


NATIONAL REPORT OF RESEARCH (PR1) of Crestart Project

Partner organisation, country: Forum foundation, BG

1. Presentation of the pilot location:

Presentation of the pilot location	About the pilot location: (max 1000 characters)	Demographics and population by denomination/religion
<p>City/ town where the interviews are conducted: Lovech, BG</p>  <p>Area: 930.8 km² Number of inhabitants: 53,578 Ratio of inhabitants (young/old, working age): 65% people aged 60+</p>	<p>Lovech (Bulgarian: Ловеч, romanized: Lovech, pronounced [ˈɫɔvɛtʃ]); is a city in north-central Bulgaria. It is the administrative center of the Lovech Province and of the subordinate Lovech Municipality. The city is located about 150 kilometers (93 miles) northeast from the capital city of Sofia. Near Lovech are the towns of Pleven, Troyan and Teteven.</p> <p>Advantages and disadvantages: Lovech is one of the alarmingly depopulating districts in Bulgaria with an increasing share of the aging population (at the age over 65). There is a great but not fully utilized potential for all sorts of tourism and organic food production in the district. The administrative center Lovech is less developed then some of the smaller towns like Troyan, Letnica, Lesidren, etc., which is due to the capture of the local economy by people not being able to develop its full potential but at the same time not allowing others to do so and also due to the local government reluctance</p>	<p>Population by ethnos (%):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulgarians - 83.68 ● Turks - 3.06 ● Gypsies - 4.03 ● Others - 0.64 <p>Religion (%):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orthodox - 59.75 ● Catholics - 0.53 ● Protestants - 0.91 ● Muslims - 2.31 ● Others - 0.08 ● None - 6.68 ● They do not self-determine - 7.62 ● Not shown - 22.08



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to implement policies in support to further and advanced local regional development.

Forty years ago the region was industrial center with many light and heavy industry factories, including the only cars manufacturing plant in Bulgaria. There was also a well-developed agricultural sector.

The rapid and prevailingly not transparent privatization of the economy in the 90s changed the industrial landscape of the district, leaving it with only few working factories, seriously damaged agriculture and huge army of unemployed people. Sometime in the late 90s criminal groups hijacked the local economy and had been suffocating every single entrepreneurial initiative.

Nowadays the situation is a bit different – the criminal groups are already legal businessmen and the local economy is still to a great extent captured by them, but there are also new initiatives and enterprises that gain international recognition – for example Walltopia (the worldwide famous producer of climbing walls) or Rico Style - a furniture producer furnishing some of the world's famous hotel and restaurant chains, the football club Tottenham, Formula 1 speedway Silverstone, Wimbledon, World Trade Center in Dubai, etc. Some SMEs are slowly making their path but the lack of qualified and motivated labour force is stopping their further growth and expansion. It might sound like a paradox, but although the big number of unemployed people, the business still faces a lack of good workers. The supply and demand on labour market do not meet regarding qualification, discipline and remuneration of labour





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	<p>force.</p> <p>The local community is divided. Main problems faced by Lovech community defined according to the respondents opinion are lack of business opportunities, low income, corruption, migration of young people from Lovech to Sofia, Varna, other bigger cities and abroad. The social and cultural life in the district is quite limited and in many ways affects young people decisions to leave. Other problems are related to lack of qualified labour force, lack of good health care, few places for sports, no working cinema that do not meet the requirements in terms of quality, lack of universities, poor infrastructure, low birth rate.</p> <p>Many small places and villages don't have access to constant medical services.</p> <p>The interviewed people find the cultural sector extreme fragile and instable in general and after the Covid crisis it is even vulnerable.</p>	
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2. Research input:

Nr of personal interviews: 13

Analyses of Activities	INTERPRETATION OF THE OUTCOMES AND ELEMENTS FOR ANALYSIS	Comments from the partner <i>We will incorporate this evaluation column into the overall summary.</i>
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<p>Activities</p> <p>Describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The key elements of the activities. - Which target-group they are aiming at - How long does the activity exist? - The ratio of professionals to volunteers - What kind of environment they work in (social/cultural) 	<p>Try to find the general picture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Relevance of the activities to the objectives of the Crestart project</i> - <i>Extent to which the activities are suitable of realizing synergies between old and new formats</i> - <i>Extent to which the activities are innovative</i> - <i>Extent to which the activities are based on cultural traditions</i> - <i>Extent to which the activities are complementary to pre-covid initiatives and activities.</i> - <i>Do the activities address a specific target-group?</i> - <i>Did the activities produce unexpected results?</i> - <i>Are the activities based upon existing traditions?</i> - <i>Were the activities targeting communities with special needs or fewer opportunities?</i> - <i>Were existing activities able to continue during Covid?</i> - <i>Extent to which the new activities bring added value to the communities</i> 	<p>Main activities: Local cultural community centers (chitalisha) activities</p> <p>Target groups: Local community, visitors, folklore artists</p> <p>How long does the activities exist: A chitalishte (Bulgarian: читалище, pronounced [tʃiˈtaliftɛ]). Derives from the verb "чета" - "to read" or "читател" - "reader") is a typical Bulgarian public institution and building that fulfills several functions at once, such as a community centre, library, cinema and a theatre. It is also used as an educational institution, where people of all ages can enroll in foreign language, dance, music and other courses.</p> <p>The chitalishta of the 19th and early 20th century had a crucial role in preserving and developing Bulgarian culture and thus played an important role during the Bulgarian National Revival. The first institutions of this kind emerged towards the end of the Ottoman era, in 1856.</p> <p>The ratio of professionals to volunteers: Almost all of the activities are developed and implemented by volunteers. They are involved to organize chitalishe libraries, to help in festivals, celebrations, etc. There are not only people but also</p>
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		<p>organizations which volunteer in support to the social and cultural life on community level..</p> <p>Relevance: Chitalishta are central to the process of transmitting intangible cultural heritage in Bulgaria as well as in Lovech, with elderly members playing a key role in encouraging young people to get involved. The efficiency of chitalishte is demonstrated by their increasing numbers over the years and the growing numbers of participants in their activities, representing all ages and population groups. With a view to popularizing and presenting intangible cultural heritage, chitalishta organize festivals, celebrations, gatherings, exhibitions and so on, and one innovative approach for developing chitalishta is the establishment of local centres for documenting, archiving and handing over knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Chitalishta faced problems during Covid as there was a limit up to 30% of the capacity to be used in the different events.</p>
<p>Organisation of activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the activities develop during Covid? - Who were the most active players, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extent to which the activities involve existing organizations. - Extent to which the activities are co-created with the communities. - Extent to which the activities involved ideas from the participants 	<p>Nearly all cultural activities had stopped during covid crisis. Almost all of the institutions changed their activities in support of the local community with main target old people and representatives of vulnerable groups. Lovech district chitalishta initiated many activities in open spaces, in support to social providers,</p>





<p>organizations or active citizens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were ideas of participants used? - Which role did digital media play? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extent to which the activities involved digital media - Name some success factors - Were the activities organized top-down or bottom-up? - Did the activities involve new actors? - Were the activities organized in a spontaneous way or were they planned? 	<p>different community based activities.</p> <p>Many citizens, members, volunteers, activists were organized and took part.</p> <p>Since the beginning of the pandemic, many Bulgarians and especially young families have decided to start living in the countryside due to the freedom and better conditions which village lifestyle offers. The existence of a high-speed internet in the villages allows distant work. Nevertheless some people have return to cities after the first covid waves the process is not a temporary phenomenon. It is a natural process in which Bulgarian villages will be inhabited by a new type of people who want to change their way of life. These people come with new ideas, skills and ambitions, and bring a lot of new opportunities.</p>
<p>Handling Crisis Situations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The influence of COVID on the activities. - Did new initiatives arouse because of COVID? - Are there activities that are more widely applicable in times of crisis, or war? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will the activities have a substantial positive impact on the organizations that were involved and on their staff? - Will the activities have a substantial Impact on the involved participants? - Will the activities remain after the COVID crisis? - Will other organizations benefit from the lessons learned? 	<p>The volunteers' movement has been strengthened during covid pandemic.</p> <p>The local authorities, organizations, cultural centers had to start thinking in a new way supported by new for the local community people as the following open door initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seatings (women get together, thy sing local folklore songs, knit and chat about daily life) - community seeds-sharing meetings - community discussions and sharing advices on growing agricultural products





		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organizing bread kneading - chants - organizing activities for children in the library, drawing, reciting poems, etc. - competitions – drawings, poems, etc
<p>Overall comment to the partners</p>	<p>Highlight the strengths and weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will other organizations benefit from the lessons learned? - Do the activities have the potential to be transferred and exploited in other European countries? - Do the activities have the potential to be transferred and exploited in other international crises? - Topics where improvement is needed? - Lessons to learn and things to get better at - Best practices that can add value. 	<p>Other organisations will benefit from the lessons learnt and the transfer of experience and activities has started on national level thus can be transferred and exploited in other European countries</p> <p>There is a need to improve the extent to which the local community is involved. In all activities carried out during covid, local people have shown proactive approach and eagerness to be involved in all cultural activities and nevertheless of the restrictions.</p> <p>The use of various digitalization tools would greatly improve the opportunities for access to culture, as well as its distribution in smaller villages and towns.</p> <p>During the pandemic, volunteers’ movement has demonstrated its potential thus this has to be well structured and developed.</p> <p>Chitalishte has great opportunities to mediate access to various online cultural events and potential to manage a cooperation and networks of cultural organizations and social service providers, through which older people and people from vulnerable groups can reach online and</p>





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		other cultural events at the local level.
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