

TMS CONFERENCE SERIES (2014)

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN TOURISM & MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Editors:

José António C. Santos

Marisol Correia

Margarida Santos

Francisco Serra



UAlg ESGHT

UNIVERSIDADE DO ALGARVE
ESCOLA SUPERIOR DE GESTÃO, HOTELARIA E TURISMO

ISBN: 978-989-8472-55-7

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Campus da Penha, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal

(+351) 289 800 137

Editorial support: Marcelo Lopo, Andreia Avelino, Lisete Afonso, Joana Afonso

ISBN: 978-989-8472-55-7

Legal Deposit: 384506/14

Cover design: Ideias Frescas (ideiasfrescas.com)

TMS Series

Editorial project of the **TOURISM & MANAGEMENT STUDIES** journal

Property: University of the Algarve, School of Management, Hospitality and Tourism

Campus da Penha, 8005-139 Faro, Portugal

(+351) 289 800 137

Email: tms-journal@ualg.pt

Website: www.tmstudies.net/

Editorial Co-ordination: José António C. Santos

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**The project "local products festivals and tourism development
in cross-border cooperation Greece-Bulgaria" (the LOFT
project) funded under the European Cooperation Programme
"Greece - Bulgaria 2007 - 2013"**

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Abstract

The project named "Local products Festivals and Tourism development in cross-border cooperation Greece-Bulgaria" (The LOFT Project), funded under the European Cooperation Territorial Programme "Greece - Bulgaria 2007 - 2013", aims at: (i) promoting and reinforcing local cultural events, directly linked to local production, by building on synergies between existing local festivals and implementing a set of actions to form & sustain a network of festivals organisers; (ii) further promoting local/ traditional products. In this respect, the project examines ways to protect and promote traditional products and production through a road show travelling in the local festivals of the region and through joint activities including a contest on local festivals and products. The LOFT Project envisages also to provide an interactive web-GIS tool (a web-based map) of the fairs and festival in the in the Programme eligible area.

The current achievements of the LOFT project include the elaboration of three major deliverables: (i) a Study on the Cultural & Historical Value of Local Products; (ii) a preparatory report for the Map of the Local Fairs / Festivals on Local Products; (iii) Master Plan for Cross-Border Collaboration & Development.

Keywords: Cross-border cooperation; local products; local fairs and festivals; tourism development.

1. Introduction

Since July 2013, the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" has been implementing as a partner organization a project named "Local products Festivals and Tourism development in cross-border cooperation Greece-Bulgaria". The project, also known as the "LOFT" Project under its acronym in English, is financed under the European Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece-Bulgaria 2007-2013.

The project activities will be deployed by 5 partners: 2 universities with expertise on economy, regional development & tourism, 1 private partner

expert on the exhibition & congress industry, 1 municipality particularly active in the field of local festivals and 1 NGO focusing on the environment & tourism.

The Project consortium includes the following organizations on the both sides of the Greek-Bulgarian Border:

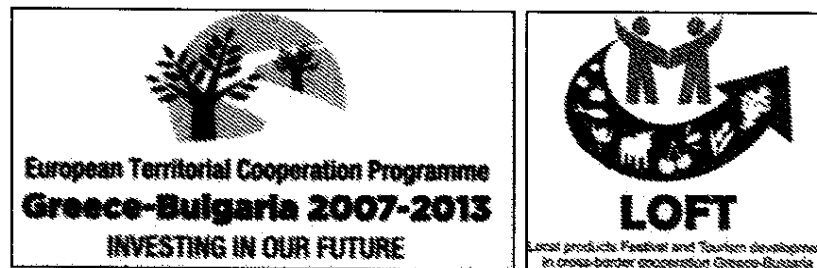
- LP (P1) School of Economic Sciences - Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (ECON-AUTH), Greece;
- P2 Exhibitions Research Institute (IEE), Greece;
- P3 Municipality of Nea Zihni, Greece;
- P4 South-West University "Neofit Rilski" (SWUNR), Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria;
- P5 Association "Eco Nevrokop", Bulgaria;
- P6 Decentralised Administration Macedonia - Thrace, Greece.

The project serves a dual purpose:

(1) To promote and reinforce local cultural events, directly linked to local production, by building on synergies between existing local festivals and implementing a set of actions to form & sustain a network of festivals organisers.

(2) To further promote local/ traditional products. In this respect, the project examines ways to protect and promote traditional products and production through a road show travelling in the local festivals of the region and through joint activities including a contest on local festivals and products (as a joint pilot activity).

Graphic 1: The logos of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme "Greece - Bulgaria 2007 - 2013" and the LOFT Project



The LOFT Project will map local festivals, study local/ traditional products and assess the growth potential of the former. It will offer visitors/ interested parties a website including an interactive web-GIS tool to allow easy navigation into these events and products and provide a wealth of information.

Two promotion stands will be produced, 1 per country, as a travelling road-show visiting local festivals to promote relevant events & products.

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The project "local products festivals and tourism development in cross-border cooperation Greece-Bulgaria" (LOFT project)

The LOFT project will also implement pilot activities at local level in both countries (e.g. 2 new local products' festivals). The LOFT Project provides also for its sustainability by creating a network of local festivals organisers, established during the project, which may undertake the operation of the website and the annual contest.

Overall, The LOFT Project will create significant value for the cross-border region as it will strengthen the linkage between culture/ tradition and economic activities. Equally, it will have a major positive impact in the cross-border collaboration by: reinforcing cultural & economic relations, promoting local products and further developing tourism activities and tourists flow.

2. Background of the project (problems / target groups / challenges to be addressed)

The cross border region of Greece - Bulgaria holds a large number of annual local fairs/ festivals associated with local products/ production. Examples include the cherry festival in Zihni, the grape festival in Elaiochori of Kavala, the buffalo festival in Iraklia, the potato festival in Nevrokopi of Drama, the chestnut festival in Paleochori of Kavala, the gastronomy festival in Blagoevgrad, the wine festival in Gotse Delchev, the festival of Greek-Bulgarian art in Gotse Delchev, etc.

From these festivals some are local, and other attracts visitors from the wider region. Most of them are dedicated on agricultural or farming products, though there are some associated to traditional handicraft (e.g. pottery) and resources (e.g. wood & marble production). Overall, the LOFT partners have pre-identified 34 such festivals organised in the Greek part and around 10 organised in the Bulgarian region. The latter can substantially benefit from the experience of the Greek festival organisers.

All these events, entail usually a dimension of local celebration and consist of a valuable vehicle for reinforcing the branding of local production as well as a pole for tourists attraction. Furthermore, they consist of well -established cultural events as they contribute to the preservation and promotion of the local/ traditional production processes/ methods and infrastructure (including buildings and equipment used for the production of the relevant products). Therefore, local fairs/ festivals help bridging culture/ tradition with economic activities at local/ regional level.

Equally important, they have a major impact on cross-border collaboration by: reinforcing cross-regional cultural and economic relations, promotion of the cross-border character of local products and further developing cross-border tourism activities and tourists flow.

However, until today there is insufficient publicity of the events (typically limited at local level), while the region lacks coordination initiatives that can jointly promote, reinforce and further develop such local fairs/festivals. Consequently, the LOFT partners have spotted an opportunity for both

enhancing cooperation between local festivals in the cross-border region, and further developing tourism by using these events as a key tourist attraction. Collaboration is an essential element for successfully addressing the above opportunity and LOFT aims to achieve it by creating a network of local festival organisers.

Under this context, we propose the development and coordination of local festivals in the cross border region of Greece – Bulgaria. To do so we suggest a set of activities aiming to create partnerships and networks between institutions which organize such events on the basis of synergies and mutual benefits. The intention is to use local products' festivals as promotion vehicles of local tradition and tourism, which support local economy, employment and fair competition.

3. Objectives of the project

The proposed project aims to serve a dual purpose:

(1) To promote and reinforce local cultural events, which are directly linked to local production in the cross-border region of Greece and Bulgaria. To do so the project builds on synergies between existing local fairs/ festivals and implements a set of actions to form and sustain a network of festivals organisers.

(2) To further promote typical local traditional products widely recognised as an essential part of the local culture and of the branding of the specific region. In this respect, the project will examine alternative ways to protect & promote traditional products and production processes through a road show travelling in the local festivals of the cross-border region and through joint activities including a contest for local festivals & products

To achieve the above purpose the project sets the following specific objectives:

- To map and assess the impact of existing cultural events (directly linked to local products);
- To identify other traditional/ local products & resources comprising part of the cultural identity of the region and suggest alternatives on how these can be promoted under existing or new local fairs/ festivals.
- To bring together organisers of existing local festivals, and invite other interested parties (e.g. local authorities, chambers, etc.); especially those involved in projects in the fields of tourism & culture.
- To identify & assess synergies and collaboration potential between the above actors/ parties;

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- To design & operate a multilingual web-portal for local festivals incorporating an advanced web-GIS tool to allow easy interaction with the user
- To set and organise a (travelling) road show (promotion stands), promoting the network of local festivals and the related traditional and/ or local products and production processes;
- To organise a cross-border network of local fairs' organisers and conduct a master plan providing for sustainability & reinforcement of local events.

4. Expected outputs and deliverables

Tangible and visible results or products relating to project activities

LOFT is expected to produce the following outputs:

- 2 promotion stands, 1 Greek & 1 Bulgarian, used as a travelling road-show visiting local fairs/ festivals to promote local products. LOFT partners plan 8 participations in local festivals, where the promotion stands will travel.
- The project multilingual website and web-GIS tool, where information on the local products' festivals of the whole cross-border region will be provided through interactive maps and visual illustrations.
- The organisation of 2 new local products festivals in Greece & Bulgaria, aiming to strengthen local events in both regions.
- The establishment of a network of local fairs organisers, to bring together institutions that currently organising local products' festivals and other who wish so. Local stakeholders such as associations of local producers may also join.
- Multilingual information material on local festivals/ traditional products and training sessions for local fairs organisers.
- Pilot activities in Nea Zihni: the 'travelling promotion stands' visiting festivals in the Greek & Bulgarian region (i.e. a travelling exhibition of local/traditional products), a study for the identification of potential sites & master plan for fair grounds (e.g. the old-railway station of Aggista), the organisation of a local products festival (duration 1-2 days) in the picturesque villages of Anastasia & Gazoros.
- Pilot activities in Gotse Delchev: 'travelling promotion stands' visiting festivals in the Greek & Bulgarian region, a study for Improving & Diversifying Local Fairs in the Bulgarian region (being relatively poor in festivals), the organisation of a local products festival (duration 1-2 days) in Gotse Delchev.

- Joint pilot activities: a competition for local products' festival organisers and producers of traditional products. Awards will be given to: the most popular festival and traditional product and the most environmental friendly festival and traditional product.

Direct and immediate effects resulting from the project

The LOFT Project was expected to bring the following results by the end of its first year:

- Enhancing and expanding the cultural dimension of the local fairs/ festivals and their cross-border influence and impact (on preserving the cultural heritage related to local/ traditional products, production processes, etc.). The project will identify and link these different elements associated with local production and jointly promote them through its activities (e.g. 2 road-shows and 2 pilots).
- Promoting cross-regional tourism through visits and participation in 8 local fairs/ festivals. LOFT is expected to enhance the economic and cultural value of the experiences of a rapidly increasing number of cross-border travellers and the many weekend 'escapes' from both sides. Additionally, it will create a self-respect and awareness about local production and traditions that will increase cross-border economic activity, create new jobs and support fair competition (between regions, festivals and local producers).
- Establishing 2 coordination activities for the promotion of the local fairs/ festivals in the cross-border region, including the network of organisers and the annual contest of local product's festivals (where local festivals & traditional products from the cross-border region will compete)
- Strengthening cultural and economic/ business relations at the cross-border region (by increasing mobility of people and goods between the Greek & Bulgarian areas). For instance, the organisation of the local products festival in the old railway station of Aggista (Zihni) will function as a crossroad for both people and products of the cross-border region.
- Encouraging sustainable development at regional level by supporting > 10 local goods produced with environmental friendly processes and by giving an environmental dimension in the organisation of local festivals (through the annual contest).
- Circulation of multilingual information material on cultural aspects related to local production.

The project "local products festivals and tourism development in cross-border cooperation Greece-Bulgaria" (LOFT project)

- The expected outputs of the LOFT Project are systemized according to the respective work packages and work actions into a set of easy to use and implement deliverables (Table 1).

Table 1: The Project LOFT Work Packages and Deliverables

Workplan No.	Description	Deliverable Name
WP1	Work Package 1 Management & Coordination: Preparation Activities, Coordination & Communication, Project & Quality Management	-Minutes of kick-off meeting (ECON-AUTH) -Quality Plan (IEE)
WP2	Work Package 2 Information & Publicity: Dissemination and publicity plan, Production of publicity material, Promotion stands in Local Festivals, Project Dissemination Workshop	-Dissemination Plan(IEE) -Initial suggestions on project publicity material -Production of project logo -Publicity Material in Greek, English & Bulgarian (IEE)
WP3	Work Package 3 Assessment of Local Fairs/Festivals on Local/Traditional Production: Study the Cultural/ Historical Value of Local Products, Mapping of Local Fairs/Festivals on Local Products, Assess the Growth Potential of Local Fairs	-Methodologies, geographical coverage, templates and structure/ list of contents for the study, mapping of festivals & GIS repository (ECON-AUTH) -Study of the Cultural Value of Local Products (ECON-AUTH, SWU) -Mapping Festivals on Local Products (IEE, SWU) -Web-GIS repository (ECON-AUTH)
WP4	Work Package 4 Enhancement of the Cross-border Dimension of Local Fairs/ Festivals: Training Local Fairs Organisers, Greek Pilot Activities, Bulgarian Pilot Activities, Joint (Bilateral) Pilot Activities	-None within 2013
WP5	Work Package 5 Creation & Sustainability of the Cross-border Network of Local Fair Organisers: Project Website & Web-GIS Tool, Networking Local Fair Organisers, Creation & Branding of the Network, Good Practice Guide for Replication	-Specifications for the website and web-GIS tool -Project website

Source: The Project LOFT Website (2014), last accessed 03.11.2014, <http://www.loft-info.eu>

5. Project methodology

The project activities are organised into 3 distinct phases:

(1) The preparatory phase (WP3), where LOFT focuses on completing data/information collection and on the elaboration of studies. Both actions contribute in the assessment of the local fairs/ festivals' role in tourism development and in the promotion of local/ traditional products, production processes and related-infrastructure.

(2) The pilot phase (WP4), where LOFT actions concentrate on the implementation of pilot activities in the targeted regions, as well as in bilateral (joint) activities aiming at enhancing the cross-border dimension of the local fairs/ festivals.

(3) The expansion phase (WP5), where LOFT partners work jointly to externalise project activities, engage local fairs organisers and stakeholders into

a cross-regional collaborative network & pave the way for the network sustainability.

Finally, the work-plan of LOFT includes 2 horizontal work-packages corresponding to the project management and dissemination.

Under the preparatory phase, LOFT partners will collect data on the cultural/historical value of local production. For this purpose, they will identify cultural assets in the cross-border region, related to local/ traditional products. For instance, for cherries in Zihni, traditional recipes for sweets will be collected, and traditional processing equipment used in home handicrafts will be recorded.

Similarly, the initial list of local festivals will be enriched to exhaustion, so that a profile of all events in the region is elaborated.

Then, based on the above data/info collected, an assessment will be carried out with the aim to (i) recommend ways for further promoting cultural resources related to local production through local festivals, (ii) identify synergies between local festivals in both sides of the borders, especially in relation to cross-border tourism development (through the Master Plan for collaboration & development), (iii) assess relevant external factors & risks; and (iv) to suggest priorities for improving and diversifying local festivals (in both regions, but mostly in Bulgaria).

The pilot phase is initiated by a training and consists of 3 pilot activities: the Greek (at Zihni), the Bulgarian (at Gotse Delchev) and the bilateral (in both countries). The first two will be implemented in a single region with the participation of interested parties from the other region. The last includes a cross-border contest for festivals and local products.

The expansion phase starts with the development of the project website & web-GIS tool to allow easy & user-friendly navigation of visitors to the virtual map of local products' festivals. It continues with networking activities targeting local fairs organisers and relevant stakeholders. These activities aim at creating a cross-border network on local products' festivals. Actions will be taken for the sustainability of the network, while the project will end with the elaboration of good practice guide.

6. Roles - tasks of partners

The School of Economics of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (ECON-AUTH) undertakes the role of the coordinator (WP1), (having vast experience in managing cross-border & European/international projects). In this, ECON-AUTH will be supported by the Exhibition Research Institute (IEE), which holds the quality management to ensure consistency between planning & implementation. These 2 partners divide the responsibilities of elaborating the dissemination strategy (ECON-AUTH) and planning & monitoring the dissemination activities (IEE, WP2 leader). Similarly ECON-AUTH will work on

The project "local products festivals and tourism development in cross-border
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the content of publicity/dissemination material, while IEE will produce it. A key WP2 responsibility for IEE is the design of the promotion stands for the road-shows in local festivals. The Municipality of Nea Zihni & Eco-Nevrokop will produce the Greek & Bulgarian stands respectively & will be responsible for the road-shows in each country. All partners will contribute to project management (i.e. participation in meetings & reporting), and to dissemination activities ECON-AUTH will lead the work on the assessment of local festivals (studies & mapping) (WP3 leader), while input on WP3 deliverables will be provided by IEE (Greek data & info) and the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" (SWUNR) (Bulgarian data & info); and the SWUNR will be responsible for the mapping of festivals. Training will be organised by IEE & Eco-Nevrokop (in Greece & Bulgaria respectively), while training material and tutors will be provided by ECON-AUTH & SWUNR. Training targets local fair organisers & introduces the concept of 'Green Fairs'. The pilot activities in each country will be led by the Municipality of Nea Zihni & Eco-Nevrokop, with the support/ guidance of IEE. The joint pilot activities will be coordinated by IEE, with the involvement of all partners. Leader in this work-package is the Municipality of Nea Zihni. Finally, under WP5 (leader SWUNR) the project website and the web-GIS tool will be developed by ECON-AUTH, with content providers all the rest of the partners. The network creation will be led by Eco-Nevrokop, and IEE will produce the Good Practice guide. The Decentralized Administration of Macedonia and Thrace (D.A.M.T., Project Partner No.6) will organize the seminars in Serres, Greece and will collect the required data for the implementation of action 3.1.

7. Three current deliverables created with the involvement of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

The current achievements of the LOFT project include the elaboration of three major deliverables: (i) a Study on the Cultural & Historical Value of Local Products; (ii) a preparatory report for the Map of the Local Fairs / Festivals on Local Products; (iii) Master Plan for Cross-Border Collaboration & Development.

The Study on the Cultural & Historical Value of Local Products

The purpose of this study is to assess the cultural and historical value of the local products in the cross-border regions of Bulgaria and Greece, in connection with their usage for organizing local product festivals.

To achieve the formulated objective, the study assigns the following concrete tasks:

1. To identify the cultural assets in the cross-border regions linked with local / traditional products.
2. To gather information on cultural / historical value of the local products.
3. To enrich the initial list of local festivals, so that a profile of all events in the region will be prepared.

The Study as structured in several major point, as follows: (i) Introduction; (ii) Theoretical background (review of literature); (1) Tourism; (2) Local products; (3) Scope and Methodology of the Study; (4) Analysis of the Local Environment; (5) Identification of Local or Traditional products; (6) Identification of the Major Stakeholders; (7) Main results and Analysis; and (8) Conclusions.

Map of the Local Fairs / Festivals on Local Products (Report)

The objective of this report is to identify and assess the existing festivals on local products in the eligible cross-border regions. To this end, the following tasks will be fulfilled:

1. Elaboration of a full list of existing festivals on local products.
2. Formulation of criteria for classification of existing festivals.
3. Comparative analysis of existing festivals by administrative units based on the chosen criteria.
4. Detailed description of existing festivals in terms of location, central theme, basic elements (products/activities offered), duration and scope.
5. Identification of main stakeholders and their roles.
6. Identification of priorities and recommendations for future development.

The Report is structured in several major points, as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) Scopes, Objectives and Methodology of the Report; (3) Overview of identified festivals on local / traditional products; (4) Profiles of Identified Festivals; (5) Identification of Stakeholders Involved and Their Roles; (6) Conclusions for the Bulgarian side of the Cross-Border Region; and (7) Conclusions for the Greek side of the Cross-Border Region.

Master Plan for Cross-Border Collaboration & Development

The objective of this Master plan is to assess and evaluate the potential for further development of the existing fairs and festivals on local products in the eligible cross-border regions for the needs of the tourism industry and of the overall cross-border tourism cooperation. This objective is achieved through the completion of the following set of tasks:

1. To analyze the festivals & fairs organizers' viewpoint on the current situation of the performance of their events;
2. To formulate a set of main strategic goals;
3. To build up a list of concrete actions for achieving of each single strategic goal;

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4. To identify and assess the risks for the successful achievement of the strategic goals and the actions for their implementation;
5. To provide whenever necessary some supplementary information for the world trends in organizing fairs and festivals based on local products.

The Master plan is structured in several major points, as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) Scope, Objectives and Methodology of the Master plan; (3) Survey on the Opinion of Organizers of Festivals on Local Products; (4) Master plan for Increasing Competitiveness Through Coordinating Tourism Supply; (5) Possible Risks for the Master Plan Implementation; (6) Recommendations, Good practices and Example to Follow; and (7) Supplements.

8. Next steps to be taken for project's implementation

Following an expected extension of all the work actions under Work package 3 (WP3) till the end of October 2014, the LOFT Project Partners and the LOFT Project Implementation team at the SWUNR will continue working on deliverables: 4.1.5 "Review of the training of Local Festival Organisers (in Bulgaria)", 4.3.1 "Study for Improving & Diversifying Local Fairs in Eligible Area of the Programme in Bulgaria" and 5.3.3 "Strategic & Operational Plan of the Network of Local Fairs Organisers". The work for further developing of the project website, GIS and the project web pages at the web site of the Faculty of Economics at the SWUNR will also continue.

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