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Fact-finding report of in-depth interviews SI-HU PRO project

Presented by: Vas Megyei Önkormányzati Hivatal (Self-Government Office of Vas County) and
ITC – Inovacijsko tehnološki grozd Murska Sobota

April 2021

"The fact-finding report is carried out within the framework of the SI-HU PRO project (SIHU232) of the INTERREG V-A Slovenia-Hungary Cooperation Programme with the support of the European Regional Development Fund."



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List of abbreviations

VMÖH – Vas Megyei Önkormányzati Hivatal (Vas County Government Office)

ITC – Inovacijsko tehnološki grozd Murska Sobota

Programme – INTERREG V-A INTERREG V-A Slovenia-Hungary Cooperation Program 2014-2020

Project – SI-HU PRO project

Report – Fact finding report

LP – Lead partner

PP – Project partner



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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the SI-HU PRO SIHU232 project

Within the framework of the INTERREG V-A Slovenia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (hereinafter referred to as the Programme), several projects have been implemented in the period 2014-2020, aiming at the development and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Programme area based on sustainable tourism.

The first call for proposals under the programme was published in 2016. Of the 12 successful projects under Priority Axis 1, one was launched in 2016, with the remaining projects starting in 2017 or 2018, except for one project which started in early 2019. The planned duration of the projects was 2-3 years. They were implemented over a timeframe.

The programme area covers the Pomurje and Podravje regions on the Slovenian side and Vas and Zala counties on the Hungarian side. In the relatively small programme area, the implementation of the parallel projects has often been more or less isolated from each other, and although they have an independent cross-border character, their activities are very often similar or almost identical along the same objective.

Coordination between projects to make the most of synergies is possible, and there is no mutual, structured information on each other's results and offers.

Recognising this, the SI-HU PRO project will focus on the establishment of a joint cross-border coordination network bringing together the promoters of sustainable tourism projects funded under Priority 1 of the INTERREG V-A SI-HU Cooperation Programme in the 2014-2020 programming period, by coordinating the maintenance of project results, creating the possibility of multi-level harmonised communication and jointly planning the future development opportunities for sustainable tourism.

As a first step in the implementation of the SI-HU PRO project, the available knowledge, information, outputs and outcomes were assessed through active involvement of the projects (in-depth interviews).

The results of this survey are summarised in this fact-finding report (hereafter: Report).



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One of the stated objectives of the SI-HU PRO project (hereafter: Project) is that the partners of the projects examined in the Report form a bilateral coordination network to identify common solutions to issues concerning the maintenance, communication and further development of the projects. The Project will also make a policy recommendation on cross-border tourism development during its implementation.

The Bilateral Coordination Network will provide a comprehensive knowledge base and strategic planning based on synergies, which will benefit all the relevant actors in the border region in the future.

The in-depth interviews with the project promoters from December 2020 to the beginning of March 2021 and a report summarising the results of these interviews will allow to get a clear picture of the programme area, the professional experiences, needs and potentials of the projects and the partners involved.

In order to gain knowledge and experience as efficiently as possible, the project partners extended the list of interviewees with two more projects and project promoters dealing with tourism development within the framework of the Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme and the Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia Cooperation Programme.



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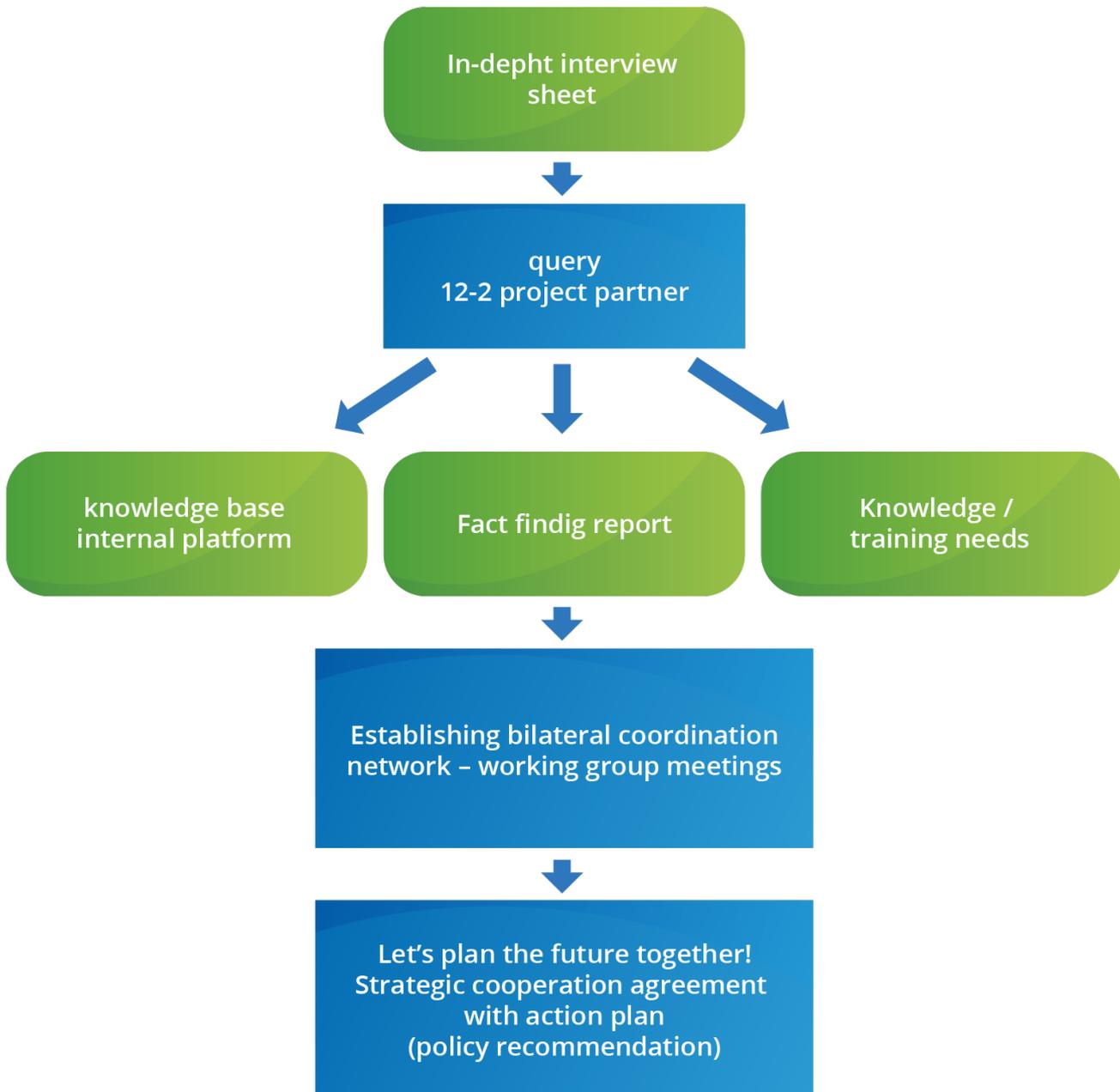


Figure 1 - Project outputs



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1.2 Preparation of the in-depth interview sheet as basis for the Report

When preparing the in-depth interview sheet, the focus was on the following groups of questions:

- o content on the collection of existing knowledge, information, strategic documents, overarching objectives and their results accumulated at programme level,
- o target-oriented questions specified at project level, the main aim of which is to identify tangible synergies and their degree of exploitation in terms of project scope,
- o examining the capitalisation of projects by exploring the communication methods and the means used,
- o Set of questions on which the SWOT analysis is based,
- o mapping plans for future development objectives.

The answers given to the main groups of questions will form the backbone of the Report.

The participants finalized the prepared interview sheet during the full-day workshop on 16 September 2020.

In late autumn of 2020, the partners of the SI-HU PRO SIHU232 project made further additions to the interview sheet, extending it with questions on the impact of the epidemic situation.

The in-depth interview sheet can be found in the [Annex](#).

1.3 Conducting in-depth interviews

The VMÖH and ITC partners agreed at their meeting on 08 August 2020 to conduct an equal number of surveys, preferably by visiting the lead partners of the projects. To enable the partners to interview an equal number of native speakers on the Hungarian and Slovenian side, for three of the 12+2 projects to be interviewed, one project partner was interviewed instead of the lead partner (Interreg SIHU - GardEN, Interreg ATHU - VELOREGIO, Interreg SIHU - Guide2Visit). In case of the Guide2Visit project, VMÖH is the lead partner and ITC interviewed one of the Slovenian project partners, with additional additions by VMÖH.

In the interview phase, a change of partners was also required by the epidemic situation: in the case of the HORSE BASED TOURISM - HBT project, a project partner was interviewed instead of the lead partner.

Due to the epidemic situation, 5 out of the 14 queries were carried out in face-to-face meetings and 9 using online platforms.

Following the methodological recommendations the interviewers concluded all the interviews efficiently and effectively.

Interviewer	Interviewee		Project	Date of the interview
ITC	HI-FI Videostudio d.o.o.	VP	MURA RÁBA TOUR	2021.02.04
ITC	Kmetijsko gozdarska zbornica Slovenije kmetijsko gozdarski zavod Murska Sobota	VP	ZELENO ŽELIMO	2021.01.13
ITC	Mestna občina Murska Sobota	VP	GO IN NATURE	2021.01.21
ITC	Občina Apače	VP	ESCAPE	2020.12.18
ITC	Občina Moravske Toplice	PP	GardEN	2020.12.16
ITC	RIS Raziskovalno Izobraževalno Središče Dvorec Rakican	PP	HORSE BASED TOURISM - HBT	2021.03.03
ITC	Zavod za kulturo, turizem in šport Murska Sobota	PP	Guide2Visit	2021.02.12
VMÖH	Nagyrécsce Község Önkormányzata	VP	TELE-KA-LAND	2021.01.18
VMÖH	Őrségi Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság	VP	Green Exercise	2021.02.10
VMÖH	Pannon Helyi Termék Kereskedelmi, Szolgáltató és Fejlesztő Nonprofit Kft.	VP	HOUSES	2021.01.25
VMÖH	Savaria Turizmus Nonprofit Kft.	PP	VELOREGIO	2020.12.15
VMÖH	Szlovén Vidék Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft.	VP	ETHOS LAND	2021.02.08
VMÖH	Zala Megyei Önkormányzat	VP	IronCurtainCycling	2020.12.08
VMÖH	Zalai Borút Egyesület	VP	Wine Picnic	2021.01.18

Figure 2 - Conducting the interviews

2. Results of the survey

2.1 Effectiveness

2.1.1 Overall satisfaction with the implementation of the project

The first question of the in-depth interview asks about the overall satisfaction with the project: "Overall, how satisfied are you /how do you rate the results of the project in terms of their content quality?" This may seem like a simple opening question, but the interviewer gets an immediate impression of the project promoter's, and through them the partners' attachment to the project right from the beginning of the interview. By scoring and justifying the score, basic information about the implementation of the project and the partnership of the project is obtained that will permeate the whole in-depth interview, appearing several times during the discussion to provide a framework for the project evaluation.

The interviewee rated the overall effectiveness of their project on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least satisfied and 10 being the most satisfied.

The aggregated scores are (14 projects):

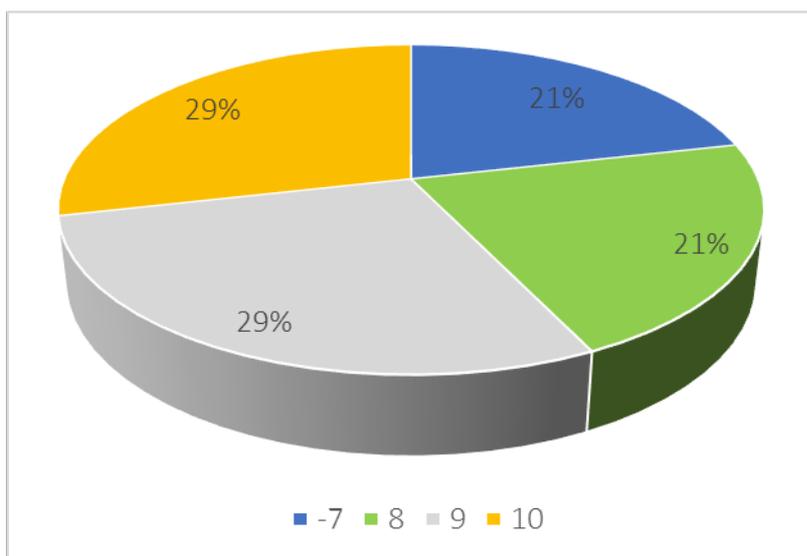


Figure 3 - Overall satisfaction with the results achieved

3 project promoters gave a score of 7 or below,

3 gave a score of 8,

4 gave a score of 9,

and also 4 gave a maximum score of 10.

For the most part, project promoters are highly satisfied with the quality of the project implementation.

Those scoring between 8 and 10 points cited the following reasons for the outstanding performance:

1. well-grounded choice of project topic, well-defined work plan, good coordination
2. objectives set in line with the partners' expectations and needs, full commitment to achieving the objectives
3. selection of the right target group, positive feedback from them
4. excellent project partnership
 - willingness of partner organisations to cooperate
 - competence
 - network of contacts
 - trust between partners
 - real-time communication between partners, responsiveness of project partners
5. the expertise of the contractors involved
6. networking.

All respondents indicated more than one of the reasons listed. The distribution of these among the 8 – 10-point respondents (11 project promoters) is as follows:

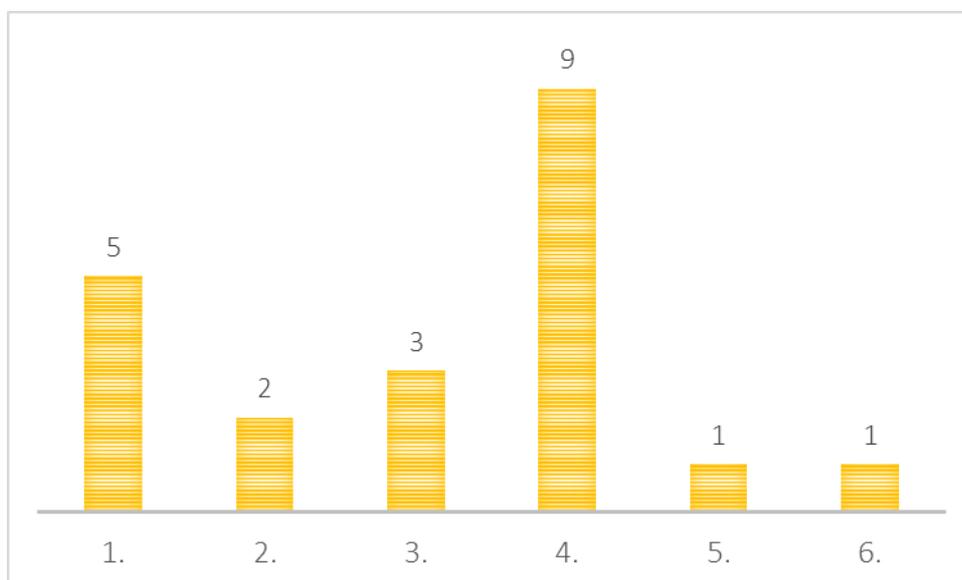


Figure 4 - Distribution of reasons for outstanding performance (by number of interviewees)

Based on the responses, the primary key to successful project implementation is a well-chosen partnership. Cooperation with organisations with which we can set a common goal in the interests of our own organisation, trust in them, their qualified staff, their professional competence and their network of contacts.

It is important that all the partners could identify with the project theme they have chosen together, and that they work together in agreement and develop a good implementation work plan and timetable.

Although the central topic usually clearly defines the target group that the project is most intended to address (e.g., families with young children in the TELE-KA-LAND project, visitors interested in gastronomy, wine culture in the Wine picnic project, etc.), there are projects with a more general, less specific theme where it is important that the partners, in addition to the correctly defined objectives, also define the target group(s) in a proper way.

Out of the 3 respondents who gave a score of 7 or below for their overall satisfaction with their project, one interviewee identified one point as negatively highlighting one of the factors influencing satisfaction mentioned above. His rating was strongly influenced by the fact that during the preparation of their project, translation errors remained in the final project document which



led to serious disruptions, misunderstandings and loss of time during the implementation phase of the project. Identical activities were implemented differently by the Hungarian and Slovenian colleagues due to misunderstandings and this was noticed with considerable delay.

One of the other two project promoters gave a score of 5 because of the specific difficulty of the COVID-19 epidemic situation (contact with hotels is part of the project but this was impossible), the other interviewee considered that there is always room for improvement and did not want to attribute a score higher than 7 to the results achieved.

When asked whether the project had delivered the actual results, they had set out to achieve, the majority of interviewees were also positive. Two respondents indicated that their projects were below 50% of completion, so they had not yet achieved the desired quantitative expectation. In the case of one project, the COVID-19 epidemic situation did not allow full organisation of the promotional activities (presence at events, press trips).

We also asked, when assessing the overall effectiveness, whether they had achieved any additional results during the implementation of the project.

The concept was interpreted in different ways by the respondents:

One of them had the idea, during a festival organised for families with young children, to capture the crowd that came to the invitation with a video made by drone at the next event and to use this communication tool to promote the results achieved, showing the great interest in the story parks and the programmes they offer (TELE-KA-LAND).

Another respondent had to organise a bilateral children's camp due to an unfortunate change of partners. They consider it extraordinary that the camp has created a great openness between the Hungarian and Slovenian children to learn about each other's language and culture (ETHOS LAND).

But a tourism product not planned in the project can also have an added value. An example is the production of a flagship wine as a trademark of the Zalai Borút Association. The new product is a wine made from a predefined blend of grape varieties indigenous to Zala. The association has drawn up the rules for the flagship wine, and the product will be named and trademarked (Wine picnic).

Reaching unintended target groups also increases the effectiveness of project implementation.



The GardEN project partners wanted to enable children to experience the small wonders of flowers and gardens during their festivals and events. They created fairy-tale characters and with the help of them engaged children in interactive activities, introducing them to the thousand little wonders of the nature. The characters of “Bodza Marci” and “Bodza Marcsi” (“Elder Marci” and “Elder Marcsi”) come to life through a whole fairy tale in the booklet. A new objective of the project is to involve the youngest children in the so-called slow tourism.

Of course, it is also an added value if more outputs of higher quality than planned are developed during the implementation of each activity, reaching a larger number of target groups. This has been achieved to a greater or lesser extent in the implementation of almost all projects.

2.1.2 Exploitation of acquired knowledge/experience, the degree of deepening network

The interviews examined the extent of knowledge acquired during the 2-3 years of implementation. Respondents expressed perceptions of "useful -" and "extremely useful knowledge acquisition". The main experiences mentioned included the following:

- the development of individual and organisational capacity to compromise
- knowledge received/acquired from project partners
- adaptation to the crisis situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic
- experience gained during the implementation of activities
- learning from good practices beyond the programme area.

The project partners' responses to the two questions on what additional information they gained from the project that will be useful to them in the future and whether they have consolidated their network of contacts are shown in the figure below (Figure 3).

Next to the project logos, the top row shows the answers concerning the acquisition of information and the bottom row the network of contacts.



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	Information: as a new product, the organisation of astronomy shows Strengthened links with existing partners and service providers
	Information: animator training curriculum Strengthened links with existing partners and service providers
	Information: the theme of the country house has brought an increase in ethnographic knowledge New network of contacts between the association, the spa, the hotel and the TDM office in connection with the Kehidakustány country house. They were linked by a common interest
	Information: training material for cycling tour guides New, strong links with cycling organisations in Vas County
	Information: learning about the process of becoming a smallholder farmer Strengthened links with existing partners and service providers
	Information: training material for cycling tour guides Excellent contacts with service providers, TDM organisations
	Information: development of the rules for the Vineyard Picnic programme Strengthened relations with existing partners and service providers (wineries)
	Information and communication: integrating service providers, encouraging cooperation
	Information: new knowledge on public procurement and tax legislation Existing contacts strengthened
	Getting information about the Hungarian forest school system and CŠOD in Slovenia No significant contacts were established
	Information: new knowledge in the field of tourism Existing contacts strengthened
	Information: training material for horse trainers Existing network strengthened
	Information: database compilation Relations with existing partners and service providers strengthened
	Information: new knowledge in the field of tourism Existing contacts strengthened

Figure 5 - Most important additional information for the respondent and impact of the project on the network of contacts



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2.1.3 Achievement of project objectives, main outputs

The survey has already shown that project partners consider it important to assess the effectiveness of a project by looking at whether the objectives were properly defined at the project design stage. We also asked our interviewees about this criterion.

Three project promoters were dissatisfied with the original objectives. One of them blamed the quantitative over-design for the difficulties in achieving the objectives, while another project promoter said that more thorough studies should have been carried out to prepare the implementation of the main project output, and that design errors had made the implementation very difficult. The third interviewee considers that the dissemination activities were not scheduled in the right chronological order. They ran in parallel with the implementation of the investments. Attractions and accommodation that had not yet been completed were promoted at fairs. No photos, brochures or leaflets were available.

However, when asked to what extent/to what quality the specific objectives and main outputs of the project have been met, the responses were positive. Three projects have completed only part of their planned activities and are in the process of achieving their objectives, seven projects have met their planned level of performance, while four projects have exceeded their objectives and key outputs overall. None of the projects underperformed.

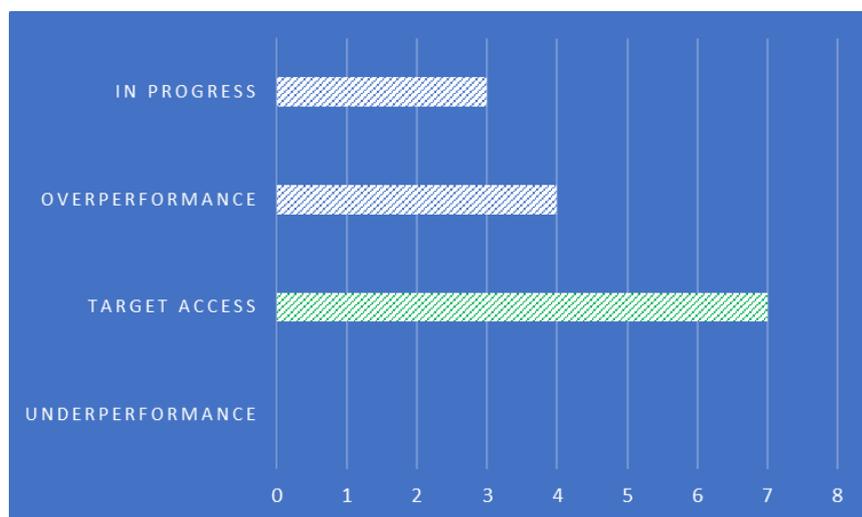


Figure 6 - Targets, main outputs to be achieved



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2.1.4 Quality of the activities carried out

For both completed and ongoing projects, there is unanimous agreement that the quality of the activities carried out so far has been up to the expected standard.

Project partners were mostly able to convey the values they wanted their project to represent.

Achieving this, of course, required considerable effort, with countless difficulties:

- Most projects have one or more activities specifically targeting tourism service providers:
 - o their inclusion in international certification schemes,
 - o organising capacity-building training and awareness-raising workshops for them,
 - o building their local networks,
 - o encouraging them to cooperate by operating various stamping and discount schemes,
 - o inviting them to events organised around the infrastructure, etc.

All the interviewees indicated that one of the biggest obstacles in preparing these activities was to reach out to and involve tourism service providers in the project. Strengthening their willingness to cooperate and gaining their trust required a lot of effort.

However, those operators who have agreed to work together can be counted on for the long-term development of tourism in the region. The development of rural micro-enterprises is a fundamental objective in the programme area.

- Another factor affecting quality was the minimum spending constraint of 85% for the first two reporting periods, which placed a burden on the consortium as a whole.
- In cases where more than 50% of the total project budget is allocated to one project partner, it may be difficult to encourage the project partnership to complete tasks on time.
- External contractors often do not understand the weight of deadlines. Even though the tasks are completed, it requires extra energy on the part of project partners to raise awareness of the importance of meeting deadlines and delivering as contracted.
- The epidemic situation has led to changes in the activities of all projects still active after the emergence of the COVID-19 virus:



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- extension of deadlines,
 - a change in the form of the activity (e.g., an event on online platform instead of an event requiring personal presence)
 - a partial or total change or replacement of the planned activity.
- It is often during the implementation that an activity becomes less relevant or obsolete in the form in which it was conceived at the time of planning, 2-3 years before. However, with the help and flexibility of the programme contract managers, these can be modified to achieve greater efficiency.

The lead partners have done their best to guide the project partners through these difficulties. When asked which element of the project they would most highlight and which they were most proud of, they gave these answers (Figure 5):



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green exercise

Acquisition of astronomical equipment in Markovci and creation of guides and tour guide applications



The 2-day festival in four locations in 2019 and 2020, the drone recording of the festivals and the implementation of the booking system



HOUSES

There are several of these: the study on the development of country houses, the selection of country houses and hotels, the appointment of mentors, the organisation of events



The cycling tour leader training course and especially the part on helping people with disabilities, but also the recruitment and training of volunteer stage leaders is a new feature



Website selling local producers' goods on the Slovenian side, shop on the Hungarian side and camping for Hungarian and Slovenian children



Mostly the very high quality equipment purchases (e-charging stations) and investments (Határkőpark near Szalafő, accommodation and recreation facilities in Lendava)

WINE PICNIC

Szőlőhegyi Piknik

The Cellar Navigator is a very well done tool and innovative in nature



The thematic route connecting the energy points and the established service network



All project elements are particularly valuable



Nature experience software packages, development of nature experience demonstration sites, training for project partners and service providers



The two renovated facilities, the interconnected cross-border network of local tourism operators, the thematic tourism packages, the website, the discount scheme and the events



Trainings, investments (purchase of equipment, etc.), publications, videos, events for target groups



Analysis of visitor habits, visitor management concept, trainings and workshops for tourism service providers and implementation of the online promotion campaign



Zeleno želimó

Two other examples of good practice in tourism-developed countries, the training of tourism service providers and the handbook for tourism service providers

Figure 7 – Which project element(s) would you highlight?



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2.1.5 Reaching target groups

The survey also found that an important aspect for project promoters in the ex-post evaluation of project effectiveness is whether the project design phase has allocated appropriate target groups to each project element. Examining this aspect, all interviewees confirmed that the target groups were well planned (except for one project, where an overestimation of the planned number was probably due to a clerical error in the main group "General public").

Some respondents made the following statements about target group planning:

- too detailed targeting and excessive quantitative targets could make it difficult to implement the project,
- it is difficult to predict the responsiveness of the target groups at the planning stage,
- it is important to take into account that several projects will address the same target groups (probably at the same time),
- the achievement of high targets may become unattainable at a stroke due to an unexpected circumstance such as the COVID-19 epidemic.

Good planning has produced good achievement results:

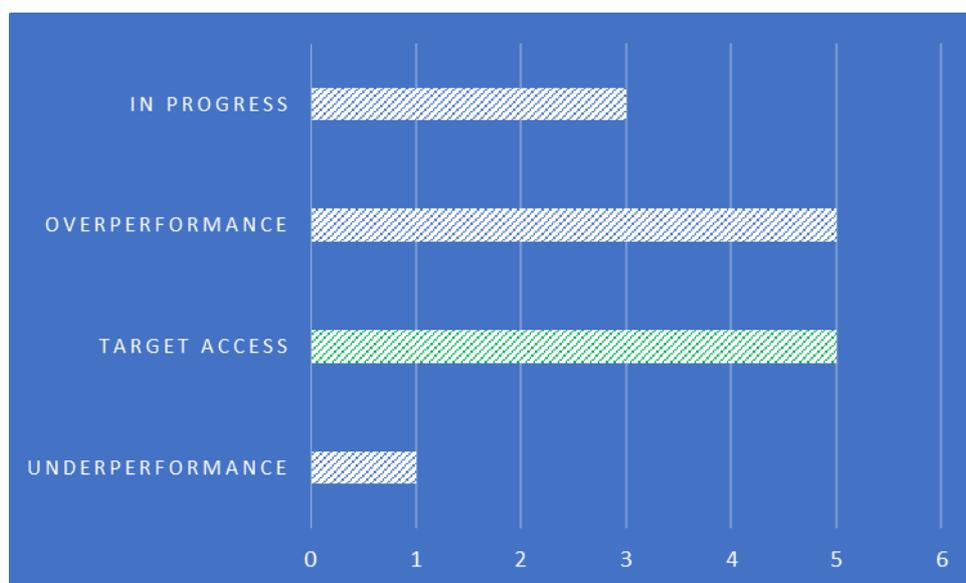


Figure 8 – Reaching target groups



Almost all closed or near-closed projects met or exceeded their target, with one project having a negative plan-actual comparison (due to COVID-19 outbreak).

In the next question of the in-depth interview, we examined the communication channels and tools used by the project promoters to achieve or exceed the target group numbers, almost without exception.

2.1.6 The communication channels and tools used

In order to reach the target groups and fulfil their dissemination obligations, project partners have applied a wide range of communication tools. The lead partner of the ZELENO ŽELIMO project has subsequently found the marketing toolbox planned and implemented in their Communication Work package to be excessive. Evaluating it at the end of the project, they would have used communication tools that were easier to operate, less in number but with targeted effectiveness.

What specific communication channels and, within them, what tools did the partners use in their projects?

- TV and radio appearances
 - o local, regional, national
 - o spot, interview, event coverage
- Press coverage through print media
 - o local, regional, national
 - o press release, promotional article, short event invitation
 - o daily newspaper, travel magazine
- Appearances in online media
 - o daily newspaper, travel magazine, leisure magazine
- Printed publications of own design
 - o leaflets, posters, information cards, brochures, maps, information booklets, handbooks,
- Digital publications of own design
 - o flyers, e-publications, e-manuals
- Self-designed short films
- Social media platforms
 - o Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

- posts, targeted campaign ads
- own webpage, publishing content in closed groups (targeted to a group chosen according to the target group of the project), inviting bloggers-vloggers
- Appearances on project websites/organisational sub-sites
- Google Ads
- Participation in events, festivals, fairs
- Promotional items
- Demonstration tours
 - for the media, target groups, tourism providers.

The use of a specific and highly effective tool, not foreseen in the project, should be highlighted: the in-car PA system for event advertising (TELE-KA-LAND). It is a remarkably successful tool for addressing a target group in rural, small villages and attracting them to festivals. Although the interviewee indicated that it took a considerable amount of time to obtain the necessary approvals according to local regulations, this tool was able to reach the target audience with excellent effectiveness.

How regularly did the interviewees use the communication channels and tools and how satisfied were they with their use? What needs for improvement were identified in the implementation of the project in terms of communication methods?

Nine used the above promotional elements continuously, five only intermittently. Of the 14 project promoters, 12 rated the effectiveness of the marketing tools as satisfactory and 2 as excellent. Nevertheless, almost all of them expressed a need for improvement in the use of marketing tools in the future.

Some of the development needs identified are specific to communication and media:



- in connection with the constant changes in innovation in the field of communication and the changing patterns of media use →
 - conducting a national survey or monitoring the existing ones, in order to reach the target group with the best possible communication tools in line with the current trends (it is necessary to follow how the target group communicates and uses the media).
- the use of communication channels and tools is very costly and requires a certain level of expertise →
 - the project manager often does not have enough knowledge to post quality content on the online social media platform without professional help, this requires training,
 - most reach on social media can only be achieved through advertising, so resources need to be allocated for this when planning,
 - Newspapers will not publish a press release with the name of the competition, the title of the programme, unless they receive the news in an advertising commission, in which case it is essential to secure a budget at the planning stage.

Another part of the development needs is related to the changes forced by the COVID-19 epidemic:

- the use of previously unused presentation options: e.g., a multi-camera virtual exhibition to showcase the country houses as a replacement for the planned event (HOUSES),
- more frequent and more substantial use of online social media platforms, which has the advantage of being able to target audiences and the results can be easily measured.

It was also mentioned that the programme specification strongly encourages the monitoring of measurability, which is

- difficult to achieve, as the number of reaches generated by each communication tool cannot be measured precisely and, in some cases, can only be estimated (e.g., number of participants in the stamping system, number of people at the stand, readership data of the printed press).

Finding and operating the most effective communication channels and tools to meet the project objectives and reach the intended target group is a major challenge for project promoters.



The factors affecting the effectiveness of the projects and their evolution in a planned-actual comparison, as listed by the interviewees in the ex-post evaluation of effectiveness, were taken into account.

Let us now look at the strategies, good practices and assessments that the interviewees took into account and adapted their development ideas and activities to when planning and implementing the projects.

2.2. Links to strategies and policy objectives

For all applications, the application form must provide information on the contribution of the proposed project to the achievement of regional, national or EU-level strategies and policy objectives. The purpose of this section of the application is to demonstrate the strategic fit of the proposed project activities in the wider context.

A specific question on the strategic fit of projects was also included in the interviews with project promoters that underpin this analysis. On the basis of the interviewees' responses and the relevant texts of their proposals, which they provided for the analysis, the contribution of the different levels of strategy, between each other and between projects and higher-level strategies and policies is presented below, with a particular emphasis on how this contribution was made, i.e., not just a list of facts.

In addition to the information provided by the projects and the interviews, the available strategic and policy documents were also reviewed, mainly to identify actual and potential interfaces, both national and cross-border. It is important to note that in many cases, interviewees referred to good practice from previous projects as a basis for the activities planned in their project.

In the survey, we did not only address project promoters in the Interreg V-A Slovenia-Hungary Cooperation Programme, but also one project partner of a project in the Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme - VELOREGIO - and one lead project partner of a project in the Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia Cooperation Programme - Zeleno Želimo. In these cases, the information contained in the application form is supplemented, to a minimum, by a brief description of the contribution to the priority areas of the Danube Regional Strategy in the case of the Austrian-Hungarian project, in a separate text box. In the case of the Slovenian-Croatian project, the



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application form does not include such a separate section, but the questions relating to the strategic, policy contribution section specifically draw the applicant's attention to the contribution to the macro-regional strategies.

When drawing up the Interreg cooperation programmes for the period of 2021-2027, the contribution to macro-regional strategies should be taken into account by the programming bodies already during the programming process, and the contribution to these strategies - which are relevant to the territory - should be set out in the programme documents as priority. The Commission's report on “the implementation of the EU's macro-regional strategies” (the latest edition is for 2020) already provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of implementation of the macro-regional strategies and outlines possible scenarios for the future. As regards the preparation of these strategies, it is underlined that actors not only at EU level but also from different national and regional levels have been involved in the preparation process. While the primary objective of the report is to analyse the progress of the macro-regional strategies and to identify criteria for further outcomes, mainly already focusing on the post-2020 period, the report also includes possible scenarios after COVID 19. The exact impact is not yet known, but we can sense that this crisis has significantly influenced the macro-regional strategy-making criteria, both in the thematic areas of the EU's green and digital vision. The report reveals that for each of the macro-regional strategies, a process of “embedding” has been initiated, aiming at aligning “the relevant priorities of the EU's funding programme for the programming period 2021-2027 with the macro-regional strategies”. One other very forward-looking proposal on linkages with the strategies is worth highlighting, namely the “monitoring and evaluation”. This is essential to “interpret” the macro-level contribution of concrete activities and results at very low NUTS levels and to evaluate complex results at macro-level, to understand the mechanisms of the processes at different levels. In this context, a monitoring toolbox has already been developed (see EPSON and ETMS).

2.2.1 The most frequently mentioned strategies and policies in the application forms

Based on the review of the relevant sections of the fourteen application forms examined and the responses to the strategy and policy-related questions during the interviews, it can be determined which of the different levels of strategies were referred to by the project partners and which of their plans they could potentially contribute to by implementing project activities and achieving



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project-specific objectives. The most frequently cited strategies and policies at different levels are detailed below.

EU level/macro-regional strategies and policies

The only EU-level strategy mentioned by the projects examined was EU 2020, and only in five application forms. In the case of this strategy, the projects contribute to the EU-level strategic objectives in the areas of innovation-based tourism development, sustainable use of natural and cultural assets, improving the social situation of people living in peripheral areas and increasing employment.

In these parts of the proposals, there was a greater emphasis on the inclusion of macro-regional strategies, in particular the Danube Region Strategy, which was not mentioned in only three of the sample of fourteen projects. In the case of this macroregional strategy, in terms of contribution to the target areas, the projects highlighted the priority area 3 “Culture and tourism” in all cases. In addition, the priority area 9 “People and skills” was also included in several of the application documents.

In addition to the Strategy for the Danube Region, the Strategy for the Alpine Region is also included in six application forms, given that Slovenia is a member of this macro-regional cooperation. All projects can contribute to the objectives of this strategy under the thematic area “sustainable management of natural and cultural assets” and in one case a contribution to the thematic objective “competitiveness and innovation” is presented.

Slovenia participates in the implementation of the Adriatic Strategy as well as in the Alpine Strategy, which is why four projects mention a link to this macro-regional strategy. The projects can contribute to the achievement of the objectives set in the thematic areas of “diversified tourism offer” and “sustainable and responsible tourism management”.

1. Danube Region Strategy - 14/11
2. Europe 2020 - 14/5
3. Alpine Region Strategy - 14/6
4. Adriatic Regional Strategy - 14/4



Strategies and policies at national level

The mention of national level strategies is rare in the applications examined, with Hungary's National Spatial Development Concept being mentioned in the relevant section only three times. The only Slovenian national strategy mentioned in one application is the Slovenian Development Strategy.

Strategies and policies at regional/county level

Depending on the area covered by the projects and the importance of the regional and/or county strategies identified by the partnership, among the strategies and development concepts for the regions and counties making up the programme area, the Integrated Spatial Development Programme of Zala County is mentioned in half of the projects examined, and the Integrated Spatial Development Programme of Vas County is mentioned in five projects as a strategy to whose objectives the projects contribute. As in the case of the Vas County Development Document, the Pomurje Regional Development Plan is mentioned five times as a strategic, guiding document. Despite the fact that several projects involve organisations from the Podravje region, the Development Plan of the Podravje Region is presented in one application form.

1. Zala County ITP - 14/6
2. Pomurje Region Development Plan - 14/5
3. Vas County ITP - 14/5
4. Podravje Region Development Plan - 14/1

Strategies and policies at local/regional/project level

In addition to the higher-level strategy documents described above, three smaller territorially focused development documents - at national park/nature park operational area and municipal level - were included by the partners in the application forms. These development strategies and concepts contain the development orientations and plans of the organisations involved in the project, to which a project can provide a real, tangible link, in contrast to the higher-level strategies, whose objectives tend to be more indirect or soft in nature, to which projects contribute. It should be noted, however, that at local level it is easier to implement specific, physical or even thematic



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measures or packages of measures that make a more visible contribution to the objectives of a strategy.

- o Development Concept of the Őrség National Park Directorate
- o Development Concept of Goričko Landscape Park
- o Integrated Urban Development Strategy of the City of Lenti.



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Strategy Project	Green Exercise	GO IN NATURE	Guide2Visit	Iron Curtain Cycling	ESCAPE	GardEN	Horse Based Tourism- HBT	TELE-KA-LAND	Wine Picnic	Ethos Land	Mura Raba Tour	HOUSES	VELOREGIO	Zeleno Želimo
EU 2020			X	X	X		X		X	X	X			
Partnership Agreement Slovenia			X	X										
Partnership Agreement Hungary			X	X										
EUSDR		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
EURALPS		X	X	X	X		X				X			X
EUSAIR											X			X
National Spatial Development Concept Hungary			X	X								X		
Slovenian Development Strategy			X	X										
Pomurje Region Development Strategy	X		X	X				X	X			X		
Podravje Region Development Strategy			X											
Zala County ITP			X	X		X		X				X		
Vas County ITP	X		X	X					X			X	X	

Figure 9 - Identifying project contributions to strategies and policies

2.2.2 Links between strategies and between strategies and projects

Based on the answers given by the interviewees and the descriptions recorded in the relevant sections of the application forms, the following thematic linkages were identified during the pre-analysis survey. In this sub-section, the links between projects and strategies are presented in detail, and the links between strategies and policies at different levels are highlighted in terms of the overlap of thematic concentration.

Thematic concentration	Strategy level			
	EU level	National	Regional/county	Local/regional
Sustainable tourism	EU 2020	National Tourism Development Strategy	Zala County ITP	Integrated Urban Development Strategy of the City of Lenti
Natural and cultural heritage	EU 2020	National Landscape Strategy 2017-2026	Vas County ITP	Development Concept of the Órség National Park Directorate

Figure 10 - Examples of thematic links between strategies

Cross-border projects can provide an excellent opportunity for bilateral coordination of the same development areas or sectoral strategies. The creation of joint strategies is usually complicated, and sometimes impossible, due to the difficulty of involving the top decision-making organisation in the project.

Link between projects and strategies

Based on what has been described so far, it can be concluded that whenever projects define a strategic or policy fit, they do it right. The presentation of the link between the planned activities and the strategic objectives remains generic in most cases due to the limited number of characters available in the application form. This is particularly the case when project partners try to list all strategies and policies with which the development concept has a minimal link in their application.

In order to find the exact linkages, it is essential to understand the strategies and policy documents, and to identify the thematic overlap between the project activities and the strategic objectives. These strategies are available in different versions online, making the work of both applicants and evaluators easier.



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There is a strong link between the Slovenian-Hungarian Interreg projects of 2014-2020 and the cycling and tourism sector strategies, in particular the Cycling Concept of Hungary and the more detailed cycling transport and cycling-tourism territorial development concepts derived from this strategy in the county development plans. In many cases, the involvement of the competent county government as project partner ensures that these interrelationships are taken into account in the implementation of projects. On the Slovenian side, as in Austria, the development agencies set up to coordinate the development of the regions play a similar role.

In order to ensure that applicants from the local level take into account the objectives of strategies and policies at different levels, it is essential that they are informed about these documents and the objectives and development orientations they contain. This outreach could also be carried out in a cross-border approach, also in the framework of initiatives such as the present SI-HU PRO project.

Based on the above, in order to maximise the synergies of the individual projects (and possibly of the strategies and concepts developed within them to achieve the objectives of the project, see for example the Green Exercise or the technical material produced in the Guide2Visit projects), the links must be ensured at the logical level of the systematic superposition of the following levels. The highest level is the policy level, which is the level of EU-level macro-regional strategies. This is followed by the national coordination level, which is intended to encompass the strategies at national level. One level down is the regional (and local) implementation level, which already lists concrete measures. Then, at the bottom of the pyramid, there are the strategies and concepts developed in the project. The key issue for initiatives at local level is to be aware of the existing policy objectives, development orientations, strategies and the technical documents at different levels, in order to ensure synergies rather than duplication/overlapping. The interconnection between the logical layers of the systematic subordination described above must be ensured in both directions.

Let us look at the strategies and concepts developed in the projects at the bottom of the hierarchy. What summary materials were produced?



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 green exercise

Tourism Development Plan for the Szalafő-Pityerszer Folk Monument Complex



Summary study on the creation of the Fairytale Park network



For the open tendering of country houses and hotels, a document called "Selection Criteria" and a development document have been prepared to help work towards bringing the selected country houses up to the same level of development



Study of conservation guidelines and assessment and rating of the cycling road network in Vas County with development proposals



Service providers and local product list



Study of thematic routes
Guide for cycling operators

WINE PICNIC

Szőlőhegyi Piknik

Rules of the Vineyard Picnic in Szőlőhegy



Study for service providers on experiences in tourism eco-efficiency and product development



Communication strategy for the project



Concept for the development of the Mura river basin in Muraszombat



SWOT analysis of the area in terms of active tourism



A strategy to develop cross-border branding,
"Analysis of opportunities and good practices" document
Developing a new tourism programme - 21st century horse-drawn carriage model document.



Visitor behaviour analysis, visitor management concept and attractiveness database



Handbook for tourism service providers
Directory of attractions and tourist services in the Slovenia-Croatia border region

Figure 11 - Project strategies, surveys, analyses, databases





2.3 Links to previous development results

In the previous two chapters, with the help of the respondents, we examined the factors influencing the effectiveness of the project and recorded how project promoters and their partners had aligned the development directions of the project with policy objectives to achieve the most effective results.

In this section, we overview whether existing development results at the design stage have been used. Was capitalisation achieved, i.e., did they develop their project by using and building on existing (project) results, was there a preceding project whose values were used?

The majority of interviewees (eight) responded that the project partnership had used the results already achieved in the development phase of the project and during implementation. They defined previous projects and identified the foundations and values that had already been built upon and that they were building on as a foundation.

The following projects have been highlighted as previous projects:

TELE-KA-LAND: 5 Postal Carriage projects (Slovenia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013)

Building on the infrastructure created in the previous project, a new development direction, a new tourism product (a network of fairy-tale parks) was developed, leaving out the less active partners in the previous project. It cannot really be considered as a continuation project.

Green Exercise: "Upkač" - Pearls of the Tall Trees project, Neighbour to Neighbour project, In Harmony with the Landscape project (Slovenia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013), PaNaNet, PaNaNet+ projects (Austria-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013)

The new application builds on the values created by the development of the protection of natural and cultural assets, the creation of new assets and the development of ecological model farms, and is not explicitly a continuation project.

HOUSES: Pannonian Gastronomic Experiences project (Cross-border Cooperation Programme Slovenia-Hungary 2007-2013)



The main aim of the project was to further develop the system of relations with hotels and visitor management for guests staying at the hotel.

VELOREGIO: CYCLING AT-HU - Bicycle Experience Without Borders project (Austria-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013)

Based specifically on the results of the previous project, the responses from the target audience were adapted for the new application. In the CYCLING project, mainly road cycling routes were developed. The feedback was that less experienced cyclists and families with young children are not confident to cycle on these routes, so the new project aims to develop safer routes with less traffic and more adapted to their needs.

ETHOS LAND: Project "Upkač" - Pearls of Tall Trees (Cross-border Cooperation Programme Slovenia-Hungary 2007-2013)

The preceding project dealt with the renewal of meadow orchards, to which the Slovenian Countryside Non-profit Ltd. was linked by the development of an apple processing plant. In the new call for proposals, producers were approached who wished to change from being primary producers to small producers selling processed products instead of and/or in addition to selling their raw products. Workshops were organised for farmers to learn about the legal background to becoming a small producer (lectures by a tax adviser and a NÉBIH (National Food Chain Safety Office) official) and to meet local small producers with recognised professional experience.

IronCurtainCycling: based on previous applications related to EUROVELO13.

The aim was to bring the programme area into the EUROVELO13 network. Cyclists would be brought off the north-south axis by linking up the regional cycling routes to their own cross-border region.

Wine picnic: Wine Culture without Borders project, Good Wine - Good Neighbourhood project, Pannonian Gastronomic Experiences project (Slovenia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013)

These projects created the infrastructure for the new tender.

GardEN: Treasures of the Kerka Valley Project (Interreg III-A - Slovenia-Hungary-Croatia Neighbourhood Programme), 5 Postal Carriage Projects (Slovenia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013)





In the Kerka Valley Treasures project, a complex botanical survey was carried out on both sides of the border, on which the new tourism product, the Forest-Field Flowers product development programme, was built.

The interviewees plan to incorporate the results of the previous and current project into the future development of tourism in the region and the potential of their institution (this is also a sustainability requirement of the programme), but they are not yet thinking about a specific continuation project.

The results, on which they will certainly build, are:

- Green Exercise: construction work will be launched on the basis of the completed Szalafő-Pityerszer Folk Monument Tourism Development Plan,
- HOUSES: the local producers developed in the project will be integrated into the network of local producers already established by the lead partner organisation (Local Product Non-profit Ltd.),
- ETHOS LAND: once fruit processing is established, the possibility of processing meat products will be sought to give local farmers a competitive advantage,
- GardEn: the idea of the Energy Point theme road has also appealed to one of the municipalities in the area that is not part of the partnership, the Municipality of Kobilje, which would like to develop it,
- HORSE BASED TOURISM – HBT: following the project, quality standards will be developed through the advanced HBT (new brand) certification scheme.

How can project promoters guarantee that all the project results obtained so far will be maintained after the project has been closed?

2.4 Ensuring sustainability

All projects have indicated in their application form the mechanisms that will ensure the future sustainability (management, financial and infrastructural) of the outputs implemented and developed by the project.

These were confirmed by the interviewees in the interview and additional safeguards built in during the implementation phase were listed:

- in principle, the partner organisations in the projects have taken responsibility for developments in the tenders that fit in with their own regional development strategy and therefore have an interest in maintaining the developments made from the tenders,
- the maintenance of infrastructure, where it is not provided by the local authority, is often entrusted by the partner organisation to the local authority or institution with territorial competence in the area concerned,
- local tourism service providers are involved in the projects, and they are driven by their economic interest in creating permanence
- the network of contacts between partners after the end of the project ensures that the results are maintained,
- section managers have been appointed to ensure the quality of the cycle routes developed (VELOREGIO),
- a mentoring system for the development of country houses (HOUSES),
- marketing of the developed tourist programme packages through Slovenian tourism agencies, i.e., there is also an economic interest in their continued operation (MURA RABA TOUR).

Thus, in all cases, sustainability is ensured by building a strong network of tourism stakeholders beyond the project partnership (involving local administrations, local service providers, local producers, NGOs, etc.).

Networking is essentially an automatic consequence of the implementation of the development activities set out in the proposals, but its quality and efficiency require considerable effort from the project partners.

In the next chapter of the Report, we will examine whether, in addition to building and expanding their own network, the project promoters were able and willing to work with other partners working on the development of the region.

2.5 Synergy assessment

Following the evaluation of the application, the Joint Secretariat specifically requested that one project (IronCurtainCycling) be complemented by a project partnership to coordinate its activities



with another project already running (Green Exercise). This is to ensure that the two project partnerships do not carry out the same activities in the region during implementation, otherwise they could reduce or offset the impact of each other's development. They should work closely together, for example through knowledge transfer or harmonisation of thematic itineraries.

The interviewees concerned indicated that, through joint project meetings, they had familiarised themselves with each other's development plans to the extent necessary, harmonised them in order to mutually reinforce the impact of each other's activities.

We asked the project promoters if they had identified any projects during the implementation of the project that would represent similar development trends in the region, but had not heard of them when the project was planned.

Before processing the answers, it is important to clarify the concept of synergy.

We can understand it as cooperation, co-impact. It can be harnessed to achieve results that far exceed those achieved individually.

The question was therefore broadened to ask whether the interviewees and their partnerships had found a project with which they had competed to develop similar activities and, if so, whether they had exploited its synergies.

Of those interviewed in addition to the project already mentioned, the lead partner of the Guide2Visit project contacted the lead partner of the Green Exercise project to find out about the tourism programme proposals they had already prepared and the content of their information boards and the locations where they were to be displayed. The information that there are activity matches in the projects was obtained through the partner participation in the IronCurtainCycling project.

The other project promoters indicated that their partnership had not identified synergy projects in the region, i.e., projects that could have been developed and implemented in partnership with their partner to achieve a more effective result. The main reason given by almost all of them was that



- the innovative nature of the project required new project-specific approaches in the implementation of the project activities (not specific to another project) and
- they do not have any information about the other projects.

This was somewhat contradicted by the survey, because although interviewees did not identify any synergy projects, they said that during the implementation of the project they had received information that indicated that similar developments to theirs were taking place in the region.

The small programme area (Figure 12) has a relatively narrow range of actors active in tourism development with whom the project partnership can work and involve in its activities. Almost all projects involve the same group of stakeholders. Their feedback provides information to project promoters on other developments in the area.

What is the reason why you have not been involved in the work of the other project, what has prevented you from doing so? The most common answer was

- the information they received was incomplete, they did not have precise knowledge of the projects running in parallel with them (Ten of the fourteen projects examined started almost simultaneously and ran in parallel throughout the period 2017-08-01 – 2018-07-31 - Figure 13),
- the implementation of their own projects is so time and energy consuming that they can only concentrate on the objectives they have undertaken to achieve, or
- the amendment to the call for proposals to achieve synergy effects could jeopardise the original objective and the commitments made in the contract.



Figure 12 - SIHU programme area (Interreg V-A Slovenia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, funding period version 1, 18 December 2015)



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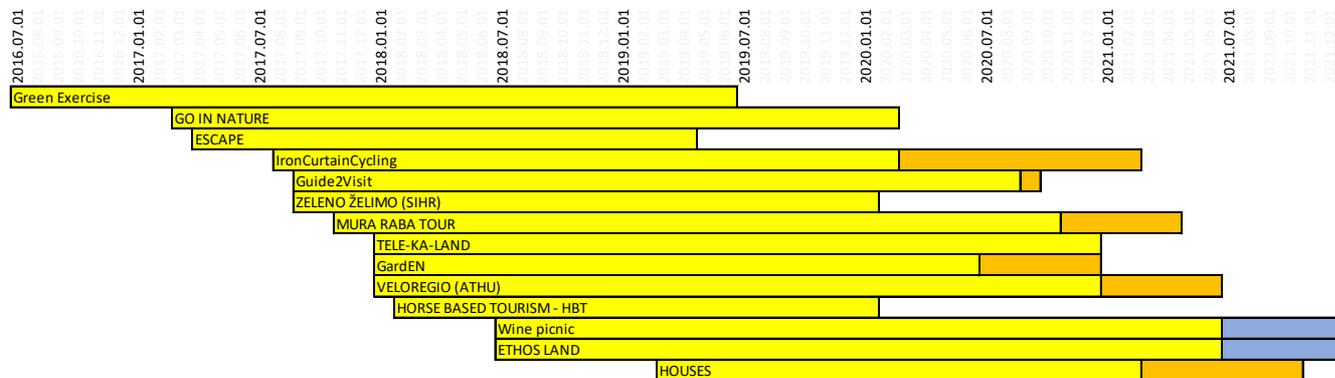


Figure 13 - Duration of projects





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The following answers were given to the question of the project promoter's reasons for the recurrence of project themes and elements, i.e., similar development activities in the region during the programming period:

- The total programme budget supports 67.59% of the projects proposed under Priority 1, "Preservation, protection, promotion and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage". These partnerships have all set out in their commitments to increase the number of overnight stays in the region and to create new tourism products and services, as required by the programme, and therefore often have the same solutions to achieve these;
- the project design is based on the needs of the local environment and the proposals of the partner organisations, which should not differ significantly in principle;
- similar problems and challenges are faced by the regional destinations and, as a result, are addressed in similar ways;
- similar problems and challenges are faced by the regional destinations and, as a result, are addressed in similar ways;
- there is not enough information at the time of application about what development solutions are being developed in other applications.

Knowing the reasons, it would be very necessary to avoid carrying out almost identical activities in parallel (e.g., developing several mobile applications for visitor guidance related to the same area or, due to the size of the area, organising multiple capacity building and capacity building training for the same group of service providers) without prior coordination. Otherwise, they may cancel each other out and the development objective will not be achieved.

What solutions were suggested by the interviewees to avoid this? To summarise, they believe that a thematic information database for applications, a common platform, where the topic, the activity and the location can be filtered, would be the only way to solve this problem. This would require institutional support to operate.

Furthermore, it would also be necessary to have a permanent meeting of tourism stakeholders to present their organisation's current work and plans. The working groups should be set up for the sectors to be developed, e.g., cycling or hiking tourism, i.e., those interested in the same thematic topic should be brought together at a bilateral table.



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If the future development vision of other applicants was available to the applicant organisations at the planning stage, all of the interviewees would consider it necessary to cooperate with the identified synergy project partners for the development of the border area.

In the next chapter, we will show how the promoters envision the future development of their destination.

2.6 Future plans

All of the interviewees are looking for opportunities to apply for the next funding period. When asked under which programme, almost all of them answered that they would very much like to participate in the SIHU programme, but they are also open to applying for other cohesion programmes, depending on their possibilities and competences.

They are mainly interested in the following topics:

- tourism (cycling, leisure, green, cultural, gastronomy)
- preservation and promotion of cultural heritage (digitisation of cultural heritage)
- rural development
- environmental protection (environmental education, climate protection, awareness-raising)
- sustainable development
- health promotion
- digitisation of agriculture
- renewable energy
- R&D
- smart urban development
- sustainable mobility
- habitat maintenance, rehabilitation
- mutual presentation of folk traditions, folk culture (music, song, dance) on the other side of the border.

Opinions are divided on whether project promoters consider it necessary to review the development needs of the region in order to prepare proposals.



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Some would definitely conduct an assessment: first by asking tourism stakeholders and/or current partner organisations, and then by exploring the needs of the local environment. There are interviewees who would do it the other way round, and some who would use the knowledge and survey gained in their project or other projects, or follow the development strategy or concept developed in them.

The following criteria were considered important by the interviewees in order of importance for the selection of future partners:

- 1) Competence of the organisation (including project practice)
- 2) Previous good cooperation (professionalism, responsiveness, efficiency, reliability)
- 3) Common purpose (content - thematic suitability)
- 4) Contact person
- 5) Interest in network development
- 6) Linguistic accessibility

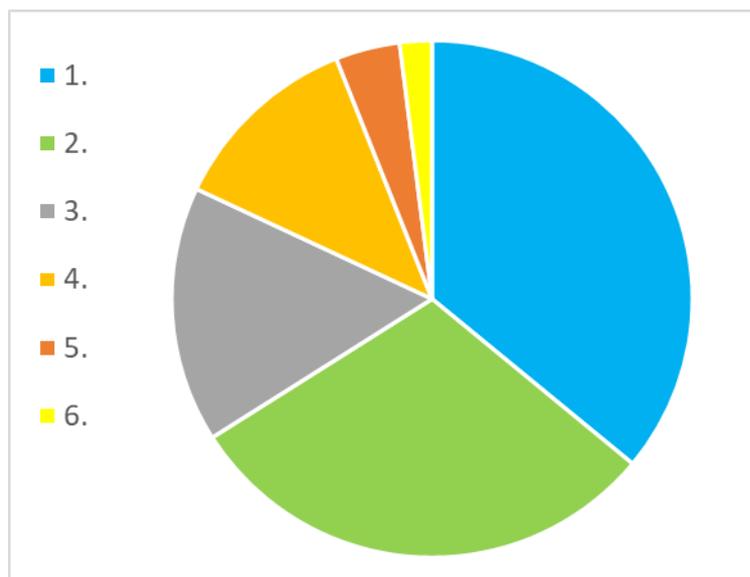


Figure 14 - Partner choice criteria weighted



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Despite the prominence of the "previous good cooperation" criterion, the interviewees are open to contact with new organisations that are not experienced in project life, if their competences allow it and if the common goal is the same.

When exploring future plans, the interviews also explored what steps the interviewee had missed so far and would like to see in the future in terms of tourism development in the border region. These are the following:

- development of a common brand for the region,
- use of joint or coordinated regional advertising,
- development of common distribution chains for the tourism packages prepared/under preparation,
- improving cooperation between operators,
- developing the local supply chain,
- linking micro-destinations,
- training of tourism professionals,
- setting up regional destination management,
- providing targeted support and systemic resources to support border areas,
- and responding to changes in the demand structure caused by the COVID-19 epidemic, developing personalised/tailored tourism products.

The border region offers plenty of development opportunities for project promoters. Most of them are already thinking about their next application ideas, but they consider it important to get to know other applicant organisations interested in tourism in the SIHU border region. The partnership between the SI-HU PRO project, Self- Government Office of Vas County and ITC - Inovacijsko tehnološki grozd Murska Sobota, which invites interested parties to bilateral working group meetings, will provide an opportunity to do so.

Let's develop the future of the region together!



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Summary

The in-depth interviews conducted with the project promoters of the fourteen tourism development projects **funded under the SI-HU PRO project in the 2014-2020 period** provided an opportunity to gather a significant amount of information. In the summary of the fact-finding report evaluating the survey material, due to the space limitation, we mainly highlight the survey results and the listed contents, which can help the applicants in the 2021-2027 funding period when planning the developments by focusing on them and providing answers to them.

The factors affecting the effectiveness of the project were identified and ranked by the interviewees:

1. excellent project partnership,
2. good choice of project theme - a well-planned work plan,
3. a well-chosen target group,
4. well-defined objectives.

For these main factors, we analysed what applicants should keep in mind when planning and what challenges they face when writing a proposal.

1. The following criteria were considered important by the interviewees in order of importance for the selection of future partners:
 - 1) Competence of the organisation (including project practice)
 - 2) Previous good cooperation (professionalism, responsiveness, efficiency, reliability)
 - 3) Common purpose (content - thematic suitability)
 - 4) Contact person
2. In general, the following topics are of interest to the respondents for future developments:
 - tourism (cycling, leisure, green, cultural, gastronomy)
 - preservation and promotion of cultural heritage (digitisation of cultural heritage)
 - rural development
 - environmental protection (environmental education, climate protection, awareness-raising)



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- sustainable development
- health promotion
- digitisation of agriculture
- renewable energy
- R&D
- smart urban development
- sustainable mobility
- habitat maintenance, rehabilitation
- mutual presentation of folk traditions, folk culture (music, song, dance) on the other side of the border.

The choice of themes can also be directly linked to the responses to the needs for further development of tourism in the border area:

- development of a common brand for the region,
- use of joint or coordinated regional advertising,
- development of common distribution chains for the tourism packages prepared/under preparation,
- improving cooperation between operators,
- increasing the capacity of service providers
- developing the local supply chain,
- linking micro-destinations,
- training of tourism professionals,
- setting up regional destination management,
- providing targeted support and systemic resources to support border areas,
- and responding to changes in the demand structure caused by the COVID-19 epidemic, developing personalised/tailored tourism products.



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3. When designing target groups, great attention should be paid to the following risks:

- overly detailed targeting and excessive quantitative targets could make it difficult to implement the project,
- it is difficult to predict the responsiveness of the target groups at the planning stage,
- it is important to take into account that several projects will address the same target groups (probably at the same time),
- the achievement of high targets may become unattainable at a stroke due to an unexpected circumstance such as the COVID-19 epidemic.

4. To achieve the goals set, it is also necessary to review the past difficulties:

- Most projects have one or more activities specifically targeting tourism service providers:
 - o their inclusion in international certification schemes,
 - o organising capacity-building training and awareness-raising workshops for them,
 - o building their local networks,
 - o encouraging them to cooperate by operating various stamping and discount schemes,
 - o inviting them to events organised around the infrastructure, etc.

All the interviewees indicated that one of the biggest obstacles in preparing these activities was to reach out to and involve tourism service providers in the project. Strengthening their willingness to cooperate and gaining their trust required a lot of effort.

However, those operators who have agreed to work together can be counted on for the long-term development of tourism in the region. The development of rural micro-enterprises is a fundamental objective in the programme area.

- A factor also affecting quality was the minimum spending constraint of 85% for the first two reporting periods, which placed a burden on the consortium as a whole.
- In cases where more than 50% of the total project budget is allocated to one project partner, it may be difficult to encourage the project partnership to complete tasks on time.



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- External contractors often do not understand the weight of deadlines. Even though the tasks are completed, it requires extra energy on the part of project partners to raise awareness of the importance of meeting deadlines and delivering as contracted.
- The epidemic situation has led to changes in the activities of all projects still active after the emergence of the COVID-19 virus:
 - o extension of deadlines,
 - o a change in the form of the activity (e.g., an event on online platform instead of an event requiring personal presence)
 - o a partial or total change or replacement of the planned activity.
- It is often during the implementation that an activity becomes less relevant or obsolete in the form in which it was conceived at the time of planning, 2-3 years before. However, with the help and flexibility of the programme contract managers, these can be modified to achieve greater efficiency.

Many factors, both positive and negative, can make it difficult or even impossible for organisations interested in regional development to plan and implement their proposals, but they cannot do it alone. Within the SI-HU PRO project, the partnership, The Self-Government Office of Vas County and ITC - Inovacijsko tehnološki grozd Murska Sobota, will work together with the partners of the projects examined in the Report in a bilateral coordination network to identify common solutions to issues concerning the maintenance, communication and further development of projects.



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Annex



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Topic	Question
general	In general, how satisfied are you with the project results? How do you evaluate them in terms of quality? Did the project really have the tangible results that were defined at the start of the project? What were the results?
general	Please provide an exact definition of the project's field of activity and the border region it targeted!
knowledge	How do you rate the knowledge acquired through the project in terms of its applicability? - very useful, useful, not relevant, inappropriate
information	Please describe or list the information that you gained through the project and that you will be able to build upon in the future! Could you strengthen the ground partnerships with this project application?
Strategic documents	In the framework of the project, were there any strategic documents/surveys/summaries prepared? If yes, in what form/format and about which topic? Which documents would you share on a future joint platform? The aim of the joint platform is for example to avoid multiple surveys/documents on the same topic and to share/make available existing documents to applicants in the border region.
Project goals and their attainment	In how far and in what quality were the specific objectives of the project and its main outputs reached? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It went beyond the planned objectives and outputs - It reached the planned objectives and outputs - It did not reach the planned objectives and outputs Judging from your experiences gained during the project, in how far would it have been necessary to define different objectives and main outputs (for example: target values, deadlines etc.)?



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Project results	In how far and in what quality were the project's main results achieved? Please elaborate. Judging from your experiences gained during the project, in how far would it have been necessary to define different main results? The realisation of which project elements do you consider to be an important result (training, program package, publication, website,
	event/tour, etc.)? Can these be used as information on the planned internal platform? If yes, in which format? For example web address, flyer, program package etc.
Contribution to achieving sectoral policy aims	Please name those strategies, best practices, surveys etc. that were considered when preparing and implementing the project!
Synergies - potential	Which synergy-projects that were unknown to you at the project planning stage did you identify in the course of project implementation? Please list the cross-border projects or project elements that are not your own projects and that you consider to be exemplary! (Wellknown "best-practice" projects). Do you see that the border-lands services are in pursuit of working together besides the project?
Synergies - utilised	In how far could you utilise the synergy projects defined in your project application? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not at all - To a minor degree - The cooperation had concrete results - There was no relevant synergy project <p>How could the synergy possibilities have been used in a better way? If the possibilities have not been utilised fully, why was that? What prevented the utilisation of synergy projects? What can be the reason of the recurrent project topics, project parts, in other words, why could similar projects emerge in the programming period in several regions?</p>



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Concrete cooperation with other projects	<p>In the course of implementing your project, did you actively cooperate with other projects? If yes, in which subject area or implementing which activity did you cooperate?</p> <p>Did you lay down framework conditions for your cooperation in a contract/agreement?</p> <p>Could you mention developmental opportunities in case of the project organizations' work, who converge these cooperations?</p>
Means of communication	<p>In the course of implementing your project, which means of communication did you use to provide information? (Ongoing information, regular information, information only at the start or end of the project)</p> <p>How successful were these methods?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They had outstanding results - They were appropriate - They did not fulfil the desired aims <p>What changes arose in the course of project implementation with regards to the means of communication? For example: other forms, other tools, different frequency, etc.</p>
Communication channels	<p>In the course of implementing your project, which communication channels did you use to provide information?</p> <p>How efficient was the use of these channels?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It had outstanding results - It was appropriate - It did not fulfil the desired aims - We chose the wrong communication channels <p>What changes arose in the course of project implementation with regards to the communication channels?</p>



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Target groups reached	<p>Did you successfully reach the project’s target groups (as committed in the project description, planned number of target groups that should be reached) through the project’s means of communication and communication channels?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We reached more people than defined as target groups - We reached the target group - We reached a part of the target group - It was not successful <p>Based on your experiences gained throughout the project, in how far would you have defined different target groups or target values?</p>
Capitalisation - in the project	Did you build on or rethink previous project results in the course of the project?
Is the project of continuative nature	Did your project have an immediate forerunner project? In how far can the project be considered as a follow-up project? Are you planning to do a follow-up project in the future?
Capitalisation - after the project	Are you planning to further use the project results?
Sustainability measures	What measures did you take in order to ensure sustainability of the project (results, outputs, etc.)?
SWOT – Question 1	<p>Please describe the biggest challenge you experienced during project implementation! If possible, please list concrete activities.</p> <p>Was the implementation of any activity, output or direct output in danger? Please provide details from a qualitative, and not from a quantitative point of view!</p>
SWOT – Question 2	From the point of view of qualitative/tangible results, which parts/elements of the project do you consider to be the strongest and most effective? If possible, please list concrete activities.
SWOT – Question 3	Did new possibilities arise during project implementation that could be capitalised as synergies? If yes, did you make use of these opportunities?



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<p>SWOT – Question 4</p>	<p>Please describe unforeseen difficulties that you experienced during the concrete implementation of the project! List the activities and project elements that seemed very promising, but you could nevertheless not achieve the desired qualitative result. What can be the reason of the low utilization of marketing opportunities and low reach of the target group in similar projects?</p>
<p>Post 2020 - appreciated thematic areas</p>	<p>Which thematic areas would you like to engage in during the 2021-2027 programming period?</p> <p>PO1 smarter Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. research and innovation capacities b. digitisation c. competitiveness of SMEs d. smart specialisation <p>PO2 Greener, low carbon Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. energy efficiency b. renewable energy c. smart energy d. climate change e. water management f. circular economy g. biodiversity <p>PO3 Better connected Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. digital connectivity b. intermodal TEN-T c. national, regional and local mobility d. multimodal urban mobility; <p>PO4 More social Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. labour markets b. education c. integration d. health <p>PO5 Europe closer to citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Integrated development in urban areas b. Integrated development in rural areas



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<p>Post 2020 - planned project, not necessarily in this programme</p>	<p>Do you plan to continue or further develop the current project during the 2021-2027 programming period? Are you planning other projects not connected to the current project during the 2021-2027 programming period? In which thematic area? In the planned project, would you use your existing strategies and assess the needs of the environment?</p>
<p>Miscellaneous, future</p>	<p>Which steps do you consider missing so far and would you consider to be expedient in the future with regards to the touristic development of the border region? Which concrete development directions would you define with regards to the region's development? Is there any area of development that is not relevant for the region? What do you think about the change of the demand's structure in case of pandemic? How could regional tourism help your enterprise/organization?</p>
<p>Training</p>	<p>1. Implementing which training would support your future work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - marketing - language training - project management training - other professional training:..... - Organisation of redundant trainings <p>2. Implementing which training would help (if relevant) the target group's future efficiency?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - marketing - language training - project management training - other professional training:..... - Organisation of redundant trainings



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