BACKGROUND INFO

Priority axis: Environment and culture responsible Danube region

→ Foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources

Highlighted in the Danube programme document:

- in order to properly valorise this area's assets through tourism, efforts are needed for improving the management of the sites both in terms of preservation of natural assets and in development of sustainable methods of exploitation
- A policy framework for coordination of actions to promote the Danube Region as a tourist destination is still lacking
- There are big disparities between the countries in terms of accommodation capacity and attractivity. According to CESCI analysis Austria is leading with above 12,000 guests per night/1,000 population, Croatia is following with 8,000 while Slovenia is above 4,000 like the Czech Republic and Germany. Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria show around 2,000 guests per night/1,000 population. Romania exploits its touristic potential to the smallest extent, being below 2,000 guests per night/1,000 population.
- Challenges and needs for cooperation
  - There is a need in for increasing the governance and coordination capacities for the preservation and valorisation of the cultural and natural resources
  - There is a need to promote Danube as the linkage of different touristic products increasing the touristic significance of the entire region
  - There is a need to protect the vivid landscape of regional cultural assets and to underpin their linkages as tools for cooperation and the development of an identity for the Danube Region.

Results to be achieved with the help of the Danube Programme

- The strengthening of governance and capacity development for the sustainable use and valorisation of the very rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage and resources of the Danube region, a right balance between conservation, protection and advancement has to be developed.
- **The attractiveness of the Danube region as a tourist destination is given by cultural heritages as well as attractive landscapes. One of the most important criteria for the development of tourism should be sustainability.**
- **Sustainable tourism development** in the entire Danube region is a must and **should integrate the experiences of the Western European countries** on the upper Danube regarding the importance of a good balance between tourism, environment protection and economic growth.
- In this respect, tourism development and the protection of cultural heritage is an opportunity to promote transnational cooperation between states, regions and communities and can thereby be an important tool for the integration of countries in the Danube region. It also helps in establishing tourism products on a sustainable basis, focusing for example on nature, culture, rural areas, viticulture, cycling, river tours and cruises.
- Cooperation is a central requirement for sustainable planning and the development of destinations. **An important role in the application of the tourism policy for the Danube region could be taken over by existing actors and networks that are based on cooperation**.

- **Common approaches for the protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage** as well as resources are determined by the **implementation of common strategies**.
- Transnational cooperation can be an important asset when developing common orientations, frameworks and tools for the exchange of knowledge and experience among regions. The programme should bring together **different stakeholders dealing with the protection of natural and cultural heritage/resources and with wider development strategies in order to develop joint and integrated approaches.**

Overall, the main **envisaged results** are:

- Improved frameworks, capacities and solutions for sustainable tourism development in the Danube region based on protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources, reduction of resource and energy consumption and sustainable mobility management in order to reap multiple benefits in terms of economic development, environmental protection and quality of life.
- Improved strategies and tools for sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage and resources for regional development in order to avoid or limit use conflicts (e.g. with tourism, natural resource consumption)

Actions to be supported under the investment priority (by investment priority)

- Development of common orientations, frameworks and strategies, development and practical implementation of transnational tools and services, preparation of transnational investments, pilot activities including small-scale investments, development and practical implementation of training and capacity building, accompanying information, dissemination and publicity measures

The following **indicative examples of action** may be considered to contribute to specific objective No 2.2 Foster sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources

- Improve frameworks and develop joint and integrated solutions for sustainable tourism ("green tourism"), leisure and culture e.g. in the areas of eco-tourism (e.g. sustainable tourist activities in national parks and nature reserves, geo-parks), cycle tourism, agro-tourism, development of new and existing Cultural Routes relevant in the Danube Region, theme paths and joint products with a critical mass and embedded in wider development and growth strategies which contribute to sustainable jobs and growth.
- Implement common strategies to develop common approaches for the protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and secure resources; support the development of broad partnership networks incorporating different programmes, central, regional and local administrations and non-governmental organisations, business support centres and mobility networks.
- Ensure the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage by developing relevant clusters and networks of heritage sites, museums, interpretation and visitor centres within the Danube region and support the implementation of joint strategies.
- **Coordinate strategies and development plans at regional and/or local level in order to achieve a critical mass, economic impact and visibility beyond the local level**. A right balance between conservation, protection of natural heritage and resources and promotion and development has to be developed. The cooperation programme doesn´t support a one dimensional economic exploitation of natural heritage and resources. The programme should bring together different stakeholders dealing with the protection of

natural and cultural heritage/resources and with wider development strategies in order to develop joint and integrated approaches.

- Strive for the reduction of energy consumption and CO2 emissions and resources consumption (e.g. water) through increased use of renewable energy sources and energy and resource efficiency measures as an integrated aspect of sustainable tourism development

- Improve frameworks and develop joint and integrated solutions to sustainable mobility management (e.g. by public transport) as integrated part of destination management and marketing of tourist products. In particular in rural and more peripheral regions the improvement of sustainable transport facilities is a basic asset to support sustainable tourism development. Mobility management may be supported under investment priority 6c only as integrated part of sustainable tourism development. No separate category of intervention related to transport is foreseen under 6c and it is not planned to support hard transport infrastructure under 6c.

- Develop and implement education, training and capacity building to support quality tourism, eco-tourism and environmental transport solutions

- Support activities in the fields of multiculturalism, cultural exchange and the establishment of connections on field of creative industry in order to increase cultural diversity. Raise the awareness on the benefits of cultural diversity in the Danube Region

- Support joint strategies for the management and protection of natural resources in close interaction with nature conservation areas and cultural heritage

- Support risk management plans for cultural and natural heritage sites exposed to climate change as part of sustainable tourism development

PROJECT IDEA

Project's background

The main drivers in the tourism market of Central Europe – apart from cities with significant cultural heritage – are the health and wellness resorts and their surrounding areas. Thermal bathes, thermal waters work as brands for certain areas, attracting people from all over the world. The visitors of the spa towns are not satisfied anymore with visiting the spas- they want real experience, want spend their time in the town (which can vary from 2-3 days to 3-4 weeks) active, and behave more likely as regular tourists and using health tourism services and facilities is not the only (or the most important) aspect of their visit.

Recreational activities are considered having a major role among wellness and health tourism activities. Our region is quite unique in Europe since it is meeting point of various transnational touristic routes (Iron Curtain Trail, Three River Path, St. Martin Route, Maria Route, informal transnational routes of bordering national parks, etc.) and health tourism is considered as the most popular and prosperous segment in the field of tourism. Hundreds of thousands visit our most popular resorts, however our spas, spa resorts, spa towns have realized only recently, that even high-quality health/wellness services and facilities are not enough anymore to be competitive on the European market. These towns have only recently started to open towards their surroundings and - in case of places situated near to the border – towards attractions of the neighbouring countries; which are not considered as rival rather as strengthening factors. In the last decade(s) – mainly through EU support – various transnational touristic routes/products have been developed but a real, functioning, consciously created link between the popular health tourism resorts/towns and active (cultural) routes is still missing.

Our aim is:

- **to make the natural and cultural heritage outside of the main resorts/tourist centres more accessible**
- **to help to achieve a more balanced state between the crowded resorts and the underutilized touristic assets in their backcountry**
- **to create a well-defined linkage between health tourism and active tourism products**
- **help to give an extra-regional and transnational dimension for the tourism flow in the participating region raising awareness on the cultural diversity of the Danube Region**
- **develop best practice systems which are a) expandable in or b) transferable to other regions**
- **to improve capacities of the relevant actors to develop and maintain regional and transnational touristic routes**

- to create networks of spa towns and their regions which are connected by the already existing thematic active cultural routes and develop the related brand ⇒ a unique network of towns will be established which can offer a wide range of attractions and activities for the visitors: ACTIVE SPA NETWORK
- to make transnational touristic routes more accessible for the health resorts' target groups
- to facilitate public-private partnerships and the integration of tourism-related enterprises in the supply chain of transnational tourism products

Overview of the main activities, outputs

- joint strategy on development and management of more balanced tourism offer with the help of active tourism
- based on the surveyed good practices in the region (exploring the best practices from other countries by desk research) the development of a common approach on how to make underutilized attractions more accessible in a sustainable way
- based on the surveyed good practices in the EU the development of a common approach on how to build up and maintain interregional and/or transnational networks of cultural and natural heritage sites connected by active tourism corridors with active participation of various stakeholders
- based on the surveyed good practices development of a common approach how to enhance „intermodality" regarding active tourism (e.g. better integration of public transport; better organized and therefore more environment friendly parking spots near bigger attractions; network of safe bike parking places, etc.)
- development of an ICT tool integrating the best solutions found in the first phase of the project. Based on a general platform, these tools (personalized to the specificities of the partners) can be used by various stakeholders in various ways to support and promote responsible and sustainable tourism, as well as multiculturalism and cultural heritage. They can help to de-concentrate tourism (direct the flood of tourists to less known areas) by creating alternative attractions using augmented reality, and they can be used to support and promote responsible tourism and to build a network of stakeholders practicing sustainable tourism.
- implementation of documented learning interactions (indicated as necessary activity in the programme documents): 1-2 study tour(s) visiting the discovered best practices; 1-2 joint workshops for test phase of the pilot project(s); joint training on the use of the developed ICT tool
- training of the target groups (e.g. SMEs of the active tourism sector, managers and/or management bodies of relevant cultural/natural heritage sites) how to make the attractions/services more accessible, attractive and high-quality for active tourists (with the emphasis on cyclists and hikers)

Pilot project ideas

- transnational cycle tourism network: Zala & Vas County (HU) – Lendava & Goricko National Park (SL) – Steierisches Vulkanland (AT)
- ideas of the other partners are welcome – we could e.g. integrate an other pilot in Harghita County (RO) and/or in the region of Krpainske Toplice (HR)

As the <u>general result of our project</u> we aim at the creation of touristic regions with a wider perspective: touristic centres which a) seek an active connection with their backcountry by building up or transforming already existing relations/links into a network benefiting all parties b) can utilize the huge potential in the already existing transnational touristic routes c) are able to build a new and desirable image for the Central European „backcountry" as the ideal destination for healing and recreation. The ICT tool we plan to develop will not be used only by the project partners but it will be offered for the other relevant actors in the territory of our partners: e.g. the Municipality of Heviz creates its own application for the town and its surroundings, but the basis of the tool will be offered to other municipalities in the county, they just have to create their own content – this

prospect ensures that along the network of actual active routes the visitors can have all the relevant information in one tool.

Partners

- Harghita County Council (RO) - LP
- Municipality of Hévíz (HU)
- Zala County (HU)
- Vas County (HU)
- Krapinske Toplice (or Krapina region?) (HR)
- Municiplaity of Lendava (SLO)
- Srce Slovenije (SLO)

Potential partners

- Goricko National Park (SLO)
- Steierisches Vulkanland (AT)
- City of Bad Radkersburg (AT)
- Centre for Public-Private Partnership of the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce (SRB)

Associated Partner (only travel and accommodation is covered)

- NGO Forza – Agency for Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Region (Ukraine)