

# EPICAH

## Action Plan

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## 1 Introduction

The current document is the Action Plan made within the EPICAH project to improve the policy instrument Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme. The EPICAH project aims to promote the improvement of the policy instruments for cross-border cooperation processes in natural and cultural heritage protection as a basis for cross-border tourism. In consequence and in coherence with the EPICAH project, the Action Plan intends to answer the following question: Which actions, methods and/or tools are necessary for improving the effective development and efficient usage of natural and cultural values?

Policy context		Action Plan type	
Investment for Growth and Jobs programme		Type 1: Implementation of new projects	
European Territorial Cooperation programme	X	Type 2: Change in the management of the policy instrument (improved governance)	X
Other regional development policy instrument		Type 3: Change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)	

According to the table above, the Action Plan will change the management of the policy instruments, more closely change the type of capitalization actions within the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme.

In the Action Plan, we present

- the methodological framework used for defining the optimal actions,
- the general information of the policy instrument,
- the justification of the need for improving the policy instrument,
- the lessons learned from the EPICAH project,
- a stakeholder analysis in connection with the EPICAH project,
- all the necessary details of the planned actions,
- as well as other additional information about the indicators, monitoring and risk assessment.

## 2 Methodological framework

The Action Plan has been developed in full compliance with the guidelines of the Interreg Europe Programme, having also adapted the more analytical structure proposed by EPICAH project. Different sources provided input for the elaboration of the Action Plan:

- The documents, reports and tools developed commonly within the EPICAH project contribute to setting the development guidelines.
- The good practices identified and presented by the partners during the transnational meetings – seven study visits and thematic seminars were organized by the partners (Italian-French maritime area, Spanish-Portuguese borders, Hungarian-Slovakian borders, Czech-Bavarian borders, Greek border area in Western Macedonia, and Estonian-Latvian borders, Romanian-Hungarian borders).
- The feedbacks from the project partners on the good practices presented during the Hungarian-Slovakian study visit were also very useful in this process.
- The outcomes of the meetings of the local stakeholders' group and other local meetings organized by the Hungarian partner, Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC. The LSG validates the final version of the Action Plan.

The sources above are strongly interconnected since the analysis, the evaluation and the potential valorization of the transnational good practices is one of the main topics in the agenda of every local stakeholders' group meeting.

Finally, the main working documents used during the drafting of the Regional Action Plan were:

1. The main Interreg Europe Programme documents,
2. The main documents of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme,
3. The State of the Art Report for the Slovakian-Hungarian border area,
4. The presentation and the evaluation fiches of the good practices visited in partners' territories,
5. The minutes of the meetings of the Local Stakeholder Group,
6. The main outcomes and conclusions of the EPICAH Online Survey about Natural and Cultural Cross Border Heritage and Tourism.



### 3 Policy instrument background

The policy instrument to be improved is the Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme. The implementation of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme (2014-2020) is in an advanced stage: the last Calls for Proposals (CfP) were already published in 2019, which means that there is a very limited possibility for improving the current cooperation programme in the phase 2 of the EPICAH project (2020-2022). However, there is one very useful tool that can be used already in this stage of implementation, namely the capitalization and dissemination of good practices which can be derived both from the EPICAH project itself and from the project co-financed by the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme. It can contribute to develop and use more efficient and effective solutions in connection with the natural/cultural heritage and cross-border tourism already in the recent programming period.

#### 3.1 The definition of the programme area

The Hungarian-Slovak border is one of the longest internal land-locked borders in the European Union, with a total length of 679 km. The programming region is extremely heterogeneous considering its economic and social situation. The area covered by the NUTS 3 level is 61,496 km<sup>2</sup>. Two regions have no direct connection with the state border. Their interests are based on territorial proximity and border effect influences experienced. The level of territorial cohesion can be characterised by among others the common use of natural and cultural heritage, as well as by the presence of cross-border cooperation.

#### 3.2 Connecting to the EPICAH project's topic

Natural and cultural heritage as well as cross-border tourism have been playing a dominant role in the strategy and among the priority axes since the first cooperation programming period. There is no part of the eligible region where tourism – based mainly on natural and cultural values – would not have at least local or even more international significance. As a consequence, the most popular priority axis for the applicants was that of tourism during the previous programming periods – mainly focusing on creating cross-border thematic routes, cycle paths or joint water tourist infrastructure. However, common destination management is not usual, which is the main reason for the relatively low number of cross-border tourist visit.

In the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme, one of the five selected Investment Priorities was IP 6/c Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage with the Specific Objective “To increase the attractiveness of the border area” (Priority Axis “Nature and Culture”). The results that the Member States seek to achieve with the EU support were as follows:

- Better utilization of the regions endogenous natural and cultural potential in supporting the sustainable development of local economies;
- Increase in social, economic and territorial cohesion by supporting joint cultural activities and activities concerning to nature preserving and protection;
- Improving social, economic and territorial cohesion by supporting joint cultural and nature conservation activities;
- Increase in the number of visitors in the programme area.

These facts justify that the Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme and its related Priority Axis are closely linked to the EPICAH project's topic and aims.

## 4 Lessons learned

During the transnational meetings, study visits and thematic seminars, the partners of the EPICAH project identified, analysed and evaluated a wide range of potential good practices which can be adapted by and built in the affected policy instruments. In case of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme, the most important question was how the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat could support and encourage the potential applicants to develop and implement integrated cross-border projects in the field of natural and cultural heritage as well as tourism.

The partners compiled a collection of good practices come to the surface during the EPICAH project. From this collection, the following good practices were the starting points for the improvement action within the Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme.

Good practice	Lessons learned
Eixo Atlantico strategy to boost tourism at border between Galicia (ES) and North Portugal	The good practice provides an ideal solution for shifting the focus towards a more integrated tourism approach instead of often small-scale and isolated initiatives of each city. In this case, complexity means that together we are stronger and more attractive. The joint interventions of the partners include different key areas of tourism development that complement each other effectively.
Proactive cross-border leadership	Integrated approach cannot be adapted and used without organizations and people which/who are able to establish sustainable partnerships and create complex development projects. It is very important to support the potential applicants in design strategically integrated and interlinked projects with a large number of actions and stakeholders. The good practice offers an optimal toolbox for preparation process, which makes the potential beneficiary able to participate in complex cross-border interventions in the field of natural and cultural heritage as well as in tourism.
The Cross-border Territorial Study for the Protection and Exploration of the Nature Heritage in Český les and Oberpfalz	The good practice gives an example for combining the environmental, economic and social values and benefits of a cross-border natural area. It is crucial to have an actual picture of the given area, which is the base for the comprehensive development. Without such examination and analysis, it is impossible to strategically design an optimal set of interventions. This approach is combined with the active participation of the stakeholders, too.
Realisation, extension and rehabilitation of museal sites in counties of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg in the	The project aimed at the integration of cultural sites in a region with the objective of increasing its tourism attractiveness. It was a well-designed process: the first was the identification of potential sites where the complex actions have to be implemented. After it and based on the local and regional assets, the partners defined the



Good practice	Lessons learned
context of cross-border tourism	complementary activities to create an interconnected and intertwined tourism offer. With this process, the project was much more than a simple rehabilitation and sustainable use of cultural heritage: it was much more a joint development of a territorial integrated touristic products.
Route of Medieval Churches – Középkori templomok útja	This is a complex tourism development project based on common religious heritage of the whole region of two neighbouring counties in Romania and Hungary with the participation of more than 30 churches. Visitor-friendly development was implemented in 19 temples, which was complemented by communication and promotion activities. The extensive network of the partners guarantees the long-term sustainability of the results.
Thematic seminar Estonia-Latvia cross-border area in June 2019: improving capitalization process of the Estonia-Latvia Programme	<p>The Head of Estonia-Latvia Programme Joint Secretariat (Mrs. Helena Jarviste) introduced the capitalization process of the Programme. The main challenges were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no budget is previewed for capitalization process;</li> <li>- there is a necessity to integrate the projects of different areas (assets), as well as their results among them;</li> <li>- everything is based on pure enthusiasm of the involved stakeholders since the capitalization it is not among the compulsory activities previewed by the programme;</li> <li>- absence of any written methodology/guideline for capitalization.</li> </ul> <p>The Programme authorities tried to carry out the capitalization by organizing meetings among the representatives of different projects of the same area with the aim to let them know each other, to present the results of their projects and to inform others about the planned activities.</p>

## 5 Analysis of stakeholders involved in the Action Plan

The following meetings organized in the framework of the EPICAH project were the most important regarding the content of the Action Plan:

- Local Stakeholders Group's meetings as key events to channel the local experiences, on-the-spot knowledge and expectations;
- regional events (so-called 'Tokaj Compass: It shows value') with nationally known experts in tourism, gastronomy, marketing, and other relevant topics for the project to introduce good practices and to share experiences;
- thematic seminar during the transnational project-level meeting organized in Hungary.

The stakeholders within the Slovakian-Hungarian border area can be classified into the following main categories.

Stakeholder	Main characteristics
Programme bodies (MA, JS) of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme	The Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat have the most comprehensive knowledge about the Programme and are duly authorized to influence the Programme's key features such as content, priorities, objectives, selection criteria, etc based on the decision of the Monitoring Committee – both in the recent period and in the next programming phase.
Municipalities	Municipalities play dominant role in preservation of cultural and natural heritage as well as in tourism both in Hungary and in Slovakia. They identify the strategic priorities of the regional and urban development and can gain the financial resources to implement the interventions to reach the defined objectives. In many cases, they are also the owners and/or the maintainers of relevant facilities. They were represented at the meetings in significant numbers and shared their opinions and expectations on the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme with the project partner.
Owners and maintainers of cultural and natural heritage as well as of tourism attractions	Cultural and natural heritage are of paramount importance to the (cross-border) tourism and, naturally, to the EPICAH project itself. The owners and maintainers of them play a crucial role in the tourism attractiveness of the whole border region. They are often also the users and beneficiaries of development funds and other financial resources.
Service providers in connection with natural and cultural heritage as well as in tourism	The more and better services are available in the Slovakian-Hungarian border area, the more tourists will visit the region – spending more nights and more money. That is the reason for involving service providers (both from the public and from the private sectors) in the elaboration of the Action Plan.
Local inhabitants	Local communities are at the same time the key players in and the final beneficiaries of the results achieved within the EPICAH project. On the one hand, they can – both positively and negatively – Influence the image of the border area; on the other hand, they can benefit from the developed and/or more rationally used natural and cultural values of the border area. The connection and the mutual understanding of each other can be strengthened between the people living in the region.

The stakeholders participated actively at the meetings listed above and contributed with their constructive opinions to the elaboration of the Action Plan.



## 6 Improvement actions

### 6.1 Action 1: Improving capitalization and dissemination of good practices and knowledge focusing on cultural and natural heritage and cross-border tourism

#### 6.1.1 The background

As presented in Chapter 4, numerous good practices serve as a basis for this action. Both the international partners and the local stakeholders stated that the main challenge in connection with the natural and cultural heritage as well as the cross-border tourism is to develop and implement territorially and thematically integrated projects.

There is a lot of successful and relevant projects implemented during the former and recent phases of the Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme, nonetheless the promotion activity of their results could be increased either within the programme area, or in the European Union. During the transnational meetings, the study visits and the thematic seminar, we experienced the usefulness of good practices at first hand: their innovative, tried and tested methods can be adapted by other initiatives and projects in the border area and in different regions of Europe with similar challenges. That is the reason for creating a platform for capitalization and dissemination of knowledge and experiences within the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme to create much more coherent, complex and sustainable projects.

#### 6.1.2 Action

The **objective of the action** is to present and disseminate good practices from the EU and from the Programme itself among the (potential) beneficiaries with the aim of strengthening clear cross-border impacts, sustainable results and integrated character (in both territorial and thematic terms) with the clear focus on cultural and natural heritage as well as cross-border tourism.

The **activities** foreseen in connection with the Action Plan are as follows: Improving the effectiveness of capitalization and dissemination within the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme:

- organizing a **capitalization workshop** with the participation of beneficiaries and potential applicants regarding natural and cultural heritage as well as cross-border tourism. The aim of the workshop is
  - o to revise the process of capitalization and dissemination applied in the Programme,
  - o to identify the real problems and challenges in connection with the tourism-related cross-border projects;
  - o to create a platform for knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences,
  - o to encourage networking and integration between projects
  - o as well as to facilitate and enhance dialogue and connections between the (potential) beneficiaries;

- organizing a **dissemination event** inviting representatives of international good practices and a wide range of stakeholders from both side of the borders to promote and communicate the adaptable solutions in case of cultural and natural heritage as well as cross-border tourism for both the general and professional public.

The capitalization workshop and the dissemination event cannot end in themselves: they have to serve higher purposes at programme-level. This long-term impact can be ensured by the main deliverables of the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event that can be used already in the last years of the recent implementation period:

- Recommendations for improving capitalization and dissemination processes of the future Interreg Programme between Hungary and Slovak Republic,
- Stakeholder database,
- Capitalization platform of future Interreg Programme between Hungary and Slovak Republic,
- Online database of good practices,
- Detailed description of good practices.

Both the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event will have clear positive impacts on the recent Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme:

- on the one hand, they will improve the performance of the programme bodies as
  - o they will be able to use the deliverables of the events for improving their own capitalization and dissemination activities as they can channel the opinions and experiences of the participants into their processes,
  - o they will create a close personal and professional relationship with the recent beneficiaries, that makes it possible to support them during the implementation of the projects related to cultural and natural as well as to cross-border tourism;
- on the other hand, they will generate advantageous changes in case of the beneficiaries themselves as
  - o they will get to know new methods, tools and activities that can be used during the implementation of their own projects (e.g. how can they involve the relevant stakeholders in a better way, how can they reach the target values of the indicators more easily, how can they ensure the sustainability of the results achieved also after the project results, etc.);
  - o they will participate in a non-formalized but active platform that is suitable for knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences – also after the events (they will have direct contact to each other in case of any questions or requests regarding project implementation).



As a summary, it can be stated that the deliverables of the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event will influence both the programme management processes and the quality and methodology of the project implementation – already during the execution of the 2014-2020 policy instrument: the Action Plan will clearly contribute to changes in the capitalization processes of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Programme. In addition, these events will strengthen the synergetic effects both project and programme level thanks to the interaction between the programme bodies and the beneficiaries.

### 6.1.3 Players involved

The following stakeholders will be involved into the implementation of the action:

**Managing Authority (MA):** The MA bears overall responsibility for the planning and implementation of the Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme itself. It coordinates the strategic planning and implementation process of the Programme together with Slovak Republic including the promotion of better-quality projects, dissemination of the results, and exchange of experiences, which means that MA has the power and authority to influence the methods used in this process in line with the agreement of the Slovak Republic as National Authority and based on the decision of the Monitoring Committee.

**Joint Secretariat (JS):** The JS has the most accurate picture both of capitalization methods and of the good practices that are worth disseminating. It has strong, daily contact with the (potential) beneficiaries and can support the knowledge transfer process. Consequently, JS can propose adequate solutions and answers regarding the aforementioned challenges. JS will share its experiences and recommendations in the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event.

**Members of the Monitoring Committee (MC):** The members of the MC can be the following organizations:

- competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities,
- economic and social partners,
- independent bodies representing civil society, such as environmental partners, nongovernmental organizations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination.

The MC can propose proper tools for capitalization and dissemination as well as it can help to identify the good practices and stakeholders to involve into the capitalization process.

**Beneficiaries of projects focusing on natural or cultural heritage and cross-border tourism:**

Beneficiaries gained considerable experiences in implementation and maintenance of cross-border projects and their results. They are able to clearly identify the main achievements and good practices to share with each other; therefore, it is highly recommended to invite them to the knowledge transfer.

**Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC (TOKAJ):** As the partner of the EPICAH project, it has decisive role in the implementation of the second phase of the project. TOKAJ is the operative body of Tokaj Wine Region Development Council and focuses on the development of the Tokaj wine region in an



integrated manner – covering among others agriculture, economic and rural development, tourism, world heritage, environmental protection, sustainable development. It is in constant contact with the local stakeholders of the region including local authorities, national parks, NGOs, companies, etc. – thus, TOKAJ is able to reach, activate and motivate them. TOKAJ plays a key role in the monitoring of the Action Plan and in the improvement of the policy instrument.

#### 6.1.4 Timeframe

The Action Plan will be implemented in the year 2020.

#### 6.1.5 Costs

The costs of organizing the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event can be estimated at €5,000.

#### 6.1.6 Funding sources

The costs of the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event will be ensured by the Hungarian partner.

## 7 Risk Assessment Plan

It is very important to identify the potential risks in the Action Plan that can jeopardize the successful implementation of the activities foreseen.

Potential risk	Probability of occurrence	Impact	Risk management tool
Low number and/or low motivation of the stakeholders at the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event	low	medium	Keeping contact with the stakeholders Clearly explaining the aims of the workshop and the event Highlighting the benefits of the improved capitalization and dissemination processes within the Programme and of the EPICAH project itself
Low number of good practices to be disseminating	low	high	Monitoring the implementation of projects constantly to identify the adaptable good practices
Low budget of the future Interreg Programme between Hungary and Slovak Republic in the next period	medium	medium	Proactive participation in the negotiation between the European Commission and the Member States
Tourism will not be one of priority areas of future Interreg Programme between Hungary and Slovak Republic	low	high	Detailed situation analysis of the border area and well-grounded strategy that justifies the significance of the tourism in the region

## 8 Indicators

Indicators are crucial for monitoring the achievement of the output and results of the Action Plan. Indicators describe the complex reality in simplified form. They have precise definition, baseline and target value and source of information.

Indicators of the action are as follows:

- 1 capitalization workshop with at least 20 participants,
- 1 dissemination event with at least 50 participants.

## 9 Monitoring

Monitoring has a key role in the implementation of the Action Plan as it is a management tool to track the progress in relation to the objectives set (and intervene, if necessary). It is important to differentiate between the monitoring and some similar activities such as control and evaluation.

	<b>Control</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Why?	To examine the compliance with rules and regulations	To track progress towards the objectives set	To investigate the impacts of the interventions in relation to the (socio-economic) challenge(s) to be addressed.
When?	Continuous, during project delivery	Continuous, during project delivery	Ex ante, mid-term (ongoing), ex post
Who?	Internal or external	Internal	External
Consequence	Sanction (if irregularity detected)	Changing course if necessary	Learning process

The monitoring is used in order to

- understand cause and effect, check assumptions,
- keep track of progress (are you on track?),
- management information: steer your intervention,
- identify changes and results,
- assess what was the contribution of your intervention.

The implementation of the Action Plan will be monitored by the Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC as partner of the EPICAH project: it will check – and if necessary, support – the execution and the

achievement of the indicators in each semester and will report the progress in each period. As a part of the monitoring process, Tokaj Wine Region Nonprofit LLC plans to organize two enlarged Local Stakeholder Group meeting with the purpose of discussing and assessing the deliverables of the capitalization workshop and the dissemination event in detail.

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