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**Preparation of Destination Management Organization (DMO) Development Model for the
Republic of Armenia**

Ref. Number: DMO-01

**ASSIGNMENT 3
TASK 5
Preparation of 4 Site Management Plans
SMP4: Poqr Tagh, Meghri**

**ARS Progetti SPA
in association with ARPA Environmental Foundation**



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
ATDF	Armenian Territorial Development Fund
AUA	American University of Armenia
BA	Business Armenia
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
CFOA	Communities Finance Officers Association
DFA	Development Foundation Armenia
DM	Destination Management
DMO	Destination Management Organization
EU	European Union
GoA	Government of Armenia
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HO.RE.CA	Hotels Restaurant and Catering
IF	Izmirlan Foundation
JV	Joint Venture
KE	Key Expert
KVS	Khor Virap Sanctuary
LEID	Local Economy and Infrastructure Development (project)
MES	Ministry of Emergency Situations
MoE	Ministry of Economy
NK	Non Key (expert)
NCFA	National Competitiveness Foundation of Armenia
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PAs	Protected Areas
RA	Republic of Armenia
SA	Study Area
SPNAs	Specially Protected Natural Areas
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TC	Tourism Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
TSPs	Tourism Service Providers
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank



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1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.1. Purpose

The study is intended to define the site management plan for the Meghri tourism area, which hosts several cultural and natural heritage sites, and will be upgraded under the project to improve the current tourism experiences.

1.2. Specific objective

According to agreements reached after the Inception Report Presentation, STMP is to be intended as a **Site Tourism Management Plan** that will supplement existing management tools with tourism development activities and procedures in order to increase the site's touristic attractiveness through specifying management, operation and other related functionalities.

1.3. Contents

According to TORs, the STMP is based on the specific nature of the site and addresses the following topics:

- Analysis of the tourism supply and demand of the Meghri tourism area
- Recommendations for the improvement of tourism attractions and activities
- Definition of key strategic management issues and a comprehensive SWOT analysis
- Stakeholder mapping and engagement
- Governance model
- Recommendations for a site management model for the Meghri tourism area
- Specification of human resource needs and key required capacities and skills per the functionality.

1.4. Stakeholder involvement

The STMP ensured identification of Key Stakeholders (i.e. owners and implementers of the STMP) soon from the beginning of the project and tightly cooperation with them for enforcing the plan's sustainability.

A workshop was organized by the Consultancy firm in coordination with Client and key stakeholders to present and summarize the findings and reach agreements based on consultative approach both during a mission to Meghri in October 2022 and during online meetings in 2023.

2. SITE IDENTIFICATION

2.1. Site Description

Today's town of Meghri was founded as "Karchavan" in 906 by king Smbat I of Armenia, during the period of the Bagratid Kingdom of Armenia. The town has a population of around 12.500 people (according to information provided by the municipality of Meghri) and is located 73km south of the provincial capital of Kapan.

Meghri is accessible by road only, due to the narrow valleys and high mountains there is no airport and no train connection. Meghri is a transit town as it borders with Iran in the town of Agarak, which is a major economic import/export partner for the whole country. Already during the Soviet times the



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town of Meghri was developed as a strategic center of food industry due to the fertile soil and relatively mild climate.

Meghri is located at an average height of 610m above sea level and is surrounded by the dominating Zangezur Mountains.

The economy of Meghri is mainly based on agriculture and the food processing industry, such as a bread-baking factory, food canning factory, as well as the above mentioned products of figs, persimmon, pomegranate, apple, honey, etc.

2.2. Site Boundaries

2.2.1. Core area

The area interested by the development of the management model concerns the so called “Small district” (Poqr Tagh) of Meghri town. The district lays detached from the modern town of Meghri (the so-called Large District). It develops on the hillside on the Western side of the highway M2 connecting Armenia to Iran.

For the sake of the management model to develop, it is proposed to consider:

1. a core area of approximately 13.5 ha which includes the traditional district of Poqr Tagh
2. an external area potentially impacted by the development of tourism.



FIGURE 1: STUDY AREA BOUNDARIES. PROPOSED CORE AREA EXTENDING OF A SURFACE OF 13.5 HA AND FOCUSING ON POQR TAGH DISTRICT

Poqr Tagh district is included in the register of immovable monuments of history and culture of the Republic of Armenia and is considered a nationwide monument according to the GoA Decree N 2322-N of 29 December 2005.

Poqr Tagh neighborhood extends over an area of approx. 3.5hectars and has been built between the end of the XIX and early XX century. The traditional neighborhood is characterized by the presence of buildings, in a poor state of conservation, of two- three floors equipped with wooden verandas and multi-paned windows with colored glass. The buildings are located on the hillside and are served by steep narrow access alleyways.

Terraced gardens and orchards are dotting the settled area. Given the steepness of the hillside and the density of the settled area some houses are using the other's roof as a courtyard or terrace, this apparently gave origin to the traditional name of these building as “People's Houses”.

The standing structures vertical partitions are made of stone and bricks. Superfetation of in contrast element in cement and metal sheets for roofing are visible.

As per the land use plan developed by the Izmirlian Foundation¹, all buildings of the neighborhood have a residential function at present. Only a guesthouse and a religious building present a different land use.

The religious building sits at the top of the neighborhood, it is a wonderful example of an Armenian monastery dating back to the XVII century. The Church of Surb Hovhannes is internally decorated by precious colorful frescoes.

¹ Presentation of Poqr Tagh Development Masterplan, Izmirlian Foundation 2020



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FIGURE 2: VIEW OF SURB HOVHANNES CHURCH



FIGURE 3: FRESCO INSIDE THE SURB HOVHANNES CHURCH



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Following the LEID Project² starting in 2016, the district was considered for a comprehensive community development program promoted by the Izmirlian foundation. The project aims at restoring and reviving of the cultural heritage of the town by rehabilitating a number of buildings in the old neighborhood and create “an international hub of cultural, ethno-urban, eco and agro hospitality”³.

The foundation has commissioned the elaboration of technical designs and cost estimates for reconstruction of part of the historical houses and to design interventions on infrastructure such as storm water drainage, traditional irrigation of terraced gardens, sewage network, energy-efficient street lighting, pedestrian and transport roads rehabilitation. Once restored the houses will be equipped with traditional furniture to host different functions such as: guesthouses, crafts center, souvenir shops and restaurants.

Here below are reported some views included in the Izmirlian Foundation’s report that portrays the expected results of the project in terms of aesthetic and functions proposed.



FIGURE 4: RENDERING OF THE PROPOSED RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION PROJECT PROMOTED BY IZMIRLIAN FOUNDATION

Source: Izmirlian Foundation Masterplan Report, 2020

² The „Local Economy and Infrastructure Development“ project was assisted by the Worldbank and aimed to stimulate economic growth and employment in 9 regions (Ararat, Vayots Dzor, Syunik, Kotayk, Lori, Tavush, Shirak, Gegharkunik, Aragatsotn) of Armenia.

³ Presentation of Poqr Tagh Development Masterplan, Izmirlian Foundation 2020



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2.2.2. Tourism impact area

As the Poqr Tagh neighborhood is relatively small in terms of area, number of houses and population and most of all considering tourism related businesses, the tourism impact area extends to the eastern and southern part of Meghri, until the border with Iran along the Araks river.

Eastern part of Meghri:

This area includes the area around the municipality, up the hill until the area around the Meghri Fortress, Holy Mother of God Church, etc.

Southern part of Meghri:

Leaving the center towards the south, the outskirts of Meghri are surrounded by orchards of fig trees, persimmon trees, pomegranate trees, olives, nuts, herbs, among others. Following the street further, it arrives at the border with Iran, in particular to the spectacular view of the Aras river and the surrounding mountain landscape.



FIGURE 3: TOURISM IMPACT AREA, INCLUDING THE ALL MEGHRI URBANIZED AREA

2.3. Key Stakeholders identification

The key stakeholders of the Meghri tourism area are composed of the following:

- Private businesses related to the tourism industry:
 - o 10 accommodation facilities such as hotels, bed & breakfast facilities;
 - o Fruit producing and processing companies;
 - o Restaurants;
 - o Small scale farmers producing dried fruits, nuts, vegetables, fresh fruit, and honey;
 - o Souvenir shops;
 - o Tour guides;
- Associations, international organisations, NGOs and non-for-profit organisations such as foundations related to tourism:
 - o Izmirlian Foundation;
 - o USAID; UNDP; World Bank, European Union, Russian Federation,
- Public entities related to tourism and its management:



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- Municipality of Meghri;
- Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports;
- Ministry of Economy – Tourism Committee;



3. TOURISM ASSETS AND DEMAND

3.1. Tourism Supply in the impact area

3.1.1. Tourism attractors and activities, and their improvements

The Meghri tourism area is full of potential attraction points. However, not all of the potentials are fully enjoyable due to lack of conservation, maintenance, accessibility, management, and other reasons. In the following the main attractions are listed according to its cultural and natural heritage value.

TABLE 1: TOURISM ATTRACTIONS IN MEGHRI

Type of asset	Name of attraction and tourism asset	Recommendations for improvement
Cultural heritage asset	Meghri Fortress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General valorisation of the ruins and a visitor concept - Improve accessibility - Signage - Illumination at night
	Holy Mother of God Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General valorisation of the church and a visitor concept - Improve accessibility - Signage - Illumination at night - Souvenir shop and bar development
	Church of Surb Sarkis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General valorisation of the church and a visitor concept - Improve accessibility - Signage - Illumination at night - Souvenir shop and bar development
	Old administrative house in central square of Poqr Tagh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rehabilitation of the building - Installation of a tourist visitor and information center - improvement of accessibility
	Central square of Poqr Tagh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General upgrade of the square in particular the road condition - Conservation and adoption of proper safety measures for the Chinar tress
	Fountain at Central square of Poqr Tagh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conservation measures for the fountain with regards to the rocks and stones architecture - water drainage system - information panel for usage (non/potable water, etc.)
	Surb Hovhannes church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - signage and information - improve accessibility, in particular the staris leading to the church (handrail, stair levels and heights, etc.)



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Natural heritage asset	Poqr Tagh walking itinerary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - walking itinerary through the traditional neighbourhood - signage with information about history, buildings, monuments, etc. - granting access to gardens and family houses
	Araks River Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Installation of a visitor platform for enjoying the view over the Araks river and valley - Signage about the historical significance

Ideas and recommendations for additional tourism attractions and activities that do not exist at the moment:

Tourism attraction:

- establish a museum / exhibition center about the history of agriculture in Meghri
- market place / bazar for local agricultural products along the streets of Meghri and along the main roads leading to Meghri
- development of culinary tourism activities: cuisine master class, soup cooking, lavash making, pumpkin dishes, etc.
- opening of a hiking trail on the upper edge of the mountains leading from Poqr Tagh to the Araks River / border to Iran
- additional hiking trails for sport tourism: trans-caucasian hiking trail, adventure and extreme tourism, climbing, rafting, etc.
- create a agriculture communal / cooperative for the promotion of local products such as dried fruits for consumption and purchase
- upgrade Poqr Tagh with an architectural conservation plan of residential houses, streets, public and administrative buildings, monuments, churches, etc.
- upgrade and usage of churches, in particular the Surb Hovhannes, church for religious music festivals and performances of choirs, orchestras, etc.

3.1.2. Tourism facilities and services, and their improvements

According to information provided by the municipality of Meghri a total of around 200 people in the town are currently working in the tourism sector.

Meghri hosts a considerable low number of tourism accommodation facilities. At the moment there are 10 accommodation providers of low-mid range quality and price levels. The total capacity of beds is 186, according to information provided by the municipality of Meghri. A detailed list is provided below.

In the neighbourhood of Poqr Tagh only one guesthouse is running at the moment, offering 6 beds. However, the owner is interested in enlarging the structure to a total of 12 beds in the next years. She is also working as a tourist guide, singer and is very active with networking and creating a tourism business interest group for Poqr Tagh.

One of the landmark B&Bs, which was restaurated and management by the Izmirlian Foundation, is currently closed. This B&B with location in the Poqr Tagh neighbourhood offers various rooms and around 15 beds.



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TABLE 2: ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS IN MEGHRI

Hotels, Guest houses/B&Bs/	Community	Main Visitors	Number of beds
I/E Mher Zakaryan	Meghri/Agarak	RA	39
I/E Emma Melkumyan	Meghri/Agarak	Russia/ FR	25
I/E Arayik Stepanyan	Meghri/Agarak	Iran, RA	34
I/E Anahit Tarverdyan	Meghri/Agarak	Iran, RA	10
I/E Sona Karapetyan	Meghri/Agarak	Russia	23
I/E Gohar Hayrapetyan	Meghri/Agarak	Iran	9
I/E Harut Mkrtchyan	Meghri	RA	12
I/E Arpine Tarverdyan	Meghri	Germany, France,Russia, China	8
I/E Shahane Khachikyan	Meghri	RA,Russia,USA,Fr ance, Germany, Poland	6
Meghri Hotel	Meghri	Russia, RA	20
TOTAL			186

According to information provided by the Municipality of Meghri there are around 10 restaurants. The guests are mainly truck drivers from Armenia and Iran, as well as local people. The restaurants offer local and international / European dishes likewise.

Moreover, there are around seven national tour operators that are working in Meghri and offering Meghri as a tourism destination. These inbound tour operators are based in Yerevan and are collaborating with international partners. According to information provided during personal interviews these tour operators demand more diversified tourism activities in Meghri for their clients. At the moment there are only a few basic tourism activities available in Meghri which is the reason why the visitors stay for a very short time. The visitors demand for activities related to agri-tourism, gastronomy tourism, hiking, and adventure activities.

Some of the tour operators that are promoting Meghri as a tourist destination are listed below:

- Hamshen tours
- One Way tours
- Armenian Geographic
- Hiking Club
- Ethno Tour

3.1.3. Infrastructure analysis and recommendations

The access to Meghri is currently possible only via road. This main road (M-2) connecting Meghri with Yerevan is mainly used by trucks transporting goods to / from Iran. Hence, the traffic is relatively heavy, the road is currently being improved by new asphalt and safety measures. However, due to the many valleys and mountains that the road is crossing the driving conditions are difficult from October to March due to rain, fog and snow. In Meghri there is no public transportation system that would be suitable for tourists.



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It is recommended to improve the road signs in terms of quantity and quality as many of the existing signs are hardly visible, especially in the dark and when it is foggy. Safety measures along the road through dedicated marking, traffic lights, illumination, reflecting lights, guard rails, etc. are further recommended.

Along the main road within Meghri town further safety measures are needed. This includes pedestrian crossings and signs, enlarged side walks, speed limits, illumination, etc.

Public infrastructure and utilities are suffering from continuous supply. Fresh water and electricity are often not available. Moreover, a water sewage system needs to be upgraded and a residual waste management system is necessary. Environmental pollution of the Meghri river is evident all along the town.

3.2. Tourism Demand

3.2.1. Visitor flows

Data and statistics about the tourism demand in Meghri is not available at the moment. It is assumed that those visitors who actually stay in Meghri are composed of drive-through passengers heading towards South to Iran or North to Armenia, this might be truck drivers, merchants, other business travellers or occasional travellers. Most of them are considered to be Armenians or Iranians.

The occasional and leisure travellers are mainly from Russia and Europe, as well as expats working in Armenia.

3.2.2. Profile of visitors

As there are no visitor statistics available in Meghri the profile of visitors can be assumed only. According to information collected during personal interviews with tourism actors such as accommodation facilities and restaurants, the visitors in Meghri stay around 1-2 nights.

The demanded experiences are mainly related to outdoor activities, as well as cultural and culinary. The social exchange and contact to the local population is also relevant for the occasional visitors of Meghri.

3.2.3. Community use of the site

One of the most important actors promoting the community use of Poqr Tagh is the Izmirlian Foundation. The foundation possesses 11 buildings and some historical monuments in and around Poqr Tagh and have been working actively in the town since 2003.

The foundation actively involves women in artisanry and craftmaking activities offering trainings and workshop facilities.

Meghri town is used by the local population for its excellent climate for the production of fruits such as persimmon, figs, pomegranates, and others. Especially the gardens and houses in Poqr Tagh have abundant fruit orchards.



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4. KEY STRATEGIC AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES FROM A TOURISM PERSPECTIVE

4.1. SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- a) The cultural landscape and luxuriant vegetation make the place an extraordinary discovery in the middle of a mountainous matrix characterizing the surrounding landscape.
- b) Peculiar elements connected to the traditional irrigation systems of the Qanat of oriental origin still present and visible shall be revived also in connection to the production of sire specific food.
- c) The site is rich in history (Silk Road) and located at an intersection of cultures mixing elements of the oriental and western traditions that is worth to revive.
- d) The site is located along a main connection road crossing the entire country and connecting Armenia with Iran.
- e) **The area is very rich in identity attractions** that are part of the living culture, essential to the local population and to their social organization. These resources are paramount assets on which to build on to develop a solid and sustainable tourism concept.
- f) The destination is characterized by **outstanding nature, heritage and ancestral traditions**. Fruit orchards are a characterizing element of the lower Meghri landscape, typical architecture is an outstanding attraction in Poqr Tagh.

Weaknesses

- a) The municipality of Meghri does not follow a certain tourism development strategy, there is no plan for integrating private businesses into a common future scenario and there is no sustainability concept.
- b) At present, the municipality does not collect any kind of data related to tourism, such as visitor statistics (arrivals, overnight, day-visitors, visitor profile, etc.) or about the local private tourism businesses (number, activity, size, etc.).
- c) Accessibility is an issue in Meghri since the town is only accessible via the main road. This road is heavily used by trucks transporting goods from / to Iran.
- d) Currently, there are only a few private businesses active in the tourism sector in Meghri which depend on drive-through travelers. There is no critical mass of tourism actors sharing the same vision for the destination.
- e) Most of the existing tourism businesses as well as those entities who are interested in contributing to the sector are hesitant with investments due to the unstable political situation.
- f) A large share of municipal finances comes from central budget transfers with limited local revenue capacity. Armenia has made great strides in decentralizing planning processes in urban and territorial planning however, the Soviet Union public administrative legacy weak regulatory framework, and low local capacities have perpetuated a strict hierarchy of planning. This is resulting in poor governance of public commons (green spaces, buffer zones, heritage sites, etc.) and a weak enforcement of building and land use regulations.
- g) Environmental hazards and pollution connected to poor basic service provision is a challenge in settled areas.

Opportunities

- a) The preliminary Izmirlian rehabilitation project might become a catalyzing opportunity promoting and encouraging privately led rehabilitation interventions and entrepreneurship (if approved by the IF board).
- b) The urban structure and peculiar vernacular architecture might indeed be suitable for the promotion of the internationally applied model of the “diffused hospitality” model which couples low environmental impact with social equity and low entrepreneurial risks.



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- c) International connections and transboundary development programs can be activated from site rich history (Silk Road) and location at an intersection of cultures mixing elements of the oriental and western traditions.
- d) Proximity to the border with Iran will make it easier to Iranian tourist to reach the site and create positive connections and melting of cultures.
- e) Rich tradition connected to carpets production might be revived.
- f) The UNESCO Geopark and its integrated GeoFood model represent an opportunity for a sustainable tourism and environmental system in Meghri.

Threats

- a) The district rehabilitated through the external intervention of the Izmirlian Foundation might become an empty box if no interest is found in private entrepreneur and if the actual existing demand is not matched in terms of services potentially provided
- b) The restoration intervention designed and promoted by a centralized, single body might result in a too homogeneous output that would hinder the authenticity and identity value of the place.
- c) The centralized and large-scale intervention might adversely impact the real estate market leading to uncontrolled mechanism of selling and losing the identity of places in one word to the gentrification of the site
- d) Natural process of migration of young population to urbanized areas could become a threat for the activation of the site into a vibrant cultural hub
- e) Low propensity to risk of investment of private owners due to economic situation and political instability in the country could result in lack on development

4.2. Critical issues

The following are the most critical issues for the development and management of tourism which are deducted from the SWOT analysis above:

Political, administrative, and legal issues:

- The municipality of Meghri does not currently have a clear plan for the development of tourism in general. There is a big lack of data with regards to international and domestic visitors, a tourism business registry, monitoring and sustainability of tourism activities, among many others. Moreover, there is a lack of human resources that are able to carry out certain activities related to a tourism action plan within the municipality employees.
- Legal issues regard in particular the proposal of agri-tourism activities in Armenia. This covers issues of property laws, business registration, liability concerning visitors, among many others.
- The military tensions with Azerbaijan are a critical issue for investment and development in general, in particular in the tourism industry. Private business owners are hesitant in investing in their structures because they are afraid of a general economic downturn in the country on the short term. In addition, the unclear situation about Armenian-Azerbaijan relations, is a further destabilizing element of the current situation.

Infrastructure issues:

- Energy: electricity shortages are a daily reality in Meghri. Businesses are suffering from the uncertainty of electricity supply. Private generators that need to be purchased and run are cost intensive.



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- Roads and signage: the main road connecting the border with Iran and the inland of Armenia is the only mode to access the town of Meghri. Currently, the road conditions are improved along some spots but it remains rather dangerous due to its limited width, foggy weather, poor illumination, and restricted signage.
- General utility infrastructure in the district of Poqr Tagh is limited, this concerns wastewater and sewage, waste collection, fresh water supply, among others.
- Environment: environmental pollution is a critical issue in the town of Meghri, in particular along the river bed.

Education, training and networking issues:

- Accommodation facilities and restaurants: the family run businesses and its employees often lack in education and training for proper tourism services. This results in relatively poor service quality although the human hospitality aspect is excellent. This covers topics such as standards of cleanliness, aesthetics of architectural and internal design, language skills, among others.
- Business management skills: in particular the family businesses often lack in proper business management skills, covering topics such as marketing and promotion, investment decision-making, among others.
- Networking: the absence of active business networking among the few tourism operators in Meghri is considered a critical issue. There is a substantial lack of cooperation among the tourism businesses. The main reason behind this might be the low visitor numbers and hence the high level of competition among the businesses in Meghri.



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5. STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS

5.1. Vision Statement

The vision of this management plan is to safeguard the district of Poqr Tagh with conservation measures and to make the site accessible to visitors who are interested in cultural tourism activities. Moreover, the local population and in particular those who are active in cultural heritage and handicrafts should be able to benefit from the tourism activities. The tourism industry of Meghri shall be developed in a sustainable manner to create job opportunities and to make Meghri town a fixed point on the tourism map of Armenia.

5.2. Stakeholder engagement

It is critical that the destination thinks carefully about the potential positive and negative impacts that tourism may have on the host community and its heritage. Communication with the host community to understand their needs, concerns, and aspirations is therefore a basic tenet of sustainable tourism.

A participative methodology shall be applied to the structural engagement of stakeholders, in particular private businesses, associations, and civil society organisations. A best practice example for the sustainable integration of stakeholders into a tourism destination management plan has been applied to the World Heritage Site of Hampi, India.⁴ Some of the activities that can be applied to Meghri are listed as follows:

- Heritage conservation: the local population shall be integrated into the conservation and protection of tangible heritage including physical interventions for rehabilitation, training, knowledge of materials to be used, among others;
- Site management: establishment of a local consultative committee to better organize the needed interventions for heritage protection and conservation;
- Tourism data collection group: creation of a voluntary group of people responsible for collecting relevant data of tourists and businesses.

⁴ More information: BAUER, B., SINHA, N., TRIMARCHI, M., ZAPPINO, V. (2017) Tourism Community Involvement Strategy for the Living World Heritage Site of Hampi, India: A Case Study. In: Bourdeau, L., Gravari-Barbas, M., Robinson, M. (Eds) World Heritage Sites and Tourism: Global and Local Relations. Routledge, ISBN 9781315546322 <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315546322/chapters/10.4324/9781315546322-15>



5.2.1. Stakeholder mapping

The following table summarizes the key, primary and secondary stakeholders from the civil society, private and public sector of Meghri.

TABLE 3: MEGHRI STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Stakeholder	Civil society	Private sector	State / Public / International
Key stakeholder	- Izmirlian Foundation	- Accommodation facilities - Restaurants - Farmers - Fruit producing and processing companies - Tour operators and travel agents - Transportation companies - Tour guides - Artisans and handicraft workshops	- Ministry of Economy - Tourism Committee - Municipality of Meghri - Regional Administration of Syunik - Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
Primary stakeholder	-	- Media agencies - TV stations and radio channels - Farmers and agricultural producer businesses - sommeliers - hosting community - Local businesses (shops, markets)	- Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS)
Secondary stakeholder	- Diocese of Syunik	- Conservation experts - Wine making equipment companies - Secondary tourism businesses	- World Bank - USAID - UNDP - EU - GIZ - WWF - CNF - Embassies



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5.2.2. Stakeholder communication

The communication with the stakeholders shall be periodical as proposed in the following table:

TABLE 4: MEGHRI STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION

	Civil society	Private sector	State / Public / International
Key stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual quarterly personal meeting with sector representatives - Tourism statistics report about Meghri, 2 times a year - Newsletter containing updates about important entries: quarterly - Update of content on destination website : once a week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual quarterly personal meeting with sector representatives - Tourism statistics report about Meghri, twice a year - Newsletter containing updates about important entries: quarterly - Update of content on destination website : once a week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism report with relevant updates about all activities : quarterly to municipality, every six months to Ministries
Primary stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletter containing updates about important entries: quarterly - Annual tourism meeting : in person once a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletter containing updates about important entries: quarterly - Annual tourism meeting : in person once a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism report with relevant updates about all activities : every six months to Ministries
Secondary stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletter containing updates about important entries: every six months - Annual tourism report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletter containing updates about important entries: quarterly - Annual tourism report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual tourism meeting : in person once a year - Annual tourism report



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5.2.3. Key strategic stakeholder issues

The purpose is to identify the aspirations, concerns, opportunities, challenges, roles, and resources of different stakeholders.

The elaboration of a SWOT analysis and its update every six months during the course of the implementation shall be the basis, the following questions could be relevant:

- What are the key stakeholder concerns?
- The key risks or threats?
- What are the key aspirations for individual businesses/stakeholders/the destination as a whole?
- What are the most threatening risks?
- What are the opportunities for doing things better?

The key to this exercise is to identify those key issues that stakeholders will need to focus their efforts, as well as identify other outcomes that might also be achieved.

5.3. Tourism Development Strategy

A basic tourism development strategy for Meghri shall be elaborated.

The strategy should identify the following key assets:

- The top 10 issues affecting the site including current and future challenges for development of a local tourism industry
- Recommendations and opportunities for improving the situation on short term
- The desired changes and some key performance indicators identifying when a certain change has happened to the satisfaction of the key stakeholders
- Identification of key tourism products for development
- Creation of a business network within the tourism sector
- Elaboration of a simple action plan with activities required for delivering future solutions
- International cooperation and funding for tourism related projects for capacity building, marketing and local management.

The tourism strategy should be built around the core issues identified from a SWOT Analysis and from stakeholder consultation. The strategy should have a simple vision that reflects the aspirations of the stakeholders. This should be about protecting the assets and processes that matter in the destination, as well as improving the visitor services. It should be based on the strengths of Meghri and on identified tourism products such as cultural, culinary and adventure.

A basic strategy can directly set out the issues, risks, challenges, objectives, roles, and responsibilities. It should consider environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health and safety, aesthetic, and tourism issues. Everyone in the destination with a role to play should be able to understand what is expected of them when they read it, and how they might benefit from supporting it.



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5.4. Governance

Every successful tourism destination needs clear governance and management. While some of the world's best managed destinations are running Destination Management Organisations, based on clear Destination Management Plans, such a governance model can also be carried out with strong stakeholder engagement and a leading entity, e.g., a powerful and motivated municipality. Funding is an intrinsic part of tourism destination governance. This part shall be transparent and needs constant monitoring from independent bodies.

There is no one-fits-for-all tourism management structure. Different destinations, societies and cultures have their own ideas of what good management looks like, how it works, and how different people and organisations work together. However, most experts agree that some structure for managing the issues at a destination scale is necessary. The legislative part is also of importance. A destination can have a pure public governance but also a form of a private-public-partnership (PPP). The PPP model has to be based on the legal situation which sometimes needs to be adapted.

In urban areas, it might be an elected mayor or a local authority with an inspired vision. In natural areas, it might be a dynamic National Park management authority with the mandate to protect the site and deliver on wider destination issues. In many larger destinations, it may be the tourism board or DMO that sets the strategy. The destination may need a custom solution, but it can probably learn a great deal from looking at good management systems in other sites.

Destination management usually requires partnership working across the tourism value chain. This can be a challenge, as effective partnership requires consensus of shared goals, aspirations, and mutual obligations. Professionals from different sectors may be reluctant to engage with each other or dedicate time to gain new skills. Site managers who need to influence tourism may need a broader range of skills, some knowledge of the tourism sector, or the willingness to learn about it quickly to help make this dialogue effective.

The management structure should be appropriate to the size and scale of the destination, and define its responsibilities for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural issues. It might be a department, group, committee, private company, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), or simply a partnership of different types of organizations linked by a shared strategy.

The most progressive heritage sites have management structures and governance that are extremely open and inclusive. A significant number of people in the destination and host community play a vital role in setting the strategy, delivering actions and activities, and monitoring progress.



6. SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN (Under Tourism Perspective)

6.1. Recommended extent and forms of tourism

6.1.1. Suggested investments at the site

In the following, investments for existing tourism assets and non-existing tourism assets are suggested. However, the most important investment is the opening and installation of a tourism visitor and information center in the old administrative building in Poqr Tagh. This could also be the location for community meetings of everyone who is part of the tourism sector.

The table reports suggested investments for existing tourism assets.

TABLE 5: SUGGESTED INVESTMENTS IN MEGHRI

Type of asset	Name of attraction and tourism asset	Recommendations for improvement
Cultural heritage asset	Meghri Fortress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General valorisation of the ruins and a visitor concept - Improve accessibility - Installation of signage and site interpretation - Illumination at night
	Holy Mother of God Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General valorisation of the church and a visitor concept - Improve accessibility - Installation of signage and site interpretation - Illumination at night - Souvenir shop and coffee shop
	Church of Surb Sarkis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General valorisation of the church and a visitor concept - Improve accessibility - Installation of signage and site interpretation - Illumination at night - Souvenir shop and coffee shop
	Old administrative house in central square of Poqr Tagh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rehabilitation of the building - Installation of a tourist visitor and information center - improvement of accessibility - development of office and meeting rooms
	Central square of Poqr Tagh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - general upgrade of the square in particular the road condition - conservation and adoption of proper safety measures for the “Chinar” trees
	Fountain at Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conservation measures for the fountain with regards to the rocks and stones architecture - water drainage system



	square of Poqr Tagh	- information panel for usage (non/potable water, etc.)
	Surb Hovhannes church	- signage and information - improve accessibility, in particular the stairs leading to the church (handrail, stair levels and heights, etc.)
	Poqr Tagh walking itinerary	- walking itinerary through the traditional neighbourhood - signage with information about history, buildings, monuments, etc. - granting access to gardens and family houses
Natural heritage asset	Araks River Valley	- Installation of a visitor platform for enjoying the view over the Aras river and valley - Signage about the historical significance

6.1.2. Suggested investments on other tourism services and infrastructure in the impact area

The following table reports suggested investments for additional tourism attractions and activities that do not exist at the moment:

TABLE 6: MEGHRI SUGGESTED NON EXISTING ATTRACTIONS

Type of asset	Name of attraction and tourism asset	Recommendations for improvement
Cultural heritage asset	Meghri agro and crafts market	- Installation of a market promoting agricultural and culinary products as well as arts and crafts - Identification of a location within Poqr Tagh, eventually within a courtyard of an existing house
	Meghri Museum and cultural community hub	- Museum with exhibitions about religion, archaeology, geology, history, cultural heritage; - The museum shall function as a cultural community center for music, arts, crafts, etc. - The location of the museum shall eventually be in the district of Poqr Tagh
Natural heritage asset	Araks River Valley hiking trail	- development of a hiking trail along the river valley with picnic areas - signage and site interpretation boards
	Hiking trails on the surrounding mountains	- access to the hiking trails from Poqr Tagh - network of at least 5 trails with different level of difficulty and duration - signage, picnic areas, waste bins, illumination



	Biking trails on the surrounding mountains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mountain biking trails could be implemented on the opposite side of Poqr Tagh - A network of around 50km of biking trails with picnic areas, waste bins and dedicated signage shall be developed
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6.2. Visitor Management

6.2.1. Carrying Capacity

According to UNESCO⁵, the idea of a single number identifying how many visitors a site can accommodate – its “carrying capacity” – is problematic. Recent research has suggested that a better way to think about it is to look at the constraints upon numbers and the variables that are likely to make anything beyond a certain number of visitors unsustainable and socially, ecologically, economically, or culturally damaging.

As mentioned above, Meghri has a total capacity of 186 beds at the moment. If we assume an annual occupancy rate of 50% this would result in 34.000 bed nights in Meghri. Moreover, if we assume that the average length of stay is 3 nights this would result in around 11.000 tourist arrivals per year. Although the population of Meghri is about the same number, such an amount of visitor arrivals would not affect the tourist destination in a negative manner in the short and medium term.

However, infrastructure for the collection and disposal of residual waste is important in order to protect the environment. With regards to wild life and protected animals, there is the need to introduce a monitoring system and respective signage along the proposed hiking and biking trails. This could prevent a negative impact on the environment and wild life.

Methodologies for calculating carrying capacity

There are several methodologies to calculate Carrying Capacity (CC) for cultural heritage sites with the ultimate scope of informing its operational guidelines⁶.

The theoretical model for CC calculation is:

$$\text{Total site surface}/(1\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{opening hours})/2$$

However, by setting additional parameters, the master plan for Meghri could become a tool to be updated over time to describe the current situation of the site, its state of conservation and any weaknesses or management problems:

Step 1 – Create a site description sheet

This document should entail some general information about the site, as well as its juridical status, environmental data (e.g. seismic risk), information on its management, availability of plans and programmatic documents, number of visitors and their profile (age, gender, nationality etc.), maximum number of visitors/ m2 (according to fire regulations), accessibility, number of opening days per year (for fenced CH sites).

⁵ UNESCO (2021). [World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit](#)

⁶ E. Cimnaghi, G. Mondini, M. Valle: “La Capacità di carico turistica: uno strumento per la gestione del patrimonio culturale” in Quaderni della Valorizzazione NS5 – Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività culturali e del Turismo.

Step 2 – Create a set of KPIs

The KPI set could enclose the following information:

Functional Carrying Capacity			
KPI	Description	Confrontation level⁷	Value of KPI
Nr. of tourist with respect to the visitable surface	CC= (visitable surface/ total surface)* theoretical CC	1	To be filled out on site
Maximum visitors	Constraint indicated by fire regulation	1	To be filled out on site
Accessibility	Presence of architectural barriers	1	To be filled out on site
Opening times	Site opening days/hours	3	To be filled out on site
Security measures in place	YES/NO	4	To be filled out on site
Heritage Vulnerability factors	To be identified on place during inspections	3	To be filled out on site

This set of KPIs could inform the definition of visitors paths, opening times, adequacy of lighting systems, security and prevention plans. In absence of data, surveys should be carried out on site.

Social Carrying Capacity			
KPI	Description	Confrontation level	Value of KPI
Resident perception on tourism flows at site	In-depth interview with key stakeholders to understand satisfaction level	3	To be filled out on site
Perception of tourist´s attitude towards residents	In-depth interview with key stakeholders to understand satisfaction level	3	To be filled out on site
Ratio between nr. of tourists in low seasons and high season	1 (i.e., visitor statistics collected at site)	2	To be filled out on site
Other specific problems at site	(e.g., thefts, vandalism)	4	To be filled out on site

This set of KPIs can inform action to de-seasonalize tourism flows, introduce behavior norms at site, prevention policies (e.g. the installation of cameras)

Psychological Carrying Capacity			
KPI	Description	Confrontation level	Value of KPI
Tourist level of satisfaction regarding presentation of CH (i.e., heritage interpretation)	Ad-hoc studies	3	To be filled out on site
% of tourists who believe the site is overcrowded	Direct observation	3	To be filled out on site

⁷level 1: comparison with normative indications (if any) or quantifiable physical factor; level 2) comparison with best practices in the literature; level 3) site-specific definition of the reference target by means of a direct comparison direct comparison with the managing body; level 4) qualitative indications to be defined in consultation with the managing body



Level of fruition of cultural offer and site comprehension	Direct observation	3	To be filled out on site
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This set of KPIs can inform actions to enhance site quality and fruition, policies to reduce crowds (e.g. introduction of an online ticket), information on ancillary services and initiatives to make the visit more pleasant.

Infrastructural/ Territorial Carrying Capacity			
KPI	Description	Confrontation level	Value of KPI
Nr. of transports to get to the site	Nr. of ordinary and dedicated transport means available	1	To be filled out on site
Toilets/ nr. of visitors	Determined by the law	1	To be filled out on site
Signage	YES/NO	4	To be filled out on site
Spaces dedicated to visitor relax (e.g., benches and pic-nic areas) in TSMP area	Direct observation and/or ad-hoc studies	3	To be filled out on site
Nr. parking lots in TSMP area	Direct observation and/or ad-hoc studies	1	To be filled out on site

This set of KPIs can inform TSMP on actions related to the introduction of dedicated transportation means (e.g., direct bus operating on weekends) to reach the site and to take decisions on incrementing signage, toilets, trash bins and other amenities available to tourists.

Step 3 – Create a result sheet

The results obtained will be incorporated in a special form, aimed at collecting in a synthetic and organic manner the indications that emerged during the application phases of the model.

As can be seen from the table below, the first field to be filled in relates to the identification of the asset being studied.

As part of the analysis of the extrapolated theoretical CC values, it is useful to make a comparison with the flows at the reference site, in order to understand whether there is **overutilization or underutilization of the cultural asset**.

The results sheet conclusions should enclose a section on management guidelines, which must contain indications of a strategic nature to improve the conditions of usability of the site and inform its operational guidelines.

6.2.2. Flow Management Techniques

As mentioned, the number of present visitors to Meghri is relatively manageable. Moreover, it is not expected that the number will significantly rise within the next 5 years, as the hotel development sector nor the infrastructure sector around Meghri is booming.

Creation of visitor itineraries:



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A certain number of specific itineraries in and around Meghri can lead to benefitting the local community and its businesses. Such itineraries can be designed by the local tourism management team, together with the municipality and the businesses. Along these itineraries (walking, hiking, by car) the local businesses can sell their products and services.

Such itineraries can lead through populated areas with a management approach. Further, it prevents the visitors to walk through areas where the local population is not interested in getting in touch with tourists. The itineraries need to be promoted by leaflets, booklets and marked with signage.

There exist various low-tech and low-cost solutions for visitor flow management but its adaptation to the local reality depend on research the actual visitor flows at the site.

There are a number of visitor management techniques that do not need considerable investment, but they do require to clearly identify the timing and intensity of the issues, as well as where such special systems need to be implemented.

Some methods to consider:

- Limit visitor access
- Spread visitors spatially and across time to minimize the intensity of negative impacts
- Advance ticketing systems
- Congestion-related pricing systems.
- Spreading visitors across the destination
- Offer visitors other experiences, products, and services to lessen the urgency and focus on a small number of 'must see' elements

6.3. Visitor rights and responsibilities

Taking care of the environment is one of the most important responsibilities of visitors and it shall be communicated in various ways, such as: in hotels, with signage along the main roads, on busses, on websites and social media channels directed at tourism marketing, at specific sites and attractions, etc.

As Meghri is a destination which is only accessible by road, the parking of cars shall be managed well and the visitors shall be informed about the parking spots around the city.

6.4. Adding value through products, experiences and services

6.4.1. Why it is important

Adding value to sustainable and authentic products, services and experiences at the destination is relevant for the local actors and for the visitors.

a) Some products, services, and experiences are outstanding universal value (OUV) critical.

Many sites are “cultural landscapes” that were created by and still sustained by traditional socio-economic systems. In these situations, it is imperative that value is added to the products of such landscapes so the system can be sustained and the OUV attributes preserved through its survival.

b) Some products, services, and experiences are community welfare critical.

Many communities living in or around the site will depend on a relatively small number of products, services, and experiences to survive and feed their families. Even if their basic economic activities are not related to the site, it is often critical for good heritage management that they are able to



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survive and have a reasonable standard of living. People who are experiencing economic decline are more likely to make choices that can damage the heritage.

c) “Distinctive”, “authentic”, and or “unique” sells.

People visiting specific cultural and natural sites have a reasonable desire for products, services, and experiences they cannot get anywhere else.

The perception of the quality of a destination is a serious matter, and one that can be helped in part by the products, services, or experiences it offers. Regardless of whether what is offered at the destination is important for the host community's livelihood or the value of the site, it is often just good sense and good economics that the opportunities provide good things to buy and do.

d) Diversifying the products, services, and experiences is inherently more robust and sustainable.

Many destinations have quite a narrow product range, which increases their fragility to risk. By widening the product portfolio, the risk can be spread for the host community and businesses.

6.4.2. Products, services and experiences that can be developed

Meghri is a destination where various tourism products can be developed. The chart below shows the relevant products and services that are related to the Meghri tourism system.

Various activities and attractions mentioned in chapters 6.1.1. and 6.1.2. shall be developed along the value chain to improve the visitor experience at the destination, as well as for improving the business opportunities for the local population.

Tourism products to be developed in Meghri:

- Culinary and Agriculture: Meghri is a hub for the production of fruits such as persimmon, figs, pomegranate and others. The city is surrounded by fruit orchards which contribute substantially to its agricultural economy. The agricultural producers and vendors represent a potential tourism attraction. There exist internationally known systems and best practices such as Slow Food Travel and the UNESCO GeoFood Parks.
- Religious tourism and churches: the cultural heritage of religion of Meghri with its various churches and historical monuments represents a potential for tourism. However, the monuments need a structural upgrade in terms of infrastructure and visitor services. Then a series of events could be organised inside the monuments or in its vicinity.
- Educational and scientific tourism: the geological heritage of Meghri is an untouched potential for the destination. Individuals and groups of researchers, students as well as hobby geologists are considered as tourists that usually stay more nights in a specific destination. On the long run, Meghri could also host conferences or events linked to its geological heritage.
- Artisans and handicrafts: the crafters of Meghri could become an attraction for tourism if certain activities such as capacity building and a design upgrade of the artisan products are carried out.
- Consumer products: this includes souvenirs which are produced by the local crafters and artisans. Such products can be used for merchandise of the regional DMO and for sales at the local visitor information center.
- Nature tourism: hiking, biking and adventure activities shall be developed in Meghri and its surrounding mountains. Such activities would certainly also be interesting for the domestic arrivals and the local inhabitants of the city.
- Museums: specific museums with exhibitions about local folklore, history, geology, etc. would be an additional source for the city.



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- Events: the performing arts such as music and dance of folklore, traditional but also modern artists and musicians are considered as an important point of attraction for any kind of visitor and locals likewise.



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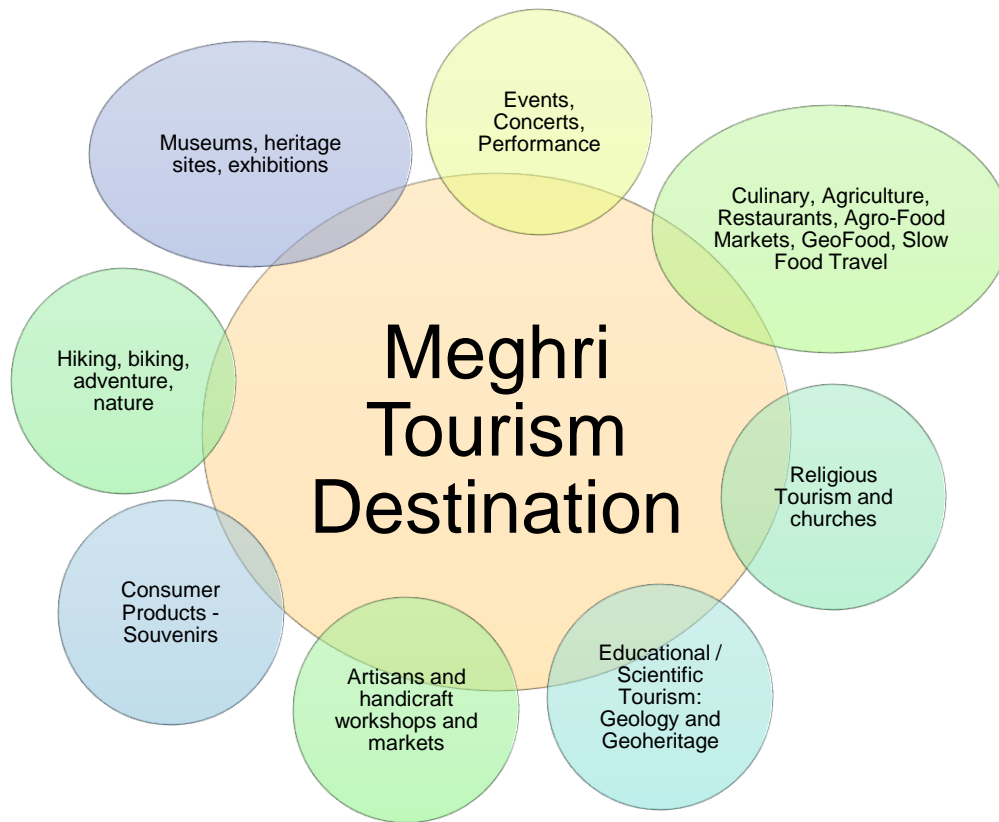


FIGURE 4: MEGHRI TOURISM DESTINATION

6.4.3. Sales

Opportunities for purchasing local products and services are an important factor for Meghri. Especially the agricultural products represent a potential demand, however, there are hardly any points of sales in the city. Market facilities in Poqr Tagh and / or along the main road to Meghri are a necessary investment.

Moreover, consumer products such as souvenirs, as well as products “made in Meghri” by local artisans and handicraftsman represent a highly demanded item. However, Meghri does not offer any relevant space for such products at the moment. It is recommended that the tourism visitor and information center hosts sales opportunities for such products.

6.4.4. Value Infrastructures

Recommendations to give more value to existing infrastructure:

- Establishment of market and vendor facilities along the main roads leading to Meghri
- Support to the agricultural production association / cooperation (as soon as it has been established) for investing in drying equipment, hygiene processes, marketing, cultivation and harvest processes, etc.



- Lower manufacturing costs of key products especially in the agricultural sector through machinery using less energy
- Installation of renewable energy supplies for the accommodation sector

6.4.5. Branding

An integrated marketing approach is suggested for the tourism destination of Meghri. As depicted below, this includes also a specific approach to public relations (PR). Brand partnerships are particularly interesting for the destination of Meghri because of its many distinctive tourism products and services to be developed in the future.



FIGURE 5: MEGHRI MARKETING CONCEPT

6.4.6. Merchandising

Merchandising in combination with a tourism destination often results in the creation of souvenirs. The artists, artisans and handicraftsmen of Meghri shall be encouraged to create gadgets and souvenirs made with local materials (clay, wood, metal, paper, straw, rocks, etc.), designing consumer friendly products. A best practice example is the product designer Giulio Vinaccia, who is operating from Italy and giving teaching and design recommendations for such products.⁸

Such products (consumer goods, furniture, bijouterie, accessories, etc.) can create significant revenues for the artisans. If the destination of Meghri decides for a certain destination logo, it can be applied to some products but shall be decided in joint collaboration with the regional DMO.

⁸ More information: <https://www.giuliovinaccia.org>, retrieved in January 2023.



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6.5. Collection of visitor flow statistics

The collection of visitor statistics is of high importance for the management and marketing of the tourism destination Meghri. In particular, the accommodation structures shall use a consistent system of data collection of basic visitor profile information, such as:

- Nationality
- Place of residence
- Gender
- Age group
- Purpose of visit
- Travel party
- Number of nights spent at the destination

However, it is recommended that such a consistent system of data collection, processing and analysis is managed directly by the Tourism Committee or the National Bureau of Statistics. Certainly, the municipality shall be responsible for the communication of data and should be trained in data collection.

6.6. Communication to stakeholders and public at large

As mentioned in chapter 6.5.5., the contribution of PR to the success of a tourism destination cannot be underestimated. This is further linked to chapter 5.2.2. and the suggestions for methods and timeline of stakeholder communication.

The communication to visitors shall also include specific information on the activities, services and products of the destination with dedicated printed brochures, maps, leaflets, guidebooks, additional to the content that shall be given through a destination website.

6.7. Risk management (Safety and security)

Risk management refer to two aspects:

- Risks to cultural heritage;
- Risks to visitors.

With regard to **Risks to cultural heritage**, because of its importance as a management tool, international standards have been developed. One of them is ISO 31000:2009, Risk Management - Principles and guidelines. The figure shows the main steps defined by the standard (inner ring) as well as concepts and tools developed for the heritage sector⁹.

⁹ See ICCROM (2016). *A Guide to Risk Management of Cultural Heritage*. Government of Canada, Canadian Conservation Institute



A risk management plan should be devised, with classification of risks from insignificant (risks easily mitigated by normal day to day process) to catastrophic (destruction of the site).



Figure 6: Steps for risk management defined by ISO 31000:2009

7. MONITORING

There are a number of reasons why monitoring is important:

- To ensure that the Value of the site is being maintained
- To assess the condition and/or state of conservation
- To allow outstanding issues to be recognised and dealt with
- To allow good practice, knowledge, and experiences to be shared between states, site managers, and other heritage professionals.

Benchmarks should be **smart**:

- **Specific.** Be extremely clear about what you mean; vague or generic benchmarks do not work – target a specific area for improvement.
- **Measurable.** Benchmarks must be based on data that can be repeated to provide comparisons – this requires quantifiable measures.
- **Assignable.** Things only happen if someone is tasked with doing them, specify in who will make this thing happen.
- **Realistic.** State what can realistically be achieved in the given time period, considering available resources.
- **Time-related.** Specify when the action will be undertaken, and when its outcome can be achieved.

Benchmarks should be relatively simple to understand and should be widely communicated.

Benchmarks to be considered include:

- Conservation or environmental benchmarks
- Community benchmarks
- Economic/Tourism benchmarks
- Site-specific benchmarks



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7.1. Conservation or environmental benchmarks

For this site we may define the main environmental benchmarks:

- Biodiversity of flora, fauna, animals
- Pollution by tourism businesses and visitors
- Water quality
- Energy efficiency

7.2. Community benchmarks

The main community benchmarks may be defined as:

- The average wage in tourism sector paid to local people in the Meghri community
- The poverty rate in Meghri
- The quality of life in Meghri
- The percentage of local young people who receive training in the tourism industry
- The number of local people who run a business related to tourism

7.3. Economic/Tourism benchmarks

The main economic/tourism benchmarks may be:

- Number of domestic tourists visiting Meghri
- Number of incoming tourists visiting Meghri
- Number of overnight tourists stays in Meghri
- The main purpose of tourist visits
- The profile of tourists
- Seasonality of visits
- Money spent by tourists on food, accommodation, souvenirs, etc.

7.4. Site-specific benchmarks

Such benchmarks may be:

- Number of cultural events organized in Meghri during a year
- Number of new tourism related companies opening
- Number of souvenir, merchandise sales from the Meghri visitor center
- Number of people working in and benefitting from the tourism industry
- Number of people receiving training for tourism business management



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8. ORGANIZATION

8.1. Governance structure

Based on discussions with the local private and public stakeholders, as well as the Tourism Committee, the following option for the governance of the Meghri tourism site is considered:

- The management is granted to a **foundation (Meghri tourism development foundation)** which is created by the Government of Armenia. The key partners are the Izmirlian Foundation and the Municipality of Meghri who shall be the Board Members of the Foundation;
- This foundation shall operate as a Local Cluster DMO, representing all interests of all key stakeholders involved: the Government via the TC / regional DMO, the municipality of Meghri, the Izmirlian Foundation, as well as the private tourism businesses.

In this case a new entity is created, the Foundation, which is a non-profit organization, that has a clear objective – to manage and valorize the tourism attractions and assets of Meghri.

The legal form of the foundation is preferred to the private LLC for managing the tourism destination. The justification is explained in detail in assignment 1.3 – Conception Framework of the DMO establishment, in particular in the chapters 2.5.2.4 and 2.5.2.5.

In line with the Law on Foundations, the Statute/Charter of the Foundation will stipulate the objectives and list of business activities that the Foundation can engage in personally. It will also define the scope of main stakeholders, the structure of the Foundation, as well as the members of the Board of Trustees.

The following is assumed:

- The Government will provide financial resources to cover operational costs, but most of all for the upgrade and maintenance of public infrastructure and utilities, in particular in Poqr Tagh;
- The Izmirlian Foundation shall act as an investor for the architectural upgrade and heritage conservation measures of several buildings in Poqr Tagh according to their draft master plan, yet to be approved by IF board and to be submitted to and approved by the municipality of Meghri;
- After approval of the draft master plan the Izmirlian Foundation develops accommodation structures (boutique hotels and B&Bs) in the district of Poqr Tagh, the management of the structures may be outsourced to specialized private operators;
- The Municipality of Meghri provides services to the site, including safety installations, waste collection and disposal, installation and upgrade of public utilities in Poqr Tagh but also at other locations identified in this document;
- A Board of trustees will be composed by five people (two from the Government, one from the TC / regional DMO, one from the Izmirlian Foundation, one from the Municipality of Meghri). The Government will appoint the President of the Board. The representative of the municipality and the Izmirlian foundation will act as vice-presidents;
- An experienced Director - hired upon a tender on a competitive basis - will be in charge for the management;
- The Foundation will be provided with a staff to cover basic functions including administration and stakeholder coordination.



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It is further assumed that the Tourism Committee carries out the following activities on the national level in order to disseminate the vision and mission to the proposed destination management structure, these include strategy formulation, marketing and branding, digitalization, marketing intelligence, crisis management, investment funding.

Besides various functions, there will be the convenience for certain tourism products to be managed at a national rather than at a local scale. This is the case of the management of transboundary tours involving long-distance hiking route, for example, cross-border with Iran.

Other functions will be delegated to the regional and local level. Decentralization should comply with good governance rules, keeping the State as ensuring authority.

It is further assumed that at regional level the DMO keeps a control on the following:

1. Tourism industry coordination;
2. Regional tourism management, with specific regard to key niche products such as gastronomy, culture and adventure / sports, as well as territories;
3. Management of specific products, including events and attractions;
4. Training and capacity building.

The regional level will also contribute to strategy formulation and marketing intelligence, particularly for specific niche products and territories, representing the interest of regional stakeholders.

8.2. Management structure

8.2.1. Main responsibilities of the Meghri Tourism Development Foundation

Main responsibilities of the foundation shall be the following:

- Coordination role of tourism related activities carried out by the local DMO, Izmirlian foundation and the municipality of Meghri;
- Ensuring that the national vision, mission and objectives of tourism development are achieved also in Meghri;
- Management and operational running of the Meghri Visitor Center in coordination with the regional DMO;
- Supporting measures for the regional DMO;
- Active stakeholder engagement in the larger Meghri town area;
- Decision-making about preferences and urgencies of urban tourism related utility and infrastructure projects, in particular in Poqr Tagh;
- Implementation of the visitor data collection process;
- Fund-raising activities;
- Responsibilities described below at § 8.2.2 and 8.2.3, attributed to the representative of the Municipality and the representative of the Izmirlian foundation, as members of the Foundation Board (both will be Vice-Presidents);
- Promote cultural ecosystems at local level, particularly building on tourism clusters, by formulating local cultural development plans (LCDP) and supporting creative tourism;
- Stakeholder engagement activities and outreach;
- Tourism Site management and key partner coordination;
- Ensure training and capacity building, together with regional universities, colleges and training centers, paying specific attention to the training of tourism related actors;



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- Management of the visitor center and its activities

Tourism product development:

- Set-up a regional agenda of events and festivals to be promoted as described above;
- Production and distribution of printed information and promotional materials to visitors through the VCs;
- Design and management of local itineraries;
- Support to the organization and promotion of local festival and events;
- Management of local artists and crafters
- development and management of arts and crafts workshops
- design upgrade of souvenirs and products
- Representation of the interest of local tourism stakeholders

Marketing and promotion:

- Implementation of marketing activities for Meghri;
- Elaboration and implementation of a marketing and branding strategy for the tourism destination Meghri in accordance with the national and regional strategies;
- marketing and destination branding, which however must be limited and consistent with regional and national market positioning so as to avoid proliferation of regional brands which cannot be appreciated by perspective target markets. Marketing should therefore concentrate on promoting regional clusters and destinations on the national market, while leaving international marketing to the TC;
- Management and update of local tourism website
- Implementation of marketing activities such as a tourism activity and destination map, brochures, leaflets, photographic and videographic material, content creation, etc.
- Drafting of newsletters, annual tourism report

8.2.2. Role and responsibilities of the Municipality of Meghri within the Meghri tourism development foundation

The municipality is a key strategic partner when it comes to the management of tourism in Meghri. The municipality is carrying out works for general infrastructure, utilities, road improvement, among others. All these works are also relevant for the overall tourism infrastructure of Meghri. Moreover, the municipality has the capacity to communicate and deal with projects that are funded by the Government or by third party organisations and international donor organisations.

The representative of the Municipality will have a crucial role within the foundation. Inside the Meghri tourism development foundation, she/he will carry the following responsibilities:

- Organization of regular meetings, according to the stakeholder engagement and communication plan, including the provision of meeting space;
- Reporting to key public stakeholders such as the Ministry of Economy and other related ministries;
- Preparation and final approval of the budget for all infrastructure related operations in Meghri;
- Lobbying with relevant Ministries with respect to investment in infrastructure, energy, transport, communication technologies, etc.;
- Fund raising for public investments in the tourism sector; Upgrade of urban infrastructure
- Monitoring the visitor data collection process;
- Ensuring social and environmental sustainability of the tourism activities in Meghri;
- Ensure that all houses in Poqr Tagh have access to urban utility services;



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- Set-up of environmental protection measures such as waste management and clean up along the Meghri river;
- Coordinate access to funds from the Government and third party development organisations for the implementation of projects;
- Facilitation of administration and bureaucracy for the organisation of events, festivals, and markets.
- Upgrade and improvement of utilities in Poqr Tagh
- Collection and analysis of tourism statistics (visitor arrivals, overnight stays, economic impact assessment, etc.)
- Management of the UNESCO Geopark project¹⁰
- Organisation and management of agri-markets
- Organisation, management and promotion of tourism related events (concerts of performing arts, markets, cultural festivals, etc.)

8.2.3. Role and responsibilities of the Izmirlian Foundation within the Meghri tourism development foundation

The Izmirlian Foundation's mission in Meghri is the support of the sustainable socio-economic development of the city. It has carried out various projects for community development and restoration as well as the revival of the cultural heritage of the site in the last decade. In particular, the conservation and restoration works of houses and monuments are focused on the district of Poqr Tagh.

The foundation is considered a strategic partner within the tourism industry of Meghri, especially when it comes to investment and restoration works but also for eventual capacity building and training activities. It has elaborated a draft master plan in 2020 with detailed activities for Poqr Tagh, yet to be approved by IF board and the Meghri municipality.

Its main responsibilities are:

- Support the development of a Conservation manual for restoration works in Poqr Tagh;
- Investment for the restoration works and architectural conservation of traditional houses in Poqr Tagh;
- Safeguard the architectural heritage of houses and monuments in Poqr Tagh that are considered in the preliminary management plan;
- Ensure that the conservation manual is strictly implemented when carrying out conservation measures of houses and monuments in Poqr Tagh;
- Investment and restructuring of buildings to be used as accommodation facilities (boutique hotels and B&Bs) and / or workshop space for cultural groups, artists, crafters, among others
- Implementation of a hospitality and accommodation concept for Poqr Tagh (the operational management of the accommodation facilities may be outsourced)
- General support for logistics, administrative, marketing and training to cultural groups and tourism related entrepreneurs
- Investment, organisation and coordination for the set-up of other relevant structures such as a cultural centre, social-entrepreneur centre, culinary arts centre, among others

¹⁰ Some years ago a UNESCO Geopark project has already been discussed with UNESCO but issues with the shared geographical extension to Nakhchivan arised. However, new boundaries that are limited to the area of the Republic of Armenia shall be discussed in order to restart negotiations with UNESCO about a Geopark project.

8.3. Functional Structure

We assume a management structure which is held by the Executive Director, that operates through functional departments: Administration, Public Utilities, Marketing & Event Management, Visitor Services. Security and Cleanings of the office might be outsourced, as it is for maintenance and other service activities.

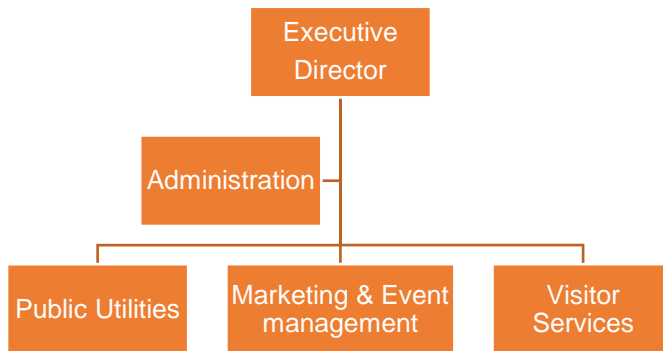


FIGURE 7: MEGHRI TOURISM DESTINATION FOUNDATION STRUCTURE

8.3.1. Timeline for the implementation of the Site Management Plan

The following table summarises the steps and timeline for the implementation of the Site management plan for Meghri.

On the short-term, it is advised that a MoU is signed between the key partners of the Meghri tourism development foundation. This is because at that time the regional DMOs and the local Cluster DMO office will not have been established as this certainly needs some time.

The Meghri tourism development foundation shall be formally established on the medium term, in a three years time, when all roles, responsibilities, and also the budget for its operation have been confirmed.

TABLE 7: MEGHRI TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TIME PLAN

Time	Key activities
Short-term (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elaboration of details of the Meghri tourism management structure and the Meghri tourism development foundation - Signing of MoU between the core partners of the future Meghri tourism development foundation such as the Government, TC, Izmirlian Foundation and the Municipality of Meghri - Set-up of the regional DMO
Medium-term (3-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Official establishment of the Meghri tourism development foundation - Approval of the Poqr Tagh Conservation Manual



Long-term (more than 5 years)

- Start of conservation works and protection measures of selected houses and monuments in Poqr Tagh
- Confirmation of the public infrastructure and utilities master plan for Poqr Tagh and selected areas of Meghri
- Consultations for the establishment of the UNESCO Geopark and its boundaries
- Implementation of the UNESCO Geopark project
- Approval and opening of hiking and biking trails, also trans-boundary with Iran

8.4. Human Resources

The following table reports the Departments along with relative personnel.

It is also assumed to engage volunteers for some activities, while ensuring gender equality.

TABLE 8: DEPARTMENT AND STAFFING

Department	Personnel
Administration	1 FTE
Public Utilities	1 FTE
Marketing & Event Management	2 FTE
Visitor Service	3 FTE
Security/Custodians	2 FTE
Cleaners	2 FTE

Human resources should be specialists of the sphere, trying however to involve local young people who have consistent trainings and skills.

The direct cost of human resources will be covered by the Meghri tourism development foundation Members.

a) Human resources from the municipality of Meghri:

The municipality of Meghri will provide human resources from the department of tourism and public utilities, including:

- Engineer for public utilities: fresh and grey water management, waste collection and disposal, energy supply, communications;
- Expert for tourism sustainability measures.

The costs for these positions shall be covered by the municipality and are accounted both as costs and revenue of the Foundation in the Business Plan (they represent the contribution of the Municipality to the Foundation).

b) Human resources from the Izmirlian foundation:

The Izmirlian foundation will provide the following human resource to Meghri tourism development foundation:

- Conservation architect



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The costs for this positions shall be covered by the Izmirlian foundation and are accounted both as costs and revenue of the Foundation in the Business Plan.

c) Human resources from the TC/Regional DMO:

- Director of the Meghri tourism development foundation
- Administration support
- Event management and fund raising
- Tourism marketing and branding expert
- Tourism product development expert
- Visitor center employees

The costs for these positions shall be covered by the regional DMO.

9. BUSINESS PLAN

All main partners of the Meghri tourism development foundation share responsibilities for the management of the tourism site Meghri.

- The site is well accessible and infrastructure works have been made for the parking lots, signage along the roads, public utilities upgrade, among others.
- Market facilities have been opened along the roads and within the city.
- It is further assumed that works for various tourism activities as explained in the chapters have been carried out.

This basic business plan identifies the main sources of costs and revenues for the Meghri tourism development foundation.

The estimations for the costs of the business plan do not regard the costs for any physical installations for attractions or any infrastructure that are described in the chapters 6.1.1. and 6.1.2 considering the suggested investments.

The financing of infrastructure (public utilities, roads, etc.) and tourism attractions (hiking trails, signage, activities, etc.) shall be provided separately by the Government, by international organisations or by private investors.

The Meghri tourism development foundation will be leading the decision making about what kind of investment and infrastructure is necessary and shall be a source of information when it comes to the decision of the locations to be developed.



9.1. Costs

The following costs are an estimation of direct costs for the Meghri Tourism Development Foundation:

TABLE 9: MEGHRI FOUNDATION COST STRUCTURE

COST CODING	ITEM	COST PER YEAR		
HUMAN RESOURCES	Director of Meghri tourism development foundation	\$	15.000,00	
	Administration support	\$	12.000,00	
	Event manager and fund raiser	\$	12.000,00	
	Marketing and branding expert	\$	15.000,00	
	Visitor center employees (3 positions)	\$	27.000,00	
	Tourism product expert	\$	12.000,00	
	Expert for tourism sustainability (municipality)	\$	15.000,00	
	Engineer for public utilities (municipality)	\$	15.000,00	
	Conservation architect (Izmirlian)	\$	15.000,00	
	Security (2 positions)	\$	18.000,00	
	Cleaning services (2 positions)	\$	15.000,00	
	OFFICE SPACE	Rent for office space	\$	5.000,00
		Utility cost	\$	2.000,00
Technical equipment		\$	2.000,00	
Office furniture		\$	2.000,00	
Organisation of meetings		\$	2.000,00	
LOGISTICS	Communication cost	\$	3.000,00	
	Travel expenses	\$	7.000,00	
TOTAL		\$	194.000,00	

9.2. Revenues streams

The revenue streams of the Meghri Tourism Development Foundation are focused on marketing cooperations with the private sector. Moreover, revenues are coming from website advertising, event organisation, as well as donations.

TABLE 10: MEGHRI FOUNDATION REVENUES

ATB INCOME STREAMS	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
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MARKETING COOPERATION	\$ 15.000,00	\$ 17.000,00	\$ 20.000,00	\$ 25.000,00	\$ 30.000,00
ORGANISATION OF EVENTS	\$ 5.000,00	\$ 7.000,00	\$ 8.000,00	\$ 10.000,00	\$ 10.000,00
SALES OF MERCHANDISE AND SOUVENIRS	\$ 5.000,00	\$ 7.000,00	\$ 8.000,00	\$ 10.000,00	\$ 10.000,00
DONATIONS	\$20.000,00	\$ 20.000,00	\$ 20.000,00	\$ 25.000,00	\$ 25.000,00
HR COVERAGE FROM IZMIRLIAN	\$15.000,00	\$ 15.000,00	\$ 15.000,00	\$ 15.000,00	\$ 15.000,00
HR COVERAGE FROM MUNICIPALITY	\$30.000,00	\$ 30.000,00	\$ 30.000,00	\$ 30.000,00	\$ 30.000,00
HR COVERAGE FROM REGIONAL DMO	\$93.000,00	\$ 93.000,00	\$ 93.000,00	\$ 93.000,00	\$ 93.000,00
OFFICE SPACE BY REGIONAL DMO	\$11.000,00	\$ 11.000,00	\$ 11.000,00	\$ 11.000,00	\$ 11.000,00
TOTAL	\$194.000,00	\$ 200.000,00	\$205.000,00	\$219.000,00	\$224.000,00

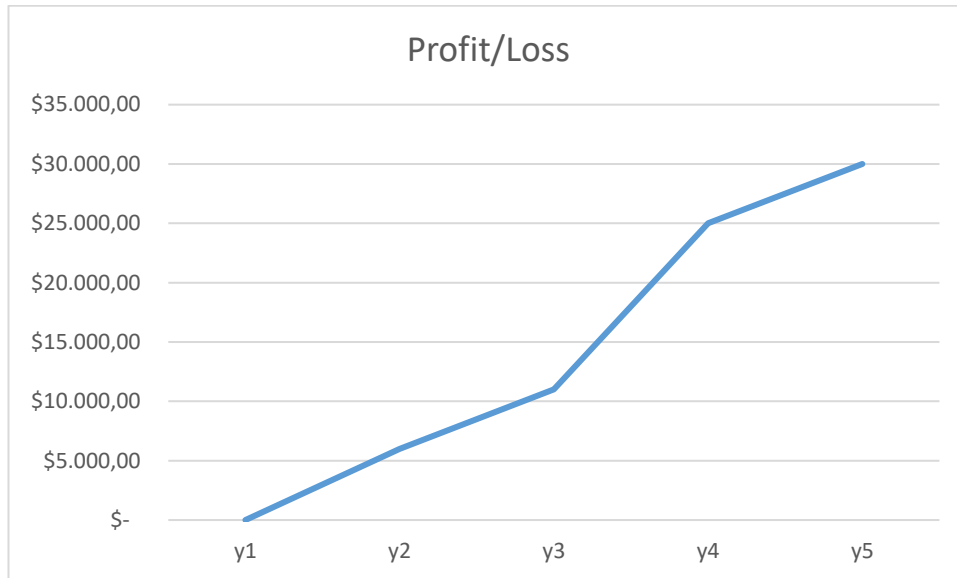
Profit and Loss statement

TABLE 11: PROFIT AND LOSS MEGHRI

	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
ANNUAL REVENUES	\$194.000,00	\$200.000,00	\$205.000,00	\$219.000,00	\$224.000,00
ANNUAL COSTS	\$194.000,00	\$194.000,00	\$194.000,00	\$194.000,00	\$194.000,00
PROFIT/LOSS	\$ -	\$ 6.000,00	\$ 11.000,00	\$ 25.000,00	\$ 30.000,00



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10. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents recommendations for a practical tourism site management model for the valorization and upgrading of services in Meghri.

The proposed management model for the tourism destination Meghri is based on a comprehensive site analysis, including the following topics:

- Analysis of the tourism supply and demand of the Meghri tourism area
- Ideas for the improvement of tourism attractions and activities
- Definition of key strategic management issues and a comprehensive SWOT analysis
- Stakeholder mapping and engagement
- Proposal for a management model
- Business plan

Meghri, and in particular the district of Poqr Tagh with its characteristic traditional architecture, is an important port of entry and exit of Armenia as it is located on the border with Iran. This is considered an important competitive advantage. However, there need to be carried out various projects that upgrade the tourism products and activities in Meghri and its surrounding areas, in particular the mountains and fruit orchards.

At the moment, the municipality of Meghri is not in the position to lead tourism development in the area. This is due to lack of investment opportunities, a vision for tourism, and a poor private business environment. In Meghri there is not a critical mass of private tourism operators. This is why a specific tourism site management model is recommended which is based on a strong collaboration approach among key players.

It is recommended to establish the “Meghri Tourism Development Foundation” which is backed by the municipality of Meghri, and the Izmirlian Foundation. This foundation, established by the Government as the local cluster DMO office, shall take decisions on behalf of the tourism destination Meghri.

The local cluster DMO is considered a satellite office of the regional DMO which will need to be established by the TC. The Izmirlian Foundation is a local player which has been working in Meghri



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for more than 20 years and has already carried out conservation works. It's role is crucial for the development of an accommodation sector in Poqr Tagh.

The municipality of Meghri shall be responsible for public infrastructure and utility works.

The proposed model has been discussed with the municipality and the Izmirlian foundation during an expert mission in october 2022 and an online meeting in February 2023.

The estimated costs per year for the Meghri Tourism Development Foundation are rather low as the management structure is basic.