

QUARTERLY INTERIM NARRATIVE REPORT

1. Description

- 1.1. Name of beneficiary of grant contract: **Háskólafélag Suðurlands – University Centre of South Iceland (UCSI)**
- 1.2. Name and title of the Contact person: **Sigurður Sigursveinsson, director of UCSI**
- 1.3. Name of partners in the Action: **No formal partners**
- 1.4. Title of the Action: **Katla Geopark: Regional development for the Eyjafjallajökull area**
- 1.5. Contract number: **CRIS 2012/293-200**
- 1.6. Start date and end date of the reporting period: **26.12.2013 - 26.3.2014**
- 1.7. Target country(ies) or region(s): **Iceland, Eyjafjallajökull area which includes the municipalities of Rangárþing eystra, Mýrdalshreppur og Skaftárhreppur.**
- 1.8. Final beneficiaries &/or target groups¹ (if different) (including numbers of women and men): **The three municipalities in Katla Geopark and their population**
- 1.9. Country(ies) in which the activities take place (if different from 1.7):

¹ “Target groups” are the groups/entities who will be directly positively affected by the project at the Project Purpose level, and “final beneficiaries” are those who will benefit from the project in the long term at the level of the society or sector at large.

2. Assessment of implementation of Action activities

2.1. Executive summary of the Action

This report is written by Steingerður Hreinsdóttir.

Steingerður is located in the UCSI office in Selfoss with access to offices in Hvolsvöllur, Vík and Kirkjubæjarklaustur while implementing projects and working on local issues as well as for offering support both to stakeholders and innovators.

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USCI and Katla Geopark have regular meetings with tourist officers in the area to coordinate operations and follow the goals of the IPA contract.

Much time has been dedicated to producing information panels for the remaining 9 sites, marketing and management strategy, building of picnic tables and other indoors activities. However despite the winter – a few good days made it possible to finalise 3 of the remaining sites.

The Reynisfjara facility is in the process of being built alongside the building of the servicehouse.

Moreover the course on Leadership, innovation and local guiding is about to finish providing the area with 25 new local guides ready to provide our tourists with quality guidance on the wonders of Katla Geopark.

Much time has been dedicated to the change of contract to the European Union following the upset of the negotiations between Iceland and the EU. First, there was the intended ending of the contract by two months' notice from the EU side, then the amendments involved in reducing the costs, and finally the introduction of the municipalities and Reynisfjara ehf as formal partners to UCSI regarding the grant contract.

2.2. Activities and results

Activity 1:

Organising seminars for local service providers and farmers; support to the local entrepreneurship and providing business support.

The 250 hour seminar on Leadership, innovation and local guiding started in August. The first seminar was held in August and the last seminar is scheduled in June 2014.

The second part of the local guide school started on the 8th of February running weekly seminars on different topics every week until the 18th of March. In the Geopark week from the 21-27th of April, the students will have to put their training into practice by offering a 2 hour guided tour around a Geosite of their choice – at the end of which – providing that they pass- will receive a certificate of a Local Tourist Guide.

The course on innovation is being run simultaneously and will be finished in May 2014.

The remaining courses are 12 hours course on Tephra layers analyses – started on the 20th of February and will finish on the 29th of May.

A 6 hours course on the Njála Saga on the 27th of April.

A 10 hours course on birds and the arts of guiding for bird watching starts on the 29th of April and finish on the 3rd of May.

Then in June there will be courses on climbing and other outdoors activities in the Geopark.

All these courses within the seminar are run in cooperation with the South Iceland association of adult education and advertised on the websites www.fraedslunet.is and www.katlageopark.is as well as in the local media as courses held by Katla Geopark with a support of the European Union.

Activity 2:

Upgrading the infrastructure and facilities for 25 selected geo-sites

Information signs have been put up on three sites during these 3 months because of exceptionally good days in January the rest of the signs and picnic tables will be waiting spring or some really good days before that.

Behind each sign is a text that everyone i.e geologists, landowners, business /service providers and so on have to agree up on. Therefore there is a group of people behind each sign – many hours and many discussions.

The project aims to use the EU and national funds as best we can and maximise our possibilities by involving local and national authorities as much as possible. A merger of different projects for maximal effects can be said to be the general aim of the project.



Preparation of a tour for a group of students from the SOAS University in London has been a trial for providing educational material for school groups. The material is ready and the group of students is arriving on the 1st of April 2014. They will be provided with educational material and seminars on the environment and they, as well as their regular teachers will give comment on the material and the course for further development of the material.

Activity 4: Developing a marketing strategy, marketing plan and management plan

We are working with the three municipalities trying to make the overall heading simpler. Creating an umbrella for tourism and information centres in the whole of the geopark – i.e to take the responsibility from the municipalities and develop a sustainable system for information and marketing Geotourism in Katla Geopark. Developing a new source of income for Katla Geopark by being a travel agency as well with booking opportunities as well as developing own tours.

We already have a licence of a tour operator and that is a step taken in August 2012 towards strengthening the tourism industry within the area as well as creating new opportunities of innovation for stakeholders. In November we met up with the Development Centre in South Iceland in order to find ways to further develop a plan for a sustainable running of the Geopark.

We continue to work very closely with stakeholders and local businesses on the marketing and management plan – all ideas of local businesses are being looked at and plan will be made in accordance with different management strategies. The first draft of sustainable financial management plan for the Geopark was introduced to stakeholders in August 2013 and after that further analyses, introduction on meetings with stakeholders have been held.

In February we held three meetings with the tourism service providers in the area for getting their response on the future of the Geopark. The meetings were held in Hótel ANNA in Rangárþin Eystra municipality, Hótel Katla in Mýrdalshreppur municipality and Hótel Klaustur in Skaftárhreppur municipality. These meetings focused on the future of the Geopark and how the Geopark in what form it would be of the best use for the service providers in the future. Some companies raised their concerns that the Geopark would become a travel agency and thought that it might then be in competition with other local travel agencies in the area. The ideal form of running the Geopark was thought to be by a support of the government and local authorities as well as by the industry itself.

Steingerður and Sigurður were invited to the monthly meetings of the municipalities boards in March to discuss the future management of Katla Geopark. It is evident that the three municipalities would like to continue the running of the geopark and will seek assistance to the national government to support the Geopark towards more sustainability.

Activity 5: Dissemination of best practices

The first meeting of the Icelandic forum of Geoparks in accordance with UNESCO regulations was held on the 20th of March. The people present came from the other two aspiring Geoparks Reykjanes Geopark and SAGA Geopark, the Icelandic UNESCO association, the ministry of the Environment, the Environmental agency of Iceland, the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, the Institute of Earth science, the Icelandic Tourist board and The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland.

2.3. Total amount spent in the reporting period

The total amount of funds spent during the fifth quarter of the project is about 60.000 Euros.

3. Partners and other Co-operation

3.1. Relationship between the formal partners of this Action

In this project UCSI is the sole beneficiary, i.e. there are no formal partners.

3.2. Relationship between your organisation and State authorities in the Action countries

There is a good and interactive relationship between the municipalities in Katla Geopark and UCSI the holder of the IPA project and all three municipalities have a member on the board of Katla Geopark. All the municipalities take responsibility in the project and provide access to facilities, data and work.

UCSI and Katla Geopark have good and supportive relationship with the state authorities in Iceland.

3.3. Relationship with any other organisations involved in implementing the Action

Skógasafn (Skógar Museum) is one of the founders of Katla Geopark. It is the main cultural museum in South Iceland and a very important link in developing and sharing geotourism and cultural tourism.

Kötlusetur (Katla Center) is one of the founders of Katla Geopark and one of Katla Geopark visitors centres. It's a very important link in implementing the IPA project among stakeholders in Mýrdalshreppur. It's also responsible in collaboration with the municipality of Mýrdalshreppur, UCSI and Katla Geopark for strengthening the infrastructure in Vík and surroundings.

Visit Vík, a tourism and marketing cluster for stakeholders in Mýrdalshreppur. Kötlusetur and Visit Vík share a director which is also a member of Katla Geopark project council.

Kirkjubæjarstofa is also one of the Katla Geopark founders. It's an important link in implementing the IPA project among stakeholders in Skaftárhreppur. It's also responsible in collaboration with the municipality of Skaftárhreppur, UCSI and Katla Geopark for strengthening the infrastructure in Kirkjubæjarklaustur and surroundings. Kirkjubæjarstofa has one member in the Katla Geopark project council.

Friður og frumkraftar (At Ease with the Elements) is a tourism and marketing cluster of Skaftárhreppur. It works with Katla Geopark on implementing and developing a marketing

strategy for the geopark. A project manager works part-time for the cluster and is also a member of Katla Geopark project council.

3.4. Outline any links and synergies you have developed with other actions

Working with different Geoparks in the North on a project called Northern Georoutes or GEO2NOR on developing travel packages within geoparks and remote areas in the Nordic countries.

Within an existing Rannís (Icelandic Centre for Research) project with Matís (Icelandic Food and Biotech R&D Company) and the Development Centre of South Iceland (DCSI) progress has been made in developing branding for locally made products within the Geopark.

3.5. Previous EU grants in view of strengthening the same target group

The UCSI has just finished a Grundtvig project on handicrafts (HENCE: Handicraft Elements in the National Costumes in Europe). The focus of UCSI's involvement in this project is on the Geopark area, more specifically in cooperation with activities in the Saga Centre in Hvolsvöllur.

4. Visibility

The project is very well made visible in all the seminars held as well as in the advertisements in the local and national papers.

The website and the video that was produced have the EU logo and are being introduced widely.

All information panels and signs have the EU logo – see pictures in the report

A Sign with the EU logo and the text partly funded by EU is on every picnic table and toilet facility

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Signature:

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Date report sent: March 24, 2014