

# QUARTERLY INTERIM NARRATIVE REPORT

## 1. Description

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- 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: **25.06.2012 – 30.09.2012**
- 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 groups<sup>1</sup> (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):

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<sup>1</sup> “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

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### 2.1. Executive summary of the Action

The IPA contract was signed in the end of June, since then we have been operating according to the IPA contract. USCI in cooperation with Katla Geopark had hired an operation manager for the geopark, Ms. Vilborg Arna Gissurardottir in January 2012, and from July 1<sup>st</sup> she became the manager of the IPA project. Since then, however, she has resigned and Mrs. Steingerður Hreinsdóttir has been hired as the new IPA project manager. Steingerður was a key person in writing the programme fiche and I am sure that this fact more than compensates for the time involved in this shift in personnel within the project. Steingerður will be located in the USCI office in Selfoss as well as having 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. Steingerður's email is [steingerdur@katlageopark.is](mailto:steingerdur@katlageopark.is) and her mobile is +354 848 6385.

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

USCI in collaboration with Katla Geopark hired two persons for the summer season. Their tasks were:

- a) Survey among tourists in the area, the goal was to map the pattern of spending within the park. It will provide baseline data for measuring the result of the IPA project.
- b) Risk assessment and management for tourist destinations within the Geopark. In first stage 15 places were evaluated. Part of the IPA grant will be used for strengthening the infrastructure within the park. This project is a guidance and strategy planning for that work.

### 2.2. Activities and results

(**Note:** There is a slight discrepancy between the list of activities in the text of the Description of the Action and the Logical framework matrix. The word “entrepreneurship” in the Logical framework should be a part of the text in Activity no. 1 but not a separate activity. The numbering of the following activities in the framework will, therefore, change; 3 becomes 2, 4 becomes 3, 5 becomes 4, and Dissemination of best practices will be activity no. 5. In this way the text in the Description of the Action will correspond to the Logical framework.)

#### **Activity 1:**

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

If the IPA contract would have been signed in April (as we had hoped for) we would have had some of the seminars in May/June before the height of the tourist season. Instead, it was decided to postpone them until late autumn. The focus shifted therefore to the second subactivity, i.e. the providing of business support (see 1.2 under Activity 1 in chapter 3.2 of the Description of the Action document). In this initial stage of the project this involved liaison with the tourist information offices throughout the region and visits to individual tourist operators in the area. Katla Geopark uniforms were also provided for all the employees of the tourist information offices.

## **Activity 2:**

### **Upgrading the infrastructure and facilities for 25 selected geo-sites**

This season 5 tourist destinations/Geosites got new signs in collaboration with the municipalities within the geopark. The signs include information about geology, history and safety instructions for tourists.

Improving Fimmvörðuháls hiking trail which includes Magni and Móði, the craters that were formed in the eruption in 2010. The hiking trail covering 22 km has been improved in terms of signs and trail marking. This is one of the most popular hikes in Iceland.

Fifteen Geosites were evaluated in terms of Risk assessment and management. Results will be used for guidance when building and strengthening the infrastructures on Geosites. This was a pilot project in Iceland in collaboration with Icelandic Tourist Board and Safe Travel Iceland.

Katla Geopark participated this summer in a project with the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre in defining the attractions and infrastructure in the area and add it to the GIS program. The project is very useful for strategic planning within the Geopark.

## **Activity 3:**

### **Producing educational and promotional material based on needs analysis**

This summer was Katla Geopark's first summer in operation after admission to the European Geoparks Network (EGN) and GGN (Global Geoparks Network). Due to that fact branding and marketing played a big role – which also fits well within the IPA project framework.

A new website was made for guests of the area ([www.katlageopark.is](http://www.katlageopark.is)), the official website of the geopark. In addition, a special informational website ([www.jardvangur.is](http://www.jardvangur.is)) was made for stakeholders in the area which hosts practical information f.ex. results of surveys, risk assessment of Geosites etc.

A new brochure was made in English and Icelandic. It was distributed within the geopark and in tourist information centers in south west Iceland.

All of the above had to be done before the summer season – therefore before the signing of the contract and therefore not for IPA money. However, as we reprint and update the brochures and work on the website it will become part of the IPA project. Therefore, the period between July and October has in many ways been a preparation period for different activities.

Promotional video was made in August and is now being shown in the entertainment system of Icelandair, the biggest international airline that operates in Iceland. Katla Geopark will also promote the video on its own. This video was done in cooperation with the Marketing Office of South Iceland.

## **Activity 4:**

### **Developing a marketing strategy, marketing plan and management plan**

Some preliminary activities have taken place in this regard:

A survey was made in cooperation with stakeholders in the area. Questionnaires were made available in hotel rooms, hostels and guesthouses and in visitors' centers in the area. In

addition, one employee had the role of asking tourists the same questions. The goal of the survey is to answer questions like: How much are tourists spending in the area, what is the pattern of the spending and how long do they stay within the park. The result will be used along with statistics about companies and employees to measure economic growth within the area during the IPA project.

In August 2012 Katla Geopark got a tour operator license in order to be able to book and sell services for stakeholders in the area in the visitor centers. This is a step towards strengthening the tourism industry within the area as well as creating new opportunities of innovation for stakeholders. This is a first step in developing a travel agency in collaboration with stakeholders in the area.

Preparations are under way regarding the proposed study visit to Europe via contacts in the EGN. Around mid-September each year there is a EGN conference. Next year it will be held in Italy and at the conference in Portugal last September initial contacts were made regarding a possible study tour that would include participation at the EGN conference and post-conference tours.

#### **Activity 5: Dissemination of best practices**

Several meetings have been held with representatives from other areas in Iceland that are looking into the possibilities of developing geoparks in their regions. This involves the Reykjanes peninsula (where the international airport is located) and several locations in the western part of Iceland.

UCSI and Katla Geopark took part in the course “Outdoors and Experiences” in the Rural tourism program at the University College of Hólar. The presentation explained in what way UCSI and Katla Geopark have worked on rural development by using the IPA program. During the workshop part the students got five different tasks including outdoors activities and experiences and they will deliver five different projects involving innovation and nature tourism.

### **2.3. Activities planned but not implemented**

Due to the fact that the IPA contract was not signed until late June some of the infrastructure work needed to be transferred to next spring. It's also due to the fact that some of the destinations did not have a completed Strategic Land Use Planning which needs to be confirmed by the municipalities before construction can take place. Strategic land use planning is in process for the destinations that have been selected for the first year of the IPA contract. The constructions will be finished by the end of June next year.

### **2.4. Assessment of the results of the Action so far**

This interim narrative report refers to the first three months of this 24 month long project. There are two factors that have slightly influenced the timeline of activities as foreseen in the Description of the Action. First, as explained above, the hoped for starting date of the project was delayed for about two months due to the political debate in parliament about IPA funds. Second, a new project manager has recently been hired as explained above.

It is most fortunate that we did not have to go through a lengthy hiring process to find a new project manager that would subsequently have to take time to familiarize with the project description. The new project manager has a very good knowledge of the project and knows all the major stakeholders involved so we are certainly on track again.

The achievements so far include better visibility of the geopark, both within the geopark but also on the domestic and international market. UCSI and Katla Geopark have been able to define the first part of the marketing strategy, develop a trademark, publish a new website and brochures for the geopark, and make a promotional video. Stakeholders in the area have also started to use the Katla Geopark logo and slogan in their promotional material.

No major obstacles have been encountered regarding the realisation of the project. However, there are issues to be resolved regarding the permits for some of the infrastructure works, but these are being dealt with via the appropriate channels, i.e. the Strategic Land Use Planning procedures.

No contract above 10.000€ has been signed yet.

### **2.5. Total amount spent in the reporting period**

The total amount of funds spent during the first three months of the project is about 25.000 Euros.

## **3. Partners and other Co-operation**

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### **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**

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 produce within the Geopark.

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

The UCSI is a current partner in 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**

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As the project is still in the early stages as regards infrastructure and facilities for Geo-sites, educational material etc. the visibility of the EU contribution has been little so far. However, at the annual meeting of UCSI in the Saga Centre in Hvolsvöllur in June 2012, a few days before the signing of the IPA project, the importance of European funds in the project was explained by Þorsteinn Björnsson of NIPAC and Christopher Opancar (TAIEX expert). Another example of the visibility of the EU involvement in the project is the use of the EU logo when the position of an educational expert for the project was advertised, both in local and national media.

Name of the contact person for the Action: **Sigurður Sigursveinsson**

Signature: .....

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