“BALKAN IDEAS NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS IN THE AGRO-FOOD SECTOR” - “BALKANET”

Communication Plan

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1 Introduction

BALKANET project is inspired by the following three elements: the awareness that it is strategically important to facilitate pilot innovative business models in agro-food sector of BMP area, the conviction that is important to improve transnational cooperation opportunities of the target area, it is necessary to enhance an operative Network through local SME's and research centres with particular regard to young innovators skills, the importance of communication transferring of best practices to foster sustainable growth of the area.

The overall objective of the project is to favour the potential of innovation, the promotion of applied research and the support to SMEs sustainable adjustment capacity.

The added value of the project is to cover strategic agro-food topic areas:

1) Agriculture/farming methods and techniques,
2) Product processing,
3) Packaging and marketing.

The project answers to some of specific needs of the target areas:

- Optimize the role of a key local activity like agro-food sector;
- Face to the actual socioeconomical frame, conditioned by high unemployment rates, especially of young people;
- To increase SME's competitiveness with special reference to sustainable innovative models.

According to this, Balkanet can secure critical mass, enhancing mobilisation capacity and innovation potential to overcome markets fragmentation.

Main Objectives

1. Identifying, analyzing and sharing of existing agro-food best practices and innovative business models valorization in the BMP area,
2. Transnational Cooperation Network between public/private research centers and local enterprises in order to improve SME's efficiently and adjustment capacity, with particular reference to the improvement of young innovators skills and business competences,

3. Raising awareness, transferring knowledge and fostering common understanding about the importance of sustainable business innovations in agro-food sector of BMP area.

Project Objectives

BALKANET objectives are identified as following:

1. Identifying, analyzing and sharing of existing agro-food best practices and innovative business models valorization in the BMP area,
2. Transnational Cooperation Network between public/private research centers and local enterprises in order to improve SME's efficiently and adjustment capacity, with particular reference to the improvement of young innovators skills and business competences,
3. Raising awareness, transferring knowledge and fostering common understanding about the importance of sustainable business innovations in agro-food sector of BMP area.

Expected project output

The main outputs are the following:

1. BMP agro food context analyses and benchmarking document. It will collect challenges and positive aspects of socioeconomic frame of BMP area – WP3
2. Creation of agro food sector innovative best practices and product /processes ideas Data Base – WP3
3. Creation of local stakeholders Group Data Base – WP3
4. Project Platform Network that is also official web site and – WP4
5. Digital web service system for all the stakeholders involved in the project – WP4
6. Creation of a Guideline document to support new innovative enterprises – WP4
7. Creation of a communication and marketing plan to support new innovative enterprises – WP4
8. Organization of experience workshops / field visits in order to facilitate the knowledge transfer and the cooperation actions among local stakeholders – WP5

9. Innovative best practices sharing meetings to improve transnational connections through SME's – WP5

Aims of the Communication Plan

Planning a strategic communication path is the key activity to create and consolidate the above mentioned "network", as well as to involve Stakeholders into the project activities.

This Communication Plan presents a set of guidelines for the Communication of BALKANET, with the main objectives to **inform** on the project progressing, main activities, and results, to increase project general visibility as well as to raise awareness on its action and goals among interested parties; to **foster** the active participation of all relevant stakeholders in order to enhance best participation and quality of project's activities.

The document establishes the basic principles to be applied by the Partnership to the corporate communication of the project and to the full range of dissemination actions that will be implemented.

This plan is intended as:

- an operational document that gives practical advice on how to generate publicity for the project and activities;
- a "living document", that will adopt those actions fitting our communication needs over the course of the project.

The main strategic purposes of this Communication plan are:

- to develop an integrated marketing communication
- to coordinate communication among Partners
    - to provide maximum visibility for project activities
    - project outputs, with particular reference to new services
- to support WP leaders in attracting stakeholders (Policy Makers) to participate in the activities defined
- to reach all audience in multiple ways
- to be effective and efficient community-wide
- to promote participation and encourage collaboration

- to communicate with a broad external audience
- to disseminate Publications and other outputs delivered during the project runtime, in particular:
    - Platform
    - Website
    - Communication Package
    - Agrofood festivals
    - Work Shops and Field Visits
    - Best practices sharing meetings

2 SWOT analysis

The Communication Plan starts from the situation analysis, considering project's communication **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats (SWOT). This short analysis of the current situations of BALKANET Project allows us to better define our communication goals and subsequent actions.

Strengths	**Weakness**
Which are the strengths of the project? • Effective teamwork skills • Successful use of ICT by our stakeholders • Key selection of the partners type, scope and role	Which are the potential weaknesses of the project? • Fragmented market demand • Low level of ICT used • Low level of cross - sectorial cooperation • Low knowledge of the official language of the project (English) by a part of stakeholders
Opportunities	**Threats**
What opportunities exist? • New skills created by the project • Existence of partners' communication Channels (i.e. institutional web site) • Social Media and online communities	Are there any potential threats? • Legislation, procedures and standards for cross-border collective connections not linked and harmonized on local, regional and cross-border level • Hyper-legislation, frequently inapplicable or not shaped on companies' needs, praxis and opportunities; • Global economic crisis • Duration of the BALKANET Project, quite short compared to the time required to enable significant changes

3 Audiences

The Programme Area, which includes the whole territory of Greece, Albania, FYROM, Bulgaria and Cyprus.

BALKANET partnership is consisted of partners from Greece, Albania, and Bulgaria.

BALKANET target groups are addressed on the following audiences:

Internal Audiences

- Partners, representing policy makers, universities, Regional Authorities and Chambers of Commerce and the project is structured in the way to achieve the optimum networking and expertize exchange among the different types of stakeholders.

First Level External Audiences (Direct beneficiaries – Directly Participating Community Members)**:**

All the work packages are able to intercept with specific actions, i.e. publishing calls for interest aimed at different stakeholders, the following target groups:

- in WP4-5 entrepreneurial young innovators, SME's and associations related to the agrofood sector;
- in WP3 research and institutional partners and private actors as well

Second Level External Audiences

The outputs of WP2 and WP5 are addressed also to three main target groups:

- Policy makers;
- Programme area stakeholders and neighbourhood interested in the above mentioned issues;
- Civil society;
- Media

General Public Strategy

The communication work package is coordinated by ILIA Chamber of Commerce.

In order to be successful, the BALKANET action has to be supported by an efficient and clear communication strategy running throughout the project runtime. Communication serves the twofold need to punctually inform on project

implementation, and involve stakeholders from Europe into its activities in order to broaden project impact and results.

The strategy of this Communication plan will work at a local/regional level and at the same time at Balkan/European level.

Each partner will be responsible for raising awareness about the project in its own region and cities, through the use of its existing and proven stakeholder networks and communication channels.

Our strategy starts from a CONSTANT FLUX OF COMMUNICATION emitted by a COMMUNICATION GROUP instituted inside the project.

The final communication task of the partnership will be **to create a unique image of the network created by the project** and to communicate its new strategic services and its new approach for a sustainable and innovative freight and passengers sector.

This main objective will be achieved through different and complementary levels of communication:

- The creation of an institutional and easily recognizable project's image;
- Communicate and promote the platform;
- Communicate and promote the best practices and results.

Key Communicators:

- Strategic Planning Communication Group
    - Partners (1 contact person for communication activities)

All communication will flow through the Strategic Planning Communication Group that will share info **monthly**. Members include representatives from the Partnership that will contribute to the construction of news and to the constant population of social media.

<u>Tasks of Strategic Planning Communication Group</u>

- Approval of Communication Plan
- Sharing of methods, and communication of exploitation progress within the project

- Apply the visual identity strategy
- Create mailing list to disseminate info and materials to potential stakeholders
- Update project-devoted web pages with activities, events and documents (check every week)
- Provide relevant contents for the 8 issues of the Project NewsletterOpen and Populate Strategic Planning Social Media (every day to 15 days)
- Provide information to be published either in the web pages or in the press relies;
- Link partners web site to the BALKANET web pages
- Identify and participate in relevant Event and other Public Opportunities
- Create press releases / Articles in professional journals and magazines

Modes of Message Delivery

Internal Sources

- Google Drive
- Email, including information about opportunities for input, summaries of results, updates on the process, reminders about additions to the web site and social media
- Meetings
    - Project Meetings
    - Call Conferences

External Sources

- Mailing List
- Internet (newspapers websites)
- International, National and Regional General Newspapers
- International, National and Regional Sectorial Press
- National and Regional Television Stations
- National and Regional Radio Stations

- Social Media
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - LinkedIn
  - Instagram

General tactic

- ➔ **Share methods, tools and templates for the sake of consistency and efficiency**
- ➔ **Each media promotes all the others**
- ➔ **Each action is a project event that must be communicated**

Exchange processes with the involved Stakeholders

With the aim to involve Stakeholders in project activities, they will be constantly updated on the project findings, results, events planned and publications so as to ensure a maximum replication and extension of the project results.

The Stakeholders will be the first target of the project communication, achieved through a **MAILING LIST** that will be set up to support the dissemination of news and materials.

Each partner will build a mailing list based on its relevant contacts and it will be the responsibility of each partner to disseminate relevant communications to the Stakeholders.

Through the project Mailing list the Stakeholders will periodically receive:

- Press releases
- News about activities and events
- Newsletter and relevant publications edited by the project

On the other hand, BALKANET will integrate all relevant information about particularly successful best practices, inventions, patents, relevant events organized by them, in its communication contents, through:

- Mentions on Articles on local traditional media

- Involving them in local and European events
- Following them on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn
- Post news about them
- Retweet and use “Like” for its news

4 Visual Identity

Partner Responsible for the Action: Lead Beneficiary

The visual identity reported in the following pages tries to find a simple, clear and visually attractive way to communicate BALKANET project.

To foster a professional and more cohesive visual identity for the communication of all the Partners, this plan is accompanied by a **KIT OF PRE-SET FILES** that can be personalized for each event ensuring consistency in the image of the project.

General tactic

- ➔ **Communicate consistently;**
- ➔ **Generate a common project message through templates for communication instruments;**
- ➔ **Follow the rules of the guide entitled "An Integrated Communication Guide for Projects" of the Transnational Cooperation Programme Interreg Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020".**

Focus on communication rules

- **Titling.** The complete denomination of the Programme is Transnational Cooperation Programme Interreg Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020. The correct usage of the Programme's name is compulsory in all official documents, projects' outputs and advertising materials, as it enforces the Programme's brand identity;
- **Emblem/Programme Logo -Slogan/Flags /Reference to EU& ERDF contribution**. In order to acknowledge the European Union's contribution, all Project activities (i.e. buildings, vehicles, events, equipment, publications, advertisements, websites, documents and certificates, promotional items such as t-shirts, pens, etc.) financed by the Programme funds must display **EU emblem**, **the Programme logo** and the flags of the countries participating in the Programme, according to the legal framework;
- Moreover, the relevant project activities must have an explicit reference to EU contribution, including a reference to the relevant financing sources :i.e. ***"The Project is co-funded by the European Union - and by National Funds of the participating countries"***;

- **Official Language** All I&P outputs (deliverables) must be in English, the official language of the programme, however, Greek, Albanian and Bulgarian may be used for better promotion of the project, i.e. a study, a leaflet, a poster, a website, etc.,;
- **Quality photographs (professional photos)** showing the project (the implementation and completion of the project various actions) must be taken for communication purposes (promotional use). These photographs should show the project in its context, highlighting the concrete results and impact of it (i.e. a photo that shows a conference room with the participants). The Lead Partner is responsible for sending the photographic materials (in an electronic form – jpg and of a good quality for advanced printing) to the Communication Officer of the JTS, immediately after the completion of the project or/and the project actions.

Note: *Project Partners are obliged to send the Information and Publicity Plan and the Information and Publicity Materials, mentioned in the article 5 of this guide (i.e. samples of leaflets, booklets, CDs, ads, promotion materials, press clippings etc.) to the Communication Officer of the JTS.*

Information and instructions on the use of the Program Logo and European flag are available at: http://www.interreg-balkanmed.eu/gallery/Files/Library/Project%20Implementation/BMP_CommunicationGuide.pdf

The BALKANET Logo

According to the BMP Communication Guide the project logo will have the following format.



Proper use of the LOGO gives the project a clearly recognizable visual identity and strengthens its public image. For this reason, the LOGO should never be altered, modified, or obstructed in any way or reproduced in other than its complete form.

Examples of Communication instruments

The BALKANET visual identity is composed by the following principal instruments that will advertising the project and support all the communication actions:

- letterheads
- folder
- business card for the Partners' staff
- leaflet template
- posters (70x100 and 6x3)
- roll up
- power point template
- Facebook template
- Twitter template
- Banner

The visual identity represents a framework within which each partner, in accordance with its own budget and with its own activities, will realize, after sharing with the LP and the WP Leader, the material more useful for the promotion of their actions..

Promotional Materials: Leaflets
Partner Responsible for the Action: LB
Contributions: -All partners
Prints: -PP2, PP3 and PP6

- **Note:** *Among the communication output, Partnership must provide at least 12.000 leaflets and brochures that will be distributed during all public events (conferences, seminars and workshops)*

5 Website

Partner Responsible for the Action: LB
WP Leaders: LB
Participants: all Partners

According to the "Information and Publicity Guidelines for Project Partners" the website shall be launched at least in the Programme language and shall provide information on the Project, its progress and results.

The website must follow the visual identity established with this communication plan.

Project Partners must display the LOGO on their websites or the website(s) financed by the Programme funds (referring to European Territorial Cooperation and the EU co-funding).

The website has to be linked with the Programme's website. It shall be launched within the first six (6) months after the Project start and shall be kept online for at least two years after Project closure. It shall run under its own Project domain (e.g. www.projectname.eu), as well as being part of an institutional website (e.g. www.ministry-environment.gr/department-for-water/research-andprojects/project-name/html).

The website represents the main source of information on all project activities to which all interested parties can be directed and will also be a key usable and dynamic tool to serve the road-mapping work.

Below you find the description of the minimal BALKANET website structure:

- HOMEPAGE: the entry point to the website, it outlines clearly all tools and sections of the web
- ABOUT BALKANET: presentation of the project, of the partners and latest news
- RESEARCH INFORMATION TOOL: the research information tool is a web database to be updated in the course of the project following research roadmapping activities and which will collect identified key actors, capacities, list of priorities, resources, etc. The access to this tool will of course be restricted: access will be managed by the Lead Partner, which will track registrations to the website and will be in charge of updating the table.
- EVENTS: It will list both events organised by BALKANET (workshops, seminars, exhibitions, press conferences) and events organised by other initiatives and which may be of interest for BALKANET scope.
- PLATFORM: a link to the project platform.
- DOCUMENT REPOSITORY: The repository will serve as the archive of project-generated material so that it can be easily accessible and downloadable by the whole consortium: it will include working documents, presentations, deliverables, reports, support material, communication material.

The BALKANET website will be linked to and publicized on other websites. A Referencing and Link Exchange Strategy will be devised in order to register the BALKANET website both on the major and the specialized search engines and directories.

6 Project Events

The BALKANET project events strategy includes:

- Events carried out both at local and international level
- Events organized both by the Partnership and events or initiatives which may be of interest for the project's scope (e.g. Exhibitions).

General tactic

- ➔ **to disseminate the project as well as the promotional instruments (brochure, roll up, etc);**
- ➔ **to promote actions and results;**
- ➔ **to foster the highest participation and involving as many stakeholders as possible;**
- ➔ **to promote dialogue with key sector stakeholders;**

Project Meetings

The Project Meetings are internal events but they have to be considered as an occasion to construct news and press releases and to communicate the state-of-the art of the project to a broad external audience.

7 Project Meetings (Project & Steering Committee meetings)		
PLACE	**DATE**	**ORGANIZED BY**
Steering Committee – Pyrgos	**10/2017**	LB
Steering Committee – Vratsa	**02/2018**	PP5
Steering Committee – Tirana	**05/2019**	PB3
Project Meeting Kickoff - Pyrgos	**10/2017**	LB
Project Meeting – Vratsa	**02/2018**	PP6
Project Meeting – Pyrgos	**03/2019**	PP2
Project Meeting Final Meeting – Tirana	**09/2019**	PP3

Among the project meetings, a **final meeting** will be act as a final dissemination and marketing activity towards the interested European parties, in order to make them aware of studies performed and made them fully acquainted of the tools, knowledge and data gathered and produced in the course of the project. The final conference is intended as an opportunity to communicate to the territorial areas as well as to European and international community active in the themes related with the project, about its results, activities performed and objectives achieved.

All partners are required to participate to the event and give their contribution on its structuring.

Dissemination Events

The project dissemination events provided in the AF are:

3 Agrofood Festivals

- LP - Pyrgos October 2018
- PP3 – Tirana 08/2018
- PP5 - Vratsa September 2018

3 workshops and field visits

- LP - Nov 2018,
- PP3 - March 2019,
- PP5 - May 2019

3 Best Practices sharing meetings

- LP - May 2019
- PP3 – July 2019
- PP5 & PP6 - June 2019

Events will be carried out after by the local partner, while structure and general strategy will be agreed at partnership level. Locally, the partner shall:

- prepare specific agenda in collaboration with the Lead Partner
- carry out all practical arrangements
- invite speakers and promote the event within target audience
- coordinate the events
- communicate the event to the Media

7 The Traditional Media Strategy

The best way to reach Stakeholders would be combining social media and traditional media such as:

- Local newspaper
- Sector related magazines
- Radio
- TV

General tactic

- ➔ **Production of a template for drafting 10 press releases (according to the AF, in order to guarantee a format able to meet journalists' requirements and thus increase publication chances**
- ➔ **Creation of a mailing list of journalists and media**
- ➔ **Organization of press conferences**
- ➔ **Verification of news publication**
- ➔ **Drafting and submission of press reviews**

Even though that the realization of a press conference it is not stated at the Application Form, 3 press conferences will be organized one per country. The exact date will be decided by the partnership, ideally in combination to another bigger event, for example an Agrofood festival or a workshop. In this way the partnership will have the chance to use another more direct way to promote the project and inform the public by its activities.

8 Newsletters

Partner Responsible for the Action: LB

Contributions: all Partners

The objectives, plans, activities and achievements of the BALKANET project will be periodically reported by means of an electronic newsletter. The newsletter will be a short but catchy document in order to keep high the interest of recipients. Each issue will present the activities and results that are being performed and achieved in the course of the project, as well as point to other online information sources that will allow the recipients to investigate further.

At least 4 newsletters (approximately one every 6 months) will be developed throughout the duration on the project. The newsletter will draw on information and news coming from all partners, and to some extent also on other external sources (European institutions, other relevant initiatives in the region) and will present:

- Editorial commenting on key developments since the last issue;
- Lead section briefing on major BALKANET achievements and next actions;
- Brief note on reports and other key documents;
- Relevant events and news
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Each newsletter will be uploaded in the public section of the website and will be electronically mailed on a systematic basis to stakeholders, associations and companies from BALKANET mailing sources and others, in order to raise awareness on the project and highlight the latest news and to obtain their feedback and comments on the project activities and results.

9 The Social Media Strategy

Partner Responsible for the Action: PP5 and PP6

Action Leader: LB

Contributions: all Partners

With their users signing up every day, Social media represent an opportunity through which BALKANET project can reach Stakeholders for the promotion of activities, news and events. In addition to disseminating information, social media offers the opportunity to involve stakeholders and to **FORM ONLINE COMMUNITIES**.

General Tactic:

- ➔ **Integration of platforms in order to achieve a multiplier effect (and to manage them easily)**
- ➔ **Offer of a way for users to participate and provide feedbacks on BALKANET profiles**
- ➔ **Promote the BALKANET website**

Goals:

- To have a solid group of followers
- To create a community composed above all by the project's Stakeholders
- To post quality content that would be of interest to the audience, and that strengthens either the image or recognition of the project

The platforms

- **Facebook** www.facebook.com/BALKANET
- **Twitter** www.twitter.com/BALKANET
- **Instagram** www.instagram.com/BALKANET
- **Linkedn** www.linkedin.com/BALKANET

The integration of the 4 platforms will allow us also to publish our news on one of them and simultaneously update the others.
The profile names are indicative, subject to the name availability.

Social Media Guidelines

- Involve followers: answer questions and quickly provide direction to resources

- Highlight news/activities/events: Share information and links for upcoming events and activities or news related to the audience, both regional and international, as well as share post event information
- Photo/video posting: Documenting the project events and realize photographic stories
- Push media mentions: links to stories about innovation / best practises / pilot cases from BALKANET platforms
- Cross-promotion: post news and comments from BALKANET website, and in general from similar EU accounts, to strengthen the focus on the policy of UE; promote related Partners activities; promote news and comments; promote related stakeholders activities
- Link sharing: Share links and updates of BALKANET website and stakeholders. This will help keep the account active, and build relationships and brand recognition with followers
- Follow trends: Use searches and hashtags to find relevant posts about the project field of interest
- Using the # symbol, called a hashtags, to mark keywords or topics and categorize messages.

11 Final publications

- **Guideline Book for the creation of innovative enterprises**
- **Marketing Roadmap Tool**

Partner Responsible for the Action: LP WP Leader: LP Contributions: all Partners

The **Guideline Book** and **Marketing Roadmap Tool** will be two main publications of the project.
The Guideline Book will be actually a manual to facilitate the creation /registration of innovative SMEs, having a generic part and then a specialization per country with topics such as the different legislation and procedures, tax and financial issues, legal base, documentation, steps for establishment and registration according to the national legislation / institutions responsible for registration, etc.

The **Marketing Roadmap Tool** will be a practical guide for marketing techniques and case studies towards the better promotion of innovative SMEs.

Position paper

Partner Responsible for the Action: LP Contributions: all Partners

BALKANET results and output will be collected by the partnership in one position paper to be addressed to Managing Authority, to National and Regional Authorities in order to better address together the next EU and National policies and to create a system able to be used at BalkanMed area level taking into consideration the knowledge gained the project implementation.

12 After- BALKANET communication plan

The publication and dissemination of the conclusions, outputs and results of the BALKANET project is as important phase during the project as after the end of it. Although dissemination is carried out during the whole project, at the end of it the final deliverables need to be transferred to Stakeholders. The final public outputs to be disseminated are:

- The Platform and its services
- Position Paper

General tactic

- ➔ **Inform key sector stakeholders about the end of the project**
- ➔ **Transfer the final outputs to the project stakeholders**
- ➔ **Bring the stakeholders/ followers of the project to attend the BALKANET website and its services for freight sector**

Action

- **WEB CHANNELS AND TOOLS:** Use the European several tools and platforms to publish the project outputs:
  - existing platform and tools
- **FINAL MAILING:** Send final Informative mails addressed to the project Stakeholders to announce where the project outputs are published and available
- **CAPITALIZE the BALKANET results joining other EU project!**

13 Plan Impact

The success of the Communication plan will be measured according to the following criteria:

- Number of press releases published on BALKANET website
- Feedbacks and comments received as a result of posting project information and activities triggering comments in the project website
- Queries posed by stakeholders with regard to the BALKANET project
- Responses to e-mails directed to various stakeholders
- Analysis of distribution of communication materials (i.e. number of downloads, number of printed copies, number of events where it have been distributed)
- Coverage and publication of project press releases by the press and in general by traditional media
- Dimension of the project mailing list at the end of the project
- Number of Followers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Linkedin
- Detailed social media access statistics on a regular basis
- Feedbacks and comments received as a result of posting project information and activities triggering comments in the social media
- Number of Local events entered in the project framework
- Number of Participation to workshops and events