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As the coronavirus situation will gradually improve in Europe, tourism is expected to play a larger role in boosting consumption to help revive the economy. As the overseas travel have been suspended due to the pandemic, domestic rural tourism is expected to welcome more tourists, for people are chasing for a more individual, healthy and natural lifestyle.

Rural tourism across Europe is undergoing big change. Whilst persistent challenges, such as depopulation and poor quality public services, and now the COVID-19 pandemic continue to put many rural communities under economic and social pressure, there are also new and exciting opportunities for rural residents. Opportunity arises from the key drivers of rural change in the 21st century, including the attraction of the tourists for the visitor's experience related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing. This attraction is complemented by the impact of existing and emerging digital technologies on the tourist attitude and preference for the destinations promoting low-carbon and circular economies, the bioeconomy, new value chains, new patterns of mobility.

Based on our previous research, review of literature and on the current situation due to pandemic crisis, seniors can play an important role in revival of the rural tourism, but they need to have upgraded competences and skills in entrepreneurial and smart village aspects.

Starting with October 2020 our organization, **(fill with your organization name)** works within the project SMART VILLAGE (financed through ERASMUS PLUS Program) with a European Consortium composed of 9 organizations specialized in tourism, smart village and training work for creating an educational platform for a new era of the rural tourism. This platform will serve after COVID-19 pandemic crisis, as to exploit in village travel opportunities to conscious tourists by turning less-known places and rural areas into new routes of sustainable tourism, working tightly with the locals to revamp their traditions and cultural heritage and turning them into assets for socio-economic local development.

The SMARTVILLAGE project aims to develop a training course dedicated to the adult people in risk of social exclusion due to economic obstacles from remoted rural areas, who will learn how to help themselves to develop a new business and contribute to the development of the community they live. They will learn how social innovation and circular economy can help rural services such as health, education, energy, mobility and other social services of key importance in marginalized rural areas where these services are often in decline.

In the last few years, the idea of a circular economy has received considerable attention worldwide because it offers an opportunity to optimize and promote sustainable development through new models based on continuous improvement and renewable resources. The change to a circular economy will lead to new business models and value chains, and this affects the design, production, use, and waste management processes, as well as the collection of products and materials for reuse.

The consortium of SMART VILLAGE Project will create a new educational curriculum for upgrading until 2022 new digital basic skills and competences to more than 900 economic disadvantaged low-skilled and low-qualified senior adults impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

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crisis, more exactly for persons living in deprived rural areas from at least 9 European local communities. The project will learn seniors how to create their own new business in villages by using innovative local cultural tourism opportunities based on social innovation best practices and circular economy principles. This project can be a great opportunity for seniors to earn their own living in the economic crisis generated by the pandemic period, keep their mind engaged and challenged and stay active in the community.

SMART VILLAGE project will produce new innovative teaching and learning approaches in the form of a research study and best practices collection, 4 multiple handbooks, a training kit, an e-learning platform as tools for acquiring entrepreneurial competences in rural tourism. The project intellectual results will ensure direct impact on more than 900 adult learners (seniors) until 2022 who will increase their low digital skills and long term impact on more than 500 travel agencies and from Europe.

The project is focusing on developing competences for seniors (50+), adult learners willing to work in the tourism chain sector from rural areas, the main considered marginalized (depopulated, isolated areas or with limited access to infrastructure: road transport networks, electricity and telecommunications, including the Internet) or are included in marginalized populations, being people with low incomes, people at risk of poverty or social exclusion and adult civil servants (+40) of the local public administration and private sector managers of SMEs from the rural villages.

European added value lies in the fact that the actions under this initiative will address some crucial challenges such as improving the digital entrepreneurship skill in rural sustainable tourism at European level. The variety of countries the project partners represent ensures valuable input from all sides. By gathering 9 partners from 6 different countries (Romania, Italia, Belgium, Ireland, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Greece), with expertise and different fields and knowledge areas, project aims to provide learning materials specifically developed to empower elderly to create business or to work in rural tourism sector in all countries of the EU.

The result of the project will be available in the first semester of 2022, when the consortium will organize pilot trainings and demonstration of the e-learning materials with the seniors who will benefit of upgraded competences for starting a new business or to reconvert their own business based on smart village principles.

