

## **BRAND STRATEGY**



### **FINAL REPORT**

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Main objectives of this assignment, in accordance with the Terms of Reference are:

WP-3: Brand Strategy

1. Recording & Assessing the thermal springs of the cross-border area.  
Methodology Building for the thermal springs in the Albanian territory (D3.1.1)
2. Local Analysis Assessment & Benchmarking Study (D 3.1.2)
3. Place a Branding Strategy and the definition of a common identity (D 3.1.3)

FOR THE ALBANIAN TERRITORY TWO THERMAL SPRINGS, IN THE PROJECT  
TRANSBOUNDARY AREA HAVE BEEN SELECTED:

1. Bënja thermal springs
2. Sarandoporou (Vromoneri) thermal springs

## **I. RECORDING AND ASSESSING THERMAL SPRINGS IN THE CROSS-BORDER AREA**

Recording & assessing the thermal springs in the c-b area deliverable (D 3.1), concerns the mapping and assessment of thermal springs in the cross border area of alttour based on secondary data and field work (questionnaires/interviews – inputs by PB4 SEA)

More specifically, LB1 will coordinate the deliverable and will provide the methodological context and compile the final report study. Each partner will provide input, review and their expertise referring to their participating regions.

### ***SPA Tourism***

The connection between health and tourism is not a new phenomenon since people began to travel to thermal springs and spa towns for medical purposes, thousand years ago and has grown substantially worldwide. The large number of beneficial effects of curative thermal springs' treatments have been known since ancient times. Thermal and mineral springs have been a part of wellness rituals and health benefits treatments in many European countries for centuries. They are closely linked to a strong culture and long tradition all over the European continent. The use of thermal or hot springs dates back several thousands' years ago. These springs were used for their high curative properties all over Europe.

The growth of the tourism industry is also facing not only with the desire of people to rest and relax, but also to remain well and physically healthy. This has recently led to a new trend and interest in the use of natural thermal, geothermal or human created springs on a global scale. This new trend for a good maintenance of health and wellness has led to the reconceptualization and development of many existing thermal spring centers, but also to the creation of many other new centers all around the globe.

Thermal tourism is part of medical and wellness in many countries. Compared to other sectors of the tourism industry, seasonal variations from summer to winter, have no impact on thermal springs' therapy. From this point of view it is a major source of income. Therefore, it has the potential to maintain tourist traffic all year round and consequently has a significant benefit to the economy.

Thermal springs and spa facilities exist in many countries and have a considerable and long reputation for successful health and wellness treatments based on the use of geothermal waters from natural thermal springs.

Seeing that the interest in these curative treatments is growing, in some regions developers of SPAs and health and wellness resorts are investigating the possibility of taking geothermal water to improve their business prospects, and it does not matter if the geothermal source flows from artesian groundwater ponds, from nearby volcanic activity or from scorching water by cooling magma bodies deep within the Earth.

Nowadays, health, wellness and spa tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry all over the world. More and more geothermal resources are being exploited by recreating resorts or water parks intertwined with medicinal healing. These attractions offered by many holiday destinations, are increasingly preferred by local or tourist vacationers, creating the possibility of both, visual attractions and psychological relaxation but also countless curative values for a better health. Associated with geothermal phenomena, many have been developed into unique tourist destinations with a high visual impact on tourism. Albania is the country that offers a variety of therapeutic landscapes where thermal baths and natural hot springs, known as "lloxha" meet with nature and the history. They are known not only as curative places but also as tourist attractions, but this still remains at a low level.

The country is relatively very rich in thermal springs having a low to medium enthalpy. It counts approximately 12 natural springs and ten wells.

The thermal baths of Albania date back to the Roman period, such as the "Ilixhas" of Elbasan or the thermal waters of Bënja. They lie in different geographical parts of the country, from north to south. Some are very popular and frequented both among Albanians and international tourists, while others still remain in a small scale of exploration or are completely unknown. These places contain rich minerals with very high curative affect and healing properties.

In most European countries there is a great promotion of thermal heritage. The facilities to run in these places are numerous and easily accessible. As far as Albania is concerned, it is still in "very slow steps" and there is no way to lead to the development of this tourism. So, it is important to create a road and to follow a strategic conceptual model that will lead to the development of thermal tourism industry and economic growth in these areas.

## **GEOHERMAL SPRINGS CLASSIFICATION**

"Geothermal water resources" are waters that have temperatures constantly higher than the average annual atmospheric temperatures of the region, with the effect of groundwater temperature, depending on the geological structure, which may contain molten material and gas in a higher amount than the surrounding water sources, where water, vapors, and gas naturally explode or are extracted from places where they are held by heat from underground or from dry and hot rocks, through human-made underground structures.

### **Classification category and definition**

According to the national legal Framework, the Law no. 11/2012 "On the Integrated Management of Water Resources"

- Geothermal Spring: Includes hot springs and extreme hot springs – heated naturally while circulating through underground voids and pore spaces.

- Natural Hot Spring: Generic term for geothermal springs of at least body temperature generally identified as pleasant bathing temperature – used for medicinal purposes and bathing. Naturally discharging from the subsurface.
- Thermal Spring: Includes hot and warm springs – generally above 25 degrees, may be artificially heated – used for medicinal purposes and bathing.
- Mineral Spring: Can be cold, warm, hot, extremely hot or artificially heated – used for medicinal purposes and bathing.
- Thermo – Mineral Spring: Geothermal mineral spring water and artesian water – used for medicinal purposes and bathing.
- Artesian Spring: Naturally discharging from the subsurface – warm to hot water – 25 degrees to 100 degrees - used for medicinal purposes and bathing.
- Saline Spring: Various temperatures – very high mineral salt content – possible sea water - used for medicinal purposes and bathing.
- Geyser: Extremely hot spring – water reaches boiling point and above – used as visual tourist attraction in geo-tourism.
- Submarine Hot Spring: Submarine vents known as black smokers emitting extreme hot water enriched with mineral and metallic trace elements.

(Classification and definition of geothermal springs; Source: Erfurt-Copper & Copper, 2009).

Albania is richer than many countries around it in the Balkans, but even further in Europe in terms of curative thermal springs. It counts fantastic sources of thermal springs, completely natural and rich in countless healing properties for any ailment. This means a "golden" opportunity for health and wellness tourism, with an extraordinary curative and above all absorbing potential of foreign tourists.



A term, still unknown to Albanians though it is the best way to keep the body healthy, to cure various health problems and to enjoy the beauties that nature has forgiven our country as well. Rich in sulfates and minerals, these springs have countless curative effects on rheumatism, skin and nervous system.

Geothermal energy sources in Albania are considered as hot water sources of the underground layers of the earth, which have a sufficient temperature to be used as a source of energy. The geothermal situation of albanides offers two directions for the use of geothermal energy:

- Thermal springs with low enthalpy and maximum temperature up to 80 ° C. This includes all natural resources of thermal springs and wells. These assets are spread over a wide area of Albania, from the south near Albania – Greece border to the north.
- The use of deep vertical wells for geothermal energy.

The thermal sources are located in three geothermal zones:

1. Kruja geothermal zone, which represents a zone with bigness geothermal resources. Has a length of 180 km. Identified resources in carbonate reservoirs are  $5.9 \times 10^8$  -  $5.1 \times 10^9$  GJ.
2. Ardenica geothermal zone, which is located in the coastal area of Albania, in sandstone reservoirs.
3. Peshkopia geothermal zone at northeastern area of Albania. Several springs are located with disjunctive tectonics of the gypsum diaper.

There are three directions for the exploitation of geothermal energy in Albania:

- The use of the heat flow of shallow geological section for heating and cooling of the buildings;
- Thermal sources of low enthalpy are the natural thermal springs or wells in a wide territory of Albania. They represent the basis for a successful use in order to achieve economical effectiveness and developing the tourism through:
  1. SPA resorts and centers for the treatment of different health problems and diseases; hotels for ecotourism.

2. Extracting chemical microelements for thermal springs.
  - Exploitation and use of deep oil and gas wells.

Thermal waters in Albania are the second source of geothermal energy. Albania has many resources of thermal waters. These thermal waters have a low enthalpy, reaching a temperature of 60 degrees Celsius in the Elbasan Spas, in <https://www.geothermal-energy.org/pdf/IGAstandard/WGC/2010/0104.pdf> Ishmi 1 / b well, in 60 degrees Celsius, in the Kozani-8 well at 65.5 degrees Celsius. The presence of a steam source on Mount Postenan in Leskovik indicates that it is the geological premise to find geothermal sources of medium enthalpy, with temperatures above 80 degrees Celsius.

### ***D 3.1.1 Recording & assessing the thermal springs in the c-b area***

#### ***Pilot site 1: Bënja Thermal Baths & SPAs (Përmet District, Albania)***

Bënja is a village in the Përmet Municipality, situated approximately 2 km away from river Vjosë's valley, and very close to the Langaricë river canyon. It is noted for its mountain ranges: Trebeshinë-Dhëmbel-Nemërçkë-Shëndelli-Lunxhëri-Bureto. It is also characterized by the existence of numerous water currents such as river Vjosë and its estuaries, Langaricë and Zagori. Further, the area is renowned for its folk songs, dances, and traditional clothing. Besides the rich intangible cultural assets, the area is also known for its tangible heritage, which includes the "Ura e Katiut" an 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman-era bridge. In addition, the bridge is situated very close to the Bënjë Thermal Baths, which represent the cornerstone of the area's tourism potential. They are important for their mineral properties and curative values, and represent the main attraction for many of the visitors to the area.



A medieval bridge stretches over a sulfur-rich river that leads to year-round natural hot springs. Albania is home to therapeutic landscapes where thermal baths and hot springs, known as 'llichha', meet with nature, history, and architecture. The country is relatively rich with low up to the middle enthalpy, with waters coming out as natural springs and wells. There are 12 natural springs and ten wells. Thermal tourism is part of medical and wellness in the T&T industry and in many countries, it's a major source of income. Compared to other sectors of the tourism industry, seasonal variations from summer to winter have no impact on thermal and hydrothermal therapy. Therefore, it has the potential to maintain tourist traffic all year round.

Rich in minerals and healing properties, the thermal baths of Albania in nowadays Elbasan, or Benja were mentioned since the Roman period. Thermal baths and springs in Albania can be found in different parts of the country. Some are well known among Albanians and international visitors, others are completely unknown. There is a route of European thermal heritage that takes visitors to numerous destinations across different countries, but when one searches for Albania, there are no results. Hence, IIA made this guide to the thermal baths and hot springs in Albania for those looking for relaxing and refreshing treatments for the body and mind.

Thermal Springs in Albania Zheji 1 and 2 Shupali Elbasan thermal baths Banja/Hydraj torrent Peshkopia thermal Baths Benja thermal springs, Lengarica, Permet Vronomeri/Sarandoporo, Leskovik Holta torrent in Gramsh Postenan steam spring in Leskovik Kapaj in Mallakstra Treblova in Vlora The Vjosa River flows across the entire valley, and eventually branches out into the Langarica River – the latter stretching across a canyon of the same name. The caves within the Langarica Canyon are really a sight to behold! Warm waters join Langarica's stream, which despite the naturally cold temperature of the river, keep it at a warming 29-30 degrees Celsius all year-round. These are the thermal baths of Bënja, or Ilixha as they are called in Albanian. They are located only 13 km from the centre of the beautiful Përmet. People flock here to seek recovery from rheumatism, skin, and kidney ailments to name but a few of the symptoms known to be relieved here. Each thermal pool, rich in minerals, serves a particular healing purpose. Benja Thermal Pools are smooth and clear, and also contain a high content of sulphur. The stone baths are the most authentic, and as such, attract a large amount of visitors all year-round. The winter, when the temperature in Përmet falls below 0 degrees Celsius is the best time to immerse yourself in these hot baths. Enjoy that satisfying contrast between the air and water! Remember though, 20-25 minutes in the pool usually suffices!

More time in the highly sulphuric waters can be quite overwhelming, and not necessarily that good for you. The Benja Thermal Pools are highly-recommended by doctors for their health benefits, but are also wonderful to immerse yourself in for no other reason than pure pleasure! The muddy deposits of the thermal waters contain regenerative properties for the skin. The waters flow from the deep chasms of the cliffs surrounding the famous Langarica Canyon. They have been well-known for their health purposes since antiquity. You can find two of the largest and most popular baths at the foot of the Bridge of Katiu (the Judge's Bridge). These are known for being particularly beneficial for curing gastric and rheumatic diseases. A visit to these natural baths provides you with wonderfully natural health benefits, whilst taking in the spectacular scenic landscape of Përmet. The water at Benja Thermal Baths contains Sulphur and has enormous high curative effects, 4 of the sources are used for chronic disease of rheumatism, another one is especially used stomach disease and the last one for skin diseases. The Benja Thermal Waters have a temperature of 26 - 32 grade Celsius. The water contains Sulphur and there is a strong smell in the area. The gods must have been truly inspired when they conceived the town of Përmet, blessing it with a timeless picturesque landscape. Here, the mountains, hills, rivers, and forests play a truly breathtaking game of hide-and-seek! Përmet has gradually become one of Albania's most visited destinations for outdoor adventure. Whether it's rafting across the Vjosa River, or healthy recreation in its natural thermal baths. Close to this touristic natural and cultural site there is also the beautiful Ottoman bridge another popular attraction in an area highly-regarded for its archaeological value. The earliest objects found in the cave settlements here belong to the Neolithic (7000-3000 BC) and the Eneolithic (3000-2000 BC) periods. Near the bridge, you'll find the Benja Thermal Baths, born from the geothermal waters near Përmet, Albania. The heated water flows down the river unless it gets diverted into one of the several human-made pools. They're a splendid spot for a hot soak on a crisp, cool day.

Some say the baths have healing properties. As such, you may see some locals arriving to bathe there and reap the water's alleged health benefits.

The pools are off the beaten path, though, so you can still expect a fair amount of privacy. The area surrounding the old bridge and the hot springs is stunning. Walking atop the stone overpass is a great way to soak in the views. The river carves through a beautiful gorge, back dropped by distant mountains that stretch toward the sky. Small waterfalls rush and ripple along some parts of the river. It is a gorgeous spot to camp.





Designated template for Benja thermal springs (in albanian)

Created:  
NAPA

**RAPA GJIROKASTËR**

**MN\_GJIROKASTRA**

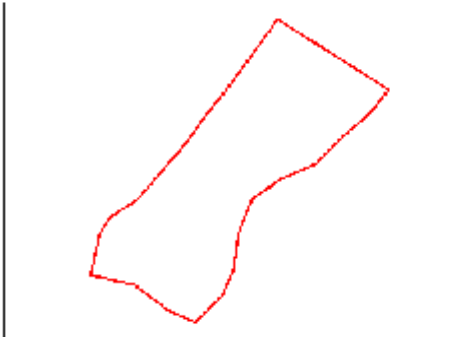
Thermal Springs of Bënja

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**Data:**

<u>Monument</u>	Thermal Springs of Bënja
<u>Status</u>	Maintaned
<u>Municipality</u>	Përmet
<u>State_MN</u>	Good

**Description:** The springs are located 7-8 km near Petran, 300 m above sea level. They are thermomineral springs with a temperature of about 25 - 300 C, which emerge on both sides of the river Lengarica, with sulfur content and dissolved gases in them. They are of scientific importance, especially in the field of geology and hydrogeology, because they are related to the great tectonic detachment of the province and they are active tectonic movements. The object also has curative, didactic and tourist values. It is visited along the road Përmet - Petran - Banja and then the pedestrian road to the monument is taken



**Geometric characteristics:**


Coordinate system:  
WGS\_1984\_UTM\_Zone\_34N

Geometric type: Polygon

Alignment (Meter):

<u>Left:</u>	451695.025500
<u>Upstairs:</u>	4455087.867400
<u>Right:</u>	451783.528800
<u>Below:</u>	4454999.364100
<u>Perimeter (m)</u>	261.78
<u>Surface (m<sup>2</sup>)</u>	3040.34

**Picture**





***Pilot site 2: Vromoneri (Sarandaporou) thermal springs (Leskovik) area, Kolonja municipality, Albania***

Nature Monument Vromoner Thermal Springs (Kolonja municipality) – IUCN III category, a protected area according to the Law “On protected areas” 41/2017 of 4.5.2017.

Coordinate system: WGS\_1984\_UTM\_Zone\_34N Geometry type: Polygon Extent (Meters):

Perimeter 38.85 metre

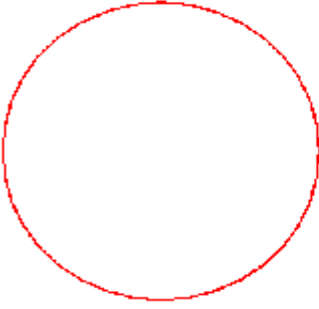
Surface 119.81m<sup>2</sup>

It is located near the village of Kuqesh, Leskovik administrative unit in Kolonjë district, on the edge of Sarandaporou river (Vjosa branch), which is situated 430 m above sea level. It represents several thermal springs. The springs emerge at the base of a large cave-shaped rock. They have scientific (geological, hydrological), medical, aesthetic and tourist-economic values. These thermal springs can be reached according to the itinerary the town of Leskovik - the village of Kuqesh (near the state border with Greece).

Designated template for Vromoneri (Sarandoporou) thermal springs (in albanian)

*Created by:*  
**AKZM**

**AdZM KORCE**



**Layer:** MN\_KORCE

**Feature:** Burimet Termale te Vromonerit

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**Attributes:**

<u>Monumenti</u>	Burimet Termale te Vromonerit
<u>Statusi</u>	E ruan
<u>Bashkia</u>	KOLONJE
<u>Gjendja MN</u>	E mire

---

**Geometry properties:**

Coordinate system:  
WGS\_1984\_UTM\_Zone\_34N

Geometry type: Polygon

Extent (Meters):

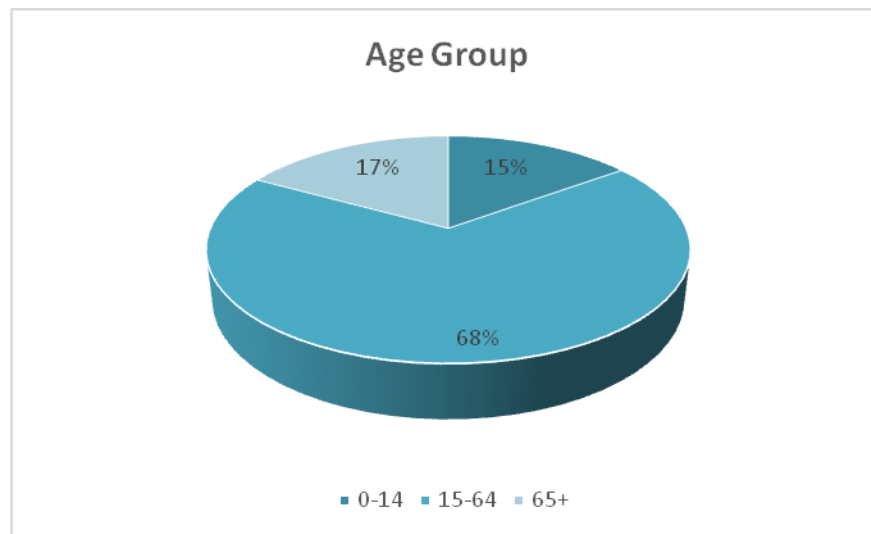
Left:	472278.368000
Top:	4438695.184500
Right:	472290.750600
Bottom:	4438682.801900
<u>Perimetri (m)</u>	38.85
<u>Siperfaqja (m<sup>2</sup>)</u>	119.81

**Foto**

**Pershkrimi** Gjendet pranë fshatit Kuqesh të komunës Leskovik në rrethin e Kolonjës, në buzë të lumit të Sarandapores, degë e Vjosës, 430 m mbi nivelin e detit. Përfaqëson disa burime termale. Burimet dalin në rrëzën e një shkëmbi në formë guve të madhe. Kanë vlera shkencore (gjeologjike, hidrologjike), mjekësore, estetike e turistiko – ekonomike. Vizitohen sipas intinerarit qyteza e Leskovikut – fshati Kuqesh (pranë kufirit shtetëror me Greqinë)

## **II. LOCAL ANALYSIS ASSESSMENT & BENCHMARKING STUDY**

Economically, the area is known for producing different types of crops, including grains, fodder, vegetables, fruits, and viticulture. Another popular product of the area is the Shakull sauce. The terrain is rich, and is composed of fertile soil and grassy pastures. Most of inhabitants in this village belong to the age group 15-64 years old.



Bënjë has developed the agro-industrial sector for personal consumption purposes, and it is noted for producing marmalade, jam, raki, wine, and dairy foods. The reason why these products are manufactured in the village is because raw material is abundant, and farmers themselves have developed the tradition of producing homemade food.

The National Business Center reports that there are only 8 businesses registered in this area, of which 3 operate in the construction sector, another three are wholesale shops, and the remaining two, are bar-cafes. There are currently no accommodation structures, or homemade food selling points in this village whatsoever. Businesses selling souvenirs, or those in the travel and entertaining sector are also notable absences.

**THERMAL SPRING**

Located approximately 120 km away from the Ionian coast of the Albanian Riviera and the town of Sarandë, the natural thermal springs of Bënjë in southeastern Albania, represent a better opportunity during the cold months of the year. It was not long ago that Bënjë's thermal springs were an overlooked landmark. However, in recent years they have caught the attention of Albanian and international visitors that travel to the south during the summer season. For this reason, there are periods during the year when the place gets a overcrowded.

The springs are located in the southern portion of the Kruja Geothermal Area. There are eight springs in Bënjë, four on the right bank of the river and the other four are situated on the left bank of the Langaricë River Canyon. Their water temperature usually ranges from 23°C to 30°C. The water temperature of the springs on the right bank of the river ranges from 23°C to 26°C. The separate thermal springs of which the thermal bath area is composed are usually situated at 1 to 3.5 meters above the river bank.

**Springs situated on the right bank of the river**

- Spring 1 is located 25-30 meters from the “Ura e Katiut”, and 20 meters from the river bed. Its water temperature averages 26°C.
- Spring 2 is located 8 meters from the bridge and is situated at 8 meters from the river. The blue color of the water makes it easy to spot.
- Spring 3 is located 25 meters from the bridge and 15 meters from the river. The spring is above the river level and the water temperature is around 26°C.
- Spring 4 is located 150-200 meters from the bridge, on the right side of the canyon, where it reaches a width of 20 meters. The spring is above the river level and the water temperature averages 23°C.

**Springs situated on the left bank of the river**

- Spring 5 is located 300-400 meters from the bridge's upper side, right in front of the entrance of the canyon. The water temperature reaches 30°C.
- Spring 6 is located at the foot of the bridge, situated approximately 4 meters from the river bed. Its water temperature reaches 30°C.
- Spring 7 is located at seven meters away from the bridge, close to the river, with a water temperature averaging 30°C.
- Spring 8 is the largest spring and is located 20-25 meters from the bridge. The water temperature reaches 30°C.

**Properties and Profits**

The springs possess healing properties for the skin, the digestive system, as well as connective tissue disorders. Therefore, besides enjoying the natural beauty of the Bënjë area and Langaricë canyons, visitors also flock to the destination for the springs' healing properties.

Stemming from the large number of daily visitors, some minor road infrastructural upgrades have been conducted, and a parking lot was built for cars and camping vehicles. Most travellers to the area are daily visitors, and hence no major lodging infrastructure has been built. Lodgers mostly use limited spaces for camping sites or choose accommodation structures in the areas nearby, such as the town of Përmet.

Transport and parking fees:

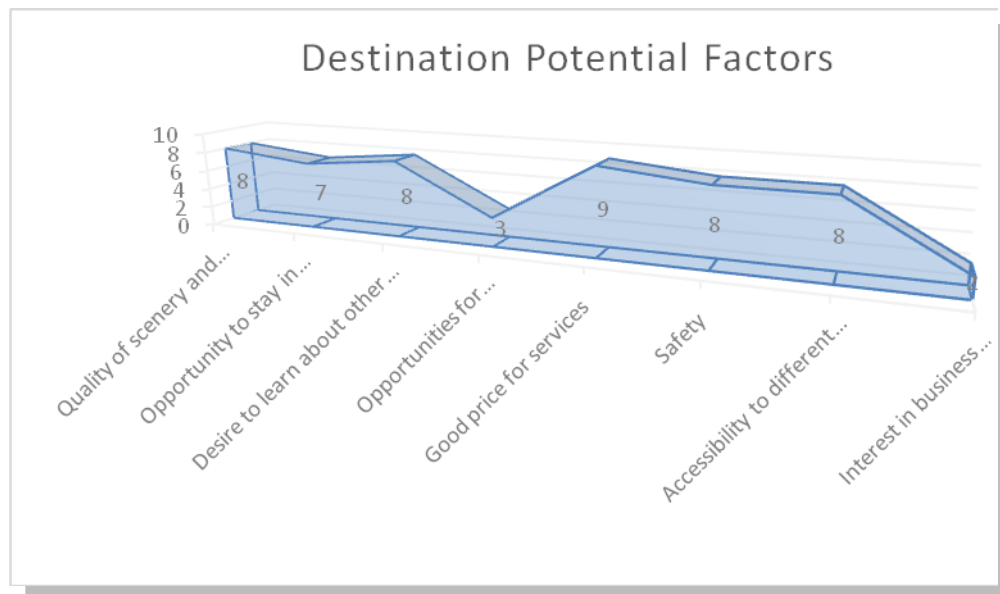
- Parking for small vehicles – 200 ALL/day (~1.60 EUR);
- Town of Përmet to Bënjë by local bus – 800 ALL/day (~6.50 EUR);
- Bike rent – 100 ALL/day (~0.80 EUR).

This income is mostly used for maintenance work.

## VILLAGE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES

### Destination Potential Factors

People that have visited the village have mostly praised it for its picturesque natural beauty and virgin landscapes, as well as the settlement's vicinity to the Bënjë thermal baths, Vjosë river, etc. Nevertheless, the village has notable deficiencies in offering the activities that would enable its development, such as tour packages, outdoor activities and sports, and other choices for visitors.

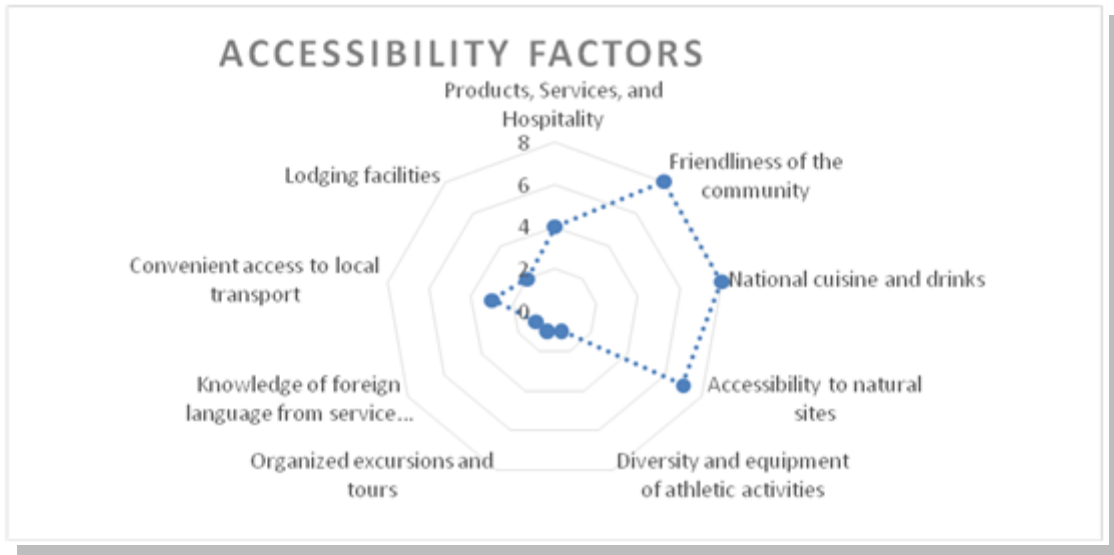


Visitors in this village have mostly rated the following elements, as main reasons for visiting:

- The healing properties and natural beauty of the thermal baths;
- Food quality, especially homemade marmalade and jams produced by local ladies;
- Hospitality and the residents' willingness to assist visitors with whatever information they are looking for, including access to other areas in the region;
- The beauty of the natural landscape.

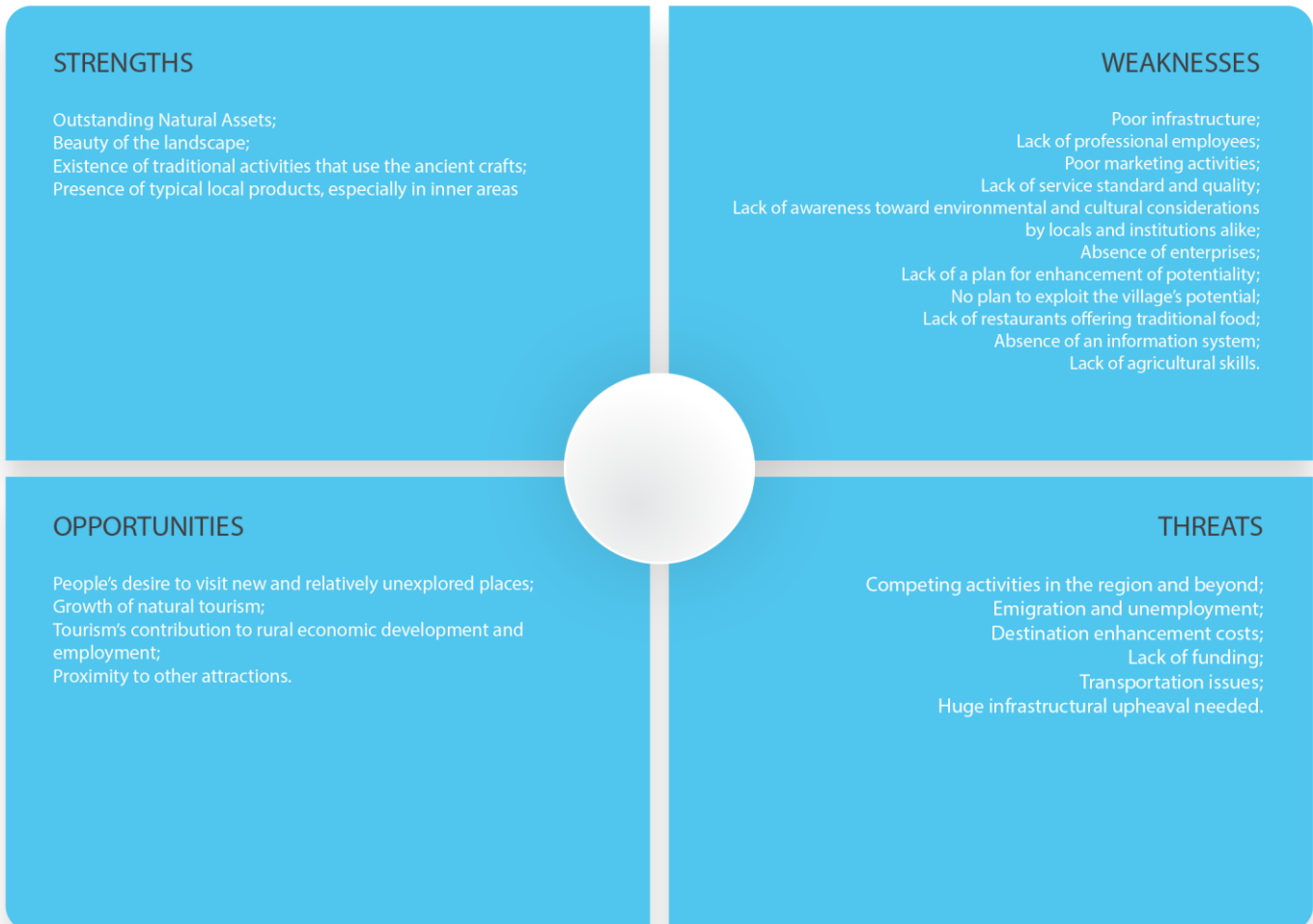
However, the village lacks accommodation structures that would enable visitors to stay overnight, and because it is far from the large urban areas where most visitors come from, many of those visiting are on day-long trips to the area, and visit in groups headed by tour guides. Most of these visitors are passers-by, travelling to

attractions such as the Bënjë thermal baths, and would rarely stop for a longer period of time. Nevertheless, in recent years, because of tours designed by these travel agencies the village of Bënjë and nearby areas have seen a spike in the number of visitors.



## SWOT Analysis

### *Identified Infrastructural Interventions*



Several important infrastructural interventions have been identified for the village of Bënjë, so that activities and strategies proposed in this report can guide future investment plans/projects. For this reason, we have provided for a development strategy focused on increasing the area's profile and potential for tourism. In our view, the most important infrastructure investments to be made should target the following issues:

- Road signs notifying travellers of the Bënjë Thermal Springs.
- Waste management;



- Poor road infrastructure within the village, and from the village to the Bënjë Thermal Springs;
- Crop fields, which are partly submerged and partly above water.

### **Proposed strategies**

- The promotion of the Bënjë Thermal Springs as a favoured wellness and ecotourism destination, which provides opportunities not only to SPA tourists, but also to other types of visitors, such as hikers, lodgers, families, young nature enthusiasts, cyclers, the elderly, ethnic and culinary aficionados; Albanians, as well as foreigners.
- The creation of an eco-park that entwines nature with agriculture and farming, offering accommodation opportunities in small wooden lodges to tourists, as well as setting campsites and camping tents.
- Developing the agritourism sector through the promotion of local products, from manufacture, to client services.
- The development of historical and cultural tourism by building hiking trails around the area.
- Information Center about activities and local history.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASTER PLAN**

Bënjë is a village focused on the SPA tourism and agriculture sector, and the light food industry associated with it. Residents earn most of their income from trading local products in nearby markets. The development master plan should aim at fostering the development of this sector, and connect it to an emerging tourism sector.

In the agro-industrial sector, businesses involved in the collection, production and marketing of agricultural products of the area should be supported. These will be the businesses involved in the production and sale of different types of jams and

marmalades, typical to the area. The main idea is that a shop for the sale of homemade products shall be set up in Bënjë, which will serve as a collection and selling point.

In the tourism sector, the first goal should be the identification of tourist hotspots, the design of tourist maps to offer a better perspective on places that can be visited in the area, the design of travel signs and their placement in the countryside, as well as the development of excursions and tour packages for visitors. An information center should be set up, serving as a point of orientation for those visiting. Of particular interest, should be the correct mapping of the 8 springs of which the Bënjë Thermal Baths Complex is composed. This map may be distributed to visitors.

Particular attention should also be paid to the preservation of local handicraft and weaving traditions and to the commercialization of these activities. A souvenir shop could be opened, which as in the case of the traditional foods shop, shall collect and sell local handicrafts and clothes. Another aim of commercializing this sector is to bring more visitors to the village. The main goal should be to turn Bënjë into a tourism destination which combines SPA properties with local cultural traditions. This could be reinforced by organizing local fair centers for folk festivities and regional handicrafts, which are marketed and sold there.

Lastly, aiming to promote local products and introduce something new to the culture of the area, the creation of an Eco-Park with a hippodrome, where equestrian activities can be held, and people will be able to rent a horse, could be envisioned. The park could also offer accommodation options for those staying overnight, as well as providing them with a taste of the local cuisine.

### **Potential Activities**

There are several activities that could be undertaken for the development of this village and the creation of various tours and excursions, as well as their promotion through travel agencies, which would contribute to an increase in village visibility. Another planned activity, besides the development of a well-devised brand strategy

for the SPA area and its infrastructure, could be the construction of a small hippodrome, which would bring to the village the opportunity to develop equestrian-related events. Adjacent to it, an accommodation structure could be set up, which will offer visitors the possibility to lodge and consume local dishes. Because the area is known for its traditional folk songs and clothing, opening a store that would sell souvenirs and local handicrafts, as well as local costumes, would contribute to its economic development by generating employment opportunities. Several of the activities with tourism-enhancement potential in which master plans and future development projects should focus include:

- SPA promotion;
- Targeted marketing for people with connective tissue disorders;
- Tours;
- Lodging;
- Hiking;
- Bicycling;
- Off-roading;
- Horse-riding;
- Souvenir;
- Mountain and rural tourism.

## TARGET MARKETS

PRIMARY MARKET				
Market segment	Estimated size	Non-lodgers	Lodgers	Average length to stay
Eco/Culture	8.000	6.000	2.000	2
Weekend Trips	10.000	7.000	3.000	1

As the area is renowned for its thermal properties, cultural traditions, handicrafts, music, folklore, clothes, and dances, people interested in these activities should be the primary targets of future development/business strategies. Based on our surveys, it is estimated that there will be around 8,000 such visitors, with an average length-of-stay of 2 days, in the first year of (hypothetical) business activity in the area. Another important target group are those visiting over the weekend, who are expected to spend at least a night in the village. As the village is accessible year-round, planning entertainment and other activities is a crucial component for bringing in more such visitors. They will be mostly interested in visiting the thermal springs, hiking at the Langaricë Canyon trails, tasting local food, spending some time outdoors, have a picnic, visit local shops, spend a night at the eco-park, try horseback activities, etc. During the first year, it is estimated that the number of such tourists will be approximately 10,000.

SECONDARY MARKET				
Market segment	Estimated Size	Non-lodgers	Lodgers	Average length to stay
Residents of other villages	4.000	4.000	-	-
Përmet tourist	3.000	3.000	-	-

The secondary market consists of residents of the surrounding areas, who will visit Bënjë mostly for its thermal springs, shopping purposes, but also for its attractions, such as horseback riding, local festivities and fairs, etc. It is expected that 7,000 such visitors may come in the first year of (hypothetical) activity of whom 4,000 are expected to be residents of nearby villages, whereas 3,000 are expected to be residents of the town of Përmet.



### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Below, all key performance indicators of the estimated business activity for 3 hypothetical years in the area have been listed. They reflect the main goals and their respective measurements. It should be taken into account that the main engines for significant improvement will be the promotion of the thermal springs in Bënjë, the development of tour packages, the construction of the accommodation structures and their sleeping units, the Eco-Park, the inauguration of shops selling local food products and handicrafts, the organization of annual festivities, etc.

Indicators	Projections	Measurements/Indicators
<b>Business creation</b>	It has been supposed that in the three years of involvement, 9 businesses in the fields of agriculture and tourism will have been supported through funding.	Number of businesses created.
<b>Job generation</b>	In these three years, the creation of 60 new jobs in the village is estimated	Number of jobs created.
<b>Supporting underdeveloped market segments</b>	A participation of about 40-50% of women in the newly-created jobs has	Number of women employed by the enterprises.

	been projected	
<b>Infrastructure improvement</b>	Creating an appropriate infrastructure for tourism and agriculture development, as well as a 12% growth in the value of each invested building.	Paved roads. Businesses created. Monetary worth of structures built/supported/enhanced.
<b>Business model improvements</b>	An improvement in the business model for at least 50% of training participants. A growth in the number of registered businesses, and consequently, a growth in the number of people insured.	Developed business plans. Businesses' organizational structures. Number of registered businesses. Number of registered people.
<b>Increased quality of service</b>	Service quality improvement by at least 30% through employee training, as well as the delivery of certificates of service quality to businesses that will be supported by prospective development projects/plans.	Number of certificates delivered. Analysis of tourist satisfaction questionnaires.
<b>Supporting businesses with grants, financing,</b>	Offering support to all individuals and businesses part of this project in the	Number of given grants. Amount of transferred funds.

<b>and training</b>	form of grants, full or partial funding, as well as counselling, training and support.	Number of trainings.
<b>Tourist arrivals</b>	Growth in the number of tourists by about 15%.	Number of tourists.
<b>Travel packages</b>	Growth in the number of tourism packages offered by several travel agencies towards this destination, by at least 30%.	Number of tourism packages.
<b>Visibility</b>	Increasing the village's social market visibility by at least 70%.	Marketing campaign reports, visitors' web traffic.
<b>Increasing village attractiveness</b>	Delivering great developmental impact measured by the cost per unit, which has the potential to contribute to the maximization of donors' and creditors' funds in a stable and recurring fashion.	Number of donors and other lenders eager to fund and support businesses in this area.

## ANNEX 1

### Operational Assumptions and Results

This session contains an estimate of income and cost for the 18 hypothetical accommodation units projected to be opened after the construction of

accommodation structures such as hostels/lodges/etc. Each of them has been hypothesized to have 3 rooms with 6 accommodation units each, contributing to a total of 18 sleeping units. A campsite with 5 tents and 10 sleeping units is also projected for the summer months. One night at the guest accommodation units will cost €40, whereas at the campsite it will be €15 per night. If a 3% annual inflation rate is accounted for, in the first year of activity, a net revenue of €36,500 is forecasted, otherwise expressed as 32.0% of gross operative cost. Tables below offer an assessment of the cash flow for the first year of activity.

<b>Estimated Operating Results</b>	<b>REPRESENTATIVE YEAR IN</b>		<b>EURO</b>
	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Ratio</b>	<b>Per Occupied Room/Day</b>
Number of Days Open Annually	365		
Number of Rooms Guest House	9		
Number of Rooms Camping	5		
Available Rooms (Annually) Guest House	3,285		
Available Rooms (Annually) Camping	1,825		
Occupancy Percentage		65%	
Occupied Room Nights Guest House	2,135		
Occupied Room Nights Camping	1,186		
Average Daily Rate Guest House			€ 45



Average Daily Rate Camping			€ 15
<b>REVENUES:</b>			
Rooms	€ 96,100	84.4%	€ 45
Camping	17,800	15.6%	€ 25
TOTAL	€ 113,900	100.0%	€ 70
<b>DEPARTMENTAL COSTS &amp; EXPENSES:</b>			
Rooms	€ 25,900	27.0%	€ 12
Camping	5,900	33.0%	€ 3
TOTAL	€ 31,800	27.9%	€ 15
<b>GROSS OPERATING INCOME</b>	€ 82,100	72.1%	€ 38
<b>UNDISTRIBUTED OPERATING EXPENSES</b>			
Administrative & General	€ 13,700	12.0%	€ 10
Sales and Marketing	13,700	12.0%	€ 10
Management Fees	5,700	5.0%	€ 3
Utility Costs	1,100	1.0%	€ 1
Property Operation and Maintenance	4,600	4.0%	€ 3
TOTAL	€ 38,800	34.1%	€ 18
<b>GROSS OPERATING PROFIT</b>	€ 43,300	38.0%	€ 20
<b>FIXED CHARGES</b>			
Property Taxes	0	0.0%	€ -
Insurance on Building & Contents	3,400	3.0%	€ 2
TOTAL	€ 3,400	3.0%	€ 2
<b>INCOME BEFORE RESERVE</b>	€ 39,900	35.0%	€ 19

Reserve for Replacement of FF&E	3,400	3.0%	€ 2
<b>NET INCOME</b>	€ 36,500	32.0%	€ 17

### **III. PLACE A BRANDING STRATEGY AND THE DEFINITION OF A COMMON IDENTITY (DELIVERABLE 3.4.3)**

#### Preliminary Analysis for Place Branding Strategy

Input to the leader of this activity (LB1) referring to the area of Korça, Sarandoporo.

#### Introduction

This current document is meant to be part of a comprehensive study on the methodologies and activities behind the promotion of spa tourism and common identity definition on the Cross-border area Greece-Albania. The paper aims to provide insights into defining potential location identification elements to establish a future destination branding strategy for the region, opening the door to the creation of tourism promotion, or position branding plans. The first part of the paper gathers data from the area through desktop analysis, then summarizes the region's current state of play, while the second part lists the goals of this deliverable and gives input on the specific region, with the intent of creating a comprehensive place branding strategy based on this document.

“The paper aims to provide insights into defining potential location identification elements to establish a future destination branding strategy for the region”

#### Purpose

### 3.4.3: PLACE BRANDING STRATEGY. DEFINITION OF COMMON IDENTITY

The deliverable aims at shaping a location's future positive image increasing visibility and recognition. The strategy is not just about the logo and a catchy strapline, it's about what the brand is focused on achieving; clear goals to attract visitors, residents, companies whatever the object may be.

Sub-objectives of the deliverable are:

- Attract new local and global tourists
- Increase the location's economy by attracting investors and launching new enterprises
- Increase residents' feelings of pride in where they live
- Intensify coverage of the location in the media
- Change the physical ambience of the location
- Create smart places and a sustainable environment
- Make the location more visible in people's minds in terms of the five senses.

“PB4 will provide input and review to the leader of this activity (LB1) referring to its rea. The plan will be shared with key-stakeholders.”

It addresses how to:

- Attract new local and global tourists
- Increase the location's economy by attracting investors and launching new enterprises
- Increase residents' feelings of pride in where they live
- Intensify coverage of the location in the media
- Change the physical ambience of the location
- Create smart places and a sustainable environment
- Make the location more visible in people's minds in terms of the five senses.

A good management of the thermal springs is essential to the overall success of the region, and this place branding strategy should aim just that. Although the project has substantial potential for development, its not likely to succeed without the

commitment of the region, the businesses and that of the thermal springs managing authority.

Through this plan, the thermal spring of the region will grow its brand nationally and internationally. In Korça region there is little to no branding of the place regarding spa tourism and this document will focus on: how to improve health tourism services to enhance, on the one hand, the income-generating impact of tourism on the welfare of the region, and, on the other hand, the use of services by improving the well-being of local people. We want to focus especially in regional communication and a common place branding. Following this strategy, we want to investigate: how do spa providers grow their services (if they do so) and how they communicate them on their website (because the internet is the most effective communication medium).

### **Literature Review**

It is now important for destination managers to understand how to differentiate one place from another and increase benefits for communities in the light of increasing competition between destinations. In this sense, the creation and dissemination of an attractive destination image (place branding), among the stakeholders, is becoming a powerful tool for regional development.

While place branding seems closely related to product branding, place branding should not be seen just commercially oriented. In 1969, researchers Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy emphasized the need to apply marketing mechanisms to non-business sectors.

In this sense place branding should be aimed at implementing long-term development strategies and contribute not only to the economic, but also social well-being of communities. The brand's goal is not only to give an impetus to the economic development of the city, but also to address existing social problems and build a "harmonious city" for everyone who is somehow involved in land use and management.

Place branding is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon involving multiple actors of different interests. Place branding should not only be synonymous with a visual representation of the characteristics of the goods or services, while visual identification plays an important part in branding. Visual elements of a brand with their specific significance can represent brand values and communicate a message to an audience, thus

1 Kotler P. and Levy S. J. (1969), Broadening the concept of marketing, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 10-15

2 Paddison P. (1993), City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 340

"If there is a gap between identity of the place and its image, branding will not achieve expected goals." increasing the territorial exposure and recognition. However, this is just part of the branding process. "Rather than advertising, per se, place promotion has sought to rebuild and re-construct the image of the city, allied to which has been a strategy of targeting specific types of activities which both reflect and bolster the image."

Place branding is still considered a relatively new research field with multidisciplinary origins. The early academic interest came especially from the domains of urban policy, tourism and marketing

Since the beginning of the new millennium, there is a growing number of articles dealing with the concept of place branding and/or place marketing.

The literature uses the terms place promotion, place marketing and place branding often as synonyms. However, we consider that a clear distinction should be made between these concepts.

We researched a huge number of articles dealing with the idea of place branding and/or location marketing and this concept appears since the beginning of the new millennium.

The terms used in the literature place branding, place marketing and place promotion, often used as synonyms.

While there is no widely accepted definition of brand and branding, several scholars have tried to contribute to the term of discussion. One of the researchers claims that “brand image is the set of beliefs or associations relating to that name or sign in the mind of the consumer”, while a brand “is being within the domain of the product and consequently under the control of the producer”.

The cycle of branding begins with self-identification and the articulation of the place 's identity. Thus, branding should represent a collection of values important to local stakeholders and.

The aim of place branding is to achieve a desired brand image thought defining brand identity. If there is a gap between identity of the place and its image, branding will not achieve expected goals. To set up a link between brand image and identity, brand positioning is necessary. Brand positioning covers “4P” aspects (price, product, promotion and place), which are also called marketing mix and which relate to activities and initiatives that companies, or destinations, implement in order to “determine their position in the consumer’s mind”.

It is important to remember that place brand is dynamic and can't be built to last forever, only once. Place is a product of many communities coexisting and cooperating. Each group has its vision of the past, present, and future of the territory and these interactions cannot be neglected. Because branding is a process of narrative formation, all ideas about the place should be expressed in a brand; otherwise a brand does not portray all of the place's characteristics and would

possibly fail because of that. Consistency between fact and a brand image is essential to the entire cycle of branding.

On the example of Korça Region, what ideas identify the place that can relate to the region? What can be put at the core of its branding strategy to become relevant to stakeholders all over the world? Chaves E. (2017), Identity, positioning, brand image and brand equity comparison: a vision about quality in brand management, *Independent Journal of Management & Production*, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 1249, “If there is a gap between identity of the place and its image, branding will not achieve expected goals.”

### Methodology

With the suggestion of PB4, agrees that the main goal of this place branding strategy for the region of Korça (in terms of spa tourism) should be:

- (1) Attract new local and global tourists
- (2) Increase the location’s economy by attracting investors and launching new enterprises
- (3) Increase residents’ feelings of pride in where they live
- (4) Intensify coverage of the location in the media
- (5) Change the physical ambience of the location
- (6) Create smart places and a sustainable environment
- (7) Make the location more visible in people’s minds in terms of the five senses.

To collect the information and data needed for place branding, the process that was carried out by the partner and the following steps to be taken include a multi-method approach, including desk research on spa tourism, the creation and distribution of an online questionnaire among the main stakeholders (interlinked also with other deliverables of the project), and semi structured interviews with the stakeholders.

In this document are presented mainly the results from the desk research conducted by PB4

Who are the target stakeholders of this strategy?

Through evaluation of the community and industry trends, the following sectors have been identified as possible stakeholders of this strategy:

- Health and wellness sector
- State bodies
- Tourism in general
- Professional and business services
- Information technology sector, including software development, data management and storage, and technical support
- Transport
- Advanced manufacturing including clean technologies
- Distribution and logistics

#### Definition of health tourism

Health tourism defined in this report as a combination of medical tourism, wellness tourism and spa tourism - is claimed to be a booming subsector of general tourism in industry reports drafted by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI, 2017, p. 7).

To understand 'health tourism', one first needs to define what 'health' is. According to Benhacine, Hanslbauer, and Nungesser (2008, p. 36), health is a 'state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not only the absence of illness and ailment'.

This definition suits the broad nature of the health tourism market that not only contains elements of recovering from illness, but also includes the whole spectrum from illness to health and wellness and from curative to preventative and then promotive (Hall, 2011).

The leading handbooks with regard to health tourism (M. Smith & Puczkó, 2014; M. K. Smith & Puczkó, 2016), both report on studies that indicate that in some cases female health tourists are the majority of clients. Certainly, retreats and yoga treatments show evidence of this development. Also Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper (2009) reports on wellness tourists to Malaysia and Thailand, both indicating that



the majority of these tourists were female. In the case of medical tourism, IVF treatment and cosmetic surgery tourism are also gendered: female medical tourists form the majority in those forms of medical tourism, following Lunt, Horsfall, and Hanefeld (2015).

Many definitions exist for health tourism (please see Annex I for an overview), but we chose to follow M. Smith and Puczkó (2015, p. 206) who define health tourism as: 'those forms of tourism which are centrally focused on physical health, but which also improve mental and spiritual well-being and increase the capacity of individuals to satisfy their own needs and function better in their environment and society'.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/601985/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)601985\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/601985/IPOL_STU(2017)601985_EN.pdf)

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Over the last decade or so, the definition of medical tourism has been the subject of vivid academic debate, including 'intentional movement of patients' (Bookman & Bookman, 2007) and 'organised travel' (P. M. Carrera & Bridges, 2006), referring to intentional travel in medical tourism. Furthermore, we have extended the definition of medical tourism a consideration of the distinction between out-of-pocket payments and public coverage (also highlighted by P. Carrera and Lunt (2010) and Mainil (2012)). The first two references defining medical tourism as being based solely on out-of-pocket payments, with 'crossborder healthcare' covering travel that thus involves public coverage of care, most notably through EU legislation. However, as P. Carrera and Lunt (2010) have highlighted, the boundary between the two forms of cross-border patient mobility is permeable.

Following the discussion provided by Connell (2013), our proposed definition for medical tourism is: ‘the phenomenon of people travelling from their usual country of residence to another country with the expressed purpose of accessing medical treatment’.

Following Johnston, Puczkó, Smith, and Ellis (2011), we define wellness tourism as: ‘involving people travelling to a different place to proactively pursue activities that maintain or enhance their personal health and well-being, and who are seeking unique, authentic or location-based experiences or therapies that are not available at home’.

We choose this definition because of its all-encompassing focus on well-being, although other definitions for wellness tourism show notions and concepts along the same lines, such as physical, mental and social harmony (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), trips aiming at a state of health (M. Smith & Puczkó, 2015) and a multi-dimensional state of being (Hritz, Sidman, & D’Abundo, 2014). Following M. Smith and Puczkó (2014, p. 10), we define spa tourism as: ‘tourism focused on the relaxation, healing or beautifying of the body in spas using preventative wellness and/or curative medical techniques’.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/601985/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)601985\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/601985/IPOL_STU(2017)601985_EN.pdf)  
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### Spa Tourism as part of Health Tourism

Spa tourism Academic and business literature on spa tourism is dominated, at least in numerical terms, by research on products and services in Central and Eastern Europe, where spas around medical waters have a long tradition (M. Smith & Puczkó, 2014).

According to Derco (2014, p. 250), ‘the activities of natural curative spas in Slovakia are being currently influenced by the commercialisation of spa services

targeted at self-payers within health tourism. The health insurers' limited spa care and standard spa stay expenses require the spas to focus on the creation of wellness products (such as beauty stays, weekend wellness stays) and on marketing activities to present such products'. A Polish case study showed that for spa resorts a difference can be made between commercial and non-commercial spa tourists (Dryglas & Różycki, 2016). Furthermore, Szromek, Romaniuk, and Hadzik (2016) showed the privatisation process for the traditionally state-run spas in Central and Eastern Europe. The process is rather chaotic because of a lack of a clear policy vision, eligibility criteria and ideas about how to maintain the therapeutic potential of the spa sector. In Germany, the traditional spas (or 'Kurorten') have been significantly affected by recent reforms of the German healthcare system and have reacted by focussing more on the development of medical wellness (Pforr & Locher, 2012). This also shows the close relationships and some overlaps between medical and spa tourism.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/601985/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)601985\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/601985/IPOL_STU(2017)601985_EN.pdf)

### **Research on the current state of Place Branding**

Region of Korça, Sarandoporo

The diverse culture, the life-affirming mentality of the region have a great basis on which health tourism goods can be built and brands based on health tourism can also be produced according to our presumptions. The key research question is how the region is currently branding itself with regard to spa and health tourism. Analysis of structured content has been used as research methodology. The research method for this section was Internet research, as the main communication channel in the tourism industry nowadays.

Hereby the below mentioned questions and the specific form of study are induced to conduct the research.

- Is health and spa tourism presented on the main website of the Korça City official tourism website?

Procedure: Photo analysis, messages to see if there is health tourism content.

Results: There is no context that directly gives the message of spa and health tourism, Sarandoporo only appears as a mentioned destination with no further explanation.

- How does the quality of different web sites (text, pictures) suggest that travelers' well-being will be enhanced during the journey?

Procedure: review of photos, messages on the main page to see if there are references to the enhancement of wellbeing.

Results: Sarandoporo is mentioned in very few websites for its curative properties, however not in a marketing form and not in marketing websites.

- Are there specific health tourism subpages and/or wellness tourism subpages for the region?

Procedure: Check dedicated health tourism, and/or wellness tourism sub-website pages.

Results: No, there are no dedicated pages for the Korça Region and its thermal springs

- Which types of tourism is mostly marketed from the businesses of the region?

Procedure: On the website, search the businesses of the region

Results: Mostly mountain tourism is promoted, and the thermal spas are just mentioned as an attraction of the region.

- Is there a common wellbeing tourism slogan and if there is one, what is it?

Procedure: check whether there is a reference to wellness or / and health tourism in the slogans.

Results: No, there is no common wellbeing slogan for the area.

- Which sort of facilities, environment will the country's multimedia content display?

Operation: Review of videos, comments on sub-pages to see if there are connections to health tourism and wellness. In terms of results, we can say that spa

tourism appears very little for the region of Korça and there is no place branding of the zone with regard to spa and wellbeing tourism.

LB1 with the support of PB4 analyzed the goals of the Place Branding Strategy and further elaborated on what should be included in the Strategy. Not all the goals and actions set in the strategy are to be carried out by the project ALTTOUR, but rather by the region, dissemination of this strategy among the stakeholders is assessed by PB4 as very important.

#### Goal 1

##### Attract new local and global tourists

In Korça region, the revitalization of Spa Tourism would mean a great opportunity to improve economic vitality. Regions across the country have rediscovered the importance of their thermal springs, both small and large, and there are plenty of examples of revitalization and branding, while the Spring of Sarandoporo, has remained forgotten. In this situation for attracting new tourists it is indispensable for the region to attract new investors, as the spas and the wellbeing center are not in the best conditions.

The retention, expansion and attraction of businesses lies at the heart of the traditional practice of economic development. From this perspective, Spa Tourism in Sarandoporo has a slight competitive disadvantage over other fields. This is due to a variety of factors, including: the location, a few hours' drive from the nearest touristic city (Korça); a hilly terrain offering few developed businesses. However, these qualities can also make the Thermal Spas a special and attractive venue for both residents and tourists alike, seen as a getaway in nature (mostly preserved and wild in the region).

It should be a priority to deliver quality real estate to attract new businesses. Upon reviewing the buildings in the area, it was concluded that there is no suitable Class A building for Spa Tourism.

Based on the findings provided by PB4, we would suggest the following strategies:

→ Strategy 1: Include information on SPAs in the tourist information offices

→ Strategy 2: Raise awareness among decision-makers

→ Strategy 3: Expand Existing Businesses

→ Strategy 3: Increase awareness of thermal

By elaborating the abovementioned strategies into actions and specific tasks, the region will gain investors, have its own place branding and ultimately attract local and global tourists. The way we see it: if the region gets new investors and the existing businesses are empowered, the businesses themselves will work for attracting tourists.

## Goal 2

Increase the location's economy by attracting investors and launching new enterprises

In Korça region, the revitalization of SPA Tourism would mean a great opportunity to improve economic vitality. Regions across the country have rediscovered the importance of their thermal springs, both small and large, and there are plenty of examples of revitalization and branding, while the Spring of Sarandoporo, has remained forgotten. In this situation for attracting new tourists it is indispensable for the region to attract new investors, as the spas and the wellbeing center are not in the best conditions.

The retention, expansion and attraction of businesses lies at the heart of the traditional practice of economic development. From this perspective, Spa Tourism in Sarandoporo has a slight competitive disadvantage over other fields. This is due to a variety of factors, including: the location, a few hours' drive from the nearest touristic city (Korca); a hilly terrain offering few developed businesses. However, these qualities can also make the Thermal Spas a special and attractive venue for both residents and tourists alike, seen as a getaway in nature (mostly preserved and wild in the region).

It should be a priority to deliver quality real estate to attract new businesses. Upon reviewing the buildings in the area, it was concluded that there is no suitable Class A building for Spa Tourism.

Based on the findings of PB4 contribution, we would suggest the following strategies:

- Strategy 1: Implement a marketing campaign targeting industries and investors
- Strategy 2: Raise awareness among decision-makers
- Strategy 3: Expand Existing Businesses
- Strategy 3: Increase awareness for Thermal Spas as a profitable business and tourist attraction

By elaborating the abovementioned strategies into actions and specific tasks, the region will gain investors, have its own place branding and ultimately attract local and global tourists. The way we see it: if the region gets new investors and the existing businesses are empowered, the businesses themselves will work for attracting tourists.

### Goal 3

Increase residents' feelings of pride in where they live

The degree of civic pride restored by residents is a result of their individual and collective stake in the community. The first form of stakeholder holding is the 'emotional,' how people feel about the region and what it personally means to them. It takes time to establish and intensify this type of emotional connection and for this reason it is positively correlated with the period of residence. Residents whose families grew up in the region and whose friends still reside in the region have a big stake in their continued presence in the city.

For increasing the resident's feelings of pride we would suggest:

1. Communities are brought together by culture, traditions and common history, so this should be strongly emphasized.
2. Thermal Springs can be used to brand a community and this characteristic can set them apart from others.

3. By promoting Thermal Springs we can help foster a sense of ownership, belonging and pride

4. The Thermal Springs are deep in the collective memory of the residents, we just need to resurface it through dialogue and interviews about the past, ask about the legends on these waters etc.

Despite the limitations in being able to monitor our progress regionally, it is known that residents with a strong sense of pride and a sense of community are key to building strong, socially sustainable and connected communities. These people will act as advocates for their region and promote the positive aspects their region has to offer and contribute to improving their neighborhood (Wellington Regional Council 2011, p. 35)

#### Goal 4

Intensify coverage of the location in the media

It is possible to influence the image of the Thermal Springs and Spa Tourism by intensifying media coverage. However media coverage should include interesting content, for example local stories could be picked to local media. Media is more likely to cover economic development news, so this project can be the start of the relation regional community-media.

Some actions that can be taken:

1. Give out press releases

The media can't cover what they don't know, so this project, the businesses and the community should raise some interest through press releases

2. In the place branding website a "Press Page" should be set up

This way the media has a "to go destination" for news on thermal springs

3. Come up with a media and social media strategy

4. Always emphasize success stories

#### Goal 5

Change the physical ambience of the location



This Strategy strongly stresses the community's desire to enhance their quality of life.

The region enjoys a number of quality place assets, including nature, culinary and by historic buildings nestled among forested hills and mountains, as well as close proximity to the river of Vjosa. In short, there is enormous potential for Thermal Spas and the region should be embraced as a symbol of that transformation. The region offers a range of attractions with spectacular scenery, excellent opportunities for outdoor entertainment and outdoor sports. We already mentioned that the residents should take pride in the region 's unique natural beauty and appreciate local culture. On this, cultural events should be organized, aiming at changing the ambience of the location. A deep appreciation of the area as a holiday destination can also change the overall way how people feel about the area.

While tourism is an important attraction to the region, the average visitor is in the area for a short visit or passing by, rather than an extended holiday, and is unlikely to enjoy many of the regions natural beauty and hence it will not be possible to attend cultural events. Raising the profile of activities, organizing for example Music Festivals, provides an opportunity change the destination from a passing by location, to a holiday destination. Supporting a wider concept of shared entertainment, including arts, cultural activities, and outdoor leisure, would not only draw a new demographic of visitors, but would also improve the mobile talent potential of the area. Marketing and place branding are integral components for achieving this goal.

#### Goal 6

##### Create smart places and a sustainable environment

The region is very far from creating smart places. However, it is true that the region needs energy, new ideas, smart solutions build on a sustainable environment. We would suggest here attracting young professionals –25 to 40 years old – usually young professionals are trained, mobile, energetic and bring new and innovative ideas, this will ultimately end up will building smart places.

Focusing on creating, attracting and retaining young professionals should be an integral part of the strategy.

Something else that can be done to help the region create smart places and sustainable environment is to develop a local atmosphere where entrepreneurship is welcomed and celebrated.

Create a public relations strategy to raise awareness on the success stories of national entrepreneurs of smart places, and interlink these smart places with Spa Tourism.

Interviewing the successful local entrepreneurs and successful smart businesses entrepreneurs could build a collection of inspiring success stories.

The idea of smart places can be pitched to local media contacts.

Plan in the region an international or national conference in the field of smart businesses.

#### Goal 7

Make the location more visible in people's minds in terms of the five senses.

Branding is not just flyers and logos. This because we as human beings are feelings.

Everything communicates with the customers at an emotional level. Our senses are very related to and always activated by these emotions – sight, smell, sound, taste and touch.

Think of one of your favorite destinations. Do you associate a certain smell or sound with it? When you taste a certain food or see something special like a picture, will the memory pop up? Those are the same sort of sensory sensations that customers tend to encounter as they choose their travel destinations.

The region has full possibilities to target all the five senses. It just needs to be a little more in the attention of the businesses and while branding the region.

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