



Delivering Efficient Sustainable Tourism with low-carbon transport Innovations:

Sustainable Mobility, Accessibility and Responsible Travel



## PRESS RELEASE

### 4<sup>th</sup> Thematic Workshop of DESTI-SMART Interreg Europe project through Videoconference

#### “Cycling & Walking at Tourist Destinations”

“Cycling & Walking at Tourist Destinations” was the topic of the 4<sup>th</sup> Thematic Workshop of the Interreg Europe DESTI-SMART project, which took place on September 9, 2020 through Videoconference, due to the travel restrictions in response to Covid-19 pandemic. The Workshop was organised by the Latvian Greenways Association. Representatives and stakeholders of all ten project partners participated.

“Cycling and Walking as part of holiday travel is a rapidly emerging societal trend in EU-28” said Viachaslau Filimonau, representative of the University of Bournemouth, UK, advisory partner of the DESTI-SMART project. “Cycling tourism is estimated to have an annual growth in EU about 7%, with Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, France, UK, Belgium and Austria to be the key markets, while it seems that its popularity is growing in East-Central Europe” added Mr. Filimonau. As for the walking tourism he highlighted that “main purpose of walking is to maintain or improve physical and mental wellbeing rather than sightseeing. The exact magnitude of the market is unknown, however UNWTO refers to it as “rapidly growing”.

The Project Coordinator, Mr Manos Vougioukas, presented the purpose of the Workshop and stated that through DESTI-SMART, partners should set their local/regional issues and priorities towards the promotion of cycling and walking by presenting their plans on Cycling routes provision, Shared bikes, CycloTourism, integration of cycling in tourism mobility strategies, promoting ‘Greenways’, potentially to be included in their Action Plans. He also stated that good practices might be

adopted by projects such as CYCLE WALK (Interreg Europe) DESTINATIONS (Horizon 2020), CHANGE, projects of the Greenways (Cycling/Hiking) network, etc.

Mr Vougioukas also referred to the Tourism Manifesto for Growth & Jobs which suggests the joint promotion of thematic tourism products, including cycle routes, as well as encourages the year-round tourism through the promotion of cycling and walking holidays. Also, among others, the Manifesto suggests that cycle routes and walking paths constitute "*dedicated passenger transport corridors*". The DESTI-SMART coordinator also referred to the UNWTO report on Walking tourism which showcases examples of walking tourism which can serve as a practical reference for destinations looking into the role of walking tourism for their own regional development.

Cycling and walking infrastructure, e-bikes, cycling, walking and hiking routes for visitors/tourists within urban, rural and coastal areas, planning strategies and legislation for cycling and walking, the Greenways network, are some of the initiatives that the partners presented in the Workshop transferring their experiences from their countries.

Cycling and walking in most destinations seems to address tourists and visitors rather than residents. Walking, including hiking, has become a holiday trend, with many destinations to promote them as tourist products, especially in the Mediterranean destinations such as Mallorca, Spain, Sardinia, Italy and Madeira, Portugal. Likewise, cycling routes and trips are also becoming more and more popular as tourist products, especially in the eastern destinations, such as in the Lake Balaton, Hungary and in Latvia.

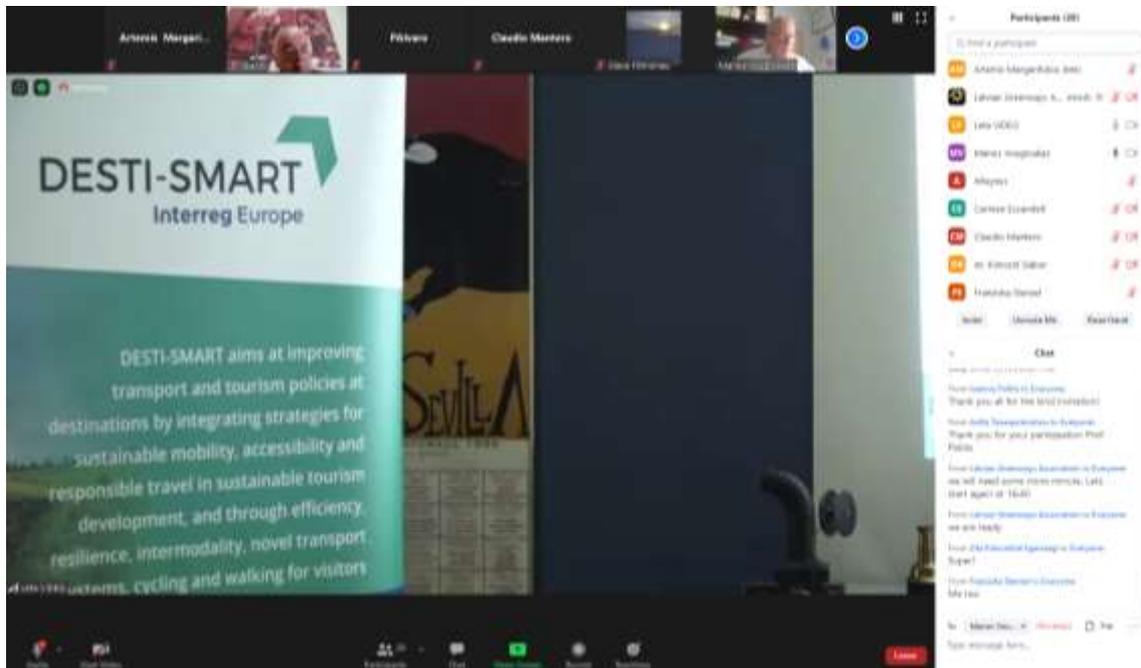
More specifically, the Latvian Greenways constitute an extensive non-motorised network reserved exclusively for cycling and walking activities and trips, developed on the abandoned railway lines of the country. The network aims to connect most of the Latvian ground and at the same time to contribute to the environmental sustainability and the enhancement of the quality of life. Towards this direction, a successful development was the certification by the Council of Europe in 2019 of the EuroVelo 13 cycling route (Iron Curtain Trail route), that stretches from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea coast, covering over 10,400 kilometres in 20 countries, both EU (14) and non-EU (6) states.

Regional and Local strategies and plans relatively recently have integrated policies on the promotion of cycling and walking. Particularly, cycling has not gain popularity yet as for commuting. "*Our aim is to mobilize and motivate the residents, by providing bikes throughout the duration of the day, increasing the availability of fleet, by special offers especially for students. Our next steps will be to increase attractiveness and to involve more stakeholders of the transport sector*" stated Nicole Halves-Holmer of the Bremerhaven Tourism Marketing and Events Company Ltd (EM), Germany, addressing also the intention of the other urban destinations of the project, such as Thessaloniki (GR) and Hastings (UK).

Along with the adoption of low-carbon and e-mobility solutions, promotion of cycling and walking constitutes a great option towards sustainable mobility in tourist destinations, with significant environmental and health benefits for the destinations.

The Workshop ended with a discussion with the Latvian stakeholders on actions towards the promotion of cycling and walking, as well as of the Latvian Greenways and the reuse of the old railway network.

DESTI-SMART's overall objective is to improve the transport and tourism policies of EU destinations, by integrating strategies for sustainable mobility, accessibility and responsible travel with efficient & sustainable tourism development. DESTI-SMART promotes the transition to a low-carbon economy, through efficiency, resilience, multimodality, novel low-carbon transport systems and the promotion of cycling & walking.



## Interreg Europe Programme

The **Interreg Europe** Programme of interregional cooperation helps regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy. By creating an environment and opportunities for sharing solutions, the aim is to ensure that government investment, innovation and implementation efforts all lead to integrated and sustainable impact for people and place.

By building on its forerunner, INTERREG IVC (2007-2013), Interreg Europe aims to get maximum return from the EUR 359 million financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for 2014-2020.

Solutions exist that can help European regions become the best that they can be. Today, the EU's emphasis is very much on paving the way for regions to realise their full potential – by helping them to capitalise on their innate strengths while tapping into opportunities that offer possibilities for economic, social and environmental progress.

To achieve this goal, Interreg Europe offers opportunities for regional and local public authorities across Europe to share ideas and experience on public policy in practice, therefore improving strategies for their citizens and communities.



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Thessaloniki - Sardinia - Bremerhaven - Madeira - Hastings - Mallorca - Vidzeme - Balaton - Pafos – BU

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