

CONTINUATION PLAN FOR THE SHAPE eSERVICE – shapingecotourism.eu

Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism
Deliverable DT 4.3.2.

1/2020

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1. Introduction

The aim of the SHAPE (Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism) project is to transform local tourism strategies into concrete, practical tools about how to manage, develop, organize, support and market assets and activities - and how to integrate these activities into communities in sustainable ways. The development work in 2017-2020 has resulted into set of new products and services presented in the project eService, shapingecotourism.eu.

The SHAPE has focused on a transnational set of sustainable heritage areas (SHAs) with diverse experiences of sustainability and regional cooperation involving stakeholders in heritage management, tourism, and governance. In these SHAs, the partners have worked together with local stakeholders, their organizations, and the institutions which have supported them, and incorporated their activities into regional strategies for sustainable development.

SHAPE -project has created a transnational web-based service to support organisations, communities and businesses in the 'Cool North' in developing, implementing and managing ecotourism initiatives.

The SHAPE eService, shapingecotourism.eu, is an open-access platform for knowledge transfers, sharing of identified good practices and developed tools, and examples of ecotourism projects based on identified natural and cultural assets and opportunities.

The SHAPE is ending in February 2020 and project eService continuation requires jointly agreed plan and continuation strategy. This document establishes this: it summarises the development phases, current technical solution and costs, and opportunities for future development and use.

2. Development phases

Shape project Work package T4 aims to create a transnational service that is an open-access platform for stakeholders to transfer knowledge, share good practices and product/service development tools, and implement these in joint development projects. It includes the content generated in other work packages, including:

- Effective methods for engaging stakeholders in sustainable networks and governance structures
- Mapping and managing assets, including consideration of climate change
- Developing and marketing tourist products/services, and
- Analyses of governance models for SHA's

At beginning, *a review of the needs and inclusion of the stakeholders* in the development and use of the e-service was completed (Shape 2018). Basing on the review, the SHAPE stakeholders expected eService to:

- Support and increased capacity for international collaboration and networking
- Increased visibility and business exposure, and
- Joint development in product and service development

After *defining the eService, infrastructure for the e-service* was established by Planeetta Internet Ltd. This includes WordPress-based Content Management System (CMS), integrated communication tools

(Social Media, Mailchimp), the joint development forum and the Network (pool of competences). Domain (shapingecotourism.eu) was chosen to describe the content also after the project.

Partners were informed about the eService by *online training sessions*. These presented the main features of the WordPress. The *content was gathered* about the SHA's and their Ecotourism Initiatives, and together with project backgrounds and available deliverables, these were included to the eService.

The eService was taken into use by using it as *a communication tool*. The posts on the project and stakeholder activities have been published and promoted through the Mailchimp Newsletters (sign-up is included into eService). Regular posts have presented Shape activities, such as set of learning journeys conducted in 2019. In June 2019, all partners were provided open-access and development rights to utilise the eService. This has enabled more in-depth descriptions of the project activities, such as Ecotourism Initiatives in each region.

The network of the eService includes currently about 50 users (1/2020). These are mostly public profiles (35). The network includes personal and organisation profiles, and social media linkages. In addition, *Forum* have been established to support joint development and discussions. Three categories (Developing skills, Challenges and opportunities, and Cooperation). Forums are not yet active but require facilitation of the discussions.

As the Shape Project will end in early 2020, *the eService continuation* needs to be discussed and agreed. To support that, we produced this Continuation Plan to support future viability. Karelia UAS has the maintenance of the eService. The partnership agreement and Shape application states that "the content will be maintained and updated as an ongoing activity of the NordMAB network, of which two members (CEDTENK, NUI) are project partners, and two others are associated partners (RMBMU, Vindelälven)." As the available resources for this transfer are not available, it is more realistic that project partners will carry on maintaining and developing the eService so that it may be used to support and develop other projects, and communicate each SHA's activities. Ideally SHA's are able to integrate the e-service for the operation and communication activities and to promote it for the use of stakeholders.

3. Technical solution and costs

The technical solution of Shape eService was developed by Planeetta Internet Ltd., following the tender request and content specifications by Karelia UAS. The Content Management System (CMS) is WordPress that originally started as a blogging platform, but over the last decades it has become a mainstream CMS that is robust and able to handle even the largest enterprise websites. It powers approximately 30% of the web, and can be seen as the default digital publishing tool for major media companies.

The decision to go for WordPress was based on its reliability, price, available add-ons and available materials for new users. This was also the solution provided by the contracted external expert. The CMS was adapted to the eService use by establishing additional features (23 plugins), including a Network (pool of organisational and personal profiles), Forums (plugin GD bbPress), Social Media Wall (Taeggie), and an Electronic Newsletter (MailChimp). With these solutions, the eService became an

extended website with easy to use posting and page editing, media gallery/file archive, end-user management, and background for stakeholder collaboration.

The website has been reliable (over 98% of the using time without connection timeouts, and longest timeouts being 30-45 minutes). This is mainly due to coherent structure and regular maintenance and updates based on maintenance agreement with Planeetta Internet.

Table 1. eService solutions, maintenance and costs.

Solution	Maintenance	Cost
WordPress CMS	Open CMS	free
GD bbPress	Open access plugin	free
WordPress updates and maintenance	Web hotel until the end of project (paid until 04/2020) 2 nd option: Karelia UAS own maintenance, monthly	1050 €/a tbc
Taeggie	Solo (1 taeggie, 3 social media account sources)	135 €/a
Mailchimp	Basic account	free
Other plugins (n 21)	Features via WordPress plugins	free

4. Organising

Several Shape partners have expressed joint interest in the further development of the eService beyond SHAPE. By the end of the Shape project there is a useful and engaging set of resources and experiences which partners hope will be of interest to NordMAB and also other networks. This knowledge base can be utilised in future collaboration, e.g. in training courses/events and development projects.

The eService also supports joint communications through event and news posting, which allows learning from other regions also after the project. The expanding the user-base of the eService is dependent on how it can be promoted better for wider networks, e.g. as a resource for other biosphere reserves, and integrated into partner's activities (biosphere partner networks, communications, training events, learning journeys etc.).

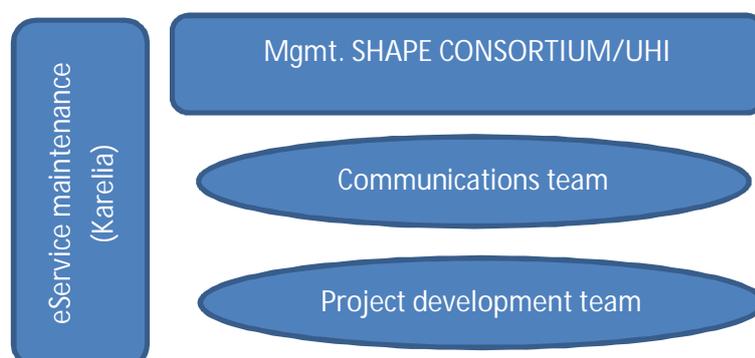


Figure 1. Organising SHAPE activities after the project. Continuing the eService requires ongoing maintenance, communications and development of new joint development initiatives.

Management: Shape consortium (6-month online meetings)
Maintenance: Karelia UAS (ongoing)

Communications: Communications team (3-month online meetings)
Training courses / calendar: All partners update as events are organised
Follow-up projects: Project development team (proposal commenting)

To organise the follow-up coordinated team meetings are essential. Shape has already experience of pre-project and project meetings in five-year period. As Karelia UAS has already established system for the site maintenance, and reliable site operation, it can be continued either through own server or contracted via Planeetta Internet Web Hotel. Shape communications team would support regular posting of latest news and events from partner regions; in addition, social media feeds of Taeggie could be extended to cover each partner region.

Potential follow-up projects, where eService could have added-value:

- NordMAB network will meet in autumn 2020 in Estonia, where follow-up project will be discussed. Then there is likely better information on available funding sources.

Other linkages:

- BioOverTemp – Horizon project (plan) on climate change adaptation. Currently North Karelia BR / Karelia UAS / Galloway and Southern Ayrshire in preparatory team. Potential to add eService a module on climate change adaptation. This would also build on Shape activities.
- UNESCO/MAB Networks have high potential – these have not yet been investigated from this eService continuation perspective.
- Karelian Heritage / Culture (Karelia UAS/Ilomantsi), utilising Kalevala mythology/heritage in business (ERDF 2020-2022). Updated contents about service design and connecting heritage to tourism business.

Shape Training

In Scotland, there are some initial plans to organise training events on the eService in each area in partnership with local land owners and their representative organisation, Scottish Land & Estates. Galloway and Southern Ayrshire has already established trainings, such as [UNESCO Biosphere Guide Training Program](#), showcasing the potential of SHA's in facilitating practical training courses. The Shape partners have been involved in earlier projects with training elements, such as [AVIP Erasmus+](#), that have produced training courses. These, as well as last deliverables on ecotourism marketing, would provide content/linkages for a training subsite at the eService.

Karelia UAS will utilise the Shape knowledge in establishing international 15 ECTS training content for students. This will likely take place in 2021 onwards. There is also potential to develop virtual training course contents/courses that could be replicated in each SHA and linked to the eService.

The key themes that the eService contents will cover are (Figure 2):

- Nature & culture (heritage/assets)
- Responsible tourism
- Planning ecotourism
- Creative (digital) marketing

- Governance

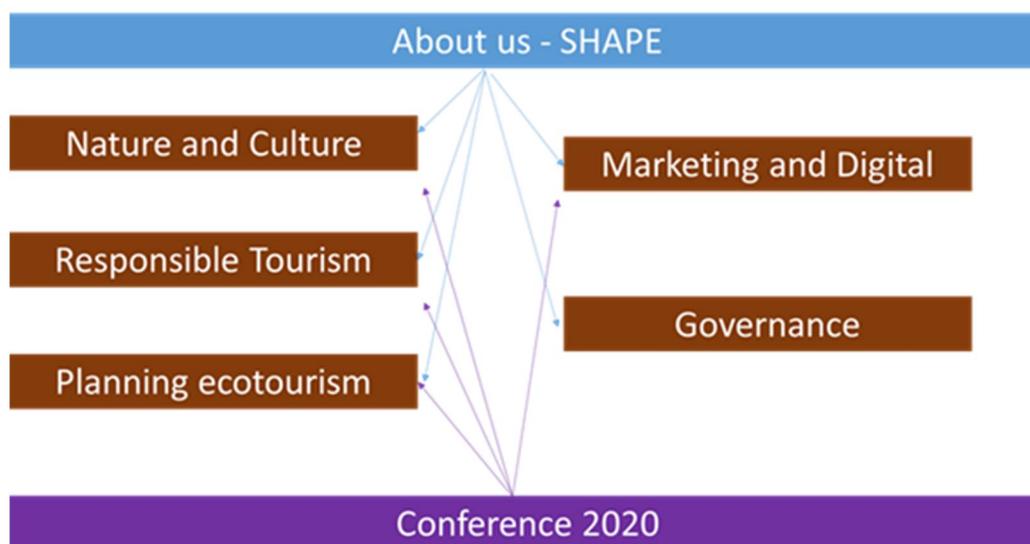


Figure 2. Re-organising the eService toward a training module content. Project deliverables and activities will be built in about us section. Thematic contents will create ‘nuggets’ that support training and capacity building activities. International Shape -conference and workshops, Shaping Ecotourism: Practical Perspectives, provides set of materials supporting the thematic contents.

5. Costs and Financing

The maintenance costs presented in Table 2. are based on actual costs of maintenance during the project and costs of solution providers. Therefore, the maintenance budget does not include any revenue that would affect on the project funding but only to secure operation as required by grant agreement and agreed at the partnership contract. The costs do not include staff costs either but they remain on basic funding of each partner organisation.

Table 2. Budget options for the maintenance (at cost, staff not included).

Option	Description	Cost
Minimum	Technical updates / maintenance as own work at Karelia UAS	1 h/month (150€ for plugins)
Current	Webhotell, eService maintenance and all updates, regular reports.	1200 € (1050 €/a, + 150€ for plugins)
Advanced	Webhotell and adding more social media coverage from each region, additional plugins/visual materials and external expertise depending on development needs	~4500 €/a (1050 €/a+ 360 €/a for Taeggie, 1000 €/a for additional features/plugins/visual appearance), 1500 € for external expertise.

Karelia UAS has secured own funding for the current maintenance level for the years 2020-21. This includes the continuation at the Webhotell and payments of the plugins. Raising the funding to allow further development (Table 2. “advanced”) requires additional funding sources. As the theme is highly

relevant for the SHAs and tourism development, this eService can likely be integrated as a valuable resource and tool for future projects.

6. Conclusions

The Shape has established a knowledge-base building on the project deliverables, conference outcomes and synergies with other projects. The eService has been launched and is maintained after the project by Karelia UAS; Shape partnership continues the creation of content and dissemination of developments in each region. The new thematic structure allows better use in training events and building on new development activities.

The most essential part of continuing the eService is the continuation of collaboration between partners and vast stakeholder networks. NordMAB meeting in Estonia in autumn 2020 will provide opportunity for further developments.

The Shape stakeholders consider the eService as valuable resource supporting the development of SHA's as sustainable travel destinations, as described by testimonial from Visit Karelia, Finland:

“Visit Karelia has ongoing Destination Management Planning process for which the Shape eService is valuable resource. We share the examples on ecotourism products and services for the business customers to support them in service developments. We will use the Shape eService as dissemination and networking tool as part of our Sustainable Destination Management.”

The Shape eService can provide a channel for communication and disseminating the results of Shape, but also knowledge from other SHA's and their development activities. It can bring collaboration activities and stakeholders visible, provide background for training and consultancy, and support further development activities of ecotourism in SHA's.

References

SHAPE, 2018. Stakeholder Feedback Review for the eService Development: Partnerships for Ecotourism (SHAPE). pp. 10. Available at:
https://www.shapingecotourism.eu/content/uploads/2018/11/DT4.2_Stakeholder_Feedback_Review_for_the_Shape_eService_Development.pdf