covid19 outbreak.

Structured approach to internal monitoring and evaluation is observed (overview of 2 progress reports from April 2019 and february 2020) through the developed QA framework measuring and



assessing the quality of management, results, WPs (mid term and end evaluation), and events. In total 6 management quality reports was conducted and approved on the project on 6 month bases.

Overall graded success level of the project is 4.15 out of 5.0. Quality of results were on average graded 4.2 out of 5.0, quality of events was graded 4.4./5.0 while management quality was graded 3.9. The overall measured rate of response on the project internally led evaluations was 68%.

Dissemination plan was slightly affected by Covid 19 mostly with cancellation of numerous regional and national tourism fairs and other events earmarked for project results promotion that was to take place in the last project year.

Even though PM and QA on the project are assessed as very good, with equal partners contributions, no defined Rules of procedures nor a code of conduct was observed in project documentation (not envisaged by the LFM).

Conclusion: Overall efficiency of the project is assessed as good. Efficiency in on time project activities delivery was not severely jeopardized by the external circumstances taking place in 2019 with changes in the structures of 3 project partners from Serbia undergoing transformation as part of the national Higher education reform process and in 2020 by the Covid19. Total granted no cost extension was kept at 4 months duration, while no severe deficiencies comparing the planned and actual activities is observed. Overall participation of project consortium partners in project activities delivery and budget spending is assessed as balanced with some indications of elderly staff neglecting and/or having difficulties in attending online events. Ownership of the consortium members over the project results and overall implementation is assessed as high.

Rules of procedures with a code of conduct could have been devised in the initial LFM for the project of this size and timeframe, providing for a more sound analysis of efficiency rate in terms of managerial aspects but possible also some a program related aspects. Some important earmarked dissemination opportunities were cancelled due to Covid19 pandemic lessening the desired impact in certain local communities (e.g. Mostar Tourism Fair, etc).



3.2.3 Effectiveness

As already mentioned (see subsection 2.1) the effectiveness of the project represents the degree to which the specific objectives of the project (see subsection 2.2) are met, ie the qualitative assessment of the change that the project has brought to the target communities. This assessment will be based on data obtained from various sources, such as interviews with team members, Interim Project Implementation Reports, Tempus (Erasmus+ office in Serbia) monitoring visits reports, as well as relevant documentation compiled by partner institutions (see subsection 3.1).

The **first specific goal** of the LANDS project was: i) to develop and accredit a series of professional courses in the agritourism sector that enable beginners professional development in the field. LANDS aims at academic and non-academic actors to improve their overall capacity and knowledge in the field by addressing the issue of unavailability of certain training courses and the low level of training of professionals and new field workers.

Within this goal, various activities were planned and implemented under WP1 and WP2. The main activities were:

- Drafting of a needs assessment study that identified which specific competencies and vocational courses are required in the market. The findings of the report were taken into account when deciding which professional courses to develop;
- Analysis of agrotourism actors conducted to identify agrotourism stakeholders in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and their attitude towards further development of agritourism. These findings were taken into account when deciding which professional courses to develop
- Creating of agritourism training courses, incl. Moodle courses as well as the comprehensive training materials

As a **result** of these activities, **32 trainings** were created and divided into two thematic areas (Program1 on household management - encompassing 15 training courses and Program2 on creation of visitors program – encompassing 17 courses). The achieved results are summarized in Tables 1 and 2, below:

Table 1: List of courses for creating a household management program

Title of the training course developed	Training course lead/s
Agritourism as business activity (possibilities and challenges of starting an agritourism business in rural areas)	Partners RDA Zlatibor; SERDA; REDAH
Accessible tourism – adjustments of the offer in agritourism to persons with special and specific needs	Academy of Applied Studies Belgrade



Spaces, objects and green scenery in agritourism	UNMO; REDAH
Business plans development in agritourism	UNIBL, WEBIN
Principles in managing a rural household in agritourism	SERDA
Financial management in agritourism	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice, WEBIN
Ecological aspects in doing business in agritourism	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice
Designing an activity program in the offer of agritourism households	Academy of Applied Studies Belgrade
Events management in and promotion of local manifestations	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice
Modern promotion and selling techniques in rural tourism	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice
Development of value chain in agritourism	RDA Zlatibor
Project cycle management and available funding sources in agritourism	RDA Zlatibor/REDAH/SERDA, WEBIN
Understanding IPARD II measure 7 on agritourism support and LAG/IPARD II program as an instrument of financial support for development of agritourism	RDA Jug/REDAH, WEBIN
Households visual identity in agritourism	UNIBL
Legal framework in agritourism business	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice



Table 2: list of training courses for creation of program for visitors

Title of the training course developed	Training course lead/s
Food and drink services as a segment of agritourism offer	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice
Organic (or ecological) production in the function of agritourism development	Academy of Applied Studies South Serbia
Use of organic products in agritourism	Academy of Applied Studies South Serbia
Tasting, presenting and selling of traditional meat products in agritourism households	Academy of Applied Studies South Serbia
Tasting, presenting and selling of traditional products: cheese/figs/plums	UNSA
Tasting, presenting and selling of wine and brendy – wine tourism on the household	UNSA and UNIBL
Alternative methods in vegetables growing	UNMO and UNIBL
Aquaculture on a family household	UNIBL
Beekeeping in the function of agritourism development	UNIBL
Animations in agritourism	Academy of Applied Studies in Uzice
Fruit picking	UNSA
Fruit pruning	UNIBL
Collection of medicinal herbs, forest fruits or mushrooms	UNSA
In house soap production in traditional ways	UNMO



Mowing and traditional haymaking	UNSA
How to produce your own seed or seedling	UNMO
Intangible-non material cultural heritage in the function of agritourism	Visoka poslovno-tehnička škola Užice

During the implementation, 675 persons were trained out of consortium staff, with 335 attending courses offered under Program 1, and 242 attending courses offered under Program2.

The second specific objective of the project was to: ii) Strengthen the teaching and pedagogical competencies of academic staff to train educators in the field of agritourism and rural economy using ICT. Professional development of teaching staff at faculties is one of the key areas of intervention for successful achievement of project results, as well as adult education for agritourism professionals and beginners. This will be provided by teaching staff who will benefit from ToT sessions on competencies and project management skills development for agritourism non-academic professionals.

This objective was reached through several separate interventions falling under CP activities supported through WP3 with academic staff and RDAa staff in focus of the intervention that included:

- Seminar on teacher training and adult education methodology (ToT)
- Development of ToT materials and manuals. ToT materials consist of presentations, instructions, role plays, icebreakers, methodologies and any other material that can be used to prepare and conduct training. These materials are published in electronic form in the form of a manual. The manual was made as a set of guidelines for the preparation and implementation of agritourism training.
- Training of agritourism educators by the TOT pool of trainers

The creation of a pool of agritourism trainers - regional pool of agritourism trainers set through constitutional and several more meetings held to discuss and agree on common principles and group values, working methods, communication and coordination and how they will be promoted in the public and in the agritourism sector, brought about a new knowledge transfer structure in the regional.

Among the various activities covered by this component of the LANDS project, team members point out study visits to Slovenia and Nitra in 2018 and 2019 as particularly important demonstrations on farms for the development and improvement of competencies in agritourism



participants from Serbia and Bosnia. The results of the study visits were included in the final versions of both training programs.

The third specific objective was to: iii) Strengthen the capacity and competencies of agritourism educators in order to successfully maintain modern courses in the thematic area for professionals in the sector and to increase access to non-formal education in the field, LANDS contributes to the introduction of educational / training opportunities through e-learning .

Milestone activities and results stemming from the WP₄ enabled the fulfilment of this objective. These included: accredited agritourism training courses; purchase and installation of the HEIs equipment; improved competences of prospective and current agritourism households through training activities.

This component of the LANDS project was reported as the longest one and the most challenging yet the results of which are expected to be highly effective for targeted communities in terms of changing the on the ground knowledge base in the field.

In ensuring the effectiveness of the implemented activities specifically under this objective, the project team followed the recommendations coming from the donor field visits in Prokulje 2018 and Sarajevo in 2019 by the Foundation Tempus and the National Erasmus+ Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NEO) with the detailed analysis of the sector in terms of accreditation of training courses process. As a result, the 2 programs consisting of 32 training courses were accredited (certified) following the positive laws applicable (Laws on HE in RS, Republic of Srpska, Canton of Srajevo and Canton of Hercegovina and Neretva) and in line with the actual market driven needs as WP₁ findings suggest. With no general authority body applicable for the accreditation of these kind of training courses, the process was conducted within each institution through their institutional procedures applicable to the delivered content, whereby a total of 29 /32 training courses were accredited by HEIs and all 32 by RDAs. The accreditations decisions suggest 2 distinctive approaches in realization of this goal: 1. HEIs accredited/licenced/certified training courses as part of their Programs for lifelong learning; 2. RDAs accredited/licenced/certified training courses as part of their training offer meant to support local business activities and entrepreneurship activation.

Through the LANDS project, the equipment necessary for conducting professional courses based on ICT for agritourism, purchased through a joint process of procurement and installed on 6 partner HEIs, was procured. The equipment will be used to introduce ICT-based courses, but also for specific courses. The purchase of e-learning and teaching and training equipment enables constant and fast interaction between project participants through fast and modern methods of communication, enabling greater access to non-formal education for interested students and increasing the potential for lifelong learning of teaching staff.

Interviews conducted with team members confirm that this specific goal has been largely met. First, most team members explicitly expressed satisfaction with the opportunity gained through the LANDS project to improve existing knowledge and gain new contacts in areas relevant to rural development, but also to obtain new technical equipment that has proven particularly useful in



distance learning due to the Covid19 pandemic. As one respondent says: *"We are especially grateful for the new equipment that the LANDS project has enabled us to purchase, it is a really big step forward for our institution and our students."*

Comparing the overall initially planned achievements indicators and the actual project documented results, suggests relatively high degree of specific objectives accomplishment as presented in the Table 3 below.

N°	Activity Title	Specific and measurable indicators of achievement	
		Planned	Actually achieved
1.1.	Mapping of agritourism development potential in RS and BA	- 80, page report in 3 languages, - min. 20 contributors, - 400 recipients;	- 60-page report in 3 languages (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian) - min. 20 contributors, - 366 recipients;
1.2.	Assessment of needs for agritourism competences and courses	- 60, page report in 3 languages, - min. 20 contributors, - 400 recipients;	- 36-page report in 2 languages (Serbian Bosnian) - min. 20 contributors, - 366 recipients;
1.3.	Stakeholders analysis in RS and BA	- 30, page report in 3 languages, - min. 20 contributors, - 400 recipients;	- 42-page report in 3 languages (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian) - min. 20 contributors, - 366 recipients;
1.4.	Introduction conference on agritourism in RS, BA and EU	- 3 groups of recommendations (for national and local institutions and HEIs), - 30 active contributors;	- 3 groups of recommendations: I-for national, regional and local authorities II-for Chambers of Commerce, tourist organizations and business associations, III-for SMEs and households service providers in agritourism, - 30 active contributors;
2.1.	Introduction seminar on Moodle training courses development	- 1 seminar held, - 24 teachers trained, - High satisfaction with training.	- 2 seminars + 1 workshop held, - 31 teachers trained + 7 RDA staff, - High satisfaction with training.
2.2.	Creation of courses, incl. Moodle courses	- 4 workshops with 60 participants, - 20 courses created & updated, - min. 30 Moodle	- 5 workshops with 60 participants, - 32 courses grouped in 2 programs/catalogues created, - min. 69 Moodle teacher/educator accounts;



		teacher/educator accounts;	
2.3.	Creation of training materials	- 20 sets of course materials created;	- 32 sets of course materials created;
2.4	Piloting of training courses	- 20 courses created & updated,	- 32 courses grouped in 2 programs/catalogues updated,
3.1.	Seminar on teacher training and adults education methodology	1 seminar held, - High satisfaction with training;	- 1 seminar held, - High satisfaction of participants
3.2.	Teacher training of trainers	- 5 ToT sessions, - min. 40 participants, - high satisfaction with training;	- 4 ToT sessions, - 22 participants per module (16 HEI & 6 practitioners), - high satisfaction with training;
3.3.	Development of ToT materials and manual	- 1 set of materials, - 60 pages manual, - Positive feedback of teachers and educators;	-1 set of materials, -50 pages manual, -Positive feedback of teachers and educators;
3.4.	Training of agritourism educators	- 6 sessions, - 60 educators trained, - High satisfaction with training;	- 7 sessions, - 102 educators trained, - High satisfaction with training;
3.5.	Creation of pools of trainers in agritourism	- min. 60 pool members, - internal regulation act created, - coordinator appointed;	- min. 73 pool members, - Internal regulation act created, - Coordinator appointed;
4.1.	Accreditation of training courses	- 20 courses accredited, - 4 course catalogues	- 2 programs with 32 modules accredited for local economic development; -29 courses accredited as life-long learning programs by University authorities, - 2 course catalogs;
4.2	Purchase and installation of equipment		- Variety of raining equipment, - Joint procurement committee set up, - 2 meetings held
4.3.	Releasing of call for	- 20 calls for participants	- 40 calls for participants



	participants and promotion of training program		
4.4	Training of rural households and prospective entrepreneurs	- 12 training sessions, - 240 households and entrepreneurs trained, - High satisfaction with training	- 40 training sessions, - 675 persons trained including households' entrepreneurs, unemployed, professionals, SMEs, etc. 51% Male, 49% Female; - High satisfaction with training
4.5	Training of agritourism professionals		
5.1	Development of QA manuals and quality plan	- 1 manual, - 30-page document, - positive feedback by consortium members;	- 1 manual, - 17-page document, - Positive feedback by consortium members; - positive feedback by consortium members;
5.2	QA Committee meetings	- QAMC set up with 15 members, - 3 meetings,	- QAMC set up with 15 members, - 3 meetings,
5.3	Activity M&E	- 80% of meetings positively evaluated, - QA plan implemented;	- 82% of meetings positively evaluated, - QA plan implemented;
5.4	Progress evaluations	- 20-page report with recommendations,	23 and 28 pages reports with recommendations,
5.5	External and internal evaluations	-1 40-page internal evaluation report published in Serbian/Bosnian &EN languages;	1 40-page internal evaluation report published in Serbian/Bosnian &EN languages;
6.1	Website programming & dissemination	- 200 hits per month, - 3 entries monthly, - Positive feedback	- 179 hits per month, - 3 entries monthly, - Positive feedback
6.2	Internal institutional dissemination	15 internal dissemination sessions;	15 internal dissemination sessions;



6.3.	Media promotion	- Min. 3 TV reports, 3 press articles - min. 5 internet articles	- 21 TV reports+1 radio, -26 internet articles - 14 press articles
6.4	Signing of long-term cooperation agreements on agritourism training development between academic institutions and RDAs	- 6 agreements signed	- 3 agreements signed
6.5.	Dissemination conference	- 100 conference participants	- 87 conference participants
7.1.	Kick off meeting	- 5 project teams constituted, - 60 participants of kick off meeting, - positive feedback of participants, - procedures agreed;	- 5 project teams constituted, - 60 participants of kick off meeting, - positive feedback of participants, - procedures agreed;
7.2.	Creation of Project /Finance Management Manual	- 30-page document - distributed to min. 60 project participants;	- 30-page document + annexes and forms - distributed to 45 project participants;
7.3.	Steering Committee meetings	- 6 PSC meetings, - min. 15 participants, - 15 meeting minutes	- 7 PSC meetings + 9 institutional coordinators meetings - more than 15 participants, - 16 meeting minutes
7.4.	Daily project management and administration	- Quarterly reporting to coordinator;	- Quarterly reporting to coordinator;

Table 3: Planned (in LFM) vs. actually achieved LANDS project outputs

Conclusion: Overall project effectiveness is assessed as good with a number of core project outputs related indicators successfully (over) achieved. Immediate effects of the action indicate high level of project performance on personal and institutional level between academic and non-academic institutions staff as well as with regards to the project co-created materials.

Availability and accessibility of training courses in agritourism to the general public, natural and/or legal entities through the Moodle platform with granted free access to all materials through guest registration and joint ownership of the produced materials by the consortium represents a step forward in the relevant knowledge transfer options in the beneficiary countries. A variety of



innovative materials produced coupled with highly rated methods of delivery and the relevance of the involved institutions, suggest forming a solid ground for obtained desired effectiveness in the short to mid run. Long term effectiveness of the formation of regional expert team in agritourism is yet to be assessed as well as the LANDS project contribution to the undoubtedly growing interest in the thematic field and the regional change in agritourism landscape.

3.2.4 Impact

As already explained (see subsection 3.1), a project impact assessment is an evaluation of the general and long-term effects produced by that development intervention in the social and human context in which the project is implemented. Regarding the LANDS project, assessing its general and far-reaching impact is not an easy task, but short and mid term impact requires consideration of the following aspects:

- a) the extent to which project outcomes have contributed to meeting the overall objective of the project (i.e. contributing to higher education institutions capacity building in creating their active role in rural areas development through the diversification of the rural economy,
- b) the extent to which information on project results and outcomes is disseminated in the beneficiary communities (in the educational, professional and business spheres) and in the general public.

All the interview participants be it from the academia or other institutions stipulate the project impact on the HEIs staff in terms of the positive change in collaboration practices and approach to networking with local stakeholders in the field of agriculture and tourism that is not research oriented. The participation of HEIs staff in co creation market driven training programs gave specific credit to these courses attested in high demand and attendance in 20 communities other than those project partners are coming from.

The systemic level impact may be seen through project team efforts in reaching out to local and regional policy and donor representatives who showed increasing interest in the topic seeing the opportunities it represents for the rural economy. The concrete verifiable examples of impact include:

- Earmarking specific amount of local budget for support to agritourism development (Raska Municipality, RS)
- Funding support for establishment and running of the Winter School of Agritourism in BA provided by the regional intergovernmental body in agriculture and rural development SWG
- Ongoing negotiation for establishing and running of the Winter School of Agritourism in Serbia with GIZ and Helvetas and USAID in BA are reported by the project partners and on the bases of the signed cooperation contract.
- TO of the City of Nis introduced agritourism as one of the priorities in their Workplan for 2019 shortly after joint conference event organized with the project LANDS consortium

As for the second aspect of the impact of the project, ie. disseminating information on the results of the project to the relevant public (especially in the educational and professional communities in the



field of agriculture and food technology), our findings speak in favor of the conclusion that this goal has been met at a satisfactory level. On the one hand, the project included a work package explicitly dedicated to disseminating information on project results through the creation of a unique visual identity of the project (logo, official headlines, business cards and specially designed promotional material), creating an informative project website (www.projectlands.net), as and propaganda activities such as newsletters, press releases and participation in several events. On the other hand, the LANDS project received significant media coverage, especially (but not only) in two beneficiary countries, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Project Coordinator personally presented and explained the project in several interviews and TV appearances).

It is interesting to mention that some of the interviewed team members believe that the LANDS project, as a result of the above-mentioned media attention, has placed partner institutions "in the spotlight" and thus improved their status and reputation. One respondent stated that improving practical training, which was one of the project's goals, would most likely increase the institution's capacity to attract new students and thus counteract the "brain drain" trend present in the Prokuplje area. Furthermore, the establishment of training centers at partner institutions together with the procurement of state-of-the-art technical equipment will certainly have a positive impact on the quality of vocational training as such and thus contribute to strengthening synergies between agricultural vocational education and agri-food industry.

Providing inputs for impact assessment on different level, the majority of the respondents agrees on the following influence LANDS project brought about:

At system level

- Fostered local academic cooperation with the associations and RDAs (companies) by supporting joint training creation, quality improvements in education/training delivery, and promotion of HEIs capacities in changing local development perspectives based on knowledge transfer;
- Enhanced international dimension of lifelong learning and adult education through cooperation with institutions in Europe
- Improved access to high quality (evidence based) and innovative educational/training materials and sessions
- increased donors and policy making stakeholders interest in the field through enabled direct follow up support

At institutional level

- Increased internationalisation and competitiveness of participating organisations;
- Increased credibility of partners in the local level;
- Supported creation of new local, regional and international networks and enhanced quality of the existing ones;
- Inter-institutional collaboration defined

At individual level

- Exposure to strong interdisciplinary, intersectoral and intercultural experience;
- Increased individual contribution and accountability to the knowledge-based rural economy promotion



On the negative side, there remains an untapped potential of the project to reach out to (both in terms of dissemination and direct inclusion) the rural youth, i.e. limited involvement of students can be observed which lessens the impact expected to be seen under the overall objective – influencing young people to pursue their professional ambitions in sectors other than the strictly agricultural, while remaining in rural areas (thereby exercising the long run potential of agritourism to obtain positive demographic effects, particularly in the areas most affected by depopulation).

In addition, the project seems to steer agritourism dynamics in the region, but pays little attention on its side effects (negative effects of agritourism development) as noted by several stakeholders in the interviews which leaves ecological effectiveness of agritourism (especially exploring the energy improvement of facilities) as a separate domain of interest of local stakeholders. They stress the importance of doing things right” rather than doing the right things, in order to account for the balance in between rural/agritourism business development aspects and natural environment protection.

Conclusion: The overall project attained impact in the short term could be assessed as good with concrete evidence showcasing the LANDS project positive effects also in communities other than those project partners are coming from and triggering the reported donors interest in the sector development. On a systemic level (national sector level in beneficiary countries) project impact is showcased through policy makers and donors increased interest in the field attested by the earmarked funding opportunities, but also with regards to inclusion of agritourism relevant topics into organizational workplans.

On institutional level exposure to strong interdisciplinary, intersectoral and intercultural experience is reported to have enhanced the quality of education/training delivery, while on individual level the project increased accountability of each team member in terms of contribution to local rural development.

The project implementation seems to have overlooked the inclusion of students and rural youth in the activity framework which lessens the potentials of the project to influence positive demographic trends expected in the long run as a consequence of youth inspiration to stay in rural areas and diversify its economy also through agritourism business.

3.2.5 Sustainability

As already indicated (see subsection 3.1), the assessment of the viability and replicability of a project involves the evaluation of the degree of probability that the benefits and changes resulting from the project will be maintained and continued in the future once the project is completed. The most important aspect of this dimension of the project is the transfer of knowledge between the actors involved, i.e. the consolidation and systematization of information, competencies, knowledge and skills acquired through project implementation. This is a major prerequisite for ensuring the sustainability and future replicability of the results achieved.



After the end of the project, the realization of project activities strengthens the relationship between academic and non-academic staff. Project activities have strengthened cooperation and built a strong network of professionals in agritourism. The project included a series of trainings that continuously improve the competencies of academic staff, improving their role in aspects of economic development and cooperation with other stakeholders in the field. On the other hand, other higher education institutions in Serbia, local communities, experts, media and non-directly targeted staff will be able to continuously increase their competencies in project management and ICT through developed training tools and inter-institutional knowledge transfer. Other higher education institutions in the Western Balkans may be inspired to join a network of partners as participants in training or as bearers of specific topics. Local agricultural communities and experts, media and professionals in higher education will be achieved by national and international openness of targeted HEIs, which will lead to economic growth and innovative practices together with more competent, highly competitive agritourism professionals. Students in targeted partner countries of higher education institutions will achieve and benefit from increased opportunities for non-formal (s) learning. The results of the project directly lead decision makers in partner countries and the general public in agritourism investments by making relevant results available in open access educational resources outside the project implementation. The general public benefits from well-balanced economic development and upcoming IPARD projects that will further improve living conditions in Serb and Bosnian rural landscapes.

For the purpose of this evaluation, respondents were asked to consider the issue of sustainability and replicability at a general level that goes beyond the individual activities mentioned above. According to some of them, the greatest benefit of the LANDS project is the provision of a very fruitful exchange of experiences between teachers and professors from partner institutions, especially a very valuable transfer of knowledge from EU partners to partners from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the area. Another factor identified by respondents as important for sustainability is that all 11 partner institutions from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have signed Long-term cooperation agreements on agritourism training development between academic institutions and RDAs establishing a common framework for cooperation on education and training focusing on rural development and agritourism.

Specific institutional and financial sustainability framework of the action is reported in BA, where RADAH enabled the creation of the Winter School of Agritourism whose funding is provided by the SWG as the leading intergovernmental body responsible for regional policy and practice in agriculture and rural development. In RS the partners are currently negotiating the funding framework for the Winter School of Agritourism with potential donors interest in the topic (and following up on the LANDS activities communication and results dissemination). Apart from the SWG as a regional actor and donor, the LSG in Raska, RS recognized the project outputs through revision of local budgets earmarking 3,5 mil RSD meant to support training in agritourism.

Conclusion. Human (capacity), institutional and financial sustainability of the project is assessed as good given the measures taken to ensure the project follow up, e.g. signing of the interinstitutional cooperation contracts and Winter Schools of Agritourism initiative which increases the probability



of continued long-term benefits from the project, and the resilience to risk of net benefit flows over time. Project partners documented their efforts in reaching out to the relevant regional and local authorities taking the financial measures to ensure the continuation of services after the end of the action. Free availability of the courses materials on the Moodle platform coupled with RDAs provision of free services in terms of training to LSG as being their members by establishment ensures financially viable use of the project results in the long run and independently of project based funding in both beneficiary countries.

Measures ensuring equal participation of women and men can be observed in the QA framework applied which resulted in their balanced participation.

Environmental sustainability of the Action has not been documented.

3.2.6 Good practices and lessons learnt

On the bases of the afore outlined findings, and the conducted interviews and focus groups, some good practices and lessons learnt stand out and could be relevant to future sector developmental actions and interventions similar in scope, structure and objectives. Some of these are of technical character, featuring the project management side of the implementation process, whereas others are referenced to the thematic focus of the Action.

Project management level.

Baseline report is missing in the initial intervention logic and given the level of project complexity and correlated activities, this could have been beneficial and would made final evaluation process clearer (measured against the benchmarks). Some of the baseline logic aspects have nevertheless been covered in the initial project research documents.

On the positive side, internal monitoring and evaluation methods and detailed QA framework enabled important insight into a number of core activities assessed by the external parties to the project (training participants, other HEIs staff, etc.).

QA detailed framework and project implementation staff initial phase training in management, quality assurance and communication on the project was highly relevant for the relatively big consortium composed of different sector institutions (10 HEIs, 2 ltd companies, 3 associations) applying different sets of rules and approaches to the topic and out of which 6 were newcomers to the CBHE action.

Various project events, e.g. workshops, seminars, study visits to EU partner countries were attended by categories of project team members (researchers/teachers, managers, financial officers) which contributed to the institutional ownership of the project emerging concepts and results.

The consortium seem to have established a practice of integrating external professional/stakeholders coming from a variety of institutions into consortium meetings to provide additional inputs (representatives from ZUOV, selo.rs, other CBHE projects, etc.). Essentially this practice, even though dependent on the institutional connections and interpersonal relations in the



sector, showed some relevant results with regards to both addressing some current issues (e.g. accreditation instances and approach), as well as boosting a wider public outreach and triggering further networking among the stakeholders relevant for the targeted sectors (agriculture and tourism).

HEIs students representatives more prominent inclusion on project core activities could have been useful for long term project effects (newcomers to the agritourism sector willing to stay in rural areas).

In addition, some lessons learnt are of particular interests as reported by the interviewed respondents including:

1. The challenges that arise due to differences that exist between partners can be overcome by insisting on continuous teamwork.
2. Creating and nurturing friendly relations among team members is an important factor for effective project implementation.
3. Already at an early stage of project implementation, a way should be found to address language barriers that may exist among team members.
4. It is of the utmost importance to create an opportunity for the exchange of experiences and knowledge between institutions of different status and from different backgrounds.
5. It is essential that new knowledge and skills acquired through the project are made available to the wider local and professional public.
6. Transparency of procedures, mutual cooperation and ad hoc training are therefore the key to efficient and effective implementation.
7. In order to create a common framework for further cooperation, it is important, through mutual agreements, to formalize existing partnerships.

Program level.

Some rural localities are highly abundant with traditions, customs and cultural and historical heritage and in conjunction with rural tourism represent specific types of tourist attractions (ethnic villages, houses, restaurants).

The evaluation respondents stressed this topic as highly relevant in obtaining support from the local authorities and donors since it is the duty of the local community to recognise, initiate and become actively involved in development strategies and master plans to take advantage of support measures and funding opportunities.

The multifunctionality of agriculture is evidenced, inter alia, by its conjunction with tourism and environmental protection areas. The natural environment is the greatest resource for tourism development recognized by a number of respondents. Given that the agriculture is the largest user of natural resources, and has the capacity to influence the appearance of the rural setting, agritourism development is expected to also provide effective mechanisms of environmental protection, and facilitate the recognition and sustainable management of economic and environmental benefits by the local community.



Importance of youth in rural areas and digitalization and environment protection all remain underexplored topics in the LANDS project.



4. Recommendations

Specific program recommendations in the sector addressing its different actors provided under WP1 (see activity 1.4. result) seem well drafted and relevant for the topics project covers at large.

General recommendations

1. Project management:

- (a) a less centralized management structure would be desirable;
- (b) key points in project development should be more clearly identified;
- (c) a greater role should be envisaged for "external" partner institutions.

2. Connection with the local and national environment: the involvement of national state institutions (especially in the field of tourism) should be increased.

3. Partnership, coordination and communication within the project:

- (a) address the issue of possible language barriers in a timely manner;
- (b) The project website can be successfully used as an online discussion platform.

4. Project implementation and specific activities:

- (a) more opportunities for local youth in project activities should be created;
- (b) students should be more involved in certain components of the project and the feedback they receive should be taken seriously;



Aneks 1 – List of interviewed stakeholders

Institution, function	M/F	Lands project participation role
1. SWG RRD, manager	F	Policy stakeholder
2. TOS deputy director	F	Policy stakeholder
3. TO Hercegovina, director	M	Policy stakeholder
4. TO City of Nis	M	Policy stakeholder
5. Municipality of Raska, local economic development department	M	Policy stakeholder
6. SERDA, coordinator	M	ToT member
7. RDA Zlatibor, coordinator	F	ToT member
8. UNMO, coordinator	F	ToT member
9. UNIBL, coordinator	F	ToT member
10. Academy of Applied Studies South Serbia, coordinator	M	ToT member
11. Portal selo.rs, director	M	Agritourism professionals/entrepreneurs /households
12. Zornica kuca, Pancevo, RS, etno restaurant manager	M	Agritourism professionals/entrepreneurs /households
13. Vila Albedo, Sabac, RS manager	M	Agritourism professionals/entrepreneurs /households
14. Agriculture cooperative "Livač" Laktasi, BA, manager	M	Agritourism professionals/entrepreneurs /households
15. Rural household "Banjac" , Kozarska dubica, BA, manager	F	Agritourism professionals/entrepreneurs /households

PROTOCOL TYPE	1. RELEVANCE	2. EFFICIENCY	3. EFFECTIVENESS	4. IMPACT	5. SUSTAINABILITY
FOCUS GROUPS	<p>1.1. Does the project presently respond to the needs of the target groups?</p> <p>1.2. Is the action (including capacity development (CD) if relevant) adequate vis-à-vis the present capacity of the local partner?</p> <p>1.3. Do all key stakeholders still demonstrate effective commitment (ownership)?</p> <p>1.4. Is there an effective sector coordination system at national/regional/international level including partner government(s), donors and other relevant stakeholders?</p> <p>1.5. Are there any complementarity issues (in particular CD) with other ongoing/planned projects or programmes funded by donors that need to be</p>	<p>2.1. Are the chosen implementation mechanisms (incl. choice of implementation modalities, entities and contractual arrangements) conducive for achieving the expected results?</p> <p>2.2. Do local partners effectively lead in the planning of the action (including CD if relevant) beyond formal endorsement?</p> <p>2.3. Inputs a) Do the resources correspond to the needs of the action? b) Do local partners provide the inputs (human or physical) that would be required to enable the action (including CD if relevant) to be effective? c) To what degree are resources (inputs) available on time from other stakeholders?</p>	<p>3.1. Has the expected progress in terms of outputs been properly achieved?</p> <p>3.2. Is the quality of outputs (including those of CD support) satisfactory?</p> <p>3.3. Are the outputs (including CD) still likely to lead to the expected outcomes?</p> <p>3.4. Is there evidence that the action supports the implementation or the development (or change) of the partners' policy/actions?</p>	<p>4.1. What is the project impact on institutional level? What is this relevant? How was this achieved?</p> <p>4.2. What is the project impact on individual level? Why is this relevant? How was this achieved?</p> <p>4.3. What is the project impact on systemic,</p>	<p>4.1. Is an adequate level of human and institutional capacity (avoiding unnecessary parallel mechanisms) put in place in order to continue delivering the action's benefits?</p> <p>4.2. Is the role of the EUD/HQ in the management and the monitoring of the operation sufficiently respectful of the leading role of the partners in order to enhance their capacities?</p> <p>4.3. If there is a financial contribution needed for continued access</p>



	<p>addressed?</p> <p>1.6. Have changed circumstances (including critical contextual constraints) been taken into account by updating the intervention logic?</p> <p>1.7 Indicators a) Are the indicators to measure results well defined and relevant to measure the achievement of the objectives? b) Are all related data available? c) Are all indicators sex-disaggregated if relevant? d) Are baselines set and updated for each indicator? e) Are target values set for the indicators and are they realistic or do they need to be updated?</p> <p>Was the structure/logic of the program appropriate?</p> <p>Does the logic of the program reflect evidence-based</p>	<p>2.4 Delays</p> <p>a) If there are delays, how important are they?</p> <p>b) Have the reasons been identified?</p> <p>c) Have revisions of planning been properly implemented?</p> <p>2.5. Have the outputs been produced/ delivered in a cost-efficient manner?</p> <p>2.6. Is the action adequately monitored and/or assessed by the local partners?</p>		<p>local, national, regional level? Why is this relevant? How was this achieved?</p> <p>4.4. What project expected impact was not achieved? Why and how is this relevant?</p>	<p>to the benefits of the action, can target groups afford such a payment?</p> <p>4.4 Are the relevant authorities taken the financial measures to ensure the continuation of services after the end of the action?</p> <p>4.5 Has the private sector been involved to ensure the sustainability of the action?</p> <p>4.6 Have the necessary measures been taken to address the environmental sustainability?</p> <p>4.7. Have the</p>
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	<p>theories of change that are relevant for this situation? • Does the logic of the program reflect smart or promising practices in other jurisdictions? • Is the logic of the program internally consistent? • Are all the essential components there, or are there one or more components that should be added to increase the likelihood of success? • Overall, is the logic/design the best feasible means to achieve the objectives?</p>				<p>necessary measures been taken into account to ensure equal participation and benefit for women and men?</p>
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