Visiting the Margins.

INnovative CULtural ToUrisM in European peripheries

The High Mountains

Networking and Social Innovation

INCULTUM

Aoos the Shared River

The High Mountains

Innovation factsheet

This Project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under Grant Agreement no. 101004552

Context

-Natural Environment: Aoos' Valley belongs to Konitsa's municipality, a mountainous municipality consisting of 47 villages spread in an area of 951.18 km2, with a population of 5.325; one of the most sparsely populated areas in Greece. Konitsa is the main town of the area and the capital of the municipality surrounded by some of the highest mountains of Greece. It is built on the edge of Vikos Canyon, core of the National Park of Vikos-Aoos and one of the four Greek Geoparks, which became a member of the European and Global Geopark Networks in 2010. Despite its natural uniqueness, Konitsa remains one of the poorest and most depopulated areas in Greece.

-The history of the area goes back to the Palaeolithic era, when the caves of the landscape gave shelter to the first inhabitants and the river easy access to food. Since then, as the archaeological data suggest, the area was constantly inhabited. Lengthwise Aoos River in Greece and Albania a historic road was passing, connecting ancient Macedonia with the harbour of Vlore and the Adriatic Sea. The road still follows the same route, but it remains in a bad condition, isolating both sides of the borders, Konitsa and Permet. During the Empires era both sides of Aoos Valley were one geographical, social, economic space. Especially during the Ottomans Empire, in Ali Pasha's era, the whole area was favoured, flourished, and obtained many privileges and became a centre of trade. Dipalitsa's Bazaar was famous and became a development tool for the area, driving up the agricultural production and the processing activities, especially of fur and leather and increasing the population, according to historical data. The last century of the Ottomans was a recession period; many people emigrated to Vlachia, Egypt, Istanbul and other places. Some of them made big fortunes and funded numerous projects, schools, churches, community infrastructures like stone bridges, paved roads and irrigation canals. The remittances of the immigrants raised the standard of living even in the recession period. The 20th century comes with the rise of national states and after its liberation from the Ottomans, Konitsa becomes an isolated place to the borders of the new Greek state, rather than a centre of a broader area that it was before. Immigration and remittances continue and the only thing that stopped the population drainage was the relocation of the refugees from Asia Minor in Konitsa. The refugees brought with them new cultural elements and new ways of cultivation and reform of the local agricultural production. The greatest wound for the area was the decade of 40s. The Greek-Italian war, the German occupation and the civil war, all have their epicentre in Konitsa. The first wins against the Italian army took place here. In Aetomilitsa village, was the headquarters of the Democratic Army of Greece. In the village, until today, there is the military hospital and all the abandoned military infrastructures. The caves in the mountains around are full of military equipment. The last act of the Greek civil war also played here, with the first testing of the Napalm bomb.

-The stone building culture, developed by the people of Mastorochoria, a complex of 13 small mountainous stonebuilt villages, was built collaboratively by their people, close to river Sarantaporos. The villages' entity was named out of their people's profession. "Mastoras" in Greek is the Craftsman and "Choria" means Villages, so Mastorochoria are the villages of the craftsmen. To overcome the recession of the last Ottoman period the people of these villages developed a unique system of technical specialization. Every village was educating its people in a specific job related to building and constructions and then they were forming groups of craftsmen of different specializations capable to complete every construction project. These groups were called Bouloukia. After their villages, they built various public and private buildings, churches, bridges, watermills, irrigation canals, terraces, etc, all around the region and the country, but they also worked in many countries abroad, like the US. They even developed their own secret professional language called koudaritika.

-Transhumance culture and the Vlachs: the basic characteristic of Vlachs is the semi-nomadic life that dictates a special way of life and identifies the characteristics of their society and economy. It is a way of life regulated by the ecological conditions that sealed the collective life of these people. Until the beginning of the 20th century, only the Vlachs of Aetomilitsa had about 40,000 sheep and goats, from which they produced milk and wool products. There are six Vlach villages in Konitsa and until today there are people speaking the Vlach language, which is only oral and is something between Latin, Romanian and Greek. There are Vlachs on both sides of the borders in Greece and Albania, but for them there is no border, they use the same routes to graze their sheep before the borders even existed. Another interesting element about them is that in some villages they never developed individual land ownership; the land was and is a common asset. Moreover, they developed a system for distribution and use of pastures. The annual redistribution of pasture use is done by a general "gathering" of the livestock farmers, in accordance with unwritten rules and in a ceremonial manner. The final decision is taken unanimously and is respected by everyone.

-Water culture: water is the dominant element of the area, it shapes the way of life of the inhabitants, their culture and activities. In every village, there are traditional community infrastructures to make good use of the water. Everywhere there is at least one watermill, water saw, community washing machines working with the power of water. Traditional irrigation systems and canals were made by the locals many years ago to irrigate not only the gardens of the houses, but also every slope and field of the area. Most of these infrastructures are abandoned now but they can be renovated and used again giving a good example of sustainable living.

Aim

Our pilot's final product will be a website that will present the culture of the area and give the opportunity to local stakeholders to create and offer online cultural products.

Furthermore, it will incorporate a digital platform that is going to give citizens, local authorities and stakeholders, as well as visitors, the chance to combine resources of the area and propose their own evidence-based development actions and policies. The tool is going to function both as an evidence based decision-making tool, but also as a full interactive tourist guide for the area where visitors can plan their tour in the area.

Innovation

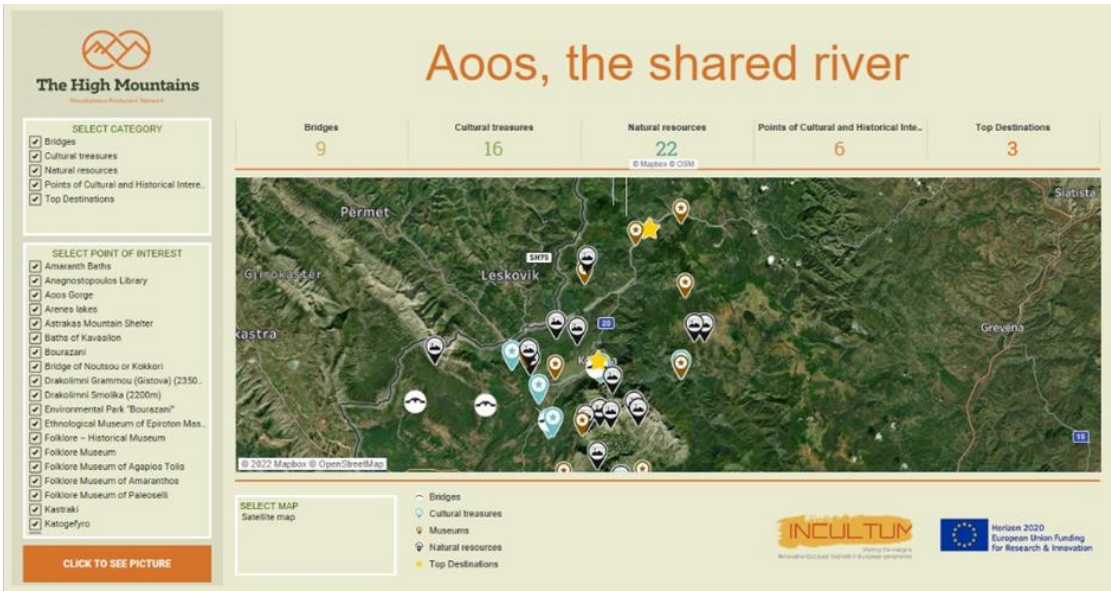
In this factsheet we explore the main **organizational and technological innovations** utilized in the framework of Aoos the Shared River pilot, in order to create a fertile ground for **social innovation** to be developed.

- ✓ Record, map, analyze, synthesize and visualize the Cultural reality of the area.
- ✓ Empower local communities to collectively imagine, plan and implement evidence-based development actions in the field of Innovative Cultural Tourism.
- ✓ Create and promote Innovative Cultural products and services through P2P production and Social Economy business models.

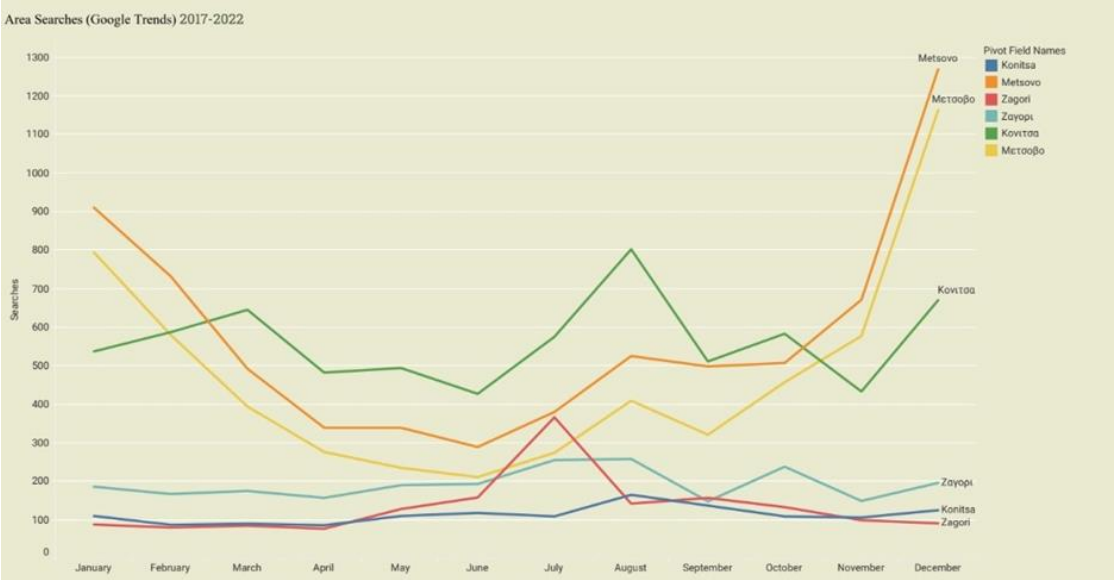
Record, map, analyze, synthesize, and visualize the Cultural reality of the area.

The innovative approaches of the pilot used to record, analyze, synthesize, and visualize the physical and socio-economic reality of the region, within the aim of developing cultural tourism in the light of Worth-Living Integrated Development (Rokos, 2004) are the following:

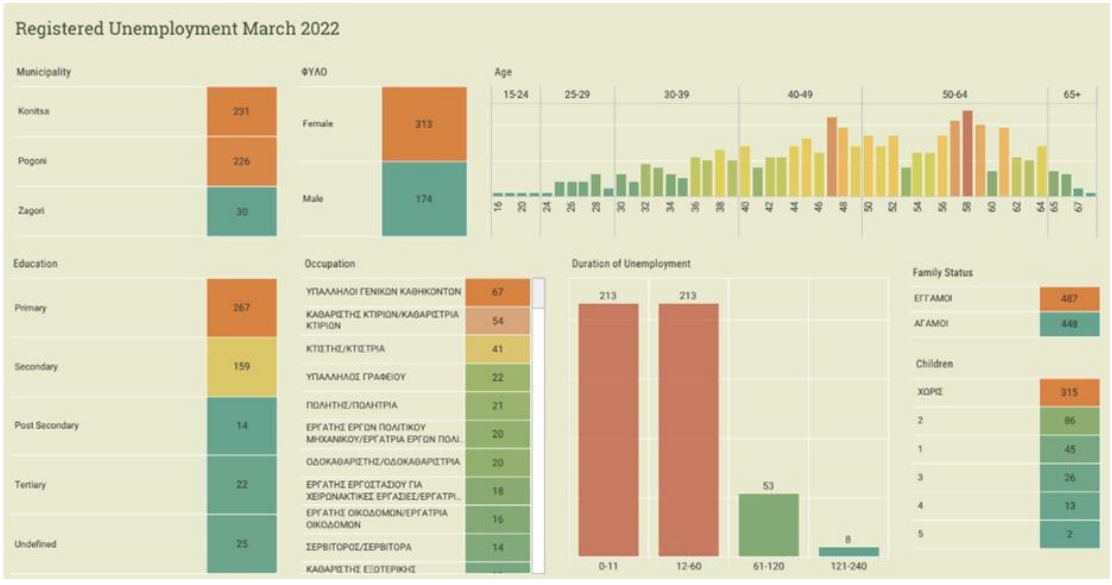
● The creation of **a knowledge geobase** for the region, **connected to business intelligence tools**, with information on the **data set of its physical, cultural, and socio-economic reality**.



B.I. systems can be understood as a process of obtaining meaningful and qualitative information about a variety of objects by helping each user to analyze the information and reach conclusions (Nycz and Polkowski 2015). These conclusions represent the extracted knowledge of a BI system and serve the decision-making process at various levels (Nycz and Polkowski 2015). According to Nelson (2010), the cornerstone of this data-driven decision-making process is the technology that enables the access, analysis and presentation of information (Nycz and Polkowski 2015). In particular, **BI and the knowledge geobase contribute to the organizational success of the pilot because they facilitate the creation of knowledge about the pilot area, allowing locals and visitors to understand the special features of the area.**



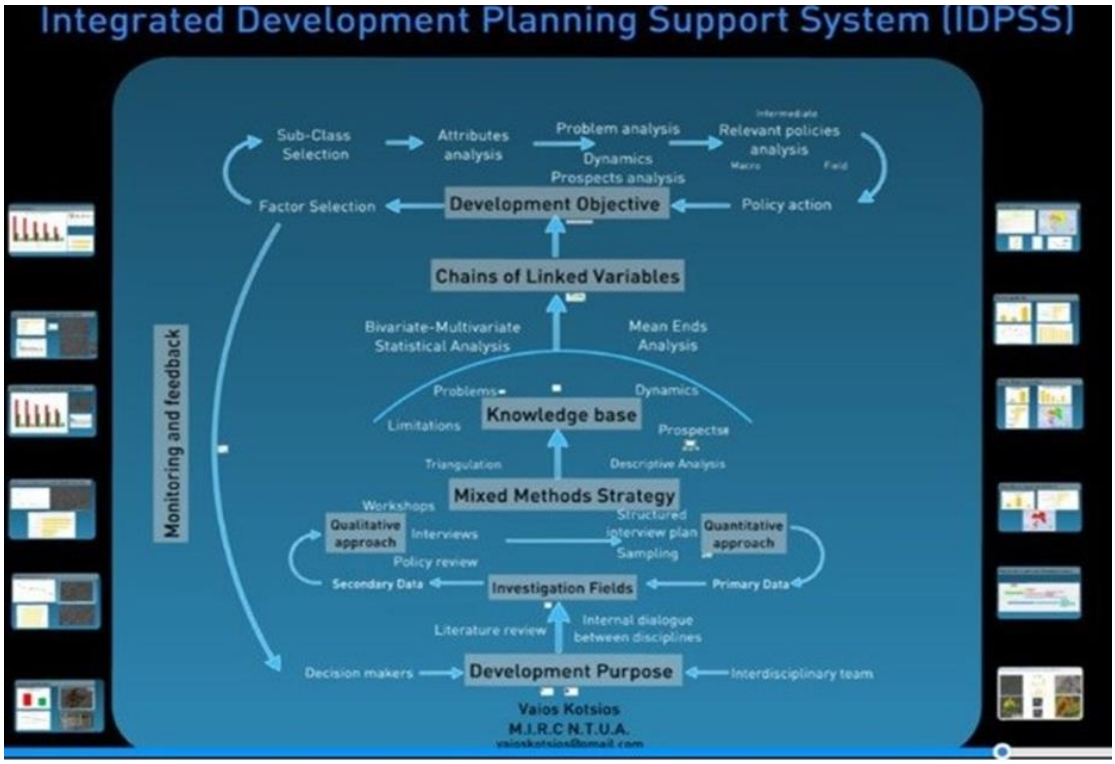
Its continuous use at various levels allows the pilot to continuously improve as a whole, as each decision maker better understands the area and the challenges it faces. In a sense, it can be said to enable stakeholders to collectively learn how to perform better.



By providing more and valuable information about the pilot and its challenges, business intelligence also enables richer decision environments, supporting creative problem solving and enabling stakeholders to deploy new solutions, products, or services.

● The use of **cutting-edge technologies and the Integrated Development Planning Support System** of cadastral environmental and development infrastructure IDPSS (Kotsios, 2016) to **extract actions** for the development of **cultural tourism** in the study area.

The system is based on the synthesis of interdisciplinary research with advanced technologies (Planning support systems, Spatial decision-making systems, Expert Systems and Business Intelligence) in the light of the Worth-living Integrated Development. Key features are the use of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the use of objective and subjective indicators and the integrated synthesis of research data. **The system allows the incorporation of any development objective related to a specific group of people or a certain area of any size (neighborhood, community, municipality, region, country).**



The system was constructed in three stages. In the first stage, a mixed method strategy was conducted by an Interdisciplinary Research Team, aiming at investigating factors that tend to play an important role in the well-being, local psychical and socio-economic features, political will of authorities, social consciousness about the problems, constraints, opportunities and prospects and social dynamics for development of the study area. In the second stage, a knowledge base for the study area, based on triangulation and descriptive statistical analysis, was created. In the third stage, in order to develop the decision-making system, linkages between

variables were elaborated with bivariate and multivariate statistical analysis and logical chains of linked variables, from the level of outputs to the level of overall improvement of life satisfaction and were substantiated through means-ends analysis. **This integrated tool can help development actors to identify appropriate cultural tourism development strategies for different social groups, assess benefits, and clarify connections between outputs and their intended effects on selected development objectives.**

Empower local communities to collectively imagine, plan and implement evidence-based development actions in the field of Innovative Cultural Tourism.

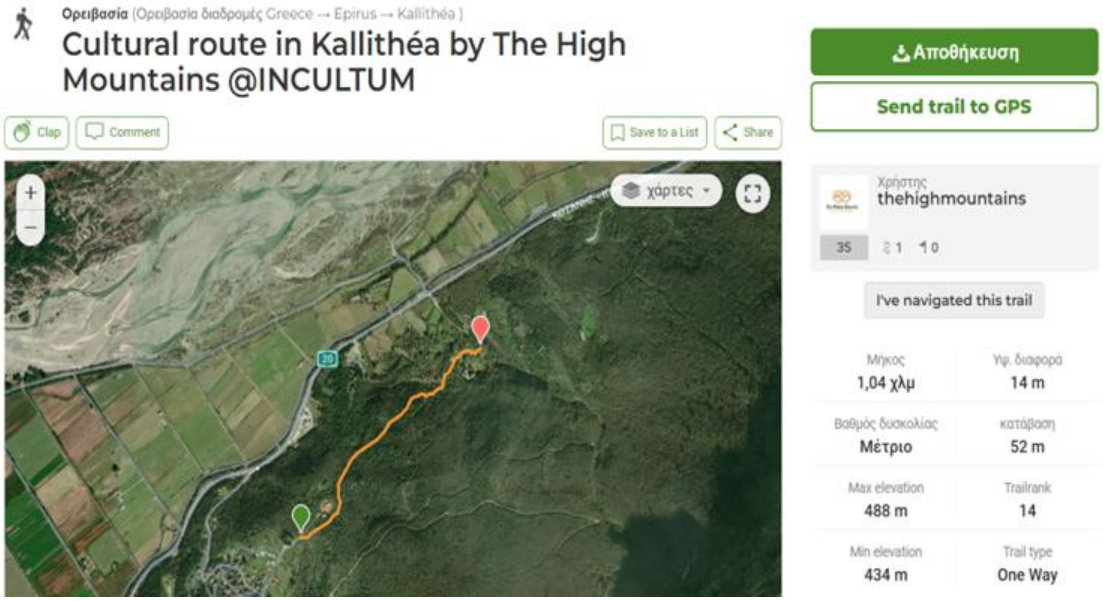
To plan evidence-based actions to support cultural tourism in their area, local stakeholders contributed to the research conducted by THM on the strengths and prospects, but also on the problems and weaknesses of the development of cultural tourism in Konitsa's municipality. The results of this research were analyzed and visualized and combined with the data collected by the desk research that THM team conducted about the area. **Using innovative business intelligence tools, the outcomes** of these two parallel researches **were presented as a feedback to local stakeholders** in the first event organized in Konitsa entitled "Culture, Tourism and Social Innovation: The Collective Organization of the Cultural Experience of our Homeland (21 May 2022)".

This innovative participatory process was an attempt to raise the collective intelligence of the stakeholders in order to plan evidence-based actions to support cultural tourism in their area. Based on the visualized evidence, local stakeholders decided the initiatives they were willing to take in order to support the development of cultural tourism in their area:

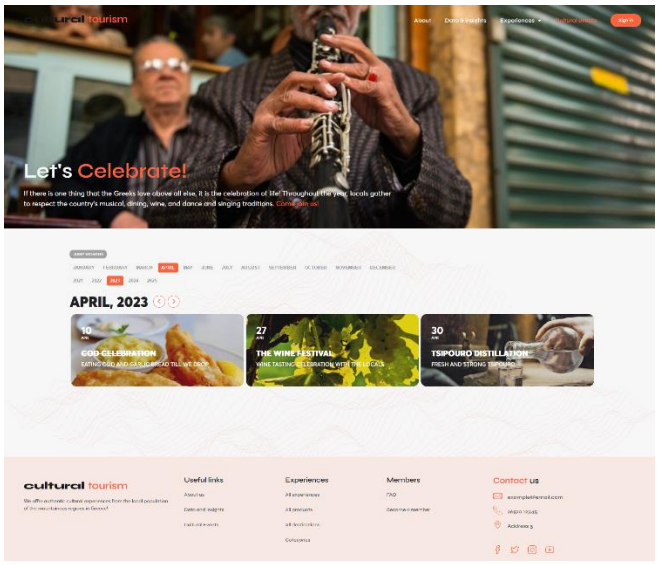
1) One of the stakeholders (the cultural association of Kallithea) proposed to take action on the **opening of a cultural route in their village** that was connecting the village with the monument of St Constantine chapel in the forest.

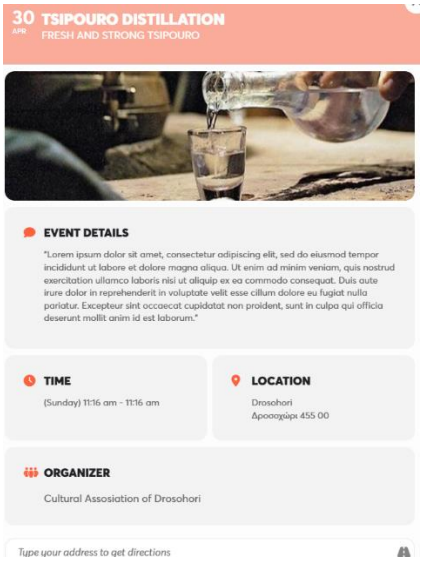
The path was opened involving the local community and connecting the village with local businesses and the monument. Although, the innovation characterized this action was the use of visitors to help in the opening of the path. THM used platforms like WWOOF and WORKAWAY to attract visitors to the area that wanted to volunteer and get in touch with locals and local culture. The municipality agreed to equip the abandoned community guesthouse, in order to host the volunteers' team that was formed. Local people and the cultural association offered their help not only in the opening of the path, but also cooking for the volunteers' team (Participatory opening of a new cultural route in Kallithea village, 10–14 October 2022).

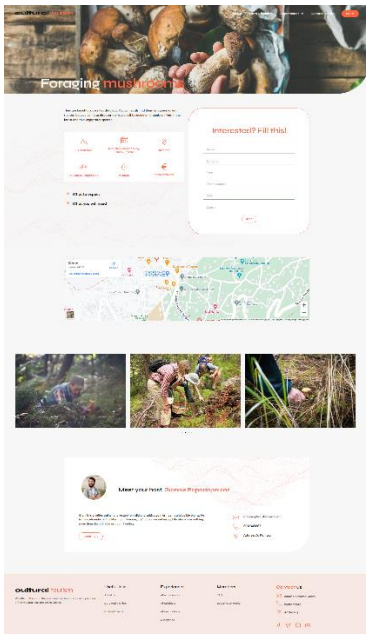
As a result, a new cultural route that passes through the village, connecting 3 local businesses with a monument of the area was established in a participatory way and it is posted on wikiloc available for the visitors of the area.

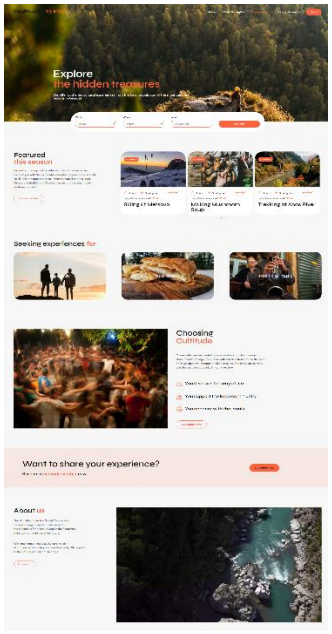


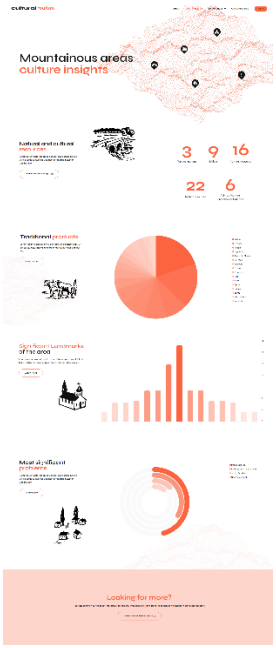
2) From the visualized data demonstrated through the B.I. tools during the first participatory event, many stakeholders realized that the **visibility of the area** outside Greece is very low. An initiative was taken from a local stakeholder (WOW branding and design Social Cooperative) and THM to **design a website to promote local culture outside Greece**. In this website local communities will have the opportunity to offer cultural experiences to visitors of the area. The B.I. tools are also going to be embedded on the website, in order for the local communities and stakeholders to evidence-base their actions, but also for the visitors to learn more about the area.







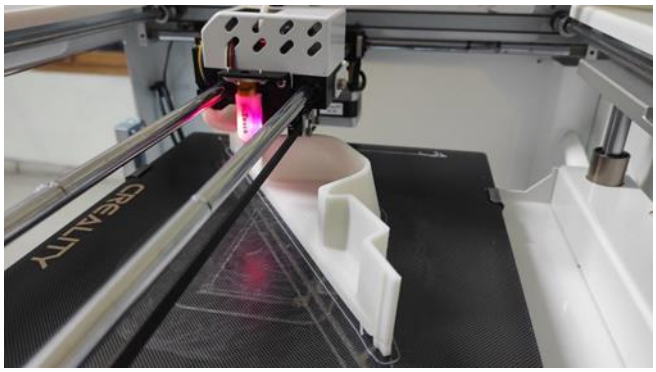




3) Another action that occurred, was regarding one of the most valuable natural resources of the area (the Dragon Lake of Tymfi) according to the results of the research presented to the stakeholders. The Hiking Association of Konitsa illustrated two issues that wanted to address taking an initiative about the Dragon Lake. **The first regards to the environmental monitoring of the Dragon Lake and the second is the environmental education along with the touristic exploitation of the resource.**

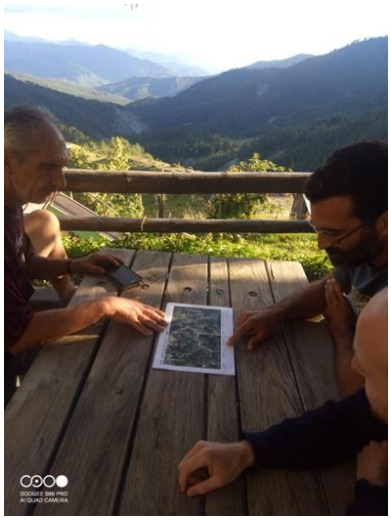
With our associated partners (p2p lab) through the local construction of a remotely

controlled water-jet designed by a team of researchers from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, using a 3D printer, we will be able to demonstrate how **free knowledge and open technologies can provide solutions for monitoring sensitive ecosystems, but also tools for local communities to educate and promote local culture.**

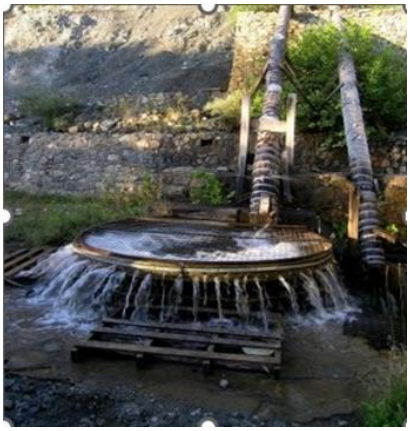


Other stakeholders like the public library of Konitsa and the Center of Environmental Education of Konitsa wanted to contribute in this action (A collaboration for the Lake of Tymfi, 28 July 2022).

4) According to the responses of the Cultural Associations, locals believe that the water resources are of a great value and that their utilization in combination with other activities could help young people relocate in their villages.



The research demonstrated that the foreseen privatization of the common water resources of the village of Aetomilitsa, in order to install Industrial Hydroelectric Plants, is considered a major threat by the local population in political, environmental, but also cultural and production terms.

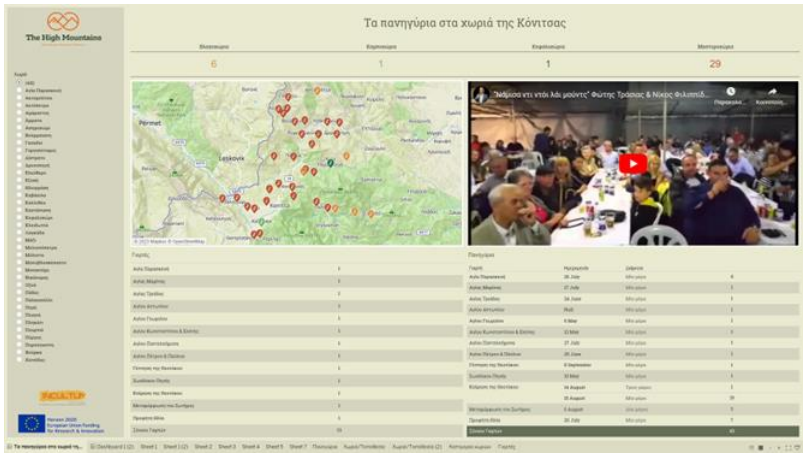


For these reasons the Cultural Association of Aetomilitsa took the initiative to organize an event with THM **to connect traditional hydropower cultural heritage with small scale**

hydroelectric production through mild technologies and the creation of energy communities.

(Aetomilitsa: From the Collective Management of Pastures to the Utilization of Water and Energy Resources by Local Communities, 27 August 2022).

5) Another valuable resource pointed out by the stakeholders of the area is the **rich cultural heritage of the traditional music and dances festivals of the area**. To promote them and make them accessible to visitors THM have collected the data related to the local music culture which are visualized and added to the interactive map.



<u>Create and promote Innovative Cultural products and services through P2P production and Social Economy business models.</u>

The development of the cultural tourism website to promote local culture outside Greece is related to the social economy, as it provides an opportunity for local communities to offer cultural experiences to visitors, potentially generating income

and creating job opportunities. The use of B.I. (Business Intelligence) tools is related to peer-to-peer (P2P) production, as local communities and stakeholders can utilize evidence-based data to create and promote their cultural experiences. The website itself also acts as a P2P production tool, as local communities can create and directly communicate their events to interested individuals through the platform, bypassing traditional intermediaries. Additionally, the development of the website supports the development of mountainous and isolated areas, by promoting their cultural assets and making them more visible to a wider audience outside of Greece.

Finally, the initiative taken by the Hiking Association of Konitsa to address the issues related to the Dragon Lake of Tymfi is related to social economy, as it aims to benefit the local community and economy by promoting environmental sustainability and responsible tourism. The use of open technologies and free knowledge for the local construction of a remote-controlled waterjet is related to peer-to-peer (P2P) production, as it demonstrates how local communities can utilize such technologies to monitor sensitive ecosystems and develop tools for environmental education and promotion of local culture. The involvement of other stakeholders, such as the public library of Konitsa and the Center of Environmental Education of Konitsa, also highlights the collaborative nature of social economy and P2P production models, as they work together to achieve common goals and benefit the local community. The development of sustainable tourism through the environmental monitoring and education of the Dragon Lake resource is related to the development of mountainous and isolated areas, as it promotes their unique natural assets and helps to create a more sustainable and resilient local economy.