



V.I.R.Tu.A.L.

VOCATIONAL INNOVATION RENEWING TOURISM ADVANCED LEARNING

Throughout 2023, V.I.R.Tu.A.L. consortium identified the **professional needs** of the local tourism entrepreneurial system as part of the activities within WP2 «Analysis of dual programmes and business needs».

A total of **150 questionnaires** were distributed and **60 interviews** were conducted.

What emerges from the analyses conducted, both in terms of interviews and questionnaires, is an increasingly competitive context and in a market that has grown significantly - in all three V.I.R.Tu.A.L. Countries - and an ever-growing need for training. Tourism companies struggle to find personnel in general; even more so, they struggle to find adequately trained personnel.

Practical aspects are considered very important. There is a strong awareness that not all skills that practice allows acquiring can be transferred in a classroom setting.

It is emphasised that it is important to find the right balance between theoretical and practical activities to be included in the educational programme. The content of the training should provide uniform and defined standards so that the related skills are recognisable.

Therefore, it is important to enhance collaboration between training and labour markets, updating training programs that are not always considered suitable for innovations, especially in technological and green aspects affecting the sector.

The interviewees' needs have been matched with mapped dual training courses

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Meetings of the consortium

On **January 29th and 30th 2024**, in **Pristina (KO)**, UBT hosted the second meeting of the V.I.R.Tu.A.L Project. During the meeting partners first discuss about WP2 results.

Partners also focused their discussion on the activities related to WP3, «Interactive Augmented and Virtual Reality Didactic Toolkit», which aims to enable students developing professional skills by performing very specific tasks in safe environments. Here, students can learn at their own pace, thus increasing their engagement and transforming the role of the teacher/trainer into more of a co-learner, coach, and development collaborator.



Dual training courses mapped

Overall, Partners identified 20 dual training courses in Albania, 24 in Kosovo and 21 in North Macedonia, under the WP2.

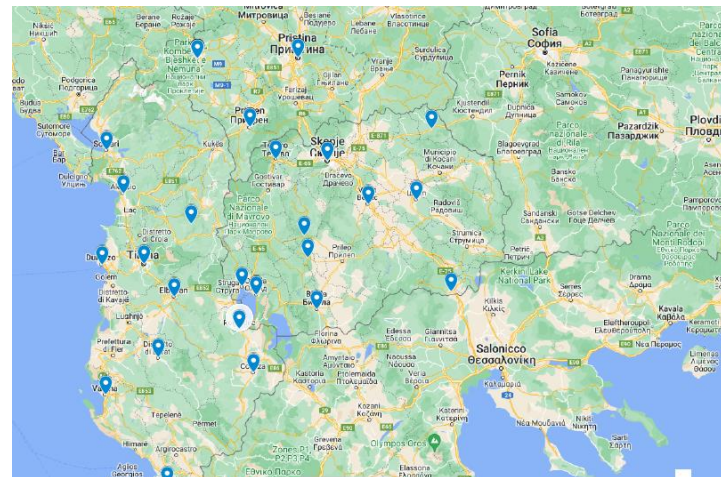
What emerges about mapping is:

1. Great variety of dual training courses

Some courses have a theoretical approach, aiming to introduce the basic elements related to the tourism sector. These courses do not transfer technical professional skills, much less operational skills. Others, on the contrary, aim to impart very operational skills that can also be acquired exclusively in the classroom, with limited use of dual-mode, for example, training courses on electronic reservation systems. Others are professional courses designed to impart the necessary skills for a specific profession: Baker, Pastry Chef, Receptionist, etc.

2. Areas of expertises/skills to be strengthened

All the courses share a common note, albeit not all to the same extent, the absence of a dedicated training area for learning soft skills. The analyses reveal an emphasis on the development of soft skills, such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. These skills are essential for success in various professional environments. Companies are placing greater importance on possessing soft skills such as empathy and the ability to adapt to different situations and problem-solving, which are crucial for customized service and managing guests from different backgrounds with very high expectations.



Tourism in V.I.R.Tu.A.L. WB Countries

*In **Albania**, tourism is a significant economic sector due to its contribution to the country's production system. WTTC data indicate that economic activity generated by the 'Travel & Tourism' sector amounted to \$1.7 billion in GDP in 2022, accounting for 9.4% of the total GDP. Albania ranks 17th globally by direct contribution to the economy of the Travel & Tourism sector. The workforce comprises 97.7 thousand individuals (8.4% of total jobs), and investments amount to \$270 million.*

*In **Kosovo**, tourism is still an emerging industry, at a very early stage of development compared to other Southeast European countries. This can be attributed to decades of lack of investment, poor private sector tourism offers, a lack of educated staff, and poor investor policies. According to the report of the Labor Force Survey, the number of employees in the field of tourism is around 28,500 people. Tourism is assumed to directly contribute more than 1% to Kosovo's GDP, while the world average tourism contribution to GDP is 3.3%.*

*In **North Macedonia**, tourism plays a significant role, with continuous growth over the years. North Macedonia recorded a total of 294,000 tourists in 2021, ranking 122nd in the world in absolute terms. It's evident that smaller countries typically have lower absolute numbers of tourists. When considering tourist numbers in relation to North Macedonia's population, the comparison becomes more meaningful. With 0.14 tourists per resident, North Macedonia ranked 92nd in the world. In Southern Europe, it ranked 13th.*

Key findings and indications for VET in tourism in Western Balkans

Partnership with employers, to ensure training programs aligned with current and future workforce needs. Set up advisory committees with industry professionals to provide insights into skills requirements.

Flexible and agile curricula, that can adapt quickly to technological advances and industry trends. Incorporate case studies and real-world projects to provide practical experience.

Practical learning opportunities as internships into academic programs to enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts.

Integration of technology into educational practices, including e-learning platforms, virtual labs and simulations. Familiarize students with tools and technologies used in tourism fields.

Soft skills development such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork. These skills are essential for success in professional environments.

Interdisciplinary approaches that encourage collaboration in different fields. This reflects the reality of many modern workplaces where employees need diverse skills.

Inclusive educational practices to address diverse student populations. Ensure that teaching materials and methods take into account the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Internationalisation of education, promote global perspectives by encouraging international exchanges, collaborative research projects and exposure to different cultures. This prepares students for a globalised labour market.

Entrepreneurial skills development to cultivate a culture of innovation and creativity. Provide students with skills and mindset necessary to start their own ventures.

Establish continuous feedback loops from employers, alumni and industry partners. Use this feedback to refine and update training programs to meet current industry tourism needs.

Dissemination and events

CEFE Macedonia joined forces with [The National Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia](#), in the WP2, to make a database of more than 100 hotels and catering providers in the country and research their needs for advancing the competencies of their staff.



The Macedonian partner also signed a memorandums of cooperation with Faculty for Tourism and Business Logistics in Skopje, [University of Information Science and Technology "St Paul the Apostle"](#) in Ohrid, and with the high schools from tourism sector - [Regional High School Center for Vocational Studies "Vanco Pitosheski"](#) in Ohrid and [Municipal High School "Kole Nehtenin"](#) in city of Shtip, in order to promote and use the results from VIRTUAL project.

KPT staff assembly meeting is a forum of the academic and administrative staff of KPT to discuss issues of everyday operation of the HEI, as well as to share news, best practices etc.

In the meeting of December 2023, inter alia, it was presented the V.I.R.Tu.A.L. project, its goal and objectives, with a specific emphasize in the context of Albania and the increased focus in tourism, tourism needs and offers.

ARTES, in November, presented the VIRTUAL project during a visit for an Erasmus mobility in Perugia (IT) of the Angel Popov school of Veliko (BG).



Partnership

