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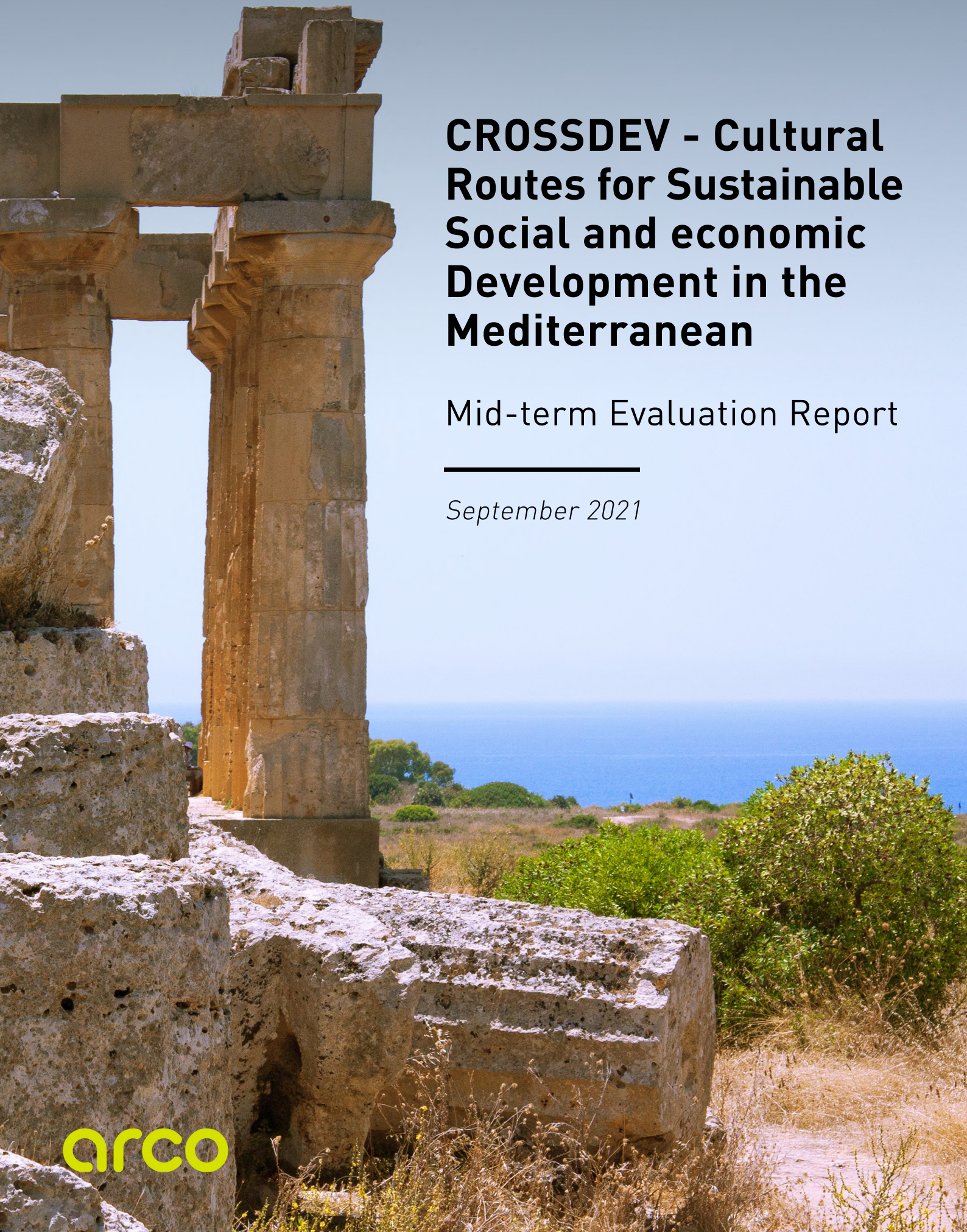
CROSSDEV



CROSSDEV - Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and economic Development in the Mediterranean

Mid-term Evaluation Report

September 2021

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This report was produced by the research centre ARCO (Action Research for CO-Development) c/o PIN S.c.r.l. – Prato, Italy.

Authors: Matteo Belletti, Andrea Ferrannini and Marta Russo.

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CONTACTS

E-mail: matteo.belletti@arcolab.org | andrea.ferrannini@arcolab.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to sincerely thank Deborah Rezzoagli – CROSSDEV Project Coordinator – for her collaborative support to facilitate all the evaluation activities.

We would also like to thank all people involved in the Mid-Term Evaluation activities – i.e., Lead Beneficiary's staff, Project Managers and Communication Officers of each Project Partners, representatives of Associate Partners and key stakeholders – for having shared with us their experience and opinion.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project:	CROSSDEV - Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and economic Development in the Mediterranean
Countries:	Italy, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine
Donor:	ENI CBC MED 2014/2020, European Union
Thematic Objective:	A.1 – Business and SMEs development (Promote economic and Social Development)
Priority:	A.1.3 – Encourage sustainable tourism initiatives and actions
Leader:	CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli
Partners:	CoopCulture and Ministry of Culture (Italy), Jordan University of Science and Technology and The Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan (Jordan), Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (Lebanon), Palestinian Heritage Trail (Palestine)
Evaluator:	ARCO – Action Research for Co-Development

FOCUS:

The **CROSSDEV** project – **Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and Economic Development in the Mediterranean** – is funded by the ENI CBC MED Programme of the European Commission within the thematic objective A.1 – Business and SMEs development and the priority A.1.3 – Encourage sustainable tourism initiatives and actions. The project started on 01-09-2019 and is expected to finish on 31-08-2022.

The main objective of the project is to contribute to the economic and social development in the Mediterranean region, strengthening and enhancing sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing common heritages and resources in less known tourism destinations. The project is implemented in four countries (Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine) by a consortium led by CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli - and composed by the following partners: CoopCulture and Ministry of Culture (Italy), Jordan University of Science and Technology and The Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan (Jordan), Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (Lebanon), Palestinian Heritage Trail (Palestine).

The five targeted less-known tourist destinations are: Via Selinuntina in Sicily (Italy); Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve (Lebanon); Palestinian Heritage Trail aka Masar Ibrahim al Khalil, from Beit Mersim to Battir (Palestine); less known sites of Aqaba (Jordan); less known sites of Umm Qais (Jordan).

The research centre **ARCO (Action Research for CO-Development)** c/o PIN S.c.r.l is in charge of the external Mid-Term and Final Evaluation of the CROSSDEV project. The Mid-Term Evaluation covers the period up to July 2021, while official data on the achievement of project targets is dated March 2021.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS:

The general objective of the Mid-Term evaluation is to understand the main results achieved by the project in first phase of its implementation. To investigate the degree of success of the project, the evaluators followed the OECD-DAC criteria (OECD, 2021), hence assessing:

- ***Relevance:*** Is the intervention doing the right things?
- ***Coherence:*** How well does the intervention fit?
- ***Effectiveness:*** Is the intervention achieving its objectives?
- ***Efficiency:*** How well are resources being used?

The Impact and Sustainability criteria will be analysed during the Final Evaluation.

Furthermore, the results utilization-focused evaluation pursues the following objectives:

- To assess the alignment between the Project's design and the objectives/priorities of ENI CBC MED;
- To analyse the added value provided by the CROSS-BORDER DIMENSION of the Project;
- To analyse the performance of the Project with regard to the following specific aspects of interest: VISIBILITY; CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES such as gender, youth involvement, environmental impact, disability; CAPACITY BUILDING; AWARENESS RAISING on sustainable tourism concept, cultural heritage valorisation and conservation, sustainable tourism and socio-economic development links.

The evaluation is based on the following methodological components:

- The analysis of the achievement of the indicators, as proposed in the project Logical Framework, combined with the desk analysis of the project documents, and the data collected during the activities;
- Conceptual content analysis of the interviews and of the results collected through the questionnaire, taking into consideration the perceptions of beneficiaries, stakeholders and project partners, as well including them directly and actively in the evaluation activities.

EVALUATION FINDINGS:

The triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of collected data throughout the evaluation along with the desk analysis of project documentation has allowed to assess the project according to the OECD DAC criteria (OECD, 2021). The table below showcases the main evaluation results, while a detailed, country-specific assessment is provided in Section 4.

RELEVANCE

The project is designed according to the thematic priority of the ENI CBC MED programme, to contribute to the socio-economic development and stability of the Mediterranean region, focusing on sustainable tourism and leveraging on tangible and intangible resources of the less known areas. The objectives of the project fully coincide with the missions and objectives of the partners involved, and the partnership includes actors with different and complementary characteristics and know-how. The project targeted destinations outside the traditional tourism routes, even in famous tourist areas such as Sicily (Italy) and Aqaba (Jordan), trying to create flywheel mechanisms between standard and sustainable tourism. The relevance of the project following the COVID-19 pandemic has changed: the tourism sector has been damaged, and it has become more urgent to promote sustainable tourism initiatives to help communities recover, especially in less known destinations. CROSSDEV project is providing an opportunity to reflect on how to address the challenges that have emerged due to COVID-19. Communication activities were of particular importance for project and programme VISIBILITY both at international and at local level. The CROSS-BORDER dimension of the project, with 4 countries involved within the Mediterranean region, is relevant as it fosters not only the exchange of experiences and good practices among partners and stakeholders, but also increases potential audience through networking and visibility activities such as the signing of cross-border agreements. Finally, the project is very relevant as it touches several CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: YOUTH are actively involved in the trainings and other dedicated initiatives as tourism actors and as students, representing much of the population in the target areas; the gender issue is at the core of the project activities, since the role of WOMEN in the communities and especially in the tourism sector is fundamental in all the contexts involved; ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY is a major theme in the promotion of tourist routes that aim to combine cultural and natural

enhancement and is particularly relevant in less developed contexts. In general, project partnership is willing to target local communities as the beneficiaries of the training and awareness campaigns to increase the impact and the sustainability of the project.

COHERENCE

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The mission of CISP, CROSSDEV Lead Beneficiary, in the framework of development cooperation is to pursue the socio-economic development of the target areas, which is consistent with the objective of CROSSDEV and of the overall ENI CBC MED Programme. The project is fully coherent with the ENI CBC MED 2014-20 Programme and with the other projects financed by the Programme. The implemented activities are linked to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals. CROSSDEV promotes social, cultural and economic development and address environmental challenges (Goals 8 and 14), generating effects also on the quality of education (Goal 4), the reduction of gender inequalities (Goal 5) and the improvement of the general quality of life in the targeted destinations (Goal 11). The key concepts that the project addresses, such as tourism "deseasonalisation", community-based tourism, cultural heritage valorisation as a driver of development, integration of local agriculture and handicrafts in tourist promotion, after COVID-19 are becoming central in local and national governments agendas. The project strictly collaborated with MED PEARLS, MEDUSA and MED GAIMS projects of ENI CBC MED Programme 2014-20 and with other interventions in the same target areas by activating collaborations and creating networks. The project activities and Working Packages are well integrated and coherent with each other. Despite the difficulties caused by the need to remodel some activities and postpone others due to the pandemic, the project fully succeeded in maintaining complete internal coherence.

EFFECTIVENESS

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The COVID-19 emergency strongly affected the project implementation in the first two years, particularly regarding in-person awareness and training activities due to restrictions to internal and international mobility and impossibility of bringing together a significant number of people. Most of the activities have moved to virtual mode, while others have been postponed and rescheduled in spring and summer seasons, targeting anyway smaller groups of beneficiaries. Furthermore, public institutions, universities, and schools are still working at minimum capacity. The target values of the expected results indicators are ambitious and not easily measured, so the effectiveness of the project in terms of expected results is difficult to assess at the Mid-Term evaluation stage. Concerning the creation of Sustainable Tourism Products, despite the challenges the project is in line with the planned schedule and the partnership is already working to finalise them in the second part of the project. As far as the number of visitor days achieved is concerned, increasing the tourist attractiveness of the destinations is a key aspect on which the partners have been working since the beginning of the project, both at the overall level and at the local level. Due to the pandemic and the restrictions imposed by national and local governments on domestic and international mobility, it is impossible to expect increased domestic and international tourist flows visiting the targeted area. As far as the achievement of output indicators is concerned, the Project partners are in line with what was expected at the end of the second year, also thanks to constant consultation and collaboration among all and targeted technical assistance addressing specific needs. The activities included in WP 2 – *Communication*, WP 3 - *Sustainable Tourism Strategies, Local Action Plans and Cross Border meetings*, WP 4 - *Increasing attractiveness of less known destinations*, and WP 5 - *Awareness & Training* have been implemented as planned, and the preliminary phase for WP 6 - *Sustainable Tourist Products and digital territorial ICT platform* has been completed.

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EFFICIENCY

The management and governance structure of the project is well organised, with continuous and active involvement of all Project Partners. The coordination between CISP as Lead Beneficiary and each Project Partner is effective, while direct communication and coordination between Project Partners can be improved. Two minor amendments were required for small budget variations, which nevertheless had a major impact on the successful implementation of the project. With regard to the management of subgrants, the ENI CBC MED programme requires that they must be treated as partners in terms of accountability and expenditure, and this has led to changes and delays with respect to the activity plan initially conceived by the partners. In general, it would have been useful to devote more resources to the subgrant component. The dialogue with the funding and managing authority is not so fluid. Finally, the project lacks a monitoring system frequently updated for measuring the achievement of expected results and output indicators.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. COVID-19 and tourist attractiveness

- Develop a robust monitoring system to be frequently updated in order to measure the achievement of expected results and output indicators and timely understand what corrective measures, if any, need to be taken.
- Extend the project duration in order to get closer to reach the expected target in terms of visitor days.
- Update the target to be reached for indicator 1.3.1 A "Increased domestic and international tourist flows visiting the targeted area" in terms of visitor days in less known destinations.

2. Project identity and transfer of knowledge to stakeholders

- Continue to invest in the exchange of know-how between the different countries, beginning with the partners but extending to local stakeholders and final beneficiaries, who will be the main players in the processes of sustainable tourism development.
- Promote learning from examples, allowing local stakeholders to visit other countries so they can learn from best practices.
- Taking into account the current difficulties due to COVID-19 and the changing international context, consider the organisation of an international initiative to present the project and the results achieved, as an opportunity for greater visibility and exchange of experiences.
- Start working on a new project targeting the same areas, to strengthen the network that CROSSDEV is building and to keep building a common identity between the actors and communities involved.

3. Impact of digitalisation on the tourism experience

- Elaborate new narratives, striving to represent sustainable tourism products that are linked to each other and that connect with the overall Mediterranean region.
- Reach tourists who may be interested in the target destinations and cultural routes that are being implemented and supported by CROSSDEV.
- Engage in collaboration with other initiatives that are fostering the use of digital tools in sustainable tourism, such as MED GAIMS project. Insist on use of technologies, working on it in the framework of the cross-border agreement among universities.

4. Active engagement of local communities, focus on cross-cutting issues

- Continue to actively engage the communities, especially youth and women, in the activities and find innovative ways to maintain high interest in the issues addressed.

- Strengthen the involvement of the universities in the partnership, making the most of the cross-border agreement signed.
- Give greater emphasis to awareness and action campaigns for the protection of the environment.
- Exploit the commitment and interest of the Palestinian partner towards accessibility and disability so that the other partners also increase their awareness and consider the issue in the elaboration of the Sustainable Development Products.
- Continuously update Local Action Plans with new data, trends and information, and opportunities to raise the attractiveness of less known destinations.

1 INTRODUCTION

The **CROSSDEV** project – **Cultural Routes for Sustainable Social and economic Development in the Mediterranean** – is funded by the ENI CBC MED Programme of the European Commission within the thematic objective A.1 – Business and SMEs development and the priority A.1.3 – Encourage sustainable tourism initiatives and actions.

The main objective of the project is to contribute to the economic (business & SMEs) and social development in the Mediterranean region, strengthening and enhancing sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing common heritages and resources.

The project is implemented between 01-09-2019 and 31-08-2022 in four countries (**Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine**) by a partnership lead by **CISP** – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli - and composed by **CoopCulture** and **Ministry of Culture** (Italy), **Jordan University of Science and Technology** and **The Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan** (Jordan), **Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa** (Lebanon), **Palestinian Heritage Trail** (Palestine).

The research centre ARCO (Action Research for CO-development) c/o PIN S.c.r.l is in charge of the external Mid-Term and Final Evaluation of CROSSDEV. The Mid-Term Evaluation covers the period up to July 2021, while official data on the achievement of project targets is dated March 2021.

The overall external evaluation aims at assessing:

- the Project alignment to ENI CBC MED objectives and priorities;
- the Project compliance to the OECD-DAC criteria of development evaluation (OECD, 2021), namely its relevance, internal/external coherence, effectiveness, efficiency (including quality of management structure), sustainability and impact;
- the Project's cross border added value and multiplier effects.

This Mid-Term evaluation report is structured as follows: **Section 2** describes the project intervention, including its Theory of Change and a brief overview about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the overall project implementation In each partner country; **Section 3** introduces the evaluation framework proposed by the research centre ARCO c/o PIN S.c.r.l.; **Section 4** presents the evaluation findings; finally, **Section 5** closes with conclusions and final recommendations raised by the evaluators.

2 CROSSDEV PROJECT

2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

The project aims at contributing to the economic and social development in Mediterranean, strengthening and enhancing sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing common heritages and resources.

In particular, the project aims at:

1. Increasing the attractiveness of less known touristic destinations in Mediterranean areas. Expected improvements are foreseen in terms of economic, income generating and job opportunities as well as social inclusion. Moreover, cross border synergies and collaborations are envisaged to reinforce attractiveness of selected destinations.
2. Diversifying the tourism offer with niche territorial assets, by developing and marketing new Sustainable Tourist Products through a cross border perspective, in order to widen to the maximum extent the economic benefits for local communities.

The CROSSDEV project involves four Mediterranean countries – Italy, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine – and targets the following five targeted less-known tourist destinations:

- Via Selinuntina in Sicily (Italy)
- Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve (Lebanon)
- Palestinian Heritage Trail aka Masar Ibrahim al Khalil, new segment of the trail from Beit Mersim to Battir (Palestine)
- Less known sites of Aqaba (Jordan)
- Less known sites of Umm Qais (Jordan)

The following Table presents the project consortium, composed by the Lead Beneficiary, six Project Partners and seven Associate Partners.

Table 1 – Project consortium

ROLE	NAME OF THE ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
Lead beneficiary	CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli	Italy
Project partner	CoopCulture	Italy
Project partner	Ministry of Culture	Italy
Project partner	Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST)	Jordan
Project partner	The Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan (JREDS)	Jordan
Project partner	Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM)	Lebanon
Project partner	Palestinian Heritage Trail	Palestine
Associate partner	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, State of Palestine	Palestine
Associate partner	Ministry of Tourism, Lebanese Republic	Lebanon
Associate partner	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA)	Jordan
Associate partner	International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO)	Other
Associate partner	Regione Sicilia, Soprintendenza del Mare, Dipartimento e Assessorato regionale beni culturali e identità siciliana	Italy
Associate partner	Institute of Hotel Management and Tourism, Bethlehem University	Palestine
Associate partner	Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna (Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism - CAST, Rimini Campus)	Italy

Source: Authors' elaboration

2.2 PROJECT THEORY OF CHANGE

The Theory of Change (ToC) is a useful tool to present the project in terms of results, showing activities, outputs, expected results, specific objectives and general objectives in a schematic way, allowing to visualise from which activities a change is expected to be generated. The ToC thus describes what a given project does and how its intervention is supposed to lead to the desired long-term change by breaking down the whole process. The ToC allows a reverse reasoning: first, the general objectives, i.e. the long-term changes, are identified; then, the conditions for their realisation (specific objectives) are highlighted; finally, these are broken down into the measurable short-term changes that are achieved (expected results) through the attainment of outputs and activities. The Toc was elaborated by ARCO according to the project documentation.

Table 2 – CROSSDEV Theory of Change

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	*Contributing to the economic (business & SMEs) and social development in Mediterranean, strengthening and enhancing sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing common heritages and resources.*	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	Increasing attractiveness of less known touristic destinations in Mediterranean areas. Expected improvements are in terms of economic, income generating and job opportunities as well as social inclusion. Cross border synergies /collaborations will reinforce attractiveness of selected destinations.	Diversifying the tourism offer with niche territorial assets, developing new Sustainable Tourist Products. A cross border perspective shall be adopted both for developing and marketing the Sustainable Tourism Products, to widen to the maximum extent the economic benefits for local communities.
	RA1	RA2
EXPECTED RESULTS	Increased attractiveness of less known touristic destinations	Increased diversification of tourism offer through the promotion of local and territorial assets.
WORKING PACKAGES, OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES	***WP 3 - Sustainable Tourism Strategies, Local Action Plans and Cross Border meetings*** ***O 3.1*** *- Local Action Plans for the promotion of less known touristic destinations* 3.1.1 Methodology for identification (research) and definition of LAPs for targeted areas 3.1.2 Needs assessment, research and SWOT analysis for LAPs in concerned project areas 3.1.3 LAPs: drafting, endorsement, diffusion, implementation/ adoption by local authorities ***O 3.2*** *- Cross-border agreements for the promotion of new tourism initiatives in less known destinations* 3.2.1 Identification of cross-border agreements to sign: institutions' consultation & "scouting" activity 3.2.2 Drafting and signature of the cross border agreements 3.2.3 Follow-up, monitoring, and coaching for the implementation of the signed cross-border agreements	***WP 5 - Awareness & Training*** ***O 5.1*** *- Awareness raised among enterprises, public bodies, local communities, youth, students* 5.1.1 Awareness, sensitization, dissemination activities in Lebanon 5.1.2 Awareness, sensitization, dissemination activities in Palestine 5.1.3 Awareness, sensitization, dissemination activities in Jordan 5.1.4 Awareness/sensitization/ information events on sustainable tourism in Sicily ***O 5.2*** *- Training for enterprises, tourism services providers, youth/students to expand tourism offer* 5.2.1 Training for tourist guides in Jordan 5.2.2 Training for MSMEs on tourism services/products marketing, and on cooperative model 5.2.3 Training for guides and guards in Lebanon 5.2.4 Training in Palestine for MSMEs, homestays owners, guides, authorities, associations, youth

WP 4 - Increasing attractiveness of less known destinations

***O 4.1** - Quality Support services to local communities, MSMEs, services providers in less known destinations*
4.1.1 Support services (Subgrants) for economic actors / tourism-linked service providers in Aqaba, Jordan
4.1.2 Quality support services for MSMEs in Sicily: skills enhancement and training
4.1.3 Quality support services for MSMEs in Palestine: skills enhancement and training
4.1.4 Subgrants for economic actors / service providers along the PH trail, Palestine
4.1.5 Quality support services for MSMEs in Jabal Moussa, Lebanon
4.1.6 Quality support services for MSMEs in Umm Qais, Northern Jordan: skills enhancement and training

***O 4.2** - Cultural and historical sites improved in selected less known touristic destinations*
4.2.1 Cultural sites improvement in Sicily
4.2.2 Improvement of cultural sites in Palestine: new segments & services in PH trail, Palestine
4.2.3 Cultural and historical sites improvement in less known destinations in Aqaba area, Jordan
4.2.4 Historical and Cultural sites improvement in Jabal Moussa, Lebanon

***O 4.3** - Increased visibility of selected less known touristic destinations*
4.3.1 Visibility marketing initiatives in Palestine
4.3.2 Visibility and marketing actions in Sicily
4.3.3 Visibility and marketing actions in Lebanon
4.3.4 Visibility marketing initiatives in Jordan, Aqaba & Umm Qais

WP 6 - Sustainable Tourist Products and digital territorial ICT platform

***6.1** - Digital Territorial ICT platform Art Planner developed to promote sustainable tourism initiatives*
6.1.1 Identification and training of Art Planner experts in concerned Cultural Routes & project areas
6.1.2 Territorial analysis and relational maps of local stakeholders
6.1.3 Development of databases of tangible /intangible heritage to be included in Art Planner platform
6.1.4 Handbook/ guidelines for Art Planner management and updating

***O 6.2** - New Sustainable Touristic Products*
6.2.1 Creation of new Sustainable Tourism Products in each project country
6.2.2 Marketing and sales activities of the new Sustainable Tourist Products

***O 6.3** - Cross-border business events to promote new Sustainable Tourism Products and enterprises networking*
6.3.1 Organization of cross-border business events in Sicily and in Lebanon

WP1 – Management
O 1.1 - Steering Committee (SC) & Inter-Partner Management Committee (IPSC) meetings
O 1.2 - General management. Set up of procedures. Operation Plans. Activities, Financial and Audit reports
O 1.3 - Mid-term and Final project evaluation Reports

WP 2 – Communication
O 2.1 - Communication and Capitalization plan
O 2.2 - Information to public audience about the CROSSDEV project and ENI CBC MED Programme
O 2.3 - Cross-border capitalization event
O 2.4 - Handbook & Video: CROSSDEV project, Cultural Routes and sustainable tourism for local development

RA1 RA2

Source: Authors' elaboration

2.3 EFFECTS OF COVID-19

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic considerably affected the overall project implementation as national governments of all partner countries took measures to restrict mobility to and from abroad, with international border closures, and internally, with national and/or regional lockdowns.

The mobility restrictions required substantial adaptation of all project activities, causing the following challenging difficulties:

- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, Project Partners had to reschedule activities or organised them in virtual mode. All partners have been working according to the directives of international and national health and governmental institutions and activity plans and timetable have been updated accordingly. Several activities have been postponed and planned in the spring and summers seasons when restrictions were reduced or removed. The fact of not being able to organize international missions and field visits represented a strong obstacle for the Lead Beneficiary and all Project Partners. Although the opportunity to be continuously in contact online is of great help, in the long run there are critical issues especially related to monitoring local activities.
- In Lebanon the COVID-19 emergency coupled with the political and economic crisis, leading to the eruption of nationwide protests due to high social discontent. The situation limited the partner capacity in implementing project activities.
- The presence in Palestine and Jordan of national and regional rigid measures to face COVID-19 slowed down some activities. Institutions, universities and schools worked at their minimum capacity, negatively conditioning the strict collaboration launched and envisaged by the project. In Palestine during lockdown periods the restriction of movement did not allow even the Project Partner to visit the targeted local communities.
- In Sicily, in compliance with the rules against COVID-19, a great part of project activities has been rescheduled during the summer seasons. The lockdown between March and June in 2020 and other restriction measures taken by the Italian Government in Autumn and Winter 2021 strongly affected the project implementation.

COVID-19 emergency is still strongly affecting the project in terms of limited international mobility and the slow vaccination process in all countries makes future scenarios even more uncertain.

3 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

3.1 PURPOSES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The main purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation is to assess how effectively the project reached its targets and objectives, providing practical recommendations to improve the second phase of the project.

The external Evaluation aims at assessing:

- The Project alignment to ENI CBC MED objectives and priorities;
- The Project compliance to the OECD-DAC criteria of development evaluation (OECD, 2021)
- The Project's cross border added value and multiplier effects.

This Mid-Term Evaluation report presents the main results of the evaluation by focusing on the following OECD-DAC evaluation criteria:

- **Relevance**: *The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries', global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change;*
- **Coherence**: *The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution;*
- **Effectiveness**: *The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups;*
- **Efficiency:** *The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.*

The following criteria will be analysed in the Final Evaluation report:

- **Impact:** *The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects;*
- **Sustainability:** *The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.*

In particular, for each project component, this Mid-Term Evaluation addresses the following questions:

Relevance:

- To what extent the programme objectives and design respond to beneficiaries' actual needs?
- To what extent the objectives and design of the intervention respond to partner's needs, policies and priorities?
- Was the programme able to adapt its design during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, in order to maintain its relevance?

Coherence:

- Is the intervention compatible with other interventions carried out by the same organisation/institution? Is it compatible with the relevant international norms and standards to which that organisation/institution adheres?
- To which extent the Project contributes to promoting ENI CBC MED Programme scope and overall objectives?

- Is the project consistent with other interventions carried out by other organisations in the same area and sector?

Effectiveness:

- To what extent were the project expected results achieved (or are likely to be achieved)?
- To which extent the Project activities contributed to enhance strategical and operational capacities of Project partners and other involved stakeholders as developmental actors?
- To which extent the project activities contributed to raise awareness on sustainable tourism concept, cultural heritage valorisation and conservation, sustainable tourism and socio-economic development links?
- What are the major factors/constraints influencing the achievement of the expected results?

Efficiency:

- Did the intervention deliver its results in a cost-effective and timely way?
- Was partners' expertise conformed to project needs and objectives?
- Is current management and governance structure of the project fully functional to reach the project's objectives or is there a need to make operational adjustments?
- Did internal governance guarantee inclusiveness of decision-making processes?

This Evaluation contributes to three overall objectives:

1. Learning. The Evaluation supports project partners in learning from the CROSSDEV experience in order to be able to improve their ongoing and future interventions in this field and support institutional learning.
2. Empowerment. By involving local partners, Project staff and Project beneficiaries and stakeholders in every step of the study, the Evaluation triggers a capacity-building process that intends empowering them in the long term.
3. Accountability. The Evaluation contributes to account to donors and beneficiaries on the use of funds.

3.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The overall Evaluation is **results utilization-focused**, an approach that implies a **participatory and interactive evaluation** involving Project partners, beneficiaries (tourism-related stakeholders, institutions, economic actors, youth, women and communities living in and around the cultural routes and sites targeted by the project), and other relevant stakeholders at local and country levels. Due to the cross-border design of CROSSDEV, the Evaluation considers two levels of analysis, the country-level and the "aggregate" level.

The methodology is composed of **four main strands of analysis**:

- Assessment of the **alignment between the Project's design and the objectives/priorities of ENI CBC MED**, and evaluation of the completeness and adherence to reality of the Project's Theory of Change.
- Analysis of the **compliance of CROSSDEV to the OECD-DAC criteria** (OECD, 2021), by country and at the aggregate level.
- Analysis of the **added value provided by the CROSS-BORDER DIMENSION of the Project,** in terms of its contribution to the exchange of experiences and methods among countries in the Mediterranean area, as well as increased opportunities for cross-border cooperation, agreements/networking among (public & private) stakeholders from different countries, with common interests and needs in improving sustainable tourism practices for local development.

- Performance of the Project with regard to the following specific aspects of interest:
    - VISIBILITY (i.e., to which extent the Project contributes to promoting ENI CBC MED Programme visibility and comply with the ENI CBC MED Visibility Guidelines).
    - CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES such as gender, youth involvement, environmental impact, disability (i.e., the extent to which they have been taken into consideration by the Project strategy and practice).
    - CAPACITY BUILDING (i.e., to which extent the Project activities contributed to enhance strategical and operational capacities of Project partners and other involved stakeholders as developmental actors).
    - AWARENESS RAISING on sustainable tourism concept, cultural heritage valorisation and conservation, sustainable tourism and socio-economic development links.

The **Mid-Term Evaluation** assesses the progress of the Project's actions and their consistency with initial plans. As all four countries have been affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mid-Term Evaluation provides an important opportunity to assess whether the assumptions behind the project design are still valid and its objectives still realistic, whether new needs have emerged and whether other risks/opportunities need to be considered in the framework.

Finally, it provides the necessary recommendations for any adjustment/action to undertake in order to improve or reorientate the project strategy in the remaining implementation period.

During the Mid-Term Evaluation, given the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 emergency, all data collection activities were conducted remotely, using web-based software for web-conferencing (Zoom/Meet), which ARCO has been using in most of its evaluations works, even prior to the COVID-19 emergency. ARCO's researchers have a consolidated experience in effective approaches to conduct evaluation activities via web-conference which allow to maintain the perceptions of beneficiaries and stakeholders at the core of the evaluation process.

3.3 EVALUATION TOOLS

In line with the methodology, the evaluator has developed a set of data collection tools necessary to evaluate the project outcomes in the Mid-Term Evaluation report.

The tools are presented in the following Table.

Table 3 – Data collection tools, Mid-Term evaluation

METHOD	TOOL	TARGET GROUP
Secondary data analysis	**DESK REVIEW** of Project's documentation, reports and other relevant M&E data, as well as evaluations reports of other Sustainable Tourism ENI CBC MED Projects (MEDGAIMS, MEDUSA, Med Pearls) with a similar focus.	//
	DESK RESEARCH of relevant national and regional statistics and literature to improve the understanding of the Project background and context in each target countries.	//
Key informant interviews	**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**, to gain a better understanding of the context of intervention, the changes undergoing in the countries, the programme outcomes, the main challenges faced, the positive and negative dynamics, the lessons learnt, and the best practices. (Conducted either online (via Zoom) or in person)	1 semi-structured group interview with the Lead Partner's Project management team 6 semi-structured individual interviews with representatives of the Project Partners, involving for each partner the Project Manager and the Communication Officer 6 semi-structured individual/group interviews with Associate Partners, local Project staff, local stakeholders, key informants (4 interviews per country)
Stakeholder questionnaire	**QUESTIONNAIRE**, to investigate the changes generated by the Project through the experience of local stakeholders/beneficiaries of the targeted communities. (Disseminated to relevant selected beneficiaries and stakeholders in cooperation with project partners)	5 respondents in Palestine 2 respondents in Jordan – Umm Qais 2 respondents in Jordan – Aqaba 3 respondents in Lebanon

Source: Authors' elaboration

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The answer to the evaluation questions was derived by triangulating the data from the different evaluation tools used.

In particular:

1. Desk analysis of project documents: Project reports, monitoring progress reports, indicator matrices, etc. were analysed and the results used to determine the progress of the project with respect to the achievement of targets and result and output indicators. Furthermore, a content analysis were made on project website and social networks.
2. Conceptual content analysis of the interviews and the questionnaire (Carter, Ritchie, and Sainsbury, 2009): The content of interviews and questionnaire was analysed to understand the presence and occurrence of certain words, topics or concepts.

4 EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 ACHIEVEMENT OF INDICATORS AND TARGETS

This section showcases the evaluation findings, in the first place, by presenting the project's achievements with respect to its target indicators as defined in the project Logical Framework (Paragraph 4.1).

The analysis of OCSA DAC criteria (OECD, 2021) in the different contexts of intervention follows in Paragraph 4.2.

Table 4 - Achievement of project expected results

PRIORITY	PROJECT EXPECTED RESULTS	EXPECTED RESULT INDICATORS	PROJECT TARGET VALUES	PROJECT VALUES ACHIEVED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF IMPLEMENTATION	ACHIEVED %
A.1.3	1.3.1 - Increased attractiveness of less known touristic destinations	1.3.1.A - Increased domestic and international tourist flows visiting the targeted area (visitor days)	48000	0	
A.1.3	1.3.2 - Increased diversification of tourism offer through the promotion of local and territorial assets / drivers especially in off season periods	1.3.2.B - Number of new sustainable touristic products in off season periods created in specific niches with a cross-border dimension (i.e. eco-tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism, wine and food tourism, historic, cultural and religious tourism etc.) and co-designed with local communities (bottom up approach)	5	0	
A.1.3	1.3.2 - Increased diversification of tourism offer through the promotion of local and territorial assets / drivers especially in off season periods	1.3.2.C - Number of persons actively and directly involved in project implementation having gained improved tourism management skills / profiles (particularly those in the area of Eco-tourism, Destination Management, Marketing, etc.)	25	0	

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data provided by CISP (28th February 2021)

Table 5 – Achievement of project outputs

PROJECT OUTPUTS	WP	INDICATORS	PROJECT TARGET VALUES	ACHIEVED VALUES SINCE THE BEGINNING OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	ACHIEVED %
3.1 - Local Action Plans for the promotion of less known touristic destinations	WP3	1.3.2.4.e - Number of action plans adopted by local authorities based on participatory activities	5	5	100%
3.2 - Cross-border agreements for the promotion of new tourism initiatives in less known destinations	WP3	1.3.2.5.f - Number of cross-border agreements signed by competent bodies to promote low season networks of destinations and / or number of low-season initiatives offered in the participating countries	3	2	66%
4.1 - Quality Support services to local communities, MSMEs, services providers in less known destinations	WP4	1.3.1.1.a - Number of enterprises substantially and actively involved in CBC-MED projects	20	60	300%
4.2 - Cultural and historical sites improved in selected less known touristic destinations	WP4	1.3.1.1.b - Number of improved cultural and historical sites as a direct consequence of programme support	8	6	75%
4.3 - Increased visibility of selected less known touristic destinations	WP4	1.3.1.2.c - Number of visibility/marketing initiatives to attract tourists in the targeted area	40	18	45%
5.1 - Awareness raised among enterprises, public bodies, local communities, youth, students	WP5	1.3.2.6.h - Number of enterprises and local community entities participating in training and awareness raising events	30	25	83%
5.2 - Training for enterprises, tourism services providers, youth/students to expand tourism offer	WP5	1.3.2.6.h - Number of enterprises and local community entities participating in training and awareness raising events	30	40	133%
6.1 - Digital Territorial ICT platform Art Planner developed to promote sustainable tourism initiatives	WP6	1.3.2.3.d - Number of private actors substantially and actively involved in new touristic initiatives	15	0	
6.2 - New Sustainable Touristic Products	WP6	1.3.2.3.d - Number of private actors substantially and actively involved in new touristic initiatives	15	0	
6.3 - Cross-border business events to promote new Sustainable Tourism Products and enterprises networking	WP6	1.3.2.6.g - Number of enterprises participating in cross-border business events	30	0	

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data provided by CISP (28th February 2021)

4.2 OECD-DAC ANALYSIS

The evaluation followed OECD DAC (OECD, 2021) evaluation criteria in the different contexts of intervention, therefore assessing the following dimensions:

- **Relevance**: the extent to which the Project design and objectives respond to the needs of the target groups of beneficiaries and to the priorities of the local/global partners and institutions involved, and whether they continue to do so if circumstances change.
- **Coherence:** the extent to which the Project activities are consistent with one another and coherent to the priorities and policies identified by the ENI CBC MED Programme [internal coherence], and the extent to which the Project is complementary and co-ordinated with other actors' interventions in the sector of local development and sustainable tourism implemented in the Project's countries and sites [external coherence].
- **Effectiveness**: the extent to which the Project achieved, or is expected to achieve, its outputs, results and objectives as defined in its Logical Framework, including any differential results across groups, with a specific attention to gender differences and vulnerable groups. This will also include the analysis of the main enabling factors and challenges encountered during implementation and the evaluation of the corrective measure taken.
- **Efficiency**: the extent to which the Project delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way, by making optimal use of the available financial and human resources.

The following criteria will be analysed in the Final Evaluation report.

- **Impact**: the extent to which the Project generated, or is expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, medium to long-term effects on the target beneficiaries and on the context of intervention.
- **Sustainability**: the extent to which the net benefits of the Project continue, or are likely to continue, in the long term after its completion.

4.2.1 RELEVANCE

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent the programme objectives and design respond to beneficiaries' actual needs?
2. To what extent the objectives and design of the intervention respond to partner's needs, policies and priorities?
3. Was the programme able to adapt its design during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, in order to maintain its relevance?

RELEVANCE: GLOBAL OVERVIEW

In line with the thematic priority of the ENI CBC MED programme, the project was designed to contribute to the socio-economic development and stability of the Mediterranean region, with the aim to generate employment and improve the socio-economic conditions of the communities, focusing on sustainable tourism and leveraging on tangible and intangible resources. Five less known tourism destinations – with depressed socio-economic conditions but with strong tourism potential – have been identified in 4 countries of the Mediterranean area. The objective of the project is to enhance the potential of these destinations by increasing their attractiveness and contributing to generate economic activities in the tourism sector. The project has chosen to select destinations outside the traditional tourism routes, even if in well known areas such as Sicily in Italy and Aqaba in Jordan, trying to create flywheel mechanisms between standard mass and sustainable tourism.

The objectives of the project fully coincide with the missions and objectives of the partners involved. The partnership includes actors with different and complementary characteristics. Some of them have a strong territorial focus and aim at promoting tourist attractiveness and enhancing specific contexts (JREDS and JUST in Jordan, APJM in Lebanon and PHT in Palestine). The Italian Ministry of Culture and CoopCulture contribute at a transversal level with institutional and methodological support, the former by means of policy promotion activities concerning the strategic lines of sustainable tourism development in the Mediterranean, the latter developing the digital platform for tourism promotion and the informative contents that will be included. CISP has a role in project promotion and co-ordination, with strong relationships with local organisations in Sicily that deal with cultural routes in Italy and the Mediterranean. The willingness to select partners already active in similar activities in their areas increases the project's chances of being sustainable and maintaining the benefits achieved.

The relevance of the project following the **COVID-19 pandemic** has changed. The tourism sector has been strongly impacted, and it has become more urgent and relevant to promote sustainable tourism initiatives to help communities recover, especially in less known destinations. As the crisis in the tourism sector can generate a great need for innovation, the CROSSDEV project is providing an opportunity to reflect on how to address the challenges that have emerged over the past year. CROSSDEV could become even more relevant in case of a further general preference towards under-tourism and outdoor activities in small groups, as it promotes authentic tourism experiences in less known destinations. It is important to work on sustainable tourism, to create new type of touristic alternatives and to make local communities aware of the importance of working on concepts such us cultural valorisation and cultural heritage, particularly in COVID-19 era.

Lead and project partners had to rethink and adapt the planned activities to the restrictions of mobility both internationally and internally in each country involved: in the first two years of the project, training and other online activities were carried out by the project partnership, while from a strategic point of view the focus was on the promotion of proximity domestic tourism, due to the extended international travel restrictions.

> *The project is relevant as it supports tourism in the region, especially in less known sites and areas excluded by tourism flows. It also helps in creating job opportunities in the tourism sector and improving the skills of service providers.*
>
> *Beneficiary of subgrants, Aqaba - Jordan*

Communication activities were relevant for project and programme **VISIBILITY** on two levels: on a general level, communicating the project activities within the framework established by ENI CBC MED, by using social networks and the project website (within the programme website) to reach a larger number of international users; on a local level, by using the already active social pages of the partners, to reach local stakeholders and a wide and already selected audience. During the first year, the communication activities presented the project and deepened the themes covered, highlighting the relevance of sustainable tourism in the changed pandemic context; during the second year, the communication focused on describing the impact of the project on beneficiaries' lives, reporting interviews and testimonies using the story-telling technique.

The **CROSS-BORDER dimension** of the project, with 4 countries involved within the Mediterranean region, is relevant as it fosters not only the exchange of experiences and good practices among partners and stakeholders, but also increases potential audience through networking and visibility activities, with participation in international events. The pandemic has further increased the need for tourist organisations, operators and public authorities to be part of international networks. Cross-border agreements are essential to create such networks, formalising the links between partners and stakeholders in different contexts. The two agreements signed in the first two years touch relevant issues within the project and beyond: the Cross-border agreement for Mutual Promotion includes Project Partners and two Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, with the aim of enhancing the fame of the less known CROSSDEV destinations following the principles of Cultural and Sustainable Tourism, organising common initiatives and sharing best practices; the cross-border agreement among five Universities from the four Mediterranean project countries fosters collaboration on the topic of sustainable socio-economic development and sustainable tourism, ensuring Universities active involvement as in project activities and contribute with academic support to the successful implementation of the project.

The elaboration of the Digital Territorial ICT platform is fundamental to help the partners to map the tangible and intangible assets of their area, build a sustainable tourism product and promote it. The platform, which will include contents elaborated by the project partners themselves in collaboration with CoopCulture, will be customised for each destination and will allow to valorise the target areas.

Finally, the project is very relevant as it touches several **CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES**:

- YOUNG PEOPLE are actively involved in the trainings and other dedicated initiatives as tourism actors and as students, representing much of the population in the target areas. Similarly, the gender issue is at the core of the project activities, since the role of WOMEN in the communities and especially in the tourism sector is fundamental in all the communities targeted: most of the subgrants targets women and the trainings aimed at skills development and knowledge transfer have a strong female participation. Investing in women and young people is a priority for the partners to ensure the success of the project.
- ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY is a major theme in the promotion of tourist destinations and routes that aim to combine cultural and natural enhancement and is particularly relevant in less

developed contexts. The elaboration of Local Action Plans has also gone in this direction, providing important theoretical bases. The training of stakeholders and beneficiaries, which also involved local governments, is intended to increase the awareness of local communities on the issue of environmental sustainability.

- The project's willingness to target local communities as the beneficiaries of the training and awareness campaigns is also very relevant. Transmitting knowledge and skills to the local communities is the key to successful long-term community-based sustainable development. CROSSDEV is also giving the chance to local communities to exchange experience with other countries, that is another very important aspect while considering tourism. CAPACITY BUILDING allows project partners and local stakeholders to become developmental actors and be able to use and promote sustainable tourism practices, while AWARENESS RAISING campaigns on sustainable tourism concept, cultural heritage valorisation and conservation enhance community empowerment, focusing in particular on young people.
- The involvement of local and national political institutions in the different areas, as associate partners or key stakeholders, is to be considered positively. The Ministries are politically interested in everything that concerns the cultural and touristic valorisation of certain areas. The project has a strong visibility dimension, which is crucial for the authorities, who therefore want to monitor what is being done. The municipalities and mayors have been very involved, especially in the elaboration of Local Action Plans.

> *Project activities are important as they are giving the best quality services for the tourist through training and teaching the local community.*
>
> *Agro-food producer, Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve – Lebanon*

RELEVANCE: COUNTRY OVERVIEW

	INSIGHTS
ITALY	The issues of sustainable tourism and deseasonalisation of tourist flows are very relevant in Sicily, one of the Italian regions most affected by mass tourism in summer. There is a strong institutional involvement and high interest at municipal and regional level in Sicily towards the project activities and objectives. In Sambuca di Sicilia the local municipality made available and renovated a space to establish the Visitor Center and the Mediterranean Youth House, while in Menfi the municipality allowed to establish Via Selinuntina Visitor Center at Palazzo Pignatelli. The Regional Government of Sicily made available the "Visit Sicily" website to promote the project's activities, mailing lists with contacts of tour operators, data on pre- and post-COVID-19 tourism.
LEBANON	Jabal Moussa was a few years ago an abandoned place that is becoming a known tourism destination at local and international level, thanks to the active involvement of local communities and the extraordinary heritage. Presence of significant elements in common with the other contexts involved in the project, first and foremost belonging to the Mediterranean geographically and culturally. CROSSDEV is relevant as it represents an opportunity to strengthen dialogue and to create links between different communities. At the same time the project allows to exchange good practices between partners, and for APJM the relation is particularly positive with PHT in Palestine. The

	activities implemented are gender imbalanced toward women, both considering beneficiaries and project staff. Guesthouse owners are mostly women, and APJM in general is more inclined to work with women and youth, as they are usually more sensitive towards the issues that the association promotes. Awareness activities have been focused also on environmental sustainability, as Jabal Moussa is an important biosphere showing a symbiosis between environmental and socio-economic aspects. Local communities need to see the benefit on the socio-economic side to be convinced about the importance of taking care of environment.
JORDAN	The project activities implemented in Aqaba involved mainly women, as in the area there are several women organizations working in tourism-related activities. The Aqaba area has one of the lowest women employment rates of Jordan, so it is particularly relevant involve them in capacity building. Strong involvement of schools thanks to online activities, and they are expecting to deepen the relations with youth once schools will go back to work in class. They implemented the Ramadan competition online to involve students, and they are willing to also involve university students in volunteering and in other kind of activities. The local stakeholders involved in Umm Qais are mainly small enterprises active in different sectors related to tourism that need to gain experience and skills in managing tourists. JUST is giving them advice and transferring knowledge through training. During the first two years of implementation, they need to communicate with stakeholders mainly by digital tools, doing their best to remain in touch in case of lockdown. Tourism sector is still strongly limited by COVID-19, but they are trying to promote Umm Qais with Jordan stakeholders and tour operators. Strong involvement of women both in training and as sub-grant winners. They want to organised school and universities tours with youth in the second part of the project, but that depends on COVID-19.
PALESTINE	Tourism is one of the mail tools to help developing rural local communities that are not known and touched by tourism flows in Palestine, communities with very high levels of unemployment among women and youth, particularly after COVID-19. Cultural heritage is poorly valorised in Palestine. Tourism in Palestine is heavily linked to religion, although there are many other things, and is mostly managed by Israel and Israeli service providers. The CROSSDEV project represents a strong alternative, focusing on the cultural identity of small Palestinian communities. The Palestinian Heritage Trail is establishing a network of services along the new segment of the trail, working with local authorities to promote cultural heritage. The project is developing community-based tourism, adapting to the challenges of COVID-19 and involving local stakeholders and beneficiaries through online activities. It is very relevant to promote the cultural heritage of rural communities, transferring to the communities themselves knowledge on hot to take care and promote their identities. Relevance of sharing common values of cultural heritage between different countries and partners across the Mediterranean, being part of an international network of actors and destinations. A particular focus has been made in Palestine on the accessibility of the trail for people with disabilities, they are organising meetings with experts at national and international level. They want part of the trail to be accessible for people with disability, relevant aspect also to attract international tour operators.

4.2.2 COHERENCE

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Is the intervention compatible with other interventions carried out by the same organisation/institution? Is it compatible with the relevant international norms and standards to which that organisation/institution adheres?
2. To which extent the Project contributes to promoting ENI CBC MED Programme scope and overall objectives?
3. Is the project consistent with other interventions carried out by other organisations in the same area and sector?

COHERENCE: GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The mission of CISP, lead beneficiary of the project, in the framework of development cooperation is to pursue the socio-economic development of the target areas, supporting activities and processes in different sectors in order to positively impact on the living conditions of local communities. Tourism is one of the main sectors in terms of its potential contribution to the socio-economic development of less developed areas. CISP has been active in the Mediterranean region since 1996, with projects in Lebanon, Palestine and, to a lesser extent, Jordan.

The project's actions are linked to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals. The CROSSDEV project targets to raise tourism competitiveness and attractiveness of less known Mediterranean destinations and rural areas. It promotes social, cultural and economic development and address environmental challenges (Goals 8 and 14-15), generating effects also on the quality of education (Goal 4), the reduction of gender inequalities (Goal 5) and the improvement of the general quality of life in the cities (Goal 11). Another element of internal coherence concerns the structure of the partnership (Goal 17), which had the primary objective of including players active in the promotion of sustainable development and in the valorisation of cultural heritage in the various countries involved.

As regards coherence with the ENI CBC MED 2014-20 Programme and with the other projects financed by the Programme, expected result and target indicators were selected from the Indicative Monitoring and Evaluation Plan of the Joint Operational Programme (JOP) 2014-2020 at the time the project was drafted. This operational mode allows the ENI CBC MED projects to have greater consistency among themselves and standardisation in terms of expected results.

The project activities and Working Packages of the CROSSDEV project are well integrated and coherent with each other. Despite the difficulties caused by the need to remodel some activities and postpone others due to the pandemic, the project fully succeeded in maintaining complete internal coherence. An initial coordination phase between the partners was followed by the elaboration of Local Action Plans and Sustainable Tourism Strategies for the less known destinations. The second year of the project was marked by a strong push for the implementation of capacity building (trainings to local stakeholders) and awareness raising activities at local and global level, simultaneously with the drafting of the first two cross-border agreements. The last year of the project foresees the conclusion of the elaboration of Sustainable Tourist Products and digital territorial ICT platform with the final objective of increasing attractiveness of less known destinations.

Some of the key concepts that the CROSSDEV project addresses – such as tourism deseasonalisation, community-based tourism, cultural heritage valorisation as a driver of development, integration of local agriculture and handicrafts in tourist promotion – were considered to be less of a priority for public institutions before COVID-19 . With the pandemic, local and national governments have started to address these issues,

and therefore the CROSSDEV project can represent a stimulus at an institutional level for the adoption of policies that facilitate and promote development processes linked to sustainable tourism and the valorisation of cultural heritage.

During the first part of the project implementation there has been strict collaboration with MED PEARLS, MEDUSA and MED GAIMS projects of ENI CBC MED Programme 2014-20 on procedures and overall management and synergies have been developed on respective mid-term events organisation and evaluation.

The project also related to the following interventions in the same target areas by activating collaborations and creating networks:

- Iter Vitis Magon - Programme de coopération transfrontalière Italie-Tunisie 2007-2013 ;
- GOAL - GOvernance for Achieving Local Strategies for tourism, 2014-15 - ENPICBCMED 2007-2013;
- HELAND - Promoting socio-economic sustainable development through innovative technological actions for Mediterranean tourism heritage and landscapes protection clusters - ENPICBCMED 2007-2013;
- S&T MED - Sustainability and Tourism in the Mediterranean, 2013-2015 - ENPICBCMED 2013-2017;
- Rural Development in Palestine Phase 2 (2016 –2019).

In Jordan, the partner JREDS is supporting and strengthening synergies with the following project:

- "Local Community as First Line of Defense in Protecting Marine Ecosystem" project through Small Grants Program (SGP) funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) administered through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
- The Sustainable Cultural Heritage Through Engagement of Local Communities Project (USAID SCHEP), is a USAID project implemented by the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) that uses a unique methodology for preserving, managing and promoting cultural heritage resources in Jordan through a community-first approach. The project began in 2014 and is set to continue until 2022.

In Italy, MIBACT is favouring synergies with Italian actors committed in sustainable tourism promotion and is facilitating synergies with the following projects:

- COSME - TRAMES - Smart TouRism Across the MEditerranean Sea, which aimed at creating a touristic offer in 5 pilot areas in the Med based on Rotta dei Fenici with 8 Smart Ways, innovative itineraries;
- COSME - GREENWAYS HERITAGE which aimed at promoting UNESCO and other heritage sites near greenways as a fundamental part of them, thereby developing a new tourism product.

4.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent were the project expected results achieved (or are likely to be achieved)?
2. To which extent the Project activities contributed to enhance strategical and operational capacities of Project partners and other involved stakeholders as developmental actors?
3. To which extent the project activities contributed to raise awareness on sustainable tourism concept, cultural heritage valorisation and conservation, sustainable tourism and socio-economic development links?
4. What are the major factors/constraints influencing the achievement of the expected results?

EFFECTIVENESS: GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Overall, collected data from project staff, partners and stakeholders / beneficiaries point out to the following main issues:

CHALLENGES

COVID-19 emergency strongly affected the project implementation in the first two years, particularly regarding awareness and training activities due to restrictions to internal and international mobility and impossibility to held meetings and/or implement activities that request participation of several persons. Due to strict COVID-19 measures adopted in the 4 countries and different lockdown periods, most of the activities have shifted to virtual mode, while others have been postponed and rescheduled in spring and summer seasons targeting smaller groups of beneficiaries. Public institutions, universities, and schools are still working at minimum capacity, consequently the strict collaboration envisaged is highly conditioned by strict COVID-19 measures.

The lack of interaction and contact between the partners negatively affected the project from the point of view of human relations, coordination and motivation to create connections between the partners both inside and outside the CROSSDEV project. Another challenge is due to the difficulty to involve local stakeholders in online training organised by LB MIBACT and COOPCULTURE due to language and technical problems. To solve this situation, they addressed technical assistance and capacity building to Partners' staff in order to replicate them at local level.

Finally, in Lebanon several social protests due to economic and financial crisis have occurred, making it difficult to implement some planned activities and to involve institutional actors at national level.

EXPECTED RESULTS ACHIEVED

The target values of the expected results indicators are ambitious and not easily measured, so the effectiveness of the project in terms of expected results is difficult to assess at the Mid-Term evaluation stage. The expected results indicators listed below will be measured at the end of the project, when the promotional initiatives will be developed in each project area.

- Increased domestic and international tourist flows visiting the targeted area in terms of visitor days;
- Number of new Sustainable Touristic Products in off season periods created in specific niches with a cross-border dimension and co-designed with local communities;
- Number of persons actively and directly involved in project implementation having gained improved tourism management skills / profiles.

As for the creation of 5 Sustainable Tourism Products, one for each less known destination, despite the challenges the project is in line with the planned schedule and the partnership is already working to finalise them in the second part of the project.

As for the number of visitor days, increasing the tourist attractiveness of the destinations is a key aspect on which the partners have been working since the beginning of the project, both at the overall level and at the local level. Activities implemented in this respect are the provision of sub-grants to economic operators, trainings to service providers and other stakeholders and activities to enhance and promote territories and their tourism heritage. These activities were implemented by adapting to the measures adopted to face COVID-19 pandemic in each country (see EFFECTIVENESS: COUNTRY OVERVIEW). However, it is difficult to foresee the achievement of the expected target in terms of visitor days in the project areas, which total 48,000 distributed as follows:

- Jabal Moussa - 12,000 visitor days
- Palestinian Heritage Trail from Beit Mersim to Battir (new segment of the trail) - 12,000 visitor days
- Less known destination of Aqaba (Jordan) - 6,000 visitor days
- Less known destination of Umm Qais (Jordan) - 6,000 visitor days
- Via Selinuntina in Sicily - 12,000 visitor days

This difficulty arises primarily from the fact that in the first two years of the project, due to the pandemic and the restrictions imposed by national governments on domestic and international mobility, it is impossible to expect increased domestic and international tourist flows visiting the targeted area. The pandemic also made it even more difficult to compute baseline values in the target destinations, for which no data collection system was foreseen. The lack of a valid measurement system makes it complicated to compute the target value achieved in terms of visitor days since the beginning of the project implementation. This problem is mainly caused by the fact that at the moment no registration systems and/or entrance tickets are foreseen to access the tourist destinations.

> *The project has given an opportunity to develop heritage and tourism areas, leading to an increase in people's interest in their lands, and to create networks at local level between associations and individuals.*
>
> *PR Director, Beit-Awwa Municipality - Palestine*

OUTPUTS ACHIEVED

As far as the achievement of output indicators is concerned, the Project partners are in line with what was expected at the end of the second year, also thanks to constant consultation and collaboration among all and targeted technical assistance addressing specific needs. All outputs delivered proved to be effective in the interest of partners and of the overall management of the project. Working Packages 2, 3 and 6 are addressed below at global project level, while Working Packages 4 and 5 are analysed in the following COUNTRY OVERVIEW.

At the overall project level, with regard to the Quality Support services to local communities, MSMEs, services providers in less known destinations the target number of enterprises substantially and actively involved was

reached and exceeded, and with regard to Awareness raising and Training the target number of enterprises and local community entities participating was also reached and exceeded.

WP 2 – Communication

The Communication/Capitalization Plan was developed in the first year and agreed among partners, as operational guidelines for the project communication, visibility and capitalization activities. The planned visibility and awareness-raising activities among beneficiaries were completed, via CROSSDEV webpage and socials networks and via partners' institutional accounts, duly shared by local institutions and municipalities. CROSSDEV held several events at local and international level to inform general audience about the objectives of the project and of the ENI CBC MED Programme.

The activities to increase the visibility of the project and of ENI CBC MED revealed more useful to reach the institutional level rather than beneficiaries. CROSSDEV's Communication engages with different targets depending on the channel, although using similar content. For example, Twitter proved to be useful for communicating with institutional partners and organisations at European level, allowing to reach the Eu Neighbours initiative (https://euneighbours.eu/en), on whose website stories about the CROSSDEV project beneficiaries were shared.

Locally, events were designed to keep stakeholders involved and informed about activities and goals, especially advertising the subgrants (where foreseen). Dedicated campaigns were organised to reach project beneficiaries. JREDS ran a successful social campaign during Ramadan with the aim of raising awareness among Jordanian students on sustainable tourism and environmental sustainability in Aqaba. The campaign consisted of small videos and surveys, in which thousands of people participated and 60 young people between the ages of 5 and 18 were awarded prizes.

For more expert audiences at international level, CROSSDEV organised an important online event within the framework of the Italian Sustainable Development Festival with the participation of representatives from Universities, European Union, NGOs, Private Sector. This type of events allowed to position the CROSSDEV project on a European scale on the issues of sustainable development and cultural valorisation, and representatives of the project were invited as a speaker in online events organised by others, confirming the key role of the project among the sustainable tourism actors.

> *Project activities are creating short-term and long-term sustainable job opportunities, are encouraging local businesses to be part of the tourism experience and are offering training to build local skills and expertise.*
>
> *Eco-guide, Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve - Lebanon*

WP 3 - Sustainable Tourism Strategies, Local Action Plans and Cross Border meetings

The activities foreseen in WP3 are to a large extent the responsibility of the Italian Ministry of Culture, as project partner in charge of elaborating the guidelines and giving technical support for the development of Local Action Plans and drafting the cross-border agreements.

Local Action Plans (LAPs) are tools to promote sustainable tourism actions into decision making processes / daily operations of local & national stakeholders. The following 5 LAPs were developed by partners, communities, economic operators, institutions in the first two year of the project:

- Lebanon: Ecotourism Management in Jabal Moussa
- Jordan: Aqaba less known sites & Umm Qais tourism promotion/management plans
- Palestine: Palestinian Heritage trail
- Sicily Ita: Via Selinuntina Marketing Strategy

A common methodology was developed within the project to support the elaboration of Local Action Plans, including guidelines for research and analysis, technical assistance, expertise and guidance. The research, carried out by each Project partners in their own context in collaboration with local authorities and private actors, was aimed to identify potentialities of target destinations and possible new cultural/ Sustainable Touristic Products.

During the first two year of implementation, two Cross-border agreements have been signed with the aim to establish permanent cross-border collaboration among partners and key stakeholders for developing common strategies to increase attractiveness of less known destinations, particularly in low season.

The first Cross Border Agreement for Mutual Promotion has been signed between CROSSDEV partners and two Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, "Iter Vitis Les Chemins de la Vigne en Europe" and "Phoenician route". The agreement aims to ensure CROSSDEV partnership sustainability beyond the end of the project trough promotional activities of less known tourist destinations, commitment in drafting new common projects, sharing of best practices and development of local microeconomics linked to tourism and hospitality.

The second-Cross border agreement, signed at the beginning of July 2021, involves five Universities of the Mediterranean region: the Jordan University of Science and Technology (Project Partner), the University of Bologna Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism – CAST, the Bethlehem University - Institute of Hotel Management and Tourism (Associates Partners), the University of Palermo - Faculty of Economics, Business and Statistics and the American University of Lebanon. The agreement will allow to combine heterogeneous skills aimed at creating a wide offer of contents to be shared by students and to develop a joint training and a virtual community to unite students from all areas.

WP 6 - Sustainable Tourist Products and digital territorial ICT platform

In November 2020 CoopCulture organised two seminars and meetings with each Project Partner. The seminars introduced the territorial marketing concept and gave an overall evaluation of the elaborated Local Action Plans and inputs to be applied in LAP implementation strategy for territorial marketing. The meetings were addressed to analyse the specific destinations and partners / stakeholders needs.

The Project partners identified the staff to be dedicated to the development of contents for the Digital Territorial ICT platform. The development of databases of tangible / intangible heritage to be included in Art Planner platform started at country level by each partner, by using territorial analysis and relational maps of local stakeholders already included in LAPs. CoopCulture began the process of technical implementation of the Digital Territorial ICT platform, testing it uploading contents on Via Selinuntina, Sicily. The test was useful to elaborate guidelines for the other Project Partners and permitted to test the technical aspects of the platform. CoopCulture also realized a first draft of the Art Planner handbook/ guidelines, an essential tool for maintenance and implementation of the platform, as well for training of people involved in data base uploading. From January to March 2021 the cycle of seminars "Participatory process - Building a Sustainable Cultural Tourism Product" has been organised to technically support partners to develop tourist products.

The preliminary phase for WP6 was completed in the first part of the project, meeting the expected timeframe. Once the information gathering is finished, the crucial phase will begin, which will lead to the editing of the

texts presenting the Sustainable Tourist Products of the 5 less known destinations and to the upload of the contents on the Digital Territorial ICT platform.

EFFECTIVENESS: COUNTRY OVERVIEW

	INSIGHTS
ITALY	*WP 4 - Increasing attractiveness of less known destinations* A 4.1.2 - In Sicily CISP, with the technical assistance of Phoenicians' Route, organized an awareness-raising event on sustainable tourism in 4 different municipalities, involving private and public stakeholders. Furthermore, seminars have been realised, with the support of CoopCulture and JREDS, to train local economic actors and service providers. A 4.2.1 – In Sicily the project decided to promote the setting up of two Visitors Centers: one in the Municipality of Sambuca di Sicilia (hinterland), one in the Municipality of Menfi (on the coast). The Municipality of Sambuca di Sicilia renovated at its own expense the building where the Visitor Centre will be set up by CROSSDEV. In October 2020 CISP carried out a test of the itinerary of Via Selinuntina and organised the inauguration ceremony of Via Selinuntina Visitor Center at Palazzo Pignatelli in Menfi, in collaboration with Iter Vitis and Phoenicians' Route. In the Center, visitors are guided by the screens on the walls to discover the territory, with maps of the itineraries and explanatory panels of the didactic activities. A 4.3.2 - A familiarization trip for media and journalist have been organized together with the national event of Archaeological Groups of Italy and the inauguration of Via Selinuntina Visitor Center at Palazzo Pignatelli. Free lands journalists and local and regional media representatives took part in the tour, that has been realised with the support of Phoenician Route. *WP 5 - Awareness & Training* A 5.1.3 – The project organised a press conference in Palermo to introduce the memorandum of understanding signed with the Superintendence of the Sea and with the Tourism Department of the Sicilian Regional Government. Other public meetings have been organized to introduce CROSSDEV in the Municipalities of Gibellina and Sambuca with local tourism stakeholders. Students at the local Hospitality Institute have been involved in two trainings concerning sustainable tourism practices and catering&food service. An online training held by a wine tourism expert has been addressed to local public & private stakeholders, focusing tourism in post-COVID 19 era. In July 2020, the project promoted an awareness-raising / information seminar (available online) on sustainable tourism with private / public stakeholders and six seminars for Small and Medium Enterprises of the hospitality sector. The largest events in terms of reached stakeholders were the tour with archaeologist and media and the inauguration of the Visitor Center in Menfi. The Italian Ministry of Culture held a few webinars as supplementary support activities related to the development and valorisation of cultural activities, dedicated to a national and international audience.
LEBANON	*WP 4 - Increasing attractiveness of less known destinations* A 4.1.5 - APJM organized an exchange visit to guesthouse owners to Shouf Biosphere Reserve, allowing them to share their experiences with the attendees. Meetings were held with professors from the Department of Food & Nutrition at Saint Joseph University. The food expert recruited by APJM conducted an assessment on local agro-food production unit managed by women, evaluating the production facility and recommending actions for its improvement. An online "Food safety" training session for local guesthouses owners was attended by 5 women and disseminated online. Training sessions had very positive feedback from the beneficiaries. The sub-grants document has been finalised by APJM,

	both in Arabic and English, later than originally planned. Sub-grants will be directed to guesthouses and artisanal bakeries of the less developed communities of the mountain area. APJM actively involved local communities both in conducting visits and in the process of drawing up the Local Action Plan, for which more than 200 families from several villages interviewed. A 4.2.4 - APJM focused project activities in Jabal Moussa historical sites of Entrance of Roman Stairs & Qornet el Deir. Visits of the cultural sites has been organized for local key stakeholders and archaeological studies were developed in Qornet el Deir, leading to the elaboration of two 3D models of the site. APJM also carried out requalification and planting work within a degraded area at the entrance of the Roman stairs. The location for the Tourist Information Center was identified, and the selected abandoned site is being converted into a Tourist Center and a small museum dedicated to the cultural findings in Qornet el Deir and surroundings. The location is planned to be the start of the Adonis trail. The process has so far included several steps such as site mapping, launching of a call for architects, selection of the best proposals, concept pitching by the two architects. The activities related to the construction of the above-mentioned infrastructures are close to being concluded. A 4.3.3 - "A magical mystery tour" was organized for key stakeholders and experts, to inform on the Local Action Plan process and other project objectives and activities. The tour was recorder and the edited video disseminated. A marketing movie was realised to promote the local culinary heritage. A local bank interested in the project activities offered a free advertising on national television. An agency specialized in digital communication was selected with the aim to support with the filming and editing of videos to be shared through social media to enhance visibility of the CROSSDEV project and of Jabal Moussa. *WP 5 - Awareness & Training* A 5.1.1 - Awareness initiatives addressed to youth and schools have been carried out and were able to reach 141 persons (students and school directors) and a survey questionnaire was handed out to students and its results integrated in the LAP. APJM developed a book for kids, with the aim of introducing them to the importance of the cultural heritage and its conservation. Meetings were held with local guides to inform them of the project progress, to involve them in the project activities and to promote the organization of visits. Some archaeologists developed scientific contents about the selected archaeological sites and the Adonis Route, and a series of short and long texts with annexes and maps have been developed. An event was organized to showcase the excavation and rehabilitation works in Qornet el Deir and the Roman stairs. The documentary of the event has been disseminated online. A cultural exhibit, "LIFE ON THE MOUNTAIN", was organized to promote the cultural history of Jabal Moussa and its surroundings. A 5.2.3 - The recruitment process of guides as initiated during the survey, where residents were asked about interested candidates in becoming local guides for Jabal Moussa. 25 candidates have been involved in the training programme for local guides.
JORDAN	*WP 4 - Increasing attractiveness of less known destinations* A 4.1.1 - JREDs has started the subgrant component developing the subgrant package, with the idea of award three sub-grants, for an amount of around 15000€ each). The first call did not see a successful participation, and only one of the submitted proposals, a shop of traditional tourist products linked to a women's association, was selected. The implementation of the awarded project is ongoing and JREDS is providing constant technical assistance. They are currently preparing the second call for the 2 sub-grants still to be awarded. A 4.2.3 - JREDS conducted field visits and inspections to assess the needs for each site. In collaboration with Department of antiquities in Aqaba and USAID, JREDS launched activities to tracing the path to connect the famous Aqaba site to the above less known

	sites tracing a direct path through Tell Al-Khalifeh, Byzantine Church, Underwater Military Museum, the Islamic Ayla City and Aqaba castle. A 4.1.6 – JUST organised a training seminar on "Small business development", followed by other training activities on Sustainable Development and Environment and Sustainability. Furthermore, JUST developed guidelines concerning quality management in tourism sector and it is setting up an online platform where to upload training materials, favouring access to university students and other stakeholders. The COVID-19 restrictions measure in Jordan affected severely the functioning of the University and delayed many academic and project's activities. A 4.3.4 - JUST and JREDS organised several initiatives and lectures on social media to maintain contact with school and university students to present CROSSDEV to the target communities and the local institutions. During Ramadan in 2020 they published number of articles, posts and fact sheets to raise awareness around the project (15 video and 15 questions published every day, reaching a lot of school and universities students from all regions of Jordan). Among other initiatives, both organised visits for key stakeholders, media educational tours for journalists and lectures addressed to private sector stakeholders. Both JUST and JREDS actively took part to national events to promote the project destinations (such as Jordanian Tourism Expo – JOTEX). A brochure about itineraries in Umm Qais and a web marketing strategy have been developed. *WP 5 - Awareness & Training* A 5.1.3 - JREDS developed a survey to promote sustainable tourism in Aqaba City through a questionnaire distributed to 250 persons. It organized visibility campaign during women international day and clean up campaigns to promote environmental sustainability. JUST organised tour field visits for institutions and journalists on site. Awareness and dissemination activities in Jordan had been severely affected by COVID-19 emergency and consequent measures taken by the Government of Jordan. One of the main challenges is the impossibility to organize workshops or public events, preventing schools and universities from participating in activities. Most of the awareness activities in presence have been postponed to date to be identified and, in the meanwhile, partners are developing online awareness campaign. A 5.2.1 - JREDS in Aqaba finalized a cooperation agreement with the project SCHEP (USAID programme) to jointly work on capacity building and technical training addressing local tourist guides. JUST developed a training platform where training materials will be uploaded and shared with students and interested stakeholders. In the next months they will start the training programme for at least 10 people that will become local guides in Aqaba.
PALESTINE	*WP 4 - Increasing attractiveness of less known destinations* A 4.1.3 - Strict collaboration agreements with 15 communities have been established by PHT within the CROSSDEV project: 4 guesthouses, 7 women centres and 5 Small and Medium Enterprises have been involved. PHT staff has developed two TORs for skill enhancement and training. The two trainings, aimed to build the capacity of local service providers, concern hospitality and marketing. On January 2021, PHT conducted the two days hospitality training for 24 service providers (21 females, 3 males) along the new segment Beit Mersim – Battir. PH trail conducted hospitality and marketing trainings to service providers with several participants (respectively 25, 45 and 24 persons) and they are going to involve in training also students. A 4.1.4 - In May 2020, PHT developed the subgrant packages. Subgrant announcement and promotion have been carried out during May and July and an evaluation committee was set up. PHT received 41 applications and signed 11 subgrants contracts with 11 local service providers (total amount 36,000€, on average 3,000€ per subgrant) along the new segment (Beit Mersim – Battir). All the projects have been completed, PHT staff and the

community's coordinators worked closely with the 11 services providers awarded, providing technical assistance and conducting specific market surveys and research. Networking have been facilitated among all the subgrants beneficiaries.

A 4.2.2 - Strong collaboration and good relationship with Local Authorities: PHT signed 15 agreements with 7 Municipalities and 8 Local Councils whose territories will be crossed by the new segment of the trail from Beit Mersim (South Hebron) and will end in Battir (West Bethlehem governances), for a total length of 50 Km. PHT started the waymarking activities of the five new segments. A film was developed and published on the local council's social media to promote the trail, and a first hiking trip was organized with around 120 participants. The call for subgrants for Local Authorities to improve cultural sites has been launched, inviting them at: Improving/enhancing the Palestinian Heritage trail; Creating/improving the services available for tourists and visitors; promoting the cultural - historical sites in the targeted area. The evaluation process interested 10 applications, and 4 Contracts with Local Authorities were signed. The activities financed by the subgrants for LA are being completed.

A 4.3.1 - PH Trail staff organized a hiking tour with the participation of 15 local guides. The aim was to introduce the guides to the new segment and encourage them to start organizing trips on it.

WP 5 - Awareness & Training

A 5.1.2 - CISP Palestine and PHT jointly elaborated the ToR for developing storytelling product to be used to sensitize, inform and disseminate CROSSDEV activities and results in the 16 communities involved in Bethlehem and Hebron governorates. The documents are used for the promotion of the area among tourists. On October 2020, PHT and CISP Palestine finalized the evaluation process, and from November 2020 the selected expert carried out the desk review on Palestinian Heritage, virtual meeting/ and interviews with local communities' representatives, field visits, collection of stories and imagines setting up a promotion document and promote the tangible and intangible local heritage.

4.2.4 EFFICIENCY

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Did the intervention deliver its results in a cost-effective and timely way?
2. Was partners' expertise conformed to project needs and objectives?
3. Is current management and governance structure of the project fully functional to reach the project's objectives or is there a need to make operational adjustments?
4. Did internal governance guarantee inclusiveness of decision-making processes?

EFFICIENCY: GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The management and governance structure of the project is well organised, with continuous and active involvement of all Project Partners, who have always proved to be collaborative and to hold the necessary skills to implement the activities and to carry out the administrative and reporting tasks.

Coordination between CISP as Lead Beneficiary and each Project Partner is effective, while direct communication and coordination between Project Partners can be improved, positively impacting on the exchange of knowledge and good organisational and management practices. Initially planned face-to-face meetings would have facilitated dialogue and communication between the Partners on everything related to project management and organisation, while having to work exclusively remotely after the first kick-off meeting in 2019 proved to be an obstacle.

During implementation, the project is entitled to three minor amendments and one major amendment (involving a change of more than 20% in budget items or a request for an extension). The resource allocation was based on expenditure forecasts made before the start of the project, which meant that in some cases the allocation was not the most appropriate. For this reason, two minor amendments were required for small budget variations, which nevertheless had a major impact on the successful implementation of the project. PHT needed more human resources than foreseen, especially to manage sub-grant activities. For the Italian Ministry of Culture, it was planned to invest in internal human resources dedicated to issues beyond their own capacity. A budget adjustment was made with the minor amendment, envisaging the tourism expert as external expertise to be contracted by the Ministry.

With regard to the management of subgrants, the ENI CBC MED programme requires that they must be treated as partners in terms of accountability and expenditure, and this has led to changes and delays with respect to the activity plan initially conceived by the partners. In general, it would have been useful to devote more resources to the subgrant component because they have proven to require considerable administration and coordination efforts, and because a larger amount would have provided opportunities for greater impact on local communities.

The training on the Management and Information System (MIS), the platform on which all information related to the management and monitoring of the project is uploaded, took place in March 2021, 16 months after the start of implementation, causing some difficulties for the partnership. A further aspect to be highlighted is the limited dialogue with the funding authority and the fact that it is necessary to go through the Joint Techical Secretariat to communicate with the managing authority, making communication less fluid.

The project lacks a monitoring system updated more frequently than every six months for measuring the achievement of expected results and output indicators. Despite the current frequency is dictated by the drafting of the Progress and Interim Reports required by the ENI CBC MED programme, this issue might complicate the partnership's awareness of what has been achieved in terms of effectiveness.

EFFICIENCY: COUNTRY OVERVIEW

	INSIGHTS
ITALY	Compared to the other countries, the allocated budget is lower, but the partnership and the stakeholders involved, first of all Phoenicians Route, proved to manage the implementation of the activities in the best possible way and to have created a good collaboration, actively involving different institutional actors, including the Regional Government of Sicily itself. CISP played an important role in the organisation and management of the activities on site. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism changed its name to Ministry of Culture in February 2021, losing jurisdiction over tourism, although cultural routes remained the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. The project manager was able to keep the project under the Ministry of Culture, avoiding a transition that would have severely complicated the implementation of the activities. The General Secretariat for Culture is a very bureaucratic structure compared to other project partners, but very active concerning cross-border agreements and event organisation. A minor amendment was requested to better allocate the budget dedicated to the Ministry of Culture. The project team currently consists of four people: project manager, communication officer, financial officer, tourism expert. CoopCulture works in Sicily with important activities, managing several tourist and cultural sites. CISP as Lead Beneficiary expects a greater contribution from CoopCulture - with whom human and organisational relations are excellent - in the second part of the project, in terms of expertise on tourism promotion.
LEBANON	Most of the implemented activities are completed or close to conclusion, while the subgrant component is starting with delay. The pandemic and the internal economic and political crisis have affected the timing of project activities in Lebanon, with delays that nevertheless remain acceptable thanks to the commitment of APJM, which sees CROSSDEV as a central project for its own development. In terms of objectives and cost effectiveness they are reaching the indicators in the best way possible, and they are sure they will reach all expected results and outputs indicators if the project will be able to receive an extension.
JORDAN	JREDS - AQABA | Good organisational and management skills, which enabled the implementation of most of the planned activities. Training activities will start soon, in cooperation with a local agency dealing with sustainable tourism. The required bureaucratic steps to implement some of the activities at local level make the whole implementation mechanism more challenging. JUST - UMM QUAIS | The university was closed for long periods due to COVID-19, which caused some management and organisational difficulties and some weakness in terms of coordination with the Lead Beneficiary. Good capacity to involve stakeholders and service providers, but some difficulties in communicating the implemented activities. Many bureaucratic steps as the competence on the less-known sites involved in the project is of different institutions, so the process was more complex than in other territories.
PALESTINE	Good organisational and management skills. Good relationship with other project partners and very cooperative whenever needed. The core staff remained the same, but there was turnover among the collaborators. From the financial point of view, some delay in the delivery of financial reports, but continuous relationship with CROSSDEV financial manager.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

This chapter introduces the main conclusions of this Mid-Term evaluation, starting from the results of the SWOT analysis. Recommendations are consistent with specific objectives with the aim to improve/orientate the Project in view of increasing its impact in the final Project year (MTE Report). The recommendations are derived directly from one or more major conclusions and take account of the circumstances currently prevailing in the context of the project and the availability of resources.

5.1 SWOT ANALYSIS

The following Table summarises the combined results of the SWOT analysis carried out with the Lead Beneficiary staff and with representatives of Project and Associate Partners interviewed. Findings are hereby presented as indicated by respondents.

Table 6 – SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS
• Presence of a diversified range of partners which allows the partnership to rely on multidisciplinary competences. • Design of project structure and objectives fully agreed with the whole partnership at the project drafting stage, allowing place-based flexibility in defining the activities to be implemented at local level. • Reliability of the Project and Associate Partners, who proved to be responsive to requests and proposals despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. • Strong leadership and institutional capacity of the Lead Beneficiary, which has set up a strong management and governance structure as well as inclusive mechanisms for all other actors in the partnership. • Full alignment of the project with the objectives and missions of the Partners. • Collaboration and cohesion among Partners, allowing to build a proactive and resilient partnership. • Capacity to involve local stakeholders able to contribute to project implementation in all four countries. • Ability to adapt and flexibility by all actors involved, enabling to rethink and reshape project activities if necessary. The opportunity to work online meant that none of the activities were definitively interrupted. • Strong focus on cross cutting issues – youth, gender, environmental sustainability – in the implementation of the project. • Importance of highly experienced partners in the respective areas to ensure project sustainability. • Strong involvement of local communities in the project activities, which allows to build networks between project partners, local institutions and SMEs/service providers in each tourist destination. • Strong involvement of women in project activities, especially in the sub-grant and training components. • High investment in human resources through capacity-building activities, addressed to both partners and stakeholders, that can positively influence the medium- and long-term sustainability of the project. • Priority assigned to communication and visibility aspects, both at project and local level. • Relevant project contribution to promote sustainable tourism and cultural valorisation in less known tourist destinations, an issue in which both national and local governments are unable to invest much, especially in less developed countries.

WEAKNESSES
• The project - given the global pandemic context – has been forced to reorganise most of its planned activities in virtual mode, causing general fatigue for partners and stakeholders involved. • Critical issues related to cultural and linguistic differences making online activities even more challenging. • Restrictions on mobility have limited the possibility to get to know the target destinations in depth and to deepen links between partners. Impossibility to meet each other is an unprecedented phenomenon. • More importance could have been given to the subgrant component at a general level, given the positive impact it can have on local communities. • Subgrants are seeds funding but are not enough to achieve a complete development of local communities. • Large reporting and accountability efforts required. • Differences in the legal nature of the partners could create some disparities in terms of bureaucracy.

OPPORTUNITIES
• Opportunity to experiment a range of online methods to meet and share information and experiences. • Seizing opportunities provided by the transition in the tourism sector towards undertourism, outdoor activities, sustainable tourism and less crowded destinations. • Involving people – especially youth – in rural areas through both capacity-building and awareness raising activities represents an important opportunity for local communities. • Community-based tourism represents an opportunity for socio-economic development of marginalised areas. • Cross-border cooperation between partners and creation of strong local networks can yield results beyond the project. • Standardisation of data collection and release in all project dissemination tools, with particular reference to the digital platform. • Increasing awareness on the need for new professional figures dedicated to the promotion of tourism and the valorisation of the tangible and intangible assets that are lacking.

THREATS
• Global pandemic impact on sustainable tourism makes difficult to have feedback on what the project is really achieving and the change it is nurturing in each context. • Negative effect on tourism sector from COVID-19, shutdown or severe limitation of tourism flows due to restrictions - both at international and national level - and uncertainties concerning the evolution of tourism, which may reduce the opportunity to reach the expected target in terms of visitor days. • Lack of opportunities to meet in person frequently with stakeholders and beneficiaries, which may hamper the capacity to establish solid and long-lasting cross-border relations. • Problems related to limited internet access and lack of necessary digital tools of some stakeholders and beneficiaries, which may reduce the full involvement of local communities. • Risk of abandonment of some traditional production sectors at local level in order to invest in the tourism sector and especially in accommodation facilities.

Source: Authors' elaboration

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. COVID-19 and tourist attractiveness

FINAL REMARKS

International tourism flows were severely affected by COVID-19. The project sought to give greater weight to local tourism, aiming to reach national rather than international tourists. This emergency solution is significant from the point of view of sustainability. Nevertheless, in less developed countries with weaker transport systems, it is difficult to rely on domestic tourism, since it goes hand in hand with a country's economic development and most of the population has little income to enjoy tourism opportunities. For a project such as CROSSDEV, which aims to increase the short-term tourist attractiveness of less known destinations, it is essential to have the possibility to reach international tourist flows. The less known destinations targeted by the project are expected to reach globally 48,000 visitor days. Reaching the expected number of visitor days will be challenging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a robust monitoring system to be frequently updated in order to measure the achievement of expected results and output indicators. Checking the achievement of the expected result indicators timely will enable the partnership to understand how much has been achieved so far and what measures, if any, need to be taken.
- Extend the project duration in order to get closer to reach the expected target in terms of visitor days. The evolution of the pandemic at international level in any case makes it rather difficult to determine what will happen in the remaining project period: without a progressive opening of national and especially international tourist flows, it will be very difficult to reach the expected target even if the partnership obtains a time extension.
- It may therefore be necessary - considering what will happen in tourism season 2021-2022 - to update the target to be reached for indicator 1.3.1 A "Increased domestic and international tourist flows visiting the targeted area" in terms of visitor days in less known destinations.

2. Project identity and transfer of knowledge to stakeholders

FINAL REMARKS

Restrictions on mobility had a negative impact on the participation in international events to promote CROSSDEV, an aspect that would have given the opportunity to better build an overall project identity, enhancing at the same the peculiarities of the destinations and routes involved. The model of the cultural route of the Council of Europe to which CROSSDEV refers requires commitment on the part of all local actors and a long time to become established (e.g., the Via Francigena in Italy required decades of local development processes to become established). During the 3 years of implementation, the project will provide partners with operational tools and guidelines in order to help the routes that will be developed in less known destinations to have a strong link with what the Council of Europe promotes. It is crucial to create a homogeneous vision of the project among the partners. Participation in international tourism events and fairs may not be feasible in the last year of the project, so it will be important to understand how to use the resources dedicated to international exchanges to ensure maximum visibility for the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to invest in the exchange of know-how between the different countries, beginning with the partners but extending to local stakeholders and final beneficiaries, who will be the main players in the processes of sustainable tourism development.
- Promote *learning from examples*, allowing local stakeholders to visit other countries so they can learn from best practices. This aspect needs to be considered also in future interventions. Service providers are asked to provide good services to visitors, but often they did not have the opportunity to travel as international tourists and to live the same experience they are supposed to offer. Thus, it appears important to strengthen service providers, allowing them to visit other benchmarking areas / good practices.
- Taking into account the current difficulties due to COVID-19 and the changing international context, consider the organisation of an international initiative to present the project and the results achieved, as an opportunity for greater visibility and exchange of experiences with other projects and actors in the Mediterranean area.
- Start working on a new project targeting the same areas, to strengthen the network that CROSSDEV is building and to keep building a common identity between the actors and communities involved.

3. Impact of digitalisation on the tourism experience

FINAL REMARKS

A challenge for the CROSSDEV project, but more generally for the development of tourism in the COVID-19 era, is to identify ways to take advantage of digitalisation. This requires building a relationship between the digital world, the tourist experience and the interaction/relationship between people, the latter being one of the key elements from the tourist's point of view. The improvement of the use of digital tools can be relevant, finding ideas for linking it with the tourist experience and understanding how it can transmit the interaction between people. Working on two dimensions, digitalisation and building narratives that connect different Mediterranean countries, can have a strong impact in terms of social and cultural sustainability. In order to find the right balance between digital and personal interaction in the tourist experience, it is necessary to try and experiment, especially by taking advantage of projects such as CROSSDEV and initiatives such as ENI CBC MED. The creation of digital platforms must go hand in hand with the development of information that is communicated in an innovative way, involving and stimulating the interest of the final users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Elaborate new narratives, strive to represent sustainable tourism products that are linked to each other and that connect with the overall Mediterranean region.
- During the first part of the project the main target audience were European and national institutions and local stakeholders. In the last year it will be necessary to reach tourists who may be interested in the target destinations and cultural routes that are being implemented and supported by CROSSDEV. It is important to be able to focus the project Communication on the final users, the tourists, finding the right way to narrate the routes and the local communities.
- Engage in collaboration with other initiatives that are fostering the use of digital tools in sustainable tourism, such as MED GAIMS project. Insist on use of technologies, working on it in the framework of the cross-border agreement among universities.

4. Active engagement of local communities, focus on cross-cutting issues

FINAL REMARKS

Most of the activities directed at local communities, such as training, awareness-raising, and the subgrant component, were implemented in the first part of the project. These activities made it possible to have a significant impact on the cross-cutting issues that the CROSSDEV project aimed to address:

- Youth were the main target audience, as: main component from a socio-demographic point of view in local communities; involved in tourist sites as tour guides; ready to learn and invest time in activities that can have an impact on their communities and lives; group affected by high unemployment rates, and therefore potential beneficiaries of the creation of job opportunities.
- As for gender balance, the project ensured that the target group of activities was evenly distributed between men and women. Women were direct beneficiaries of several project activities. Families and women have received subgrants and attended training to improve the hospitality of guesthouses and production processes of food and handicraft products for tourists.
- Environmental sustainability is central to the tourist development of the territories and is an aspect highly valued by tourists interested in cultural itineraries such as those promoted by the project.
- Disability is an aspect highly considered, especially by the Palestinian Heritage Trail, which aims to have segments and sites of the route that are accessible to people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the remaining phases of the project it will be necessary to continue to actively engage the communities, especially youth and women, in the activities and find innovative ways to maintain high interest in the issues addressed.
- Strengthen the involvement of the universities in the partnership, making the most of the cross-border agreement signed, as a means of involving young students and as an opportunity to develop routes in less known destinations through research activities.
- Give greater emphasis to awareness and action campaigns for the protection of the environment.
- Exploit the commitment and interest of the Palestinian partner towards accessibility and disability so that the other partners also increase their awareness and consider the issue in the elaboration of the Sustainable Development Products.
- Continuously update of Local Action Plans with new data, trends and information, and opportunities to raise the attractiveness of less known destinations.

ANNEX 1 – LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

- N° of in-depth interviews: **13**
- Online Platforms: **Zoom/Meet**
- Time: maximum **1.30 hour** per interview
- Language of the interview: **English / Italian**

Table 7 – Project partners and key stakeholders interviewed

Organization	Role	Country	Interviewee(s)
Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)	Lead Partner	Italy	- Deborah Rezzoagli, project coordinator - Gianluca Falcitelli - Annalisa Marocchi, communication officer
Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST)	Project Partner	Jordan	- Ahmed Freewan, project manager - Ismail Naser, communication officer
The Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan (JREDS)	Project Partner	Jordan	- Mohammed Al-Tawaha, project manager - Waed Ajarmeh, communication officer
Palestinian Heritage Trail (PHT)	Project Partner	Palestine	- George Rishmawi, director - Ghaida Rahil, project manager
Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM)	Project Partner	Lebanon	- Joelle Barakat and Roula Mezher, project manager - Marc Atallah, communication officer -Pierre Doumet, president
Ministero della Cultura	Project Partner	Italy	Alessandra Lucchese, project manager
CoopCulture	Project Partner	Italy	- Paola Autore, project manager - Sara Moscatelli, communication officer
Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority	Associate partner	Jordan	Thelma Radwan, Directorate of Tourism
Ministry of Tourism, Lebanese Republic	Associate partner	Lebanon	Petra Obeid, Head of Youth and Local Bodies Department
Institute of Hotel Management and Tourism, Bethlehem University	Associate partner	Palestine	Elias Juha, acting director
Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna (Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism – CAST)	Associate partner	Italy	Patrizia Battilani, director
Rotta dei Fenici	Relevant stakeholder	Italy	Antonio Barone, director
CISP Palestina	Relevant stakeholder	Palestina	Chiara Rambaldi, country representative

Source: Authors' elaboration

The following associate partners and key stakeholders were not included in the Mid-Term evaluation due to their limited involvement in the first phase of the project or because they did not respond to the interview invitation:

- Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, State of Palestine;
- International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO);
- Regione Sicilia, Soprintendenza del Mare, Dipartimento beni culturali e identità siciliana, Assessorato regionale beni culturali e identità siciliana;
- ITER VITIS.

Finally, the following stakeholders / beneficiaries have been involved in the self-administered questionnaire:

Table 8 – Stakeholders involved through the questionnaire

Country	Place	Stakeholder	Name and surname
Palestine	Beit-Awwa	Beit-Awwa Municipality, PR coordinator	Mohammed Masalma
Palestine	Battir	Koshk al ain, sub-grant winner	Enas Bataha
Palestine	Beit Oulla	Beit Oulla Women Club, sub-grant winner	Bashar Farashat
Palestine	Beit merism	Guesthouse owner, sub-grant winner	Somai Amro
Palestine	Surif	Surif municipality, tourism committee coordinator	Amani Heih
Lebanon	Jabal Moussa	Eco-guide from the local community	Lara Atallah
Lebanon	Jabal Moussa, Mchati	Guesthouse owner	Hoda Nader
Lebanon	Jabal Moussa, Yahchouch	Agro-food producer	Roula Souaid
Jordan	Umm Qais	Plant nursery	Wejdan Malkawi
Jordan	Umm Qais	Coffee shop	Saleh Al-Rousan
Jordan	Aqaba	Aqabawi Foundation	Mustafa Al Ajlouni
Jordan	Aqaba	Johud Al Ayadi	Raghda Qasem

Source: Authors' elaboration