

PRESS RELEASE

PeakED: Environmental Involvement and Education for young entrepreneurs and volunteers» .

Tourism at a Crossroads

Completion of Research on Climate Change and its Impact on Tourism in the Mountain Regions of Olympus, Carpathians and Rila, three of the most important tourist and natural zones of the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Eastern Mediterranean, with a focus on Jordan.

The Development Organization of Local Government of Larissa S.A. – AENOL S.A., within the framework of the European Program Erasmus+ KA2 Youth project entitled: "PeakED: Environmental Involvement and Education for young entrepreneurs and volunteers" in collaboration with the Professor of the Department of Meteorology and Climatology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Mrs. Christina Anagnostopoulou, completed the research in the framework of this co-funded project.

The project, which started in December 2023 and runs for 2.5 years, aims to build capacity and develop – through a participatory bottom-up process involving value chain actors, stakeholders and policy makers – relevant policy frameworks across Europe to create new or upgraded/upgraded value chains that contribute to the climate resilience and sustainability of mountain areas.

The PeakED project is an action plan that adopts innovative approaches and methodologies for the sustainability of mountainous areas, undertaking to cultivate a set of skills in people who are actively involved in the management of mountain ecosystems.

Ms. Anagnostopoulou's research focused on the impact of climate change on the tourism sector in the mountainous regions of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Tourism, as a key pillar of local development and sustainability, is facing ever-increasing challenges. Natural disasters, effects of climate change, and cultural risks pose significant threats to the attractiveness and sustainability of these regions, which have a rich history and unique natural beauty, and are important destinations for naturalistic, cultural and religious tourism. The research revealed critical issues that affect tourism activities, the development of the tourism product, as well as the maintenance of sustainability in these areas.

The survey showed that the **charm of destinations is declining**, as climate change negatively affects the attractiveness of mountain destinations, degrading the natural beauty and uniqueness of these areas. Rising temperatures and the deterioration of the natural environment, exemplified by the extreme temperatures in Jordan during the summer months, discourage visitors from exploring natural and historical treasures. At the same time, extreme weather events create an **additional economic headache**, significantly increasing operating costs in the tourism sector. Droughts, floods and other extreme conditions require costly adjustments to tourism infrastructure, causing financial pressure on businesses. In addition, a tourist discrepancy is just around the corner regarding the traditional summer tourist season, which shows a decrease in demand, since travelers now prefer trips in spring and autumn, which creates **imbalances in the tourist market**. Finally, the cultural heritage is also at high risk due to climate change, which **threatens incalculable damage to historical and cultural monuments of world heritage**, whose preservation and promotion is constantly undermined.

The protection and promotion of these destinations requires innovative strategies, environmental sensitivity and cooperation. It's time for action to keep the passion for exploration and discovery alive.

It is time for:

- **Investing in Sustainable Infrastructure:** Installation of water and energy saving systems in tourist units.
- **Creation of Alternative Tourism Products:** Development of thematic forms of tourism (ecotourism, agrotourism) adapted to climatic conditions.
- **Enhancing the Resilience of Cultural Resources:** Systematic conservation and protection of historical monuments from environmental damage.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Joint initiatives with other countries in the wider region to exchange best practices for tackling climate change in tourism.