

**TOURAGE INTERREG IVC project**

# **Implementation Plan**

**Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County**

FINAL VERSION – December 2014

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## 1. Description and reference on TOURAGE project

### Overview

The project has grown out from the idea that although demographic change brings many challenges it can also bring opportunities to the regions. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the Europe and relatively remote regions have both a lot of unexploited and unknown development potential in this regard. The project seeks to identify good practices on developing tourism possibilities for growing segment of elderly travellers.

The results gained in this collaboration will be essential instrument to communicate to the rest of Europe the means by which "The Senior Tourism Model" can be created and enhanced and also what kind of tools can be used to improve regional senior tourism policies.

TOURage project is funded by the Interregional Cooperation Programme INTERREG IVC aimed at improving the effectiveness of regional policies and instruments. The project runs from January 2012 until December 2014.

### Objectives

The overall objective of the project is to enhance the regional economy by means of senior tourism development and to support active and healthy ageing. The project aims to enlighten the responsible personnel of regional authorities, decision-makers and politicians in the field; its challenges and benefits; its future trends and above all good practices exchanged and deployed.

### Activities

- Identifying and exchanging good practices will help to overcome the challenges connected to senior tourism ("silver tourism") and develop a clear understanding of central possibilities of silver tourism in the partner regions.
- Evaluating the most important challenges facing silver tourism in the partner regions.
- Exchange experiences on senior tourism through successful seminars, working groups and study visits.
- Deepening of the relations between partners and their respective regions.
- Developing joint methodologies and giving policy recommendations based on good practices exchanged during the project.
- Dissemination of the obtained project results for the benefit of relevant tourism stakeholders at a local to European level.
- Increasing networking capacity and synergies within European-wide silver economy networks and projects.
- Finding solutions to turn population ageing into an asset and overcome structural change by new innovative means.
- Promote sustainable regional economy and wellbeing.

## Partnership

The partnership consists 11 partners from 9 European Union Member States. The TOURage partners are the following:

- Lead Partner: Regional Council of North Karelia Finland
- Bourgas Regional Tourist Association Bulgaria
- Region of East Macedonia & Thrace Greece
- Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency Hungary
- Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Regional Development and Environmental Management Agency Hungary
- West Regional Authority Ireland
- Vidzeme Planning Region Latvia
- Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic Poland
- Podkarpackie Region Poland
- County Council of Granada Spain
- Regional Development Agency of the Prešov Self-Governing Region Slovakia

## 2. Description of senior tourism in the region

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county is having a population of 555000 (2010). This is a declining NUTS3 border region on the North-Eastern part of Hungary. The pre-dominantly agricultural region (which is among the poorest one in the TOURage region's comparison<sup>1</sup>) has a surface area of 5937 km<sup>2</sup>. The population density is continuously declining. Comparing to other TOURage regions it has an average size of territory and population.

### Tourism

The number of tourists is just over 100000 guest nights in the last decade's tourism statistics (106542 in 2010). The number of hotels is quite few. In a TOURage comparison as well Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is not the most developed touristic region of the peripheral regions of Europe.

Tourism is not the most important economic activity of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Neither in employment, nor in its economic share has an importance in the county's economy. Especially in comparison with more developed regions (e.g. Granada), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is lagging behind in the utilization of its tourism potential. The heavy fluctuation of the number of tourism enterprises shows that tourism is not yet strong in economic terms (in 2010 1666 enterprises declared tourism as their main field of activity).

The most important tourism attractions of the region have a high visitor number. The pilgrimage tourism of Máriapócs based on the legend of Holy Mary is attracting annually 600 thousands of visitors which makes it the most visited place of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and one of the TOP12 attractions of TOURage partnership. The Zoo of Nyíregyháza is the second most visited attraction having 380.000 visitors annually. Besides the spa centers of Nyíregyháza and Nyírbátor are attracting more than 100.000 visitors annually in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg.

The most important origins of foreign tourists visiting Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg are the neighbouring 3 countries of Ukraine, Slovakia and Romania. Besides the tourists are coming also from Germany and Poland. On an average the tourists stay less than 3 nights in the county which should be developed.

Concerning the organizations involved in tourism there is quite a weak coordination on county level. There is the North Great Plain Regional Marketing Directorate operating on NUTS2 level including 2 other counties besides Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, and there are some local Tourinform offices in the county. Comparing to other TOURage partners there is a need to institutionalize tourism coordination and promotion activities in the county. The institutional form for that could be either a specific county board, a county organization, a cluster or a tourism association as in other TOURage regions.

### Demography

The population structure of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is quite balanced comparing to other TOURage regions. Ageing is not yet a serious issue in the county, but the share of 65+ population is already higher than population under 14.

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<sup>1</sup> TOURage Regional analysis e-brochure. Available on the internet:  
[http://www.tourage.eu/uploads/REGIONAL%20ANALYSIS\\_FINAL13032014.pdf](http://www.tourage.eu/uploads/REGIONAL%20ANALYSIS_FINAL13032014.pdf)

Although it is important to mention that Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is one of the regions where deaths (6813 in 2010) exceed live births (5329 in 2010), so the natural population change is negative. Another negative trend is that the fertility rate of women in the age of 15-49 is decreasing, and at the moment is only 0,0178, which is one of the lowest in all TOURage regions.

Concerning the crude rates of population change among the TOURage regions in Vidzeme, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Balaton region an enormous decline can be seen. It shows that in a long-term Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is declining heavily in population, and ageing could be an issue as well if the currently high live births would start to decrease.

Currently there some county organisations for seniors which are active on coordinating senior issues and problems related to ageing. Unfortunately besides their voluntary activity there is a lack of financial resources to have more influence on regional development.

### **3. Presentation of GPs exported and imported offered by the region, first results of GP transfers**

During the project implementation SZSZBCRDEMA offered the following GPs for export (which were presented during the study visit in April 2014):

#### **ROUTE OF MEDIEVAL CHURCHES** (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, Hungary)

A route of medieval churches as a heritage touristic attraction: It mainly consists of medieval churches that are under historic building protection and represent the unique character and traditions of the church architecture of this county. The visitors get to gain in-depth knowledge of this unmatched architectural and cultural heritage which is unique in the Carpathian Basin. The aim of the development was to trace out a thematic route of medieval churches in the Hungarian-Romanian-Ukrainian border area, which was the first common thematic route of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Satu Mare counties and Transcarpathia. Since all three of these counties consider their cultural, architectural heritage as an outstanding public value, a common harmonised development programme was implemented for the sake of protection and promotion. The medieval churches are in the centre of the programme since these are unique treasures of the area.

#### **FAITH AND HEALTH** (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, Hungary)

The project serves a complex of two towns' religious and health tourism development in the region's cultural values, architectural and historical heritage. At the beginning of the programme Nyírbátor and Máriapócs had dozens of impressive monuments but most of them were in very bad condition and did not provide an adequate infrastructure. Attendance of the buildings deteriorated to such an extent that the sites were beginning to lose their religious and tourism attractiveness. Organising large-scale cultural and religious events was impossible, because of the lack of supporting facilities.

Nyírbátor has had a thermal spa for decades but due to outdated services, utilisation was well below its potential. Another problem was that tourists could only spend a night or two in the settlements. Senior tourists are a priority group, as they are interested in spas and in cultural monuments and heritage.

#### **GASTRONOMIC JOURNEY** (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, Hungary)

The objective of this programme is to show the gastronomic culture of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. Five different traditional regions were identified, which are the following: Nyírség, Bereg, Szatmár, Rétköz and Nyíri-mezőség. These regions have their own gastronomic culture and tradition. The point is that not only do counties have different cultures in gastronomy but it is also the case

within a county and its regions as well. This is a good practice of how to raise the attention of inhabitants to explore their own county. A programme started within the project called “Old foods in new clothes”. This programme is a new innovative way to show our tradition in gastronomy. A main target group are senior tourists, because if they visit something new, they want to explore its own gastronomy. They are searching for places where they can taste delicious traditional foods of the county.

#### **TDM ACTIVITIES OF HAJDÚSZOBOSZLÓ** (Hajdú-Bihar county, Hungary)

The Hungarian Great Plain (Hajdúszoboszló is the 3rd most visited spa in Hungary, the average number of spa visitors annually is more than 1 million, one third of them are foreigners). Its main attraction is the bathing complex with its famous spa, open-air bath, Aquapark and Aqua-Palace. The conditions for active and passive recreation are available in Hajdúszoboszló thanks to the features and services of the city. The catering units, hotels and the city of Hajdúszoboszló offer a wide variety of programmes in addition to bathing. The well maintained and landscaped resort city is perfectly suitable for the recreation of families and those who wish to recuperate and refresh themselves.

The complex service provision for elderly people visiting Hajdúszoboszló Spa is the most important activity of Hajdúszoboszló TDM. In offering services for other age groups as well, one of the main target groups of the TDM is to serve domestic and foreign senior tourists.

#### **HORTOBÁGY NATIONAL PARK** (Hajdú-Bihar county, Hungary)

Hortobágy National Park is the first and until today the largest protected natural area of Hungary, which extends some 82 thousand hectares. The park won the “Part of The World Heritage” title in 1999 from UNESCO. In 2008, as “Hungary’s best destination for preserving living traditions”, it was awarded the “EDEN - European Destinations of Excellence” title from the European Commission. Hortobágy presents the harmonic living of man and landscape together.

Strong seasonality characterises the national park programmes. One of the conditions of the financial sustainability of programmes and demonstration sites is extending the tourist season and reducing seasonality, therefore they initiated developments.

Although there was an interest from many partners especially for the religious tourism good practices presented and offered for export by Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, but finally a concrete transfer process was not launched. Regional Development Agency of the Prešov Self-Governing Region was interested to transfer the Faith and Health programme, but concrete step besides the study visit was not done to have a further development in the process.

SZSZBCRDEMA have chosen 2 GPs for import during the project implementation. These are the following:

- Marketing for over 55's – West Regional Authority (Ireland)
- Preservation and Promotion of Wooden Churches - Regional Development Agency of the Prešov Self-Governing Region (Slovakia)

### 3.1 Marketing for over 55's

SZSZBCRDEMA is a coordinator of the county level marketing programme called Fairy Land (Tündérmező). This programme was initiated by the Agency in order to have a harmonized visual identity and brand of the county, which could be used during the promotion of different heritages of the county.

Fairy Land today is a known brand not only in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county but also nation-wide and thanks to cross-border project initiatives in the neighbouring countries as well. This common marketing strategy of the county gives opportunity not only to promote different tourism products and services through its available communication channels (website, newsletter, Facebook), but also to have specific tourism package offers for different segments of tourism.

There is already developed specific package for bicycle tourists (Fairy Tour) and under planning for young generations, but as an outcome of the good practice exchange process the following new developments could be reached for senior tourists on the basis of the good practice of Marketing for over 55's of West Regional Authority Ireland:

- Development of senior tourism **subsection on the website of the Route of Medieval Churches** [www.temple-tour.eu](http://www.temple-tour.eu) (later will be developed also on the Fairy Land website - [www.tundermezo.hu](http://www.tundermezo.hu)) – functional links on the following thematic:
  - description of the religious traditions and values of the county;
  - additional touristic products/services offered by the church route for seniors (spa, religious, cultural, gastronomic products);
  - church route related service availability (accessible accommodations, restaurants etc.);
  - tourism information points;
  - religious events;
  - specific medieval church route description for seniors (e.g. accessible church of Nyírbátor).
- Creation of an **e-brochure** on Senior Tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county with the following thematic issues:
  - description of the county;
  - specific tourism products for seniors (spa, religious, cultural, gastronomic products);

- service availability (accessible accommodations, restaurants etc.);
- tourism information points;
- touristic events;
- specific thematic routes developed for senior needs (description of programmes).

As a result of the good practice transfer SZSZBCDREMA will be ready to provide more age-specific offer for senior visitors arriving to the county, and visiting the main sights or the church route. The website and e-brochure will be promoted and disseminated on different tourism events (conferences, fairs), and by the information centers and tourism attractions Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county.

### **3.2 Preservation and Promotion of Wooden Churches**

The good practice of Presov Self-Governing Region gave the opportunity to analyze the operation of a tourism service company related to the tourism products of the wooden churches of North-Eastern Slovakia protected in many case by UNESCO. This service company is owned by the church and its function is to develop tourism programmes, packages, and in general to attract tourists.

As SZSZBCDREMA has developed a wide range of tools and products in the last years related to Fairy Land strategy, it is an open issue how to maintain and further develop the marketing and promotion activities. One possible approach is to create a tourism service company to manage all these issues.

The solution of Presov was discussed in different forums, but until the finalization of the Implementation Plan there was no political decision done on this issue which organizational solution should be followed for this matter. During the 2014-2020 period there is planned many investments on the field of tourism promotion in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, and this organizational issue will be decided using also the example of Presov.

## **4. Presentation of survey on local seniors and foreign tourists (future trends in senior tourism)**

The Questionnaire for local seniors on tourism was filled out by 129 persons in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. The majority of these seniors are tend to have only short 1-3 days of holidays (36%), and two third of them stay not longer than one week (67%). 35% of seniors asked are spending their holiday abroad, 65% in Hungary. The majority of seniors are travelling in Autumn period (38%), and only a few of them in the Winter (4,5%). Summer is an important period for travelling for this age group as well in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County (30%).

Out of total answers (83) received more than half of them organized their travel individually and more than one third of them through a travel agency. During decision making own travel experience is the most important for seniors of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, but information from friends, relatives, guidebooks and travel catalogues are also important.

Out of 112 respondents 67 reported they prefer to travel by train, but also in a high number they travelled by plane for holiday. Most of them travel with their spouse or partner (59 out of 111 – 53%), many of them travelling alone (19%), and some of them with other relatives (15%).

Financial reasons, lack of time or health problems were the most regular answers as a barrier of not travelling. The main motivations for travel were to spend some time with family and to escape daily routines.

## 5. Structured plan for future actions of the region on the field of senior tourism – action fields

The following actions are planned to be achieved on the field of senior tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county:

### ▪ Ensuring dialogue (local meetings or any other platforms to mobilise relevant stakeholders)

1. Creation of a senior tourism working group for the Fairy Land strategy – regular invitation of the members to Fairy Land events and for specific working group activities in order to have a continuous communication between the county representatives, tourism experts and senior stakeholders.
2. Organisation of senior tourism working group activities:
  - workshops;
  - conferences;
  - exhibitions;
  - study tours.
3. Publishing a brochure on senior tourism based on the e-brochure already developed.

### ▪ Preparation of project ideas to local/regional/national/EU programmes

Preparation of cross-border projects to develop the accessibility of tourism products/services and thematic routes in the border areas with Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg will be eligible for funding in 3 different cross-border programmes. These are the following:

- **HU-SK 2014-2020:** The Cooperation Programme is prepared and already filed for adoption to the European Commission. The programme intends to provide financial resources for cultural and natural heritage protection which can provide opportunity for specific tourism service and product development as well for senior people. Besides people-to-people cooperation opportunities give a chance for senior people and people working with seniors to share their ideas and knowledge on silver economy and senior tourism. The first call for proposals will be available after the adoption of the cooperation programme in the second half of 2015. Further information: [http://www.husk-cbc.eu/hu/altalanos\\_tajekoztato\\_a\\_20142020\\_idoszakrol](http://www.husk-cbc.eu/hu/altalanos_tajekoztato_a_20142020_idoszakrol)
- **RO-HU 2014-2020:** The Cooperation Programme for Romania and Hungary is not yet adopted. The programme is focusing as well on the cultural and natural heritage protection investment priority. It can provide funding opportunity for similar actions as it was mentioned for the HU-SK 2014-2020 CP. Further information: <http://2014.huro-cbc.eu/en/>
- **ENI HU-SK-RO-UA 2014-2020:** This is a European Neighbourhood Instrument programme involving four countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine). Because of the crisis in Ukraine the planning process of this programme just started in the second half of 2014. At

the moment it can not be foreseen how much it will focus on tourism, but based on the previous programme experiences, tourism could be a field of future activities of the programme. Further information: <http://www.huskroua-cbc.net/>

- **Launching new senior tourism programmes**

Based on the good practice transfer process the specific senior tourism package will be offered for senior tourists arriving to the county as part of the Fairy Land strategy.

- **Developing/harmonising relevant regional policy documents/instruments**

During the TOURage project implementation a new county development concept, strategy and operational programme has been adopted. In this document senior tourism was mentioned and supported. This strategy set its horizon for 2020, therefore in the new coming EU programming cycle in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county senior tourism will be an important segment of tourism development activities.