



LOCAL ACTION PLAN

Country: Spain

Pilot area: Ribera d'Ebre

1. Introduction

This document is a project-level **Local Action Plan (LAP)** and compiles the main conclusions from the:

- Med Pearls Research Study on Slow Tourism International Trends and Innovations
- SWOT analysis of the Med Pearls Mediterranean Action Area
- SWOT analysis of *Ribera d'Ebre*
- Mapping of Natural and Cultural assets of *Ribera d'Ebre*

The aim of the LAP is to provide context, background and guidance to the local DMCs to align their proposals to the requirements of the Slow Tourism approach and the needs and specificities of the project pilot areas.

The LAP is based on the Med Pearls project findings after its first year of implementation and needs to be backed-up by local and regional public and private stakeholders to ensure a long-term impact.

2. About the Med Pearls project

Tourism is a key driver for the development of local economies in the Mediterranean, directly contributing to 7.7 million jobs and indirectly to 20 by 2012 (according to the Joint Operational Programme SWOT analysis of the ENI CBC MED Programme). Projections are really promising, especially in fields like ecotourism or other forms of sustainable tourism. The outstanding variety and richness of cultural & natural assets throughout the region is a competitive advantage compared to other destinations.

Nevertheless, some barriers are undermining the possibilities of utilizing its full potential and of increasing its contribution to local development in a sustainable way. The mainstream model deployed so far relies too much on 'sun & beach' offer, characterised by being large-scale & low-cost, with a lack of innovation, diversification & reinvestment of profits into local economies, while causing high environmental pressures. Situation worsens because of a demand shift caused by political instability. To address these challenges, Med Pearls' approach proposes an alternative model based on 4 pillars to reposition the area as a quality destination for Slow Tourism (ST):

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- i) Deseasonalization (taking advantage of the exceptional weather conditions);
- ii) Diversification (developing new tourist products & experiences for niches & new segments based on Slow Tourism and valorising the rich existing heritage);
- iii) Innovation (introducing ICT & digitalisation to bolster the most promising tourist product ideas coming from local MSMEs);
- iv) Local economy development (by supporting Slow Tourism, around 66% of the trip costs from packages remain in local destinations (as estimated by the ATTA 2014 Snapshot), thus at local stakeholders, while in mass tourism packages up to 80% of travellers expenditures go to airlines, hotels or other international companies, according to UNEP).

Med Pearls will work towards the integration of the Mediterranean diversity into a top quality & single brand for Slow Tourism, guaranteeing similar experiences to visitors based on regions' values & lifestyle.

Based on the above, the Project Objective is to internationally position the Mediterranean as an integral destination of quality and excellence for Slow Tourism by accelerating innovative initiatives built from public & private cooperation.

Med Pearls project is co-financed by the European Union under the European Neighbourhood Instrument cross-border cooperation program "Mediterranean Sea Basin" 2014-2020 (ENI CBC MED). It started on 1st September 2019 and has a duration of 36 months (until 31st August 2022). It counts on an overall budget of 3.015.132 EUR, which are co-financed at a 90% rate by the ENI CBC Med program.

It includes the following project partners:

- Lead Beneficiary: Spain: Catalan Tourist Board
- Project partner 1: Egypt: Confederation of Egyptian European Business Associations
- Project partner 2: Greece: Municipality of Thessaloniki
- Project partner 3: Jordan: Discovery Travel & Tourism LLC
- Project partner 4: Italy: APS Mediterranean Pearls
- Project partner 5: Palestine: Palestine information & communications technology incubator
- Project partner 6: Palestine: Palestine Wildlife Society
- Project partner 7: Egypt: Alexandria Chamber

More information is available at: <http://www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/med-pearls>

3. About Slow Tourism

➤ Definition of Slow Tourism

Although there is not a single definition, Slow Tourism is a type of tourism that:

“Sensitizes demand and supply of ethical values, allows to get possession of time again, relieves anxiety and stress caused by hectic paces, allows the guests to be back in tune with themselves and whatever surrounds them, creates a new form of awareness thanks to a deeper and involving experience and thus emphasizes sustainability, responsibility and eco-friendliness”.

According to some authors, it can only be called “Slow Tourism” if it satisfies six dimensions, both from the point of view of supply and demand. These are:

- Time
- Slowness (opposed to “time is money”)
- Otherness (sphere of relationships between individuals with different opinions, beliefs, knowledge and cultures)
- Authenticity
- Sustainability
- Emotion

To roll-out this LAP in the pilot area, it is strongly recommended to use the main findings and conclusions from the Med Pearls “**Research study on Slow Tourism international trends and innovations**” which can be downloaded from this [link](#); specific information on the Slow Tourism concept is given on pages 9 to 11.

➤ General Aspects of a Slow Tourist profile

As far as the slow tourist profile is concerned, information of interest can be found in the chapter “Conceptualization and Trends on Sustainable and Slow Tourism” of the before mentioned study.

In the following table a comparative profile of the slow tourist, in contrast to that of the “mainstream” tourist is presented.

	Slow Tourist	Mainstream Tourist
Inspiration	From travel books to Internet	Internet
Reservation	By phone or e-mail (for a more direct contact) but also Internet	Internet booking engines but also email
Use of tour operators	Only if not avoidable	Yes
Destination info & maps	From travel guides (paper) to smartphone	Smartphones or tablet
Taking pictures	Analogic camera, if possible – smartphones	Smartphones

Use of social networks to communicate trip or pictures	Growing trend	Yes, in every case
Personal attitude towards destination, people, and environment	“Disconnection” from the everyday world and full “connection” to the destination	Permanent connection with the everyday world (smartphone) and little (or none) connection with destination.
Apparel and clothes	Soft and essential. Probably buys local clothes at destination	Heavy (unnecessary apparel), bought and brought from origin
Means of transport to destination	Preference for alternative means of transport mainly train or bus. Also shared transport, environmentally friendly, and hurry-free...	Preference for low cost airlines and/or exclusive use vehicle
Means of transport in destination	Public transport, shared, environmentally friendly, and hurry-free...	Those that allow quick movement e.g. exclusive use vehicle
Accommodation	Local housing and/or small, friendly, and familiar business	Major hotel franchises
Meals	Local & traditional cuisine / eco-friendly foods and beverages	Fast food, hotel food, international food
Agenda	Flexible agenda or none.	Everything is within a programme
Activities	Prefers direct contact with nature, and/or local population. No intermediaries	Fully intermediated. Minimum contact with local population.

➤ Check list to develop a Slow Tourism product

This check list is available at the document “**Criteria and requirements to create Slow Tourism packages**” prepared specifically for the Med Pearls project with the aim to support the creation of Slow Tourism packages and experiences that are highly attractive to Incoming Travel Agencies and Tourists.

The document can be downloaded from the Med Pearls website, specifically from the following [Link](#).

The criteria are classified in the following sections: transport, accommodation, activities and food. In addition, there is a section devoted to general aspects such as the ones related to the package itself or the DMC or Incoming Travel Agency offering the package.

For a tour package to be considered Slow, it should meet a minimum of compulsory requirements. It is considered that a Slow Tourism package has to be coherent and balanced, so compliance with a minimum of 40% of requirements in each category is recommended. The more requirements the package meets, the more “Slow Tourism philosophy” will be. Each category details the minimum requirements to be met.

4. About the Pilot Area

Ribera d'Ebre was selected for being one of the territories in Catalonia with a lower number of visitors but with distinct resources and elements to enhance slow tourism. The area has an interesting mix of small towns with their own character, combined with farmland and a natural influenced by the river Ebre. The county has also unique resources, be it at the level of natural, cultural and intangible heritage, or an arrange of local producers producing local crafts and gastronomic products.

In terms of tourism infrastructure, the area has growing potential with a varied accommodation offer that combines both hotels and smaller establishments that fit the slow tourism philosophy. Such as rural houses, lodges, campings and apartments. Furthermore, the area also offers visitors mobility options to move inside the destination through more eco-friendly and sustainable options such as buses, railway and taxis, bike renting and hiking routes. In comparison with the other two Catalan pilot areas, Ribera d'Ebre also has an offer of fluvial mobility, which helps diversify the transport options.

Last, but not least, the area also offers events and activities throughout all the year that are respectful in representing the culture of the territory, as well as tourism activity providers that fit the slow tourism interests. Some examples are of farm and agro-tourism providers, gastronomy and wine tourism, nature and active tourism, cultural and ecotourism services. The main highlights of the region are the pottery, biscuits, oil and honey producers that offer tourism services as well as active experiences related to the river Ebre.

5. SWOT of the pilot area

STRENGTHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region belonging to a Biosphere Reserve and a Top 100 green destination. • Catalonia and Terres de l'Ebre as prestigious and recognized umbrella brands • Historical and cultural heritage with potential for tourism although mostly unknown • Important natural heritage. The river Ebro as an outstanding natural and tourist resource. • GR-99 trekking route as the backbone of the tourist offer and positioning of the region. • Increasing private investment in the creation of business projects in the tourism industry sector. • Business sector with the capacity to grow and project their tourist vision. • Engagement of the Association of Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs in the Ribera d'Ebre • Available dialogue platforms between entrepreneurs of different sub-sectors (the County Tourism Board, Terres de l'Ebre regional rural tourism board) • Mostly organized and associated tourism sector. • Hiking and cycling routes. Apart from the GR-99, local authorities are also developing other itineraries such us GR-7 to make them more competitive for tourism use. Connection with the greenway route "Val de Zafan". • Railway route crossing the north side of the county and connecting with Madrid and Zaragoza. • The nuclear power plant established in the area provides economic resources that allow for the development of tourist infrastructure (e.g. restauration of Ca Don Joan Manor) • High sustainability awareness among the agri-food industry and hospitality industry. • High percentage of the territory are protected natural areas.
WEAKNESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism of local actors. • Complex and insufficient public-private cooperation. • Insufficient accommodation and restaurants.

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- Lack of local products in restaurants and other hospitality services. It is difficult for local food providers to sell quality products at real value.
- Undervalued local heritage.
- Local population is unaware of the potential of the tourism industry in their area.
- Sustainability is not explicitly communicated. It is understood as an implicit element in the chain of value but not communicated as added value.
- Lack of public transportation within the area and lack of investment to improve the existing railway infrastructure, which is deficient in service and maintenance.
- The Ebro Delta is generally used as the most representative landmark of the “Ebre / Terres de l’Ebre” Brand. Therefore, local actors do not feel included in the branding strategy of the region.
- In the local imaginary, Ribera d’Ebre is viewed as a transit area, not a destination.
- Lack of incoming agencies /DMC in the area
- Professionals in the sector lack skills in foreign language
- Low mobile reception in specific areas
- Tourism companies have not adopted technology and digital tools.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Values of the territory align with a type of tourism that promotes the discovery of the territory and a healthy lifestyle
- Historical and cultural heritage is little known but it has a lot of potential.
- Growing interest in rural tourism, healthy and organic food, local and Km0 products.
- Attractive living conditions for professionals in urban centers and digital nomads.
- Political will for the implementation of the development strategy based on the river Ebro and GR-99.
- New emerging destination
- Proximity with the areas of Terra Alta, Priorat and Baix Ebre, which offer a quality complementary tourism offer.
- Sustainable Tourism as a differential element for the area's development. It is a key factor to debunk the industrial concept predominating in the local imaginary.
- Wine tourism: 2 DO (Montsant and Terra Alta) and Vimbanc
- Oil tourism: 2DO (Terra Alta and Siurana)
- 10 new hiking routes and 20 cycling routes are being developed in the area
- Tourism products linked to the flowering of fruit trees (almond tree, cherry tree, peach tree)
- Post-nuclear transition. Progressively change the actual system towards a renewable energy model.
- Opportunity to create destination branding from scratch, because the area is not well-known in terms of tourism.

THREATS

- Dispersion of projects.
- Management of the river and its flow without taking into account the tourist activity linked to river navigation. This does not help to boost the sector.
- Lack of investment in river management and maintenance (insect problematic, “black fly”)
- Excessive dependence on the Catalan market (metropolitan area)
- Some political decisions support a model of development contrary to the interests of tourism (e.g. the creation of a major landfill in the area)s
- Aging of the local population
- The agricultural sector currently employs the older segment of the local workforce in small cultivation and farming properties, which provide local products for tourism. Continuity of the sector is not guaranteed, as younger generations move to urban areas and other employment options.

6. Main cultural and natural assets of the pilot area

Regarding cultural heritage assets, Ribera d'Ebre stands out with historical and archaeological sites like the passage of the Moorish people through Catalonia, the Roman settlement in Vinebre, different Iberian archaeological sites and the Cistercian Adjubs; cultural and religious monuments such as the castles and churches of Miravet, La Palma, Flix, Ascó and Mora d'Ebres; and museums like the Railway Museum and the Museum and Birth-house of St Enric d'Ossó. In regard to intangible heritage the region is proud to have a strong river navigation culture with llaguts (traditional boats) and a distinguished local handcraft industry of potteries, pauma baskets and carpets, biscuits and traditional stone constructions. Furthermore, the area also hosts many festivals and traditional festivities like gastronomy and food production festivals (La Clotxa and olives, cherries and peach festivals), river festivals and the Jota dance festival. It is also important to highlight that the area has an important significance in Catalan history, as it is where the Batalla de l'Ebre (Ebre Battle) took place during the Spanish Civil War.

On the other hand, regarding natural heritage the main assets could be considered: the different protected natural areas influenced by the river Ebre (like the Sebes and Riba-roja Reservoir natural areas with its wild life), notable lagoons and wetlands, birdwatching sites, and the Serra Tivissa-Vandellós and Pic de l'Àguila mountain range and peaks.

7. Key tourism players (stakeholders) in the pilot area

The main tourism stakeholders in the area, that are also in charge of promotion, are the Diputació de Tarragona (Provincial Council of Tarragona), the Turisme del Consell Comarcal de Ribera d'Ebre (Ribera d'Ebre County Tourist Office) and the Consell Comarcal de Ribera d'Ebre (the county government body).

8. Slow Tourism proposal in the Pilot Area

Below, some of the main experiences and products that can be identified as activities related to slow tourism:

- Agrotourism and farm tourism activities and services related to local products.
- Gastronomy tourism and food production experiences and services providers.
- Nature and active tourism with a lot of activities related water sports and river activities.
- Wine tourism services providers.
- Cultural tourism providers.
- There is an important amount of pottery and other handcraft producers.

9. Insertion of the Pilot area in the Med Pearls network

➤ SWOT of the Med Pearls Mediterranean Action Area

Besides the individual SWOT analysis conducted in each of the 13 Med Pearls Pilot Areas, further analysis has led to a global SWOT for the Mediterranean Action Area. In line with the project objective, the main goal is to internationally position the Mediterranean as an integral destination of quality and excellence for Slow Tourism, and hence the whole region is to be promoted and commercialised as a single tourism destination.

Thus, the Med Pearls SWOT analysis for the Mediterranean area is the following one:



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STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well-established brand / destination name. - Tourism resources richness: cultural heritage, museums, archaeological sites, natural resources, landscape, unique flora and fauna. - Rich rural landscape in proximity - Rich local / traditional production - Diverse environment: financial, social and natural (biodiversity) - Variety of natural resources - Local cuisine which can be further enhanced - Strong and wide local market - Location, proximity to major urban centres and markets - Transportation alternatives - Proximity to well-known sites / established destinations - Access to organized health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited number of visitors due to insufficient tourism campaigns and / or low popularity - Shortage of specialized products providers (niche tourism) - Shortage of certified tourism service providers - Limited (or no) access to tourism information offices - Insufficiencies in urban infrastructure - Insufficient language and ICT skills - Insufficiencies in technological and digital tools and infrastructure - Limitations in disabled people accessibility - Inadequately funded local transportation - Limited accommodation options
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise public awareness on slow tourism and sustainability of tourism sector in general - International initiatives to promote and fund alternative / mild forms of tourism - Create new eco-tourism and slow tourism products - Strong mindset from population to accept further investments on tourism - New website for promotion - Potential development of new integrated itineraries and programs for activities and actions on slow tourism area - Potential traditional local festivals in an organized integrated schedule - New integrated market for local products - Structural capacity for further investments on accommodation infrastructure - Creation of new gastronomical contexts - COVID-19 – mass tourism restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unorganized, excessive competition among local entrepreneurs - Incomplete tourism market which leads to potential price imbalances and unfair wealth dissemination - Bureaucracy in various tourism actions and tourism initiatives - Constant economic crisis' phenomena in various sectors and activities (lack of resources and professionals in some instances)

➤ **Strengths and opportunities in common with other Med Pearls Pilot Areas**

Once the Med Pearls project concludes, a network of 26 Slow Tourism products or “Pearls”, enhanced by ICT technologies, will be put in place and enrich the Mediterranean tourism offer. These new Pearls will share common values across 6 countries. They will be inter-connected through shared elements like gastronomy, landscape, traditions, fauna, flora, etc. which link the different territories of the Mediterranean.

Additionally, they will all propose experiences based on the Slow Tourism concept, thus ensuring similar tourism experiences to people willing to visit the area. Since the Pearls have been developed following a common methodology, the resulting outcome will be standard experiences in 6 different countries but adapted to local realities.



This approach allows working as a network and facilitates the exploration of win-win approaches like 'cross-selling strategies'. In fact, Med Pearls will allocate significant efforts to train the DMCs behind the Pearls to design and implement a cross-selling strategy and thus commercialize the 26 Pearls in all the 6 project countries.

➤ **Med Pearls actions to support promotion and commercialization of the Pearls**

Med Pearls foresees to roll out different actions to support the promotion and commercialization of the 26 new Slow Tourism products (Pearls) created in the fringes of the project. These actions have its own separate budget and will be managed by project partners, who will be acting as focal points in each country.

Thus, this section describes these tools and instruments that will enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of the Pilot Areas and the 26 pearls.

Med Pearls will draft a **Promotional & Commercialization Plan** that will guide both project partners and tourism destinations in the preparation and implementation of all the promotional and commercialization activities that will support the international positioning of the Mediterranean.

This plan will be fed by the findings of two research studies, the 'ST international demand. Data base of specialized operators' and the 'Guidelines on Most Innovative Practices on promotion and commercialization'.

The promotional and commercialization items are described below:

○ **Med Pearls Online Platform**

The Med Pearls Online Platform is a cross-border tool to inform, promote & commercialize the Mediterranean as a Slow Tourism quality destination. The platform will inform about the Slow concept, about the 6 project countries and 13 destinations (stressing its main cultural & natural heritage assets) and about the 26 Pearls. Visitors interested in purchasing one of the holiday packages linked to a Pearl will be redirected to the DMC in charge of managing the Pearl and proceed with the booking process. Additional digital actions will complement the Platform in positioning the Med Pearls tourism offer.

○ **International exhibitions**

Med Pearls will identify key international tourism exhibitions in which the Mediterranean and the 13 destinations should be promoted. Business missions combining representatives from the project partners and from the DMCs managing the Pearls will be organised, travelling to these exhibitions to gain international visibility, get in touch with tourism operators, DMOs, etc.

○ **Fam & Blog trips**

Delegations of specialized tour operators, journalists, bloggers, etc. will be arranged so as they can visit the Med Pearls destinations and meet with the local stakeholders, notably the DMCs managing the Pearls. These visits will be coordinated by the project partners, possibly combining different countries in one single trip.