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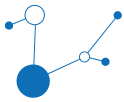
Central Mountains

Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians

Deliverable D.1.4.2

Final version
03 2024





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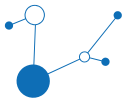
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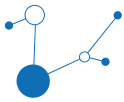


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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AC	Framework Convention on the Protection of the Alps (Salzburg, 1991), abbreviated as the “Alpine Convention”
ACE	Association of the Carpathian Euroregion (PL) - CM PP
AF	Application Form (of the Central Mountains project)
AP	EGTC Alpine Pearls ltd (AT) - CM PP
ARZ	Association of Regional Brands (CZ) - CM PP
AT	Austria
Brasov	Brasov County (RO) - CM PP
CBFA	Cross-Border Functional Area
CC	Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Kyiv, 2003), abbreviated as the “Carpathian Convention”
CE	Central Europe
CF	Carpathian Foundation-Hungary (HU) - CM PP
CIPRA	CIPRA International Lab (AT) - CM PP
CM	Central Mountains (project)
COP7	Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties
CSTP	Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform
CSTC	Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centre
CZ	Czechia
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EURAC	Eurac Research / European Academy Bozen/Bolzano - CM PP
FOK	Foundation of Landscape Protection (PL) - CM PP
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
HU	Hungary
ISIG	Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (IT) - CM PP
IT	Italy
NAP	National Action Plan
PL	Poland
PP	Project Partner
RO	Romania
Rzeszow	Rzeszów County (PL) - CM Lead Partner
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SK	Slovakia
WP	work package
ZMOS	Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (SK) - CM PP



I. INTRODUCTION

The Central Mountains project is an initiative focused on the sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe, with a particular emphasis on participatory governance. This project is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in 2015, aiming to address a broad spectrum of environmental, economic, and social issues. Central to the project's approach is the empowerment of local communities, encouraging them to take a leading role in decision-making processes that impact sustainable and meaningful development within mountain regions such as the Alps, the Carpathians, and the Sudetes.

Given the unique challenges faced by mountainous areas, including diverse daily challenges and the need for dedicated governance models, the Central Mountains project aims to inspire and enable communities in these regions to lead in making critical sustainable development decisions. This includes addressing sustainability in tourism management, where the project seeks to optimize the positive impacts of tourism while minimizing its negative effects on the environment, society, and economy. The rationale for developing this Action Plan, therefore, lies in the project's broader goals of sustainable mountain area development through cross-border cooperation, activation of sustainable processes, and direct involvement of citizens and youth in governance processes.

In essence, the Action Plan for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians is a strategic component of the Central Mountains project. It aims to reduce the environmental footprint of tourism, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance the welfare of local mountain communities by fostering collaboration, shared responsibility, and a comprehensive understanding of sustainability at various levels. This Action Plan is thus positioned as a critical tool for achieving the project's overarching goals of sustainable development, community empowerment, and participatory governance within the Central Mountains regions.

The Central Mountains project and its proposed Action Plan align with the objectives of the Carpathian Convention, focusing on fostering cooperation for sustainable development and environmental protection in the Carpathian region. The Action Plan offers significant potential to foster sustainable tourism in the Carpathians by optimizing benefits and minimizing adverse effects of tourism, thereby advancing the Carpathian Vision 2050 of living in harmony with nature, as outlined in the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework¹ adopted at the 7th Carpathian Convention Conference of the Parties (COP7) in 2023.

Project Partners (PP):

- Rzeszów County (PL) - CM Lead Partner
- Association of the Carpathian Euroregion (PL) - CM PP
- EGTC Alpine Pearls Ltd (AT) - CM PP
- Association of Regional Brands (CZ) - CM PP
- Brasov County (RO) - CM PP
- Carpathian Foundation-Hungary (HU) - CM PP
- CIPRA International Lab (AT) - CM PP
- Eurac Research / European Academy Bozen/Bolzano - CM PP
- Foundation of Landscape Protection (PL) - CM PP
- Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (IT) - CM PP
- Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (SK) - CM PP

¹ Carpathian Biodiversity Framework

http://www.carpathianconvention.org/cop7/docs/officialdocuments/CC%20COP7%20DOC7_Carpathian%20Biodiversity%20Framework_ADOPTED.pdf



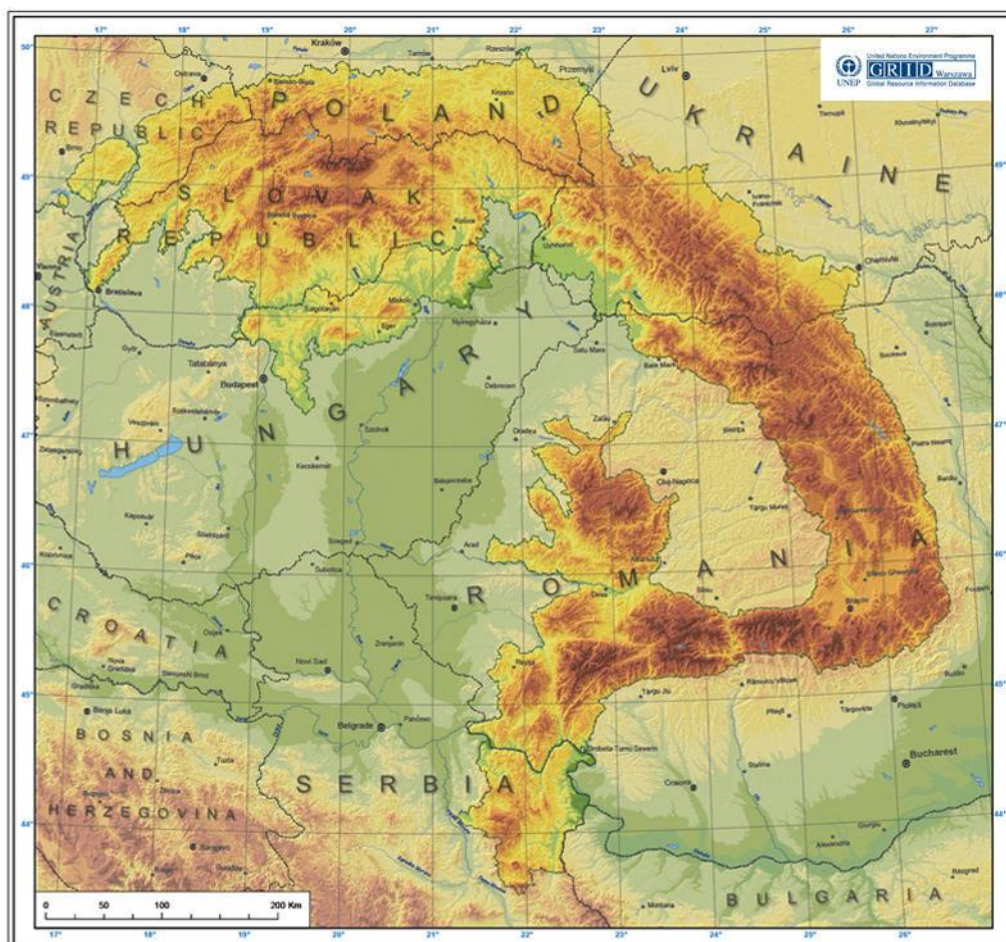
I.1 Regional and local context

The Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians serves as a comprehensive framework for the entire Carpathian region. However, in alignment with the Central Mountains (CM) project, it incorporates specific Objectives and Actions that were established within the CM project framework. These include, in particular, pilot actions designed to test and demonstrate sustainable tourism practices.

The plan encompasses regions within four of the seven Carpathian countries: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, acknowledging the specific regional and local contexts. Special emphasis is placed on the Poland-Slovakia (PL-SK) border region as a significant area for testing Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs), which are crucial for fostering effective and sustainable tourism development in mountainous regions. At the same time, the plan's broader applicability ensures that the strategies and actions devised can be implemented across the entire Carpathian region, thus contributing to the overarching goal of sustainable tourism development.

The Carpathian region's diverse natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and unique biodiversity present numerous opportunities for sustainable tourism, such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. The PL-SK border region, with its wealth of natural and cultural resources, is particularly suited for the implementation of pilot actions under the Action Plan.

In this way, the Action Plan integrates targeted initiatives in the PL-SK area with a holistic strategy that can be adapted and applied across the Carpathians, providing a flexible and scalable approach. This strategy addresses specific regional needs while promoting an integrated effort to support sustainable tourism development throughout the Carpathian area.





1.2 The territorial challenges

The Action Plan addresses several territorial challenges specific to the mountainous contexts of the Carpathians. These regions face a unique set of daily challenges that necessitate dedicated governance models designed to foster relationships and provide localized responses. The complexity of these challenges is compounded by the diverse geographical, environmental, and socio-economic conditions prevalent in mountainous areas.

Some of the key challenges include **environmental sustainability**, wherein the delicate balance of mountain ecosystems requires careful management to prevent degradation from tourism and other human activities. Additionally, **socio-economic challenges** are significant, with many mountain communities facing issues related to economic diversification, employment opportunities, and infrastructure development. The remoteness and accessibility of mountain areas also pose **logistical and infrastructural challenges** that impact both residents and visitors.

Cultural preservation is another critical area, as mountain regions are often rich in cultural heritage that needs protection and sustainable promotion. Lastly, the **impacts of climate change** are felt more acutely in mountainous areas, necessitating strategies for adaptation and resilience.

The goal of the Action Plan is to confront the diverse challenges identified through comprehensive analyses in the "Joint Strategy for Community-Led Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas in Central Europe," with a particular emphasis on participatory governance. These challenges are centered on the need for **effective management strategies that engage local communities and stakeholders in sustainable tourism development**. By empowering local communities to actively participate in decision-making processes, the Action Plan not only addresses these challenges but also aims to encourage sustainable and meaningful development. This approach ensures that development initiatives are responsive to local needs and aligned with broader environmental and socio-economic sustainability goals. The emphasis on participatory governance underscores the importance of collaborative management practices that harness the unique insights and contributions of local communities, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to sustainable development outcomes.

Transnational and cross-border cooperation is indispensable for addressing the territorial challenges identified in the Central Mountains project due to the inherent interconnectedness and shared nature of mountain regions across national borders, including the Alps, the Sudetes, and the Carpathians. The project seeks to leverage collaboration and coordination between neighbouring countries to rethink integration and development aspects at border regions. The ultimate objectives of this cross-border cooperation include the creation of lasting partnerships, the enhancement of existing networks, and the provision of a transnational framework for cooperation and multisectoral policy integration.

1.3 Innovative approach

The Action Plan for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians distinguishes itself by aiming for clearly defined, specific results within the lifetime of the Central Mountains (CM) project, as well as long-term strategic objectives and activities to be continued in the future. This includes improving existing or establishing new governance structures across the Carpathians and creating a new Cross-Border Functional Area (CBFA). This CBFA aims to strengthen cooperation among rural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and regional product producers, achieved through several pilot actions planned under the CM Work Package 2 (WP2).

This plan diverges from general strategic Action Plans that might list objectives and activities with only indicative timelines for future implementation. Instead, it adopts a dual approach: it is part strategic, setting a long-term vision and goals, and part operational, focusing on immediate actions to be initiated and completed within the project's timeline. This innovative approach ensures that while the plan is



anchored in a strategic vision for the future, it remains grounded in actionable, practical steps that address immediate needs and challenges.

The CM Action Plans are thus designed not just as guides for future intentions but as actionable blueprints for immediate implementation. This operational aspect is emphasized with the Action Plans detailing specific activities, their execution timelines, and the resources required, ensuring a proactive stance towards achieving the project's goals. This makes the CM Action Plans a hybrid model that combines visionary strategic planning with pragmatic operational planning, tailored to the specific objectives and context of each Action Plan within the CM project.

The pilot actions related to the "Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians" are conceived to directly engage with and address the unique challenges and needs of the local contexts within the Carpathian region. These actions are designed to test and implement innovative approaches and solutions tailored to the specific environmental, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics of the mountain areas in the Carpathians, and specifically in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, with a special focus on the PL-SK border region.

The purpose of these pilot actions is multifaceted: they aim to foster participatory governance, enhance sustainable tourism practices, improve the resilience and adaptability of local communities to changing environmental conditions, and promote economic development that respects the ecological balance and cultural heritage of the region. These actions are intended to serve as practical, scalable models that can be adapted and replicated in similar contexts across the Carpathian region and beyond.

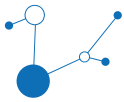
The innovative approach of these pilot actions lies in their community-led design, which emphasizes the empowerment of local stakeholders, including residents, businesses, NGOs, academia and governmental bodies, in the decision-making process. This approach ensures that the initiatives are deeply rooted in the local context, addressing real needs and leveraging local knowledge and resources.

Beneficiaries and key stakeholders involved in the implementation of these pilot actions include local communities, tourism operators, SMEs, central, regional and local governments, environmental and cultural NGOs, and academic institutions. By involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, the Action Plan ensures that the pilot actions are inclusive, sustainable, and aligned with the overarching goals of the Central Mountains project and the "Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe".

1.4 Beneficiaries and key stakeholders

In the implementation of the "Action Plan for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians" and related pilot actions, it is crucial to involve a wide array of stakeholders to ensure comprehensive and inclusive development.

Main beneficiaries, including local communities, tourism operators, and small businesses in tourism and hospitality, along with regional and local governments, stand to gain significantly. The plan also relies on the direct involvement of project partners, local authorities, NGOs, tourism associations, and businesses within the tourism sector. Additionally, entities such as regional development agencies, educational institutions, and civil society groups, though not directly involved, need regular updates on the plan's progress. Finally, the broader public, media, and higher governmental bodies, while not engaged in day-to-day activities, should be informed about the project's outcomes and achievements. Furthermore, involvement of the Carpathian Convention bodies, including the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, will be crucial for providing guidance and expertise for the Action Plan implementation. This approach ensures a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement strategy, vital for the plan's overall success and sustainability.



It's important to note that the composition of these stakeholder groups may evolve over time, with new stakeholders emerging and others' roles or interests changing. This dynamic nature requires continuous stakeholder engagement and management throughout the project's lifecycle.

Detailed description of beneficiaries and stakeholders is included in chapter IV. Stakeholders.

II. CORRESPONDENCE WITH STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS AND INITIATIVES

II.1 Alignment with higher-order Strategic Documents and Initiatives

The Action Plan for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians is deeply embedded within a framework of broader, higher-order strategic documents and initiatives that define the trajectory of regional development in Europe. Among these are the Carpathian Convention, the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSAR) and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), alongside the Territorial Agenda 2030.

EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSAR): The "Central Mountains" project significantly contributes to the EUSAR, given the Alps' central role in the strategy. EUSAR identifies effective transnational coordination as a critical area for improvement, recognizing the challenges posed by inadequate cross-border cooperation. Through initiatives like the new Alpine Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC), this project aims to foster more effective coordination among stakeholders, thereby enhancing multi-level governance.

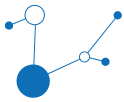
EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR): Mountainous areas, including parts of the Carpathians and the Alps within the Danube region, hold particular significance due to their unique environmental and socio-economic challenges. The EUSDR's key document, the "EUSDR Needs Assessment for Closer Cooperation" (2022), underscores the importance of strategic cooperation for addressing and overcoming these challenges. The project's enhanced Carpathian Civil Society Platform (CCSP) will facilitate greater civil society participation, thereby strengthening the grassroots dimension of the strategy.

Territorial Agenda 2030: This agenda emphasizes multi-level governance, advocating for cooperation and coordination across various governance levels, involving citizens, civil society, public administration, and businesses. The section "Integration Beyond Borders" highlights the importance of Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs), transboundary planning, and other legal cross-border agreements, which are central to the "Central Mountains" project.

Carpathian Convention: a multilateral treaty adopted and signed by seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine, and effective since January 2006, serves as the primary governance mechanism for protecting and sustainably developing the Carpathian region. It stands as the second sub-regional treaty-based regime worldwide, alongside the Alpine Convention, offering a framework for cooperation, policy coordination, joint strategies for sustainable development, and stakeholder dialogue. Article 9 of the Carpathian Convention addresses sustainable tourism outlining measures for promoting sustainable tourism in the Carpathian region, emphasizing the importance of benefiting local communities while preserving the area's exceptional nature, landscapes, and cultural heritage

The Action Plan is also designed to support to directly support the implementation of **the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention**. It does so by aligning its objectives and initiatives with key provisions of the protocol, including but not limited to:

- **Article 6** on stakeholder participation, ensuring that all relevant parties are engaged in sustainable tourism development efforts.



- **Article 7** on international cooperation, recognizing the transboundary nature of the Carpathian region and the need for collaborative approaches to address common challenges.
- **Article 8** on the promotion of the Carpathian region, aiming to raise awareness and attract sustainable tourism in a way that respects and preserves the natural and cultural assets of the region.
- **Article 9** on the development of regional sustainable tourism products, encouraging the creation of tourism offerings that reflect the unique characteristics of the Carpathians and contribute to the economic vitality of local communities.
- **Article 10** on ensuring common high-quality standards in tourism services and infrastructure to enhance visitor experiences while safeguarding the environment.
- **Article 11** on enhancing the contribution of tourism to local economies, ensuring that tourism development supports local economic growth and provides tangible benefits to the communities.

This Action Plan, therefore, serves as a concrete step towards the realization of the strategic visions laid out in The Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe (described below) and the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention. By doing so, it not only addresses the specific needs and challenges of the Carpathian region but also contributes to broader goals of sustainable mountain development in Central Europe.

II.2 Alignment with the Alpine-Carpathian Joint Strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe

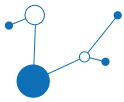
Central to the development and implementation of this Action Plan is its alignment with the "Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe". This pivotal strategy, produced as a key output of the Central Mountains project, serves as the guiding beacon for the initiatives and objectives laid out in this Action Plan. The strategy, which is currently in draft form, is poised for final refinement and endorsement, incorporating valuable inputs from Project Partners (PPs) and consultations with pertinent entities under the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions. The Strategy as well as the Action Plan are expected to be tabled for endorsement by the Carpathian Convention at the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP8) towards the end of 2026 following the conclusion of the Central Mountains project.

This Action Plan contributes to the implementation of the Joint Strategy by embracing and promoting the principles and guidelines it sets forth. Key among these are the provisions related to improved governance models in the mountainous regions of Central Europe, which this Action Plan seeks to develop and test through a series of pilot actions. By fostering participatory governance, enhancing sustainable tourism, and facilitating cross-border cooperation, the Action Plan aims to realize the vision of community-led sustainable development as outlined in the Joint Strategy.

The anticipated endorsement of the Joint Strategy and the Action Plan by the Carpathian Convention will elevate its status, positioning it alongside other significant policy documents within the Convention. Thus, the implementation of this Action Plan not only furthers the objectives of the joint strategy but also reinforces the synergy between this initiative and the broader goals of the Carpathian Convention.

II.3 Alignment with other Strategic Documents and Initiatives

In addition to aligning with the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention and the broader strategic frameworks, the Action Plan acknowledges and stands by previous documents endorsed by the Convention. These include several strategies and Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) that have been pivotal in shaping the region's approach to sustainable development:



- **Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians:** This strategy, resulting from the Ecological Tourism in Europe project, was adopted at the 4th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP4) in 2014. It laid the groundwork for sustainable tourism practices in the Carpathians, emphasizing ecological preservation and sustainable economic growth. Its implementation was foreseen until 2023.
- **Strategy for Local Sustainable Tourism Development Based on Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Carpathians:** As a result of the Centralparks project, this strategy was endorsed at the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention (COP7). It focuses on leveraging the Carpathians' rich natural and cultural assets to foster local tourism development in a sustainable manner.

These strategies, along with the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, the Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management, the Joint Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Transport, and the International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians, have collectively contributed to a robust framework for sustainable development in the region.

The current Action Plan not only draws from these precedents but also aims to further their objectives by introducing innovative approaches to sustainable tourism, stakeholder engagement, and transnational cooperation. It seeks to enhance the contribution of tourism to local economies, promote the Carpathian region, and develop regional sustainable tourism products, all while ensuring high-quality standards and stakeholder participation in line with the foundational principles outlined in these earlier strategies and SAPs.

This Action Plan also recognizes and aligns with other significant strategic frameworks, including the "Macro-regional Strategy for the Carpathian Region" and the "Carpathian Horizon 2020" strategy.

- **Macro-regional Strategy for the Carpathian Region:** Though not formally adopted by the European Council, this comprehensive proposal outlines a macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian area, identifying four main priority areas based on the pillars of economic, social, and environmentally sustainable development: Competitive Carpathians, Green Carpathians, and Cohesive Carpathians, with a horizontal priority on institutional cooperation. The "Central Mountains" project directly responds to the challenges outlined in this document by advancing sustainable tourism development, participatory governance, and transboundary cooperation, thus contributing significantly to the realization of the strategy's objectives.
- **Carpathian Horizon 2020 Strategy:** Developed by the Carpathian Euroregion, this strategy emphasizes new paradigms of integration, commercialization, and internationalization of the Carpathians' potential. It underlines the necessity of transnational cooperation through Cross-Border Functional Areas, a European cooperation system, a network of Carpathian cities, and collaboration among Carpathian non-governmental organizations. The "Central Mountains" project addresses all aspects highlighted in this strategy, promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development across the Carpathians.

The implementation of this Action Plan will significantly contribute to achieving the objectives outlined in these macro-regional strategies. By fostering enhanced institutional cooperation, supporting the development of competitive, green, and cohesive Carpathians, and promoting active participation in civil society, this Action Plan embodies the spirit and goals of the strategies above. It emphasizes the importance of cross-border cooperation and participatory governance as crucial elements for the sustainable development of the Carpathian region, in alignment with the broader objectives of these strategic frameworks.



III. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

This section of the Action Plan outlines the primary aim and subsequent objectives tailored to the Central Mountains (CM) project's unique context. The aim and objectives provide a structured pathway towards realizing the vision for sustainable tourism development within the Carpathian mountain areas of Central Europe. They are designed to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART), ensuring clarity and feasibility in their pursuit.

III.1 Main Goal

The primary aim of this Action Plan, in alignment with the CM project, is to harness sustainable tourism as a vital force for the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathian region. This effort is uniquely fuelled by the active participation of local communities, who not only serve as stewards of their rich heritage but also as collaborators across borders, fostering a spirit of unity and shared purpose in sustainable development.

To strengthen and improve governance models in the Carpathian mountain areas of Central Europe, particularly focusing on sustainable tourism fuelled by local community engagement and cross-border cooperation.

This overarching goal seeks to transform the Carpathians into a leading sustainable tourism destination, where tourism not only thrives in harmony with nature but also celebrates and revitalizes the local traditions, cultures, and landscapes.

III.2 Strategic Objectives

These strategic objectives are designed not only to guide the specific activities of this Action Plan but also to communicate to stakeholders and beneficiaries the envisioned achievements. By aligning closely with the overall objective of the CM project, this Action Plan contributes to a larger vision of sustainable mountain development, characterized by robust governance, vibrant local cultures, and thriving natural landscapes.

The strategic objectives for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians align with the strategic documents of the Carpathian Convention, particularly its Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, and the Alpine-Carpathian Joint Strategy for Community-Led Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas in Central Europe with a focus on participatory governance in several ways.

Chapter V of the CM Action Plan will outline a series of specific actions designed to fulfil the objectives delineated in the "Goals and Objectives" section. These actions, meticulously crafted within the framework of the CM project timeline or extending beyond, aim to transform strategic visions into tangible outcomes. Each action will be described with clarity, focusing on the anticipated results and the tasks necessary to achieve these outcomes. The action descriptions will be succinct, yet detailed, ensuring they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

OBJECTIVE 1. INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION IN THE CARPATHIANS

Strengthen cross-border and transnational structures for collaboration to address shared challenges in sustainable tourism development. This involves building effective partnerships among local, regional, and



national stakeholders and ensuring that governance models are participatory, involving youth and encompassing multiple levels and sectors.

- **Alignment:** Strengthening cross-border and transnational collaboration aligns with the strategy's emphasis on participatory governance processes and the need for effective cooperation networks that involve all sectors and stakeholder levels. This objective highlights the importance of governance as a key factor for sustainable mountain development, which is closely linked to the strategy's goals.
- **Justification:** The focus on building effective partnerships and participatory governance models is integral to addressing the challenges and opportunities unique to mountainous landscapes, thus enhancing the capacity of decision-makers and policymakers to involve local communities and organizations as leaders in sustainable development efforts.

OBJECTIVE 2. GREEN CARPATHIANS

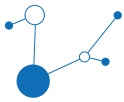
Ensure the conservation and sustainable management of the Carpathian natural heritage. Initiatives under this objective aim to protect the biodiversity and natural landscapes of the Carpathians, ensuring they continue to be a cornerstone of the region's tourism appeal.

- **Alignment:** This objective directly supports the Carpathian Convention's as well as the Joint Strategy's aim to develop a sustainable mountain environment across the Carpathians by focusing on the protection of natural resources. It aligns with the strategy's emphasis on integrating sustainability across various themes, ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of natural heritage.
- **Justification:** The focus on conserving the Carpathian natural heritage underpins the broader strategy of fostering an environment where local economic development and natural resource protection go hand in hand, supported by cross-border cooperation and sustainable processes.

OBJECTIVE 3. INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE CARPATHIANS

This objective aims to synergize the competitiveness and social cohesion of the Carpathian region as a distinguished destination for sustainable tourism. By fusing the development of high-quality, sustainable tourism products and offerings with the promotion of social cohesion and economic well-being, this initiative seeks to leverage the unique natural and cultural assets of the Carpathians to enhance local economies, preserve cultural heritage, and foster inclusive development that benefits all community members.

- **Alignment:** This objective aligns with the Joint Strategy's emphasis on community-led initiatives and participatory governance, resonating with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on sustainable communities and economic growth. It underlines the importance of engaging local communities in sustainability efforts, particularly in tourism promotion, while also ensuring the quality of governance processes in mountain areas to enhance social cohesion and economic well-being.
- **Justification:** By encouraging communities to conceptualize and implement sustainable actions within their unique cultural and environmental contexts, this objective supports the strategic vision of sustainable and tangible development in mountainous areas. It emphasizes the role of sustainable tourism as a catalyst for community empowerment, economic stability, and the preservation of cultural heritage, contributing to the long-term sustainability and cohesive development of tourism in the Carpathian region.



IV. STAKEHOLDERS

In crafting the next chapter of the Central Mountains Action Plan, it's paramount to recognize the diversity and dynamism of the stakeholder landscape. This chapter sets out to map of entities - from individual contributors to collective groups - who will play a pivotal role in the plan's execution or be affected by its outcomes. Stakeholders encompass a broad spectrum, including local communities, governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and educational institutions, all of whom share a stake in the sustainable development of the Carpathian region.

A fundamental premise underpinning this chapter is the fluid nature of stakeholder engagement. The composition of stakeholders is not static; it evolves in response to the shifting contours of project dynamics and external factors. New stakeholders may emerge as unforeseen contributors, while others might recede, altering their level of engagement or interest. This ever-changing scenario underscores the need for a flexible and adaptive approach to stakeholder management within the lifespan of the CM project.

IV. 1 Main Beneficiaries

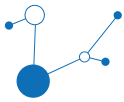
The main beneficiaries of the Action Plan, integral to its success, are characterized by a broad and diverse spectrum. These stakeholders, fundamental to the sustainable development and transnational and cross-border cooperation in the region, include:

- **Local Communities and Authorities:** Central to the Action Plan, they stand to benefit from strengthened governance frameworks that enhance their roles and capabilities in sustainable development initiatives. This empowerment facilitates their active participation in local and regional development efforts.
- **Youth and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Including civil society organizations (CSOs), these groups are pivotal in driving community engagement, advocacy, and the implementation of sustainable practices. They play a critical role in mobilizing communities towards common goals and sustainable development.
- **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** Particularly those within the tourism and hospitality sectors, SMEs are expected to experience economic growth and resilience through sustainable regional development frameworks. The Action Plan aims to create a conducive environment for these enterprises to thrive.
- **Local Action Groups (LAGs):** LAGs act as crucial intermediaries in the implementation of local development projects. The Action Plan is set to enhance their capacity to facilitate and lead community-driven initiatives, aligning with broader regional strategies.

These stakeholders are united by the overarching goal of fostering sustainable development and enhancing cross-border cooperation. Their involvement is characterized by mutual learning, knowledge exchange, and collaborative efforts tailored to address specific needs and capacities. The Action Plan envisions a cohesive network of actors, empowered through effective coordination and committed to realizing the shared vision of sustainable growth and development across the Carpathian region.

IV. 2 Directly Involved Stakeholders

The group of stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of the Central Mountains Action Plan encompasses a diverse array of entities and individuals, each bringing unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives to the table. This collective effort is pivotal for the Action Plan's execution:



- **Destination Management Organisations (DMOs):** These organisations play a crucial role in orchestrating tourism strategies, marketing, and the sustainable management of destinations, ensuring that tourism development aligns with the Action Plan's objectives.
- **Local and Regional Authorities:** Their involvement is essential for regulatory support, facilitation of necessary permits, and alignment of the Action Plan with local and regional development policies.
- **Governmental bodies:** These entities play a crucial role in aligning national policies with regional sustainable development goals. Their engagement ensures that the Action Plan's initiatives are supported by regulatory frameworks and policies conducive to sustainable development across the Carpathians. Their involvement not only legitimizes the Action Plan's objectives but also facilitates access to resources, policy alignment, and broader regional cooperation.
- **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** These entities contribute expertise in various areas such as environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and community development, acting as bridges between the Action Plan and community interests.
- **Business Associations and Entrepreneurs:** These stakeholders, particularly those in the tourism and hospitality sectors, are crucial for the economic aspects of the Action Plan, contributing to its viability and sustainability.
- **Cross-Border Associations:** Their participation facilitates regional cooperation and the sharing of best practices, enhancing the Action Plan's effectiveness through collaborative efforts across borders.
- **Carpathian Convention bodies, particularly the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism:** These stakeholders group consisting of the governmental representatives and other relevant experts will ensure alignment of the Action Plan implementation with the objectives of the Carpathian Convention.

The active engagement of these stakeholders ensures a comprehensive approach to the Action Plan's implementation, leveraging the strengths and capacities of each to achieve the shared goal of sustainable development in the Central Mountains region.

IV. 3 Stakeholders to be Regularly Informed

The stakeholders to be regularly informed about the progress and outcomes of Action Plan, though not directly involved in its implementation, play a crucial role in the broader ecosystem of the project. This category includes regional development agencies, educational institutions, research organizations, and civil society groups, among others. These stakeholders have a vested interest in the development of the Action Plan due to their potential impact on regional development, educational opportunities, research initiatives, and community welfare.

Effective communication with these stakeholders involves a nuanced understanding of their specific interests and information needs. The Action Plan's external communication strategy emphasizes the importance of identifying key messages and tailoring them to the diverse audiences. Questions such as "Why does this matter to the stakeholder?" and "What benefits does the Action Plan bring?" guide the communication process to ensure relevance and engagement.

The Action Plan outlines a structured approach to external communication, focusing on:

- **Defining Key Messages:** Establishing clear, impactful messages that resonate with the various stakeholder groups based on their interests and the potential benefits to them.
- **Identifying Target Audiences:** Understanding who needs to be informed and why, ensuring the information provided aligns with their interests and needs.



- **Selecting Communication Channels:** Choosing the most effective platforms and methods for reaching each stakeholder group, considering their preferences and access to different media.
- **Allocating Resources:** Determining the necessary resources and skills required to execute the communication strategy effectively, ensuring messages are delivered efficiently and received as intended.

The CM Project Communication leader plays a pivotal role in ensuring timely and appropriate dissemination of information, overseeing the communication process to ensure stakeholders are kept abreast of progress and outcomes. This structured approach to communication is designed to foster a well-informed stakeholder community, enhancing the Action Plan's transparency and fostering a supportive environment for its objectives.

IV. 4 Stakeholders for Final Results Communication

For the stakeholders involved in the final results communication of the Action Plan, the focus shifts towards broader audiences that are not directly involved in the project's day-to-day activities but are essential recipients of its achievements and impacts. This group primarily includes the general public, media outlets, and higher-level governmental bodies. The strategic communication with these stakeholders is pivotal to amplifying the reach and impact of the project's outcomes.

The external communication strategy for these stakeholders emphasizes the need to:

- **Define Key Messages:** It's crucial to craft clear, concise messages that convey the significance and successes of the Action Plan to a broader audience. These messages should highlight the positive impacts and advancements brought about by the project, catering to the interests and concerns of the general public, media, and government bodies.
- **Target Audiences and Recipients:** Identifying the broader audiences and tailoring the communication to suit their interests and information needs ensures that the achievements of the Action Plan resonate well beyond the immediate circle of stakeholders.
- **Select Communication Channels:** Choosing the right platforms is vital to ensure that the messages reach the intended audiences effectively. This might include press releases, public presentations, social media campaigns, and official reports disseminated through media outlets and governmental communication channels.
- **Allocate Necessary Resources and Skills:** Implementing an effective communication strategy requires appropriate resources and expertise. This involves not only the tools and channels used for communication but also the skills necessary to engage with the media, the public, and government bodies in a manner that promotes understanding and support for the project's objectives and outcomes.

By adhering to this structured approach to external communication, the project aims to foster a broader awareness and appreciation of the sustainable development efforts in the Carpathian region, ensuring that the fruits of these endeavours are recognized and valued by society at large.

V. ACTIONS

In this chapter, we delineate a series of strategic actions tailored to achieve three pivotal objectives that underpin the Central Mountains' vision for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathian region. These objectives include fostering institutional cooperation, conserving the region's natural heritage, and integrating development with competitiveness to elevate the Carpathians as a premier sustainable tourism



destination. The actions are meticulously categorized into three distinct groups to ensure clarity and effectiveness in implementation:

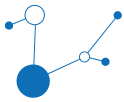
1. **Actions to be implemented within the project (CSTP and CBFAs)** - These actions are obligatory and are designed to lay the foundational structures for achieving our outlined objectives within the project's lifespan.
2. **Actions which will start during the project and end later** - These optional actions are initiated within the project's timeframe but are projected to culminate beyond the project's closure, ensuring sustainability and long-term impact.
3. **Actions to be implemented after the project closure** - Also optional, these actions are planned for initiation post-project, aiming at sustaining and building upon the achieved milestones for enduring benefits.

Each action proposed in this strategic framework is accompanied by a well-defined **Timeline**, specifying the start and end points to ensure timely execution and evaluation. The **Resources** required for each action are explicitly outlined, encompassing financial, human, and material needs to ensure preparedness and efficiency. Furthermore, **Responsibilities** are assigned to relevant stakeholders, delineating the roles and duties of various actors, from local to national levels, to foster accountability and collaborative effort.

This comprehensive approach, underpinned by a clear structure of actions, timelines, resources, and responsibilities, is crafted to operationalize the Central Mountains project's vision, leveraging the unique assets of the Carpathians for sustainable tourism development that benefits both the environment and the local communities.

OBJECTIVE 1. INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION IN THE CARPATHIANS

Activity 1.1 Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP).
Status: Pilot Action to be implemented within the project
<p>Description: The action emerges as a pivotal initiative from the Central Mountains (CM) Work Package 2 (WP2) pilot action implementation timeline, juxtaposed against the overarching CM project timeline. The main challenges in enhancing the collaborative mechanisms of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) are centered around the need for a more cohesive and comprehensive transnational cooperation structure. Despite the CSTP's potential, its current state reveals significant gaps, particularly in the connectivity between its various components and the lack of a clear, unified direction. To address these challenges, it's essential to redefine CSTP's objectives and establish a well-structured cooperation system that aligns with the commitment levels of its participants and partners. This entails drafting a program for the CSTP's institutionalization and professionalization, which includes exploring viable operation financing models. It's also crucial to accurately identify CSTP's clientele and tailor services to meet their specific demands.</p>
<p>Tasks & Results: For the activity "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)" under Objective 1 "Institutional Cooperation in the Carpathians," the tasks and expected results should be focused on strengthening cross-border and transnational collaboration for sustainable tourism development. This initiative is a key component of the Central Mountains Work Package 2, aiming to refine collaborative mechanisms within the CSTP by establishing a participatory governance model involving various stakeholders.</p>



These tasks and expected results aim to establish a robust, structured cooperation system within the CSTP, emphasizing increased stakeholder engagement, participatory governance, and alignment with existing transnational and cross-border cooperation frameworks. This approach will ensure that the CSTP effectively addresses the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism development in the Carpathian region.

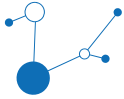
Task 1: Strategic Activation and Comprehensive Planning for National CSTP Centres with Brand and Impact Focus

Objective To foster strategic collaboration among CSTC Poland, CSTC Romania, and CSTC Slovakia in advancing and executing a renewed Work Programme for the CSTP. This program will incorporate the development of a unified Carpathian identity and the adoption of a comprehensive Indicator Set for evaluating tourism impacts. These efforts will be in harmony with participatory governance frameworks and active stakeholder participation. Furthermore, it will emphasize the establishment of the CSTP as a network, engaging regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) from all seven Carpathian nations, based on a membership model. Initial discussions on the Carpathian brand, as proposed by ACE, will take place within this network, ensuring a collaborative and inclusive approach to branding and impact assessment initiatives.

To effectively monitor the impact and progress of the CSTP and its constituent CSTCs in Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, a comprehensive Set of indicators should be established. These indicators will serve to assess various dimensions of tourism development, sustainability, and the effectiveness of governance structures. Some exemplary indicators might include:

- **Number of Initiatives Undertaken:** This would measure the quantity of projects, campaigns, or programs initiated under the CSTP and within individual CSTCs, providing a clear indicator of activity and engagement levels.
- **Tourist Satisfaction and Experience:** Surveys and feedback mechanisms can gauge the quality of the tourist experience, including satisfaction with accommodations, activities, and services.
- **Engagement in the Common Carpathian Brand:** The process will start with preliminary discussions within the network, as proposed by ACE, to ensure a collective and inclusive framework for the Carpathian brand's conceptualization. Indicators for this stage could include the extent of collaborative involvement in brand development, the integration of feedback from diverse stakeholders within the network, and the establishment of a shared vision for the brand that reflects the unique values and characteristics of the Carpathian region.
- **Participation in Workshops and Training:** The number of local entrepreneurs and stakeholders participating in capacity-building activities would indicate the extent of community engagement and skill development.
- **Innovation in Tourism Offerings:** Tracking the number of new or unique tourism products or services developed, which could include eco-tourism packages, cultural tours, or adventure sports offerings.
- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** Measuring the number and depth of collaborative projects between the CSTCs of different countries to foster regional cohesion and shared benefits.

Monitoring these indicators will provide a multifaceted view of the tourism sector's performance in the Carpathians, ensuring that efforts are leading towards sustainable development, economic growth, and enhanced visitor experiences. It will also facilitate the continuous improvement of strategies and actions within the CSTP framework.



Expected Result:

- Development and adoption of a comprehensive Work Programme for the CSTP, which now includes initiatives for the creation and promotion of a common Carpathian brand, aimed at enhancing the region's identity and appeal as a sustainable tourism destination.
- Incorporation of the Set of Indicators for measuring the positive and negative effects of tourism in the Carpathians into the CSTP's operational framework, ensuring that sustainable tourism development aligns with Article 24 of the Tourism Protocol of the Carpathian Convention². This will enable informed decision-making and continuous improvement in tourism practices based on empirical evidence.
- Reinforcement of national committees within CSTC Poland, CSTC Romania and CSTC Slovakia to include expert groups focused on brand development and impact measurement, ensuring a multidisciplinary approach to tackling these new objectives.
- Enhancement of existing platforms for cooperation and thematic exchange among stakeholders, with specific forums or working groups dedicated to the development of the Carpathian brand and the application of the tourism impact indicators. This will facilitate targeted discussions and collaborative efforts in these areas.
- Promotion of initiatives that engage new actors in the activities of the Carpathian Convention, with a particular focus on integrating these new tasks related to branding and impact measurement. This will broaden the scope of engagement and bring fresh perspectives to the initiatives.
- Establishment of a coherent and authoritative endorsement by relevant bodies for the new dimensions of the CSTP's activities, ensuring that efforts to develop a common Carpathian brand and utilize impact indicators are recognized and supported at both the regional and international levels.

By integrating these additional elements into the strategic planning and operational activities of CSTC Poland and CSTC Romania, the CSTP aims to enhance its effectiveness in promoting sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians. The focus on developing a common Carpathian brand and employing a Set of Indicators for tourism impact assessment represents a significant step towards achieving a more sustainable, cohesive, and competitive tourism region.

Task 2: Re-launching the Database on Sustainable Tourism and CSTP Website

Objective: To re-launch and update the Database on Sustainable Tourism and the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) website to serve as comprehensive resources for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians.

Expected Result:

- An updated and user-friendly Database on Sustainable Tourism (accessible via <http://www.ceeweb.org/stcdb/>) that provides current data, case studies, best practices, and research findings relevant to sustainable tourism in the Carpathians. The database should facilitate easy access to information for all stakeholders, encouraging informed decision-making and innovation in sustainable tourism practices.

²

http://www.carpathianconvention.org/tl_files/carpathiancon/Downloads/01%20The%20Convention/Protocols%20in%20pdf/Protocol%20on%20Sustainable%20Tourism_adopted.pdf



- A revitalized CSTP website (accessible via <http://cstp.center/>) that serves as a central hub for the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform, offering updated information on CSTP initiatives, news, events, and opportunities for collaboration among stakeholders in the Carpathian region. The website should also feature a section dedicated to the Database on Sustainable Tourism, ensuring seamless navigation between the two resources.
- Both platforms should incorporate interactive features such as forums, feedback mechanisms, and social media integration to enhance stakeholder engagement and collaboration. The re-launch should be accompanied by a comprehensive communication and outreach campaign to inform stakeholders of the updated resources and encourage their active participation.

Tip for Implementation: In formulating the New Work Programme for the CSTP, particularly focusing on Task 1, it's crucial to adopt a multifaceted strategic approach that holistically addresses key areas: destination management, long-distance trails, sustainability in tourism, and engagement with communities and youth. This comprehensive strategy should draw upon the valuable insights and recommendations that emerged from the collaborative sessions and partner dialogues during the Interregional Meeting in Brasov, held on March 18-19, 2024.

- **Destination Management:** Emphasize a deep-dive analysis into each country's current destination management practices, focusing on legislative frameworks, the operational effectiveness of DMOs, funding mechanisms, and identifiable challenges. This will lay the groundwork for developing a unified set of performance and sustainability indicators, thereby enhancing destination management efficiency across the Carpathians.
- **Long-distance Trails:** Advocate for a shared understanding and development of long-distance trails, including hiking, cycling, alpine, and sub-alpine paths. This involves assessing the existing infrastructure and service offerings, legislations, and trail management practices to devise a master plan for trail development that aligns with sustainable tourism goals.
- **Sustainability in Tourism:** Foster the adoption of a general framework for identifying and promoting green destinations and tourism-related businesses. This includes agreeing on evaluation and certification schemes for sustainability, proposing green incentive policies, and developing a Carpathian brand that reflects the ethos of green certified destinations and businesses.
- **Communities and Youth Engagement:** Create a repository of community-building and educational programs at the Carpathian level. Identify common interests among these programs to establish knowledge exchange networks, thereby fostering active involvement and empowerment among communities and the youth in sustainable tourism development.

This strategic approach aligns with the overarching objectives and activities outlined in the Action Plan, ensuring a cohesive and integrated effort towards advancing sustainable tourism development in the Carpathian region. By addressing these key areas comprehensively, the New Work Programme for the CSTP aims to enhance the competitiveness, sustainability, and community involvement in the Carpathian tourism sector.

Timeline: For the activity "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)," the timeline will be structured around the two critical periods, Period 3 (April 2024 - September 2024) and Period 4 (October 2024 - March 2025), within the CM project framework. This timeline aims to ensure coherent planning and execution of tasks necessary for the successful implementation of this pilot action within the project's scope.



Period 3 - April 2024 to September 2024

April 2024

Initiation of Strategic Activation for CSTC: Commence engagement with CSTC Poland, CSTC Romania, and CSTC Slovakia for strategic planning, focusing on the development of a new Work Programme for the CSTP. This includes starting discussions on the establishment of a common Carpathian brand and defining a preliminary set of indicators for tourism impact assessment.

May 2024

Stakeholder Engagement Workshops: Conduct workshops with stakeholders in each national CSTC to gather input on the common Carpathian brand and to discuss the Set of Indicators for tourism impacts. This will involve cross-sectoral stakeholders, including tourism businesses, local authorities, and NGOs.

June 2024

Drafting of the Work Programme: Begin drafting the CSTP Work Programme, integrating the common Carpathian brand initiative and the Set of Indicators. This will include detailed plans for stakeholder engagement, branding strategies, and methodologies for impact assessment.

July 2024

Database and Website Evaluation: Assess the current state of the Database on Sustainable Tourism and the CSTP website to identify necessary updates and improvements. This will involve technical evaluations and stakeholder consultations to ensure the platforms meet the needs of sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians.

August 2024

Development of Updated Content: Start the development of updated content and features for the Database on Sustainable Tourism and the CSTP website. This includes the incorporation of new case studies, best practices, and interactive elements to enhance user engagement.

September 2024

Review and Feedback: Conduct a mid-term review of the progress made in drafting the CSTP Work Programme and the update of the Database and CSTP website. Gather feedback from stakeholders to refine the approaches and ensure alignment with the objectives of enhancing transnational cooperation within the CSTP.

Period 4 - October 2024 to March 2025

October 2024

Finalization of the Work Programme: Complete the final draft of the CSTP Work Programme, incorporating feedback received during the review phase. This will result in a comprehensive document outlining the strategic direction and specific initiatives for the CSTP, including the common Carpathian brand and tourism impact assessment.

November 2024

Relaunch Preparation: Prepare for the relaunch of the updated Database on Sustainable Tourism and the CSTP website. This includes finalizing updates, testing new features, and planning the communication strategy for the relaunch.



December 2024

Work Programme Adoption: Hold meetings with the national committees of CSTC Poland, CSTC Romania, and CSTC Slovakia to adopt the CSTP Work Programme. Secure commitments from stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of the Programme.

January 2025

Relaunch of Database and Website: Officially relaunch the updated Database on Sustainable Tourism and the CSTP website. Conduct a comprehensive communication campaign to promote the new resources to stakeholders across the Carpathian region.

February 2025

Implementation of Branding and Impact Assessment Initiatives: Begin the implementation of initiatives outlined in the CSTP Work Programme related to the development of the common Carpathian brand and the application of the Set of Indicators for tourism impact assessment.

March 2025

Evaluation and Planning for Continuation: Evaluate the outcomes of the pilot action, focusing on the effectiveness of the new cooperation system within the CSTP, the adoption of the common Carpathian brand, and the utilization of the Set of Indicators. Plan for the continuation of these initiatives beyond the CM project timeline, identifying potential funding sources and partnerships to sustain the efforts.

This timeline ensures that the pilot action "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)" is strategically planned and implemented within the constraints of the CM project's overall timeline, laying a solid foundation for sustained transnational cooperation in sustainable tourism development in the Carpathian region beyond the project's conclusion.

Resources: For the successful implementation of Activity 1.1 "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)," the following resources are identified as essential within the operational and strategic planning parts of the CM action plan:

Operational Planning (Within CM Project Lifetime)

Financial Resources:

- Allocation from the CM project budget as specified in the Application Form (AF) for WP2 pilot actions, ensuring that the financial contribution for this pilot action meets or exceeds the budgetary requirements outlined in the CM AF.

Personnel:

- Dedicated staff from the participating project partners (PPs), including project managers, coordinators, and support staff, responsible for the day-to-day management and implementation of the action.
- Contracted external experts in sustainable tourism, brand development, and impact assessment to provide specialized insights and facilitate the development of the new Work Programme for the CSTP.
- Service providers for technical aspects such as website development, database management, and event organization for the launch and promotional activities.

Materials and Equipment:



- Marketing and promotional materials for the Carpathian brand development and launch, including digital content, brochures, and visual identity assets.
- Technical infrastructure for the CSTP website and Database on Sustainable Tourism, including server hosting, software licenses, and digital tools for content management and user interaction.

Knowledge and Skills:

- Training and capacity-building for CSTP and CSTC staff on new cooperative mechanisms, participatory governance models, and the utilization of impact indicators.
- Workshops and seminars for stakeholders to enhance their engagement and contribution to the CSTP's objectives and initiatives.

Information and Data:

- Research and data collection to inform the development of the Carpathian brand and the set of impact indicators, including tourism statistics, sustainability metrics, and stakeholder feedback.

Legal and Administrative Resources:

- Agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with key stakeholders and partners to formalize collaboration and roles in the implementation of the action plan.
- Intellectual property rights management for the Carpathian brand and related content.

Strategic Planning (Post-CM Project Lifetime)

Financial Resources:

- Estimated budgets for continued activities beyond the CM project, identifying potential funding sources such as grants, public funding, and private investments.
- Financial models for the CSTP's sustainability, exploring options like membership fees, service charges, and sponsorships.

Personnel:

- Plans for maintaining or expanding the team responsible for the CSTP's ongoing operations, considering the potential need for additional staff or continued involvement of external experts.

Materials and Equipment:

- Long-term investment in the maintenance and upgrade of the CSTP website and database to accommodate evolving requirements and technological advancements.

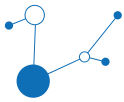
Knowledge and Skills:

- Continued professional development for CSTP and CSTC personnel to adapt to emerging trends in sustainable tourism and digital cooperation platforms.

Information and Data:

- Strategies for ongoing data collection and analysis to monitor the impact of the CSTP initiatives and adapt strategies accordingly.

Legal and Administrative Resources:



- Future considerations for legal frameworks and agreements supporting transnational cooperation and data sharing among stakeholders in the sustainable tourism ecosystem.

By identifying these resources early in the planning phase, the feasibility of the "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the CSTP" action can be thoroughly assessed, ensuring that planners are aware of potential constraints and opportunities for acquiring necessary resources. This foresight allows for precise allocation of resources to specific tasks and action items, contributing to the effective and efficient realization of the pilot action's objectives.

Responsibilities: For the implementation of Activity 1.1 "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)," the responsibilities are designated as follows within the context of the CM project:

Lead Organizations:

Carpathian Euroregion (ACE) and Brasov County are the primary entities responsible for overseeing the development and testing of the new cooperation system within CSTP, as stipulated in the Application Form for the CM project.

Task Assignments:

Strategic Activation and Comprehensive Planning:

- **ACE:** Leads the strategic activation and planning for the national CSTP centers, focusing on developing a cohesive Carpathian brand and a set of impact indicators. This includes coordinating workshops, stakeholder engagements, and drafting the initial work programme.
- **Brasov County:** Supports ACE by facilitating connections with relevant stakeholders within Romania and contributing to the development of the common Carpathian brand and impact indicators.

Re-launching the Database and CSTP Website:

- **Technical Team:** A specialized technical team, potentially comprising members from both ACE and Brasov County, alongside contracted IT service providers, is responsible for the technical development, update, and re-launch of the CSTP website and sustainable tourism database.
- **Marketing and Communication Team:** This team will handle the promotion and awareness campaign for the re-launched CSTP website and database, ensuring stakeholders are informed and engaged.

Additional Responsibilities:

CSTP National Centres (CSTC Poland, CSTC Romania, CSTC Slovakia):

- Engage in the process by providing country-specific insights, contributing to the brand development, and facilitating local stakeholder engagement.
- Participate in the establishment and utilization of the set of impact indicators to assess tourism development and sustainability within their respective jurisdictions.

External Experts:

- Contracted experts in sustainable tourism, brand development, and impact assessment will provide specialized knowledge and facilitate key aspects of the cooperation system's design and testing phase.

Stakeholder Working Groups:



- Composed of representatives from tourism businesses, local authorities, NGOs, and other relevant sectors as well as the Carpathian Convention bodies these groups will contribute to the participatory governance model, offering diverse perspectives and insights.

Collaborative Bodies:

- **Joint Task Force:** A collective body, possibly under the governance of CSTP and its Centres, will ensure a coordinated approach to the implementation of this activity, facilitating transnational and cross-border collaboration and stakeholder engagement across the Carpathian region.

General Responsibilities:

- All involved parties must adhere to the general rules and responsibilities as outlined by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, ensuring compliance, transparency, and effective collaboration throughout the project's implementation phase.

Communication and Coordination:

- Regular updates and coordination meetings will be scheduled to ensure all teams and stakeholders are aligned with the project's progress, objectives, and timelines. This will also facilitate the sharing of resources, insights, and best practices among the teams and broader project consortium.

By clearly defining these roles and responsibilities, and effectively communicating them to all involved parties, the initiative ensures a well-organized and collaborative approach towards enhancing the CSTP's cooperation system, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of tourism in the Carpathian region.

Activity 1.2 Development of Strategy and Operational Model for Cross-Border Functional Areas

Status: Pilot Action to be implemented within the project

Description: The action of "Creating and Testing New Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) in Mountain Areas of the Carpathians and the Sudetes" is an integral part of the Central Mountains (CM) Work Package 2 (WP2), as outlined in the CM project timeline. This initiative encompasses three pilot actions aimed at enhancing the strategic and operational framework of three CBFAs within the Carpathians, developing a mobile application to support these areas, and establishing a joint branding strategy for the Sudetes CBFA.

The primary goal of these actions is to foster stronger cross-border cooperation and integration within the Carpathian and Sudetes regions, addressing common challenges and capitalizing on shared opportunities in sustainable tourism and environmental conservation. By creating and testing these new CBFAs, the project aims to establish a model for effective, sustainable cross-border collaboration that can be replicated and scaled across similar mountainous regions.

The creation of Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) will introduce a novel form of transboundary cooperation aimed at fostering the development and promotion of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians. This innovative approach is designed to bring together various stakeholders from different sides of the borders to work collaboratively on common goals and initiatives that enhance the region's appeal as a sustainable tourism destination. By leveraging the unique cultural and natural assets of the Carpathian region, the CBFAs aim to create a cohesive strategy that not only



promotes sustainable tourism practices but also contributes to the socio-economic well-being of local communities. This action represents a significant step towards integrating efforts across borders, ensuring a unified and sustainable approach to tourism development in the Carpathians.

Tasks&Results: Based on the described activities for the development of a Strategy and Operational Model for Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) in the Carpathian and Sudetes regions, particularly focusing on "Kremenaros", "Beskid Niski" and "Brama Przemyska," the tasks and expected results could be formulated as follows:

Task 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Analysis

Objective: To identify and engage a diverse range of stakeholders from the "Kremenaros," "Beskid Niski" and "Brama Przemyska" CBFAs, ensuring their active participation in the development process of the strategy and operational model.

Expected Result: A comprehensive stakeholder analysis report that categorizes stakeholders by their level of influence, proximity to the project, and potential impact on the CBFAs. This report will serve as a basis for developing an inclusive participatory process for strategy formulation.

Task 2: Participatory Strategy Development

Objective: To collaboratively develop a strategic framework for the selected CBFAs, incorporating insights and contributions from stakeholders to ensure the strategy is well-informed and grounded in local realities.

Expected Result: A finalized strategic document for each CBFA, outlining clear objectives, initiatives, and actions designed to enhance cross-border cooperation and sustainable tourism development. The strategy will reflect a balance between environmental, economic, and social conditions, aiming for long-term stability and community-led sustainable development.

Task 3: Operational and Financial Model Design

Objective: To design practical operational and financial models for the "Kremenaros," "Beskid Niski" and "Brama Przemyska" CBFAs that will support the implementation of the strategic objectives and ensure the sustainability of initiatives.

Expected Result: Detailed operational guidelines and a sustainable financial framework for each CBFA, including potential funding sources, revenue models, and cost management strategies. These models will facilitate the translation of strategic goals into actionable and funded projects.

Task 4: Legal Framework Establishment

Objective: To develop and establish a legal basis for the operation and cooperation within the CBFAs, ensuring that activities are compliant with national and EU regulations and that cross-border collaboration is facilitated.

Expected Result: A set of legal agreements or memoranda of understanding signed by stakeholders from both sides of the border, providing a solid legal foundation for the CBFAs' activities and ensuring their legitimacy and operational viability.

Task 5: Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange

Objective: To enhance the capacities of local stakeholders through training, workshops, and the exchange of best practices, focusing on the management of cross-border functional areas and sustainable tourism development.



Expected Result: A series of capacity-building programs successfully conducted, leading to improved skills among local stakeholders in areas such as sustainable tourism, cross-border cooperation, project management, and participatory governance.

Timeline: For the activity "Development of Strategy and Operational Model for Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs)" within the Central Mountains (CM) project framework, the timeline will be delineated over two pivotal periods: Period 3 (April 2024 - September 2024) and Period 4 (October 2024 - March 2025). This timeline is crafted to ensure the systematic progression of tasks necessary for the establishment and operationalization of CBFAs in the Carpathian and Sudetes regions, particularly focusing on "Kremenaros," "Beskid Niski," and "Brama Przemyska."

Period 3 - April 2024 to September 2024

April 2024

Initiation of Stakeholder Engagement: Launch the process of identifying and engaging stakeholders across "Kremenaros," "Beskid Niski," and "Brama Przemyska." This includes preliminary meetings to introduce the CBFA concept and gather initial input.

May 2024

Stakeholder Analysis Report: Finalize and disseminate a comprehensive stakeholder analysis report, categorizing stakeholders based on influence, impact, and proximity to the project. This report will inform the subsequent participatory strategy development process.

June 2024

Strategy Development Workshops: Conduct participatory workshops with stakeholders to collaboratively draft the strategic framework for each CBFA. These sessions aim to harness local insights and ensure that the strategy is reflective of the diverse interests and needs within the CBFAs.

July 2024

Drafting of Strategic Documents: Begin the consolidation of input from the strategy development workshops into draft strategic documents for each CBFA. This phase will involve refining the objectives, initiatives, and actions outlined during the workshops.

August 2024

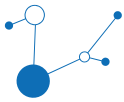
Operational and Financial Model Design: Initiate the design of operational and financial models for the CBFAs. This task will involve detailed planning sessions with financial experts, legal advisors, and key stakeholders to ensure the viability and sustainability of the proposed models.

September 2024

Legal Framework Discussions: Start discussions and negotiations to establish a legal framework conducive to cross-border cooperation within the CBFAs. Engage legal experts and representatives from relevant national and EU regulatory bodies to guide this process.

Period 4 - October 2024 to March 2025

October 2024



Finalization and Adoption of Strategic Documents: Complete the final versions of the strategic documents for each CBFA, incorporating feedback from stakeholders and experts. Hold meetings with key stakeholders to formally adopt the strategies.

November 2024

Operational Guidelines and Financial Frameworks: Finalize the operational guidelines and sustainable financial frameworks for each CBFA. These documents will detail the implementation mechanisms for the strategic objectives, funding sources, and cost management strategies.

December 2024

Signing of Legal Agreements: Facilitate the signing of legal agreements or memoranda of understanding between stakeholders from both sides of the border, solidifying the legal basis for CBFA activities and ensuring regulatory compliance.

January 2025

Launch of Capacity Building Programs: Implement the first series of capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing stakeholder competencies in sustainable tourism management, cross-border cooperation, and participatory governance.

February 2025

Knowledge Exchange Initiatives: Organize knowledge exchange initiatives, such as best practice sharing sessions and study visits between the CBFAs, to foster mutual learning and collaboration on sustainable tourism development.

March 2025

Evaluation and Future Planning: Conduct an evaluation of the CBFA development process, assessing the outcomes against the set objectives and identifying areas for improvement. Initiate discussions on the continuation and scaling of CBFA initiatives beyond the CM project timeline.

Resources: For the successful implementation of Activity 1.2 "Development of Strategy and Operational Model for Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs)," the following resources are essential:

Financial Resources:

- Allocated budget from the CM project as detailed in the Application Form (AF) specific to WP2 pilot actions, ensuring adherence to predetermined financial commitments.
- Potential external funding sources post-CM project for sustaining and expanding CBFA initiatives, including grants, sponsorships, and public-private partnerships.

Personnel:

- Project management team comprising members from the participating Project Partners (PPs), responsible for overseeing the strategic and operational development of the CBFAs.
- External consultants specializing in cross-border cooperation, sustainable tourism development, and legal frameworks to provide expert advice and support.
- Technical teams for the development and maintenance of digital tools such as mobile applications and information systems supporting the CBFAs.

Materials and Equipment:

- Development and promotional materials for the CBFA initiative, including branding for the Sudetes CBFA and marketing collateral for cross-border tourism products.



- Technological infrastructure for the implementation of the cross-border tourist information and promotion systems, including software, servers, and related digital resources.

Knowledge and Skills:

- Training programs for local stakeholders within the CBFAs to build capacity in areas such as sustainable tourism practices, digital tool utilization, and cross-border collaboration.
- Knowledge exchange platforms to facilitate the sharing of insights, best practices, and innovative approaches among CBFAs and beyond.

Information and Data:

- Comprehensive data collection and analysis tools to support the strategic development of the CBFAs, including market research, tourism trends, and stakeholder feedback mechanisms.
- Access to existing databases and research relevant to the Carpathian and Sudetes regions to inform the development of the CBFA strategy and operational model.

Legal and Administrative Resources:

- Legal expertise to navigate cross-border regulations and establish a coherent legal framework for CBFA operations, including agreements, MOUs, and compliance with EU and national laws.
- Administrative support for the coordination of CBFA activities, stakeholder engagement, and cross-border collaboration efforts.

Strategic Planning (Post-CM Project Lifetime):

- Long-term financial planning to ensure the sustainability of CBFA initiatives, exploring revenue-generating models and continued funding opportunities.
- Strategies for the ongoing development and adaptation of the CBFA model to new challenges and opportunities, ensuring its relevance and impact in promoting sustainable tourism in the Carpathian region.

By outlining these resources, the CM action plan for Activity 1.2 ensures a comprehensive approach to establishing effective, sustainable cross-border collaboration through the development of CBFAs. This strategic resource allocation facilitates the successful implementation of the pilot action within the CM project timeline and lays the groundwork for its continued evolution and impact beyond the project's conclusion.

Responsibilities: For the implementation of Activity 1.2 "Development of Strategy and Operational Model for Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs)," the responsibilities within the CM project are allocated as follows:

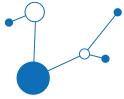
Lead Organization:

- **Carpathian Euroregion (ACE):** As the main entity responsible, ACE will oversee the comprehensive development and operationalization of the CBFA strategy and model. This includes coordination of all tasks, stakeholder engagement, and ensuring alignment with the overall objectives of the CM project.

Task-specific Assignments:

Stakeholder Engagement and Analysis:

- **ACE:** Leads the stakeholder engagement process, identifying and involving diverse stakeholders from "Kremenaros," "Beskid Niski," and "Brama Przemyska."



- **Local Project Teams:** Within each CBFA region, dedicated teams will conduct localized stakeholder analysis and facilitate engagement activities.

Participatory Strategy Development:

- **Strategy Development Team:** A cross-functional team composed of representatives from ACE and local CBFA areas will collaboratively develop the strategic framework, incorporating stakeholder contributions.

Operational and Financial Model Design:

- **Financial Experts:** Contracted by ACE, these experts will design sustainable financial models for each CBFA, identifying potential funding sources and revenue strategies.
- **Operational Specialists:** Will develop detailed operational guidelines ensuring the practical implementation of the strategic objectives.

Legal Framework Establishment:

- **Legal Advisors:** Engaged by ACE, they will provide expertise in establishing a legal framework conducive to cross-border cooperation within the CBFAs, ensuring compliance with national and EU regulations.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange:

- **Training Coordinators:** Appointed by ACE, they will organize capacity-building programs, enhancing the skills of local stakeholders in sustainable tourism, project management, and participatory governance.
- **Knowledge Exchange Facilitators:** Will foster an environment of mutual learning and best practice sharing among the CBFAs.

Collaborative and Support Roles:

- **Cross-Border Teams:** Comprising members from each CBFA region, these teams will ensure the localized implementation of strategies and models, adapting to the unique needs and opportunities of their respective areas.
- **External Partners and Institutions:** Collaborating with academic institutions, research bodies, and environmental organizations to enrich the CBFA development process with scientific insights and innovative approaches.
- **Government and Public Authorities:** Liaising with regional and local authorities to align the CBFA initiatives with broader development plans and to secure necessary approvals and support.

Oversight and Coordination:

- **ACE:** Beyond the lead role, ACE will also be responsible for overall project management, ensuring coordination among different task forces, monitoring progress, and facilitating communication between all parties involved.

General Responsibilities:

- All individuals and teams involved must adhere to the principles of transparency, collaboration, and sustainability, upholding the standards set by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme and the objectives of the CM project.



- Continuous sharing of knowledge and progress updates among all CBFA regions to ensure cohesive development and implementation of the strategy and operational model.

By clearly defining these responsibilities and ensuring proper communication among all parties, the CM project aims to establish a strong foundation for the effective and sustainable development of Cross-Border Functional Areas within the Carpathians, fostering enhanced cooperation and integration across the region.

Activity 1.3 CBFAs goes digital

Status: Pilot Action to be implemented within the project

Description: The action "CBFAs go digital" involves the development of a mobile application (platform) for the Transborder Functional Areas (CBFAs) in the Carpathians. This initiative is part of a broader effort within the Central Mountains Work Package 2 (WP2) aimed at creating and testing new Cross Border Functional Areas in mountainous regions. The mobile application is designed to facilitate cross-border cooperation and communication and enables networking and know-how exchange between members and partners, as well as destination management organisations (DMOs) around Carpathians region. The application will also promote sustainable tourism best practise, including cultural and natural heritage protection and conservation practices.

The development of this mobile application represents a significant step towards modernizing and digitizing the support information/communication infrastructure for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians, aligning with the broader objectives of enhancing cross-border cooperation and sustainable development in the region.

Tasks & Results: For the "CBFAs Go Digital" initiative, which encompasses the development of a mobile application for the Cross Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) in the Carpathians, the tasks and expected results can be outlined as follows:

Task 1: Platform Development

Objective: To develop a comprehensive mobile application that serves as an interactive platform for the CBFAs, offering easy access to networking and know-how exchange between members and partners as well as information sharing from day-to-day tourism practices etc. product development, project preparation, events for tourism professionals etc.

Expected Result: A fully functional digital platform that seamlessly operates across various devices, offering features for easy communication, cooperation and coordination for CBFAs and their partners, organised along clearly defined themes added and administrated interactively by the users.

Task 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Content Integration

Objective: To engage a diverse group of stakeholders, including destination management organisations (DMOs), local communities, tourism operators, conservationists, and cultural heritage experts, in contributing content and insights to the platform, ensuring it reflects the rich diversity of the Carpathian region.

Expected Result: An analysis of the existing situation and practice in cross-border communication and cooperation, perceived needs, and up-to-date tools for improvement. The goal of the involvement of SGs is to present the best practices of natural and cultural heritage protection, and



sustainable tourism offerings of the Carpathians, contributed by a wide range of stakeholders, fostering a sense of community ownership and participation.

Task 3: User Experience and Accessibility Enhancement

Objective: To ensure the platform is user-friendly, accessible, and provides a valuable tool for enhancing the tourism practices promoting sustainability.

Expected Result: An application characterized by intuitive navigation, high usability, and accessibility features, making it a go-to resource for cross-border communication, cooperation, and coordination of stakeholders and engaging in sustainable tourism activities.

Task 4: Strategic Promotion and Outreach

Objective: To launch a comprehensive communication campaign to promote the platform among the thematic group of stakeholders.

Expected Result: Increased awareness and usage of the platform, contributing to a broader engagement with sustainable tourism practices around Carpathians.

Task 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting

Objective: To implement a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the platform's effectiveness in fostering cooperation within the CBFAs and promoting sustainable tourism practices. This includes developing a comprehensive report detailing the development process, features, functionalities, and the anticipated impact of the application.

Expected Result: A detailed report that captures the development journey of the platform, its key features, stakeholder involvement, and its impact on enhancing cooperation and promoting sustainable tourism practices in the Carpathian region. This document will serve as a valuable resource for future digital initiatives and provide insights into the participatory approach employed in the platform's development.

Tip for Implementation: Utilize a Responsive Web Application (RWA) Instead of a Standard Mobile App

When developing digital platforms for projects like the "Digital Transformation of CBFAs", consider opting for a Responsive Web Application (RWA) instead of a traditional mobile application. The major advantage of an RWA is its versatility across various devices, including desktops, tablets, and smartphones. This means users can access the full functionality of the application regardless of the device they're using, ensuring a consistent and seamless experience.

Furthermore, RWAs can be more cost-effective in terms of development and maintenance. Developing a single RWA eliminates the need for multiple versions of an app for different operating systems (iOS, Android, etc.), significantly reducing development and update costs. This unified approach not only streamlines the development process but also simplifies future updates and maintenance, allowing for more resources to be allocated towards enhancing features and user experience.

In summary, adopting an RWA for the Carpathian project's digital platform could provide a more accessible, versatile, and cost-efficient solution, ensuring wider reach and engagement while optimizing development resources.

Timeline: For the activity "CBFAs goes digital," which entails the development of a mobile and web application for the Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) in the Carpathians, the timeline is structured across two critical periods within the Central Mountains (CM) project: Period 3 (April 2024 - September 2024) and Period 4 (October 2024 - March 2025). This timeline ensures a



systematic approach to the digital platform development, from initial conceptualization to final implementation and evaluation, within the CM project's timeframe.

Period 3 - April 2024 to September 2024

April 2024

Project Kick-off and Requirements Gathering: Initiate the "CBFAs go digital" project with a kick-off meeting to outline project goals, timelines, and deliverables. Conduct a comprehensive requirement-gathering phase with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations from the platform. Suggest the structure and functionalities of the mobile application.

May 2024

Stakeholder Engagement for Content Collection: Engage with destination management organisations, local communities, tourism operators, conservationists, and cultural and natural heritage experts to curate content for the platform. Organize workshops and meetings to facilitate content contribution and integration.

June 2024 - August 2024

Formulate and organise public procurement for the development of the mobile application based on the stakeholder inputs, focusing on creating intuitive user interfaces and user experiences.

Development of Platform: Start the technical development of the mobile and web applications based on the finalized design and stakeholder inputs. This includes coding, database setup, and integration of features such as interactive maps and event calendars.

September 2024

Develop initial prototypes for testing and feedback: User Testing and Feedback Iteration: Conduct user testing sessions with a select group of stakeholders and potential users. Collect feedback on the usability, features, and overall user experience of the platform and iterate on the design and functionality accordingly.

Period 4 - October 2024 to March 2025

October 2024

Final Development and Refinement: Continue the development of the platform, incorporating feedback from the testing phase to refine and enhance functionalities. Ensure the platform is fully responsive and optimized for various devices.

Accessibility and Localization Enhancements: Implement accessibility features to ensure the platform is inclusive and user friendly for people with disabilities. Add localization features to cater to the diverse linguistic backgrounds of users in the Carpathian region

November 2024

Initial Promotion and Awareness Building: Begin initial promotion activities to build awareness of the upcoming platform among target audiences. This includes social media campaigns, presentations at local events for tourism professionals, and engagement with local media.



December 2024

Platform Launch Preparation: Finalize preparations for the official launch of the platform, including the completion of all technical developments, content integrations, and final user testing.

January 2025

Official Platform Launch: Launch the mobile application with an official event or press release. Engage stakeholders and media to maximize outreach and encourage platform adoption among the target audience.

February 2025

Monitoring and User Engagement Analysis: Implement monitoring tools to track user engagement, platform performance, and feedback. Analyse usage patterns to identify areas for improvement and potential feature enhancements.

March 2025

Evaluation and Reporting: Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the platform's initial impact on promoting sustainable tourism initiatives and fostering cooperation within the CBFAs. Prepare and disseminate a detailed report covering the development process, platform features, stakeholder involvement, and insights into the participatory approach utilized in the project.

Resources: For the effective execution of Activity 1.3 "CBFAs goes digital," the following resources are essential:

Financial Resources:

- Allocated budget from the CM project, as detailed in the Application Form, to cover the costs of development, implementation, and promotion of the mobile and web application.
- Potential additional funding sources identified for post-project sustainability, including digital infrastructure maintenance and further application enhancements.

Personnel:

- A dedicated project team comprising internal staff (project managers, communication manager), external staff (IT developers, UX/UI designers), and content managers from the participating Project Partners (PPs) to oversee the development and launch of the digital platform.
- External consultants and experts in areas such as mobile app development, web security, and sustainable tourism practices from the participating PPs to provide specialized skills and insights.

Materials and Equipment:

- Public procurement of application development and licences required for the creation of the mobile application.
- Marketing and promotional materials to support the launch and widespread adoption of the application among target audiences.

Knowledge and Skills:

- Workshops and capacity-building sessions for stakeholders, including destination management organisations, local communities and tourism operators, to and maximise their engagement with and contribution to the platform.



Information and Data:

- Access to relevant and up-to-date information on the Carpathian region's stakeholders.
- Data collection and analytics tools to monitor user engagement, application performance, and the effectiveness of the platform in promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Legal and Administrative Resources:

- Legal consultations to address public procurement law, intellectual property rights, data protection regulations, and compliance with national and EU digital service standards.
- Administrative support for the coordination of multi-stakeholder involvement, content curation, and ongoing platform management.

Strategic Planning (Post-CM Project Lifetime):

- Long-term digital strategy for the continuous update and improvement of the application, including new features and functionalities that respond to evolving user needs and tourism trends.
- Sustainable financial model for the platform's maintenance and development, potentially through app monetization strategies, partnerships, and sponsorships.

By detailing these resources, the CM action plan for Activity 1.3 ensures a comprehensive and strategic approach to digitising the support infrastructure for sustainable tourism practices in the Carpathians. This planned allocation of resources facilitates the successful development, launch, and long-term sustainability of the "CBFAs go digital" initiative, contributing to enhanced cross-border cooperation and sustainable development in the region.

Responsibilities: For the successful implementation of Activity 1.3 "CBFAs goes digital," responsibilities are allocated as follows:

Lead Organization:

- **ZMOS Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (SK):** As the main responsible entity, ZMOS will oversee the entire lifecycle of the digital platform development, from initial planning to public procurement, launch and subsequent evaluation. This includes managing the project team, coordinating stakeholder engagement, and ensuring the platform aligns with the broader objectives of enhancing cross-border cooperation and sustainable development in the Carpathians.

Supporting partners:

- The implementation of the activity will include the cooperation and support of other project partners: Rzeszów County, Association of the Carpathian Euroregion, Carpathian Foundation, Brasov County, Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (as partner responsible for WP2).

Task-specific Assignments:

Platform Development:

- Public procurement for external service delivery. External development staff will lead the technical development of the application and its testing.

Stakeholder Engagement and Content Integration:

- **Communication Manager (ZMOS):** Will curate and integrate content into the platform, liaising with destination management organisations, local communities,



tourism operators, conservationists, and cultural and natural heritage experts to ensure a diverse representation of the Carpathian region.

User Experience and Accessibility Enhancement:

- **UX/UI Specialist of the PPs:** Tasked with optimizing the platform's user interface and experience, ensuring it is intuitive, engaging, and accessible to a broad audience, including individuals with disabilities.

Promotion and Outreach:

- **Communication manager (ZMOS):** Responsible for devising and executing a comprehensive communication strategy to promote the platform among target audiences, utilizing various channels such as social media, local events for tourism professionals, and media engagement.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting:

- **Evaluation Specialist of the PPs:** Will implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the platform's impact on promoting sustainable tourism and enhancing cooperation within the CBFAs. They will also prepare detailed reports summarizing the development process, platform performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Collaborative and Support Roles:

- **Local CBFA Coordinators:** From each Cross-Border Functional Area involved in the initiative, coordinators will provide localized support and feedback, ensuring the platform is relevant and useful to their specific regions.
- **External Technical Partners:** Including web development agencies or freelance experts who may be contracted to provide additional technical expertise or support specific development needs.

Oversight and Coordination:

- **ZMOS Project Oversight Committee:** Comprising senior members of ZMOS and representatives from key stakeholder groups, this committee will provide strategic oversight, review progress, and facilitate interdepartmental coordination.

General Responsibilities:

- All team members are expected to maintain open lines of communication, share progress updates regularly, and collaborate effectively to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities.
- Ensuring adherence to data protection and privacy laws, as well as accessibility standards, to make the platform inclusive and compliant with EU regulations.

By clearly delineating these responsibilities and ensuring all parties are aware of their roles, the CM project aims to foster a collaborative environment conducive to the successful development and deployment of the "CBFAs goes digital" initiative. This structured approach ensures accountability, encourages proactive problem-solving, and aligns efforts towards the common goal of enhancing sustainable tourism in the Carpathians through digital innovation.



Activity 1.4 Carpathian Tourism Observatory

Status: Action which will start during the project and end later

Description: Building on the foundation laid by Activity 1.1, "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)," the establishment of the Carpathian Tourism Observatory aims to emulate the success and functional methodologies of similar initiatives like the Swiss Tourism Observatory (Tourobs)³ in the Alps. Drawing inspiration from Tourobs, which centralizes diverse data sources into interactive sectorial dashboards to optimize data utilization, the Carpathian Tourism Observatory will focus on continuously monitoring tourism trends and innovations, particularly those impacting mountainous regions. It will aim to provide tailored solutions to enhance commercial or political tourism strategies through meticulous data analysis.

The core activities of the Carpathian Tourism Observatory will resonate with those of Tourobs, encompassing the detailed analysis and reporting of tourism trends, conducting both quantitative and qualitative research, and facilitating workshops and training sessions for local entrepreneurs and stakeholders. Furthermore, it will offer research-backed support for pioneering tourism initiatives, thereby mirroring Tourobs' approach of data valorisation, trend analysis, and the provision of personalized data-driven solutions to boost the understanding of tourism dynamics and the competitiveness of local tourism sectors.

To maximize the impact and effectiveness of the Carpathian Tourism Observatory, a broad spectrum of participants is essential. This includes local tourism authorities, policymakers, tourism enterprises like hotels and tour operators, environmental NGOs, community groups, and academic bodies. Engaging such a diverse group ensures a comprehensive perspective on tourism development, integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This collaborative strategy will not only position the Observatory as a pivotal resource for scientific data analysis but also as a practical support tool for destinations, aiding in the translation of research outcomes into viable strategies for sustainable tourism growth.

By adopting Tourobs' extensive data management and analysis framework, the Carpathian Tourism Observatory is poised to offer valuable insights into the Carpathians' tourism sector dynamics. This initiative is set to identify emerging trends and engage stakeholders, thereby enhancing the region's tourism competitiveness and promoting sustainable development. The Observatory's actions, designed to commence during the project and persist thereafter, signify a lasting dedication to comprehending and influencing the future of tourism in the Carpathians, akin to the continuous efforts observed with Tourobs in the Alpine region.

In adapting the Tourobs model to the Carpathian context, a pragmatic strategy would involve appointing a leading Carpathian higher education or scientific institution as the main coordinator, in synergy with Activity 1.1. This central entity would collaborate closely with other universities and research institutions across the Carpathian region as partners, forming a consortium that ensures comprehensive regional coverage and leverages local expertise. This collaborative framework would not only standardize data collection and analysis methods across various nations but also anchor the observatory's activities in the Carpathians' diverse socio-cultural and environmental landscapes. Such an approach enables a scalable management model for the observatory, laying a solid groundwork for its functions and guaranteeing its efficacy in fostering sustainable tourism development across borders. The CSTP platform, as highlighted in Activity 1.1, might assume responsibility for this activity post-project, ensuring continuity and lasting impact.

³ <https://www.tourobs.ch>



Task&Result: For the Carpathian Tourism Observatory initiative, the development of an operational model should be guided by the following tasks and expected results, specifically focusing on collaboration with statistical offices, universities, and tourism organizations in the Carpathians.

Task 1: Establishing a Collaborative Framework

Objective: To create a foundational structure for continuous cooperation between the Carpathian Tourism Observatory, statistical offices, educational institutions, and tourism organizations.

Expected Result: A memorandum of understanding or a formal agreement that delineates the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of each party. This will ensure a coordinated approach to data collection, analysis, and dissemination of tourism-related insights.

Task 2: Data Collection and Integration System

Objective: To develop a comprehensive system for collecting, storing, and analyzing tourism data from diverse sources, including statistical offices and research conducted by universities.

Expected Result: An integrated digital platform that enables the seamless aggregation of data, ensuring real-time access to tourism trends, visitor statistics, economic impacts, and other relevant metrics.

Task 3: Research and Innovation Hub

Objective: To foster an environment of academic and practical research that contributes to the innovation in the tourism sector of the Carpathians.

Expected Result: A series of published research papers and case studies that provide new insights into sustainable tourism practices, with contributions from university scholars and industry experts.

Task 4: Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing

Objective: To enhance the skills and knowledge of local entrepreneurs and stakeholders through workshops, training sessions, and online resources, leveraging expertise from academia and industry leaders.

Expected Result: A program of regular workshops and training sessions, alongside an online repository of educational materials, case studies, and best practices in sustainable tourism development.

Task 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Participatory Governance

Objective: To involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and the development of tourism strategies, as highlighted in the Central Mountains project, by utilizing platforms for thematic exchange and cooperation among target groups.

Expected Result: The establishment of new platforms or the enhancement of existing ones, such as the Carpathian Civil Society and the under-construction Carpathian Sustainable Tourism platform, to facilitate stakeholder engagement and participatory governance.

Task 6: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Objective: To implement a system for continuous monitoring and evaluation of tourism initiatives and the impact of the Observatory's activities.

Expected Result: A set of key performance indicators (KPIs) and regular reporting mechanisms that allow for the assessment of progress towards sustainable tourism development goals in the Carpathians.

By focusing on these tasks and aiming for the outlined results, the Carpathian Tourism Observatory can effectively map the future of tourism in the region, ensuring that its growth is sustainable, inclusive, and beneficial to all stakeholders involved.



Timeline: For the establishment of the Carpathian Tourism Observatory, a strategic initiative designed to extend beyond the Central Mountains (CM) project timeline, the planning will commence in 2025 and will initially focus on foundational tasks to set up the observatory's operational framework. This planning phase will be segmented into quarters over the first two years to ensure detailed and structured execution of activities, with a long-term vision for continuous development and enhancement of the observatory's functions.

This timeline sets a robust foundation for the Carpathian Tourism Observatory, aligning its establishment with the broader objectives of fostering sustainable tourism development and cross-border cooperation in the Carpathian region. By planning for a phased rollout of activities over the initial years, the observatory is positioned to evolve into a pivotal resource for data-driven insights and innovative tourism strategies, contributing significantly to the competitiveness and sustainability of the Carpathian tourism sector.

Year 1: 2025

Q1-Q2 (January - June 2025)

Initiation and Collaborative Framework Establishment:

- Kick-off meeting to define the vision, objectives, and operational scope of the Carpathian Tourism Observatory, drawing from the successes of similar models like Tourobs.
- Development and signing of a memorandum of understanding or formal agreements with key partners, including statistical offices, higher education institutions, and tourism organizations, to solidify roles and collaborative efforts.

Q3 (July - September 2025)

System Development for Data Collection and Integration

- Design and development of an integrated digital platform for efficient data collection, storage, and analysis. This will involve selecting suitable technology solutions and engaging with IT specialists to ensure the platform meets the needs of diverse data sources and users.
- Initial data collection phase, focusing on establishing baseline metrics and integrating existing tourism data into the platform.

Q4 (October - December 2025)

Launch of Research and Innovation Hub:

- Official inauguration of the observatory's research and innovation hub, involving academic institutions and industry stakeholders.
- Announcement of the first set of research projects and case studies focused on sustainable tourism development and innovative tourism practices in the Carpathians.

Year 2: 2026

Q1 (January - March 2026)

Capacity Building and Knowledge Dissemination:



- Organization of the first series of workshops and training sessions for local entrepreneurs and stakeholders to enhance their understanding and implementation of sustainable tourism practices.
- Development of an online repository of educational materials, including research findings, case studies, and best practices.

Q2 (April - June 2026)

Stakeholder Engagement and Participatory Governance Enhancement:

- Establishment or enhancement of platforms for thematic exchange, such as the Carpathian Civil Society and the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform, to facilitate active stakeholder engagement in tourism strategy development.
- Conduct participatory workshops to involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and strategy formulation for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians.

Q3 (July - September 2026)

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Implementation:

- Development and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the observatory, including the definition of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the impact of tourism initiatives and the observatory's contributions to sustainable tourism development.
- Initial reporting period to review progress against established KPIs and identify areas for improvement.

Q4 (October - December 2026)

Review and Strategic Planning for Future Development:

- Comprehensive review of the observatory's activities, achievements, and challenges faced during the first two years of operation.
- Strategic planning session to outline future directions, new research initiatives, and enhanced stakeholder engagement strategies to ensure the observatory's continued relevance and impact on the Carpathian region's tourism sector.

Resources: For the establishment and operation of the "Carpathian Tourism Observatory," which is not designated as a Pilot Action within the CM project and therefore lacks a predefined budget, the following resources are anticipated to be essential:

Initial Setup and Operational Phase (Starting Q3 2025)

Financial Resources:

- Since this activity lacks a predefined budget within the CM project, securing funding will be paramount. Primary funding sources will include European Union funds through programs such as Interreg and relevant national programs that support regional development and innovation in tourism.
- Collaboration with potential funding bodies, crafting of grant applications, and engagement with private sector sponsors who have an interest in sustainable tourism development.



Personnel:

- A dedicated core team to lead the observatory's setup, including project managers, data analysts, researchers, and administrative staff. This team will be responsible for overseeing the observatory's development, stakeholder engagement, data collection, and analysis activities.
- Engagement of external experts for specialized tasks, such as IT development for the digital platform, legal advisors for compliance issues, and academic professionals for research and innovation contributions.

Materials and Equipment:

- Essential IT hardware and software for data collection, storage, and analysis, including servers, databases, and analytics tools.
- Office space and related infrastructure to house the observatory's operational team and host meetings, workshops, and other collaborative activities.

Knowledge and Skills:

- Training and capacity building for observatory staff, focusing on data analysis, sustainable tourism practices, and stakeholder engagement strategies.
- Development of a comprehensive knowledge exchange framework to facilitate continuous learning and sharing among stakeholders.

Information and Data:

- Establishment of partnerships with statistical offices, tourism organizations, and academic institutions to ensure access to a wide range of tourism-related data.
- Investment in software and methodologies for integrating, analyzing, and visualizing data from diverse sources.

Legal and Administrative Resources:

- Legal consultations to ensure compliance with data protection regulations, intellectual property rights, and cross-border data sharing agreements.
- Administrative support for project management, stakeholder coordination, and reporting.

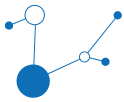
Long-Term Sustainability and Expansion (Beyond Initial Phase):

Financial Planning:

- Development of a sustainable financial model for the observatory's long-term operation, potentially including membership fees, service offerings, and continued access to public and private funding.
- Exploration of revenue-generating activities aligned with the observatory's mission, such as custom research services, data analysis, and consultancy.

Partnership Expansion:

- Broadening the network of contributing partners to include a wider array of stakeholders from across the Carpathian region and potentially other mountainous areas interested in the observatory's insights.
- Strengthening ties with European and international tourism and sustainability organizations to enhance the observatory's reach and impact.



Technology and Innovation:

- Continuous investment in the latest data analysis and visualization technologies to keep the observatory at the forefront of tourism research and innovation.
- Exploration of emerging trends and tools in data science, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to enhance the observatory's analytical capabilities.

Outreach and Engagement:

- Ongoing marketing and communication efforts to maintain the observatory's visibility, attract new stakeholders, and disseminate findings widely.
- Regular organization of events, workshops, and conferences to share insights, foster dialogue, and promote sustainable tourism development.

Responsibilities: For the "Carpathian Tourism Observatory" initiative, responsibilities are structured to ensure a collaborative effort across various stakeholders and expert groups. This initiative, not defined as a Pilot Action within the CM project, requires strategic planning and coordination to secure necessary resources and achieve its objectives. The following outlines the assignment of responsibilities:

Lead Coordination:

- **Carpathian Euroregion (ACE) as CSTC Poland:** Serves as the primary coordinator, leveraging its regional influence and networks to spearhead the observatory's establishment. ACE's role encompasses overall project management, stakeholder coordination, and ensuring alignment with the broader goals of sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians.

Collaborative Partnerships:

- **CSTC Romania and CSTC Slovakia:** As key collaborators, these centres will contribute to the observatory's activities, ensuring regional representation and integration of diverse perspectives from across the Carpathians. Their involvement is crucial in data collection, stakeholder engagement, and the dissemination of observatory findings within their respective territories.

Operational Tasks and Expert Involvement:

Establishing a Collaborative Framework:

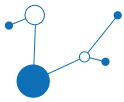
- **Legal and Policy Expert (ACE):** To lead the development of formal agreements, ensuring a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities among all partners. This includes MOUs with statistical offices, academic institutions, and tourism organizations.

Data Collection and Integration System:

- **Data Management Team:** Comprising data analysts and IT specialists from ACE and collaborating CSTCs, responsible for designing and implementing the digital platform for data aggregation and analysis.

Research and Innovation Hub:

- **Research Coordinator (ACE):** To oversee the research activities, liaising with academic partners and industry experts to initiate studies and innovation projects within the observatory framework.



- **Academic Partners:** Universities and research institutions across the Carpathian region, contributing scholarly expertise and facilitating access to cutting-edge research and methodologies.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing:

- **Training Program Lead (CSTC Romania and CSTC Slovakia):** To design and execute educational initiatives aimed at enhancing local capacity in sustainable tourism practices, data utilization, and observatory-related tools.

Stakeholder Engagement and Participatory Governance:

- **Stakeholder Engagement Specialist (ACE):** To organize platforms for thematic exchange, such as workshops and forums, enabling participatory governance and inclusive decision-making processes.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:

- **Evaluation Specialist (CSTC Slovakia):** To develop and implement a framework for ongoing assessment of the observatory's impact, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with the set objectives.

Supporting Roles:

- **External Consultants and Experts:** Engaged for specific tasks such as digital platform development, legal compliance, and specialized research, providing additional expertise to complement the core team's capabilities.
- **Administrative and Support Staff:** Across all participating organizations, to provide essential administrative, logistical, and communication support for the observatory's activities.

Cross-Functional Coordination:

- Regular coordination meetings among ACE, CSTC Romania, CSTC Slovakia, and other partners to ensure alignment, share progress, and address challenges collectively.

General Responsibilities:

- All individuals and teams involved are expected to adhere to principles of transparency, collaboration, and mutual respect, ensuring the observatory's activities are conducted ethically and effectively.
- Continuous communication and knowledge sharing within the observatory network to foster a collaborative environment and ensure all partners are informed and engaged in the initiative's progress.



OBJECTIVE 2. GREEN CARPATHIANS

Activity 2.1 Green Tourism Initiatives

Status: Action which will start during the project and end later

Description: Anchored within the broader framework established by Activity 1.1, "Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)," the "Green Tourism Initiatives" are integral to Objective 2, "Green Carpathians." This initiative is dedicated to preserving and sustainably managing the Carpathian region's natural heritage through a series of concerted actions. These include educational programs focused on sustainable tourism practices, support for grassroots movements, and the advocacy for regenerative tourism aimed at safeguarding both the natural environment and cultural heritage. The initiative is aligned with and contributes to the achievement of several global and regional objectives and frameworks:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The initiative directly supports SDGs, particularly:

- SDG 4 (Quality Education) by providing educational programs in sustainable tourism.
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting sustainable tourism practices that contribute to local development while preserving cultural and natural heritage.
- SDG 15 (Life on Land) by focusing on regenerative tourism that supports the conservation of terrestrial ecosystems.

Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism: The initiative is in line with the principles outlined in the Carpathian Convention's Tourism Protocol, which emphasizes the need for sustainable tourism development in the region. By focusing on education, grassroots support, and regenerative practices, the initiative contributes to the implementation of various Articles of the Tourism Protocol, particularly Articles 12, 13, 17, 21 and 22⁴, which advocates for sustainable tourism practices that minimize negative impacts and enhance positive contributions to the natural and cultural environment.

Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe: The initiative is consistent with the broader objectives of the Joint Strategy. Promoting sustainable tourism initiatives, it supports the strategy's goals of enhancing cross-border cooperation, conserving natural and cultural heritage, and ensuring economic development in the region aligns with sustainability principles.

Tasks&Results: For the "Green Tourism Initiatives" under "Green Carpathians," aimed at ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of Carpathian natural heritage through the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) and initiatives animated by Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTC), the tasks and expected results can be outlined as follows:

Task 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Analysis

Objective: To identify and engage stakeholders across the Carpathian region, including local communities, tourism operators, environmental organizations, and cultural heritage experts, ensuring their active involvement in green tourism initiatives.

⁴ <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/convention/protocols/protocol-on-sustainable-tourism/>



Expected Result: A comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan that facilitates the involvement of diverse groups in shaping and implementing green tourism initiatives, ensuring that these initiatives are grounded in local needs and sustainability principles.

Task 2: Development of Educational Programmes in Sustainable Tourism

Objective: To develop and implement educational programmes aimed at raising awareness and building capacity in sustainable tourism practices among local stakeholders and visitors.

Expected Result: A series of educational materials and workshops that effectively disseminate knowledge on sustainable tourism, environmental conservation, and cultural heritage preservation, contributing to informed and responsible tourism behaviours.

Task 3: Support for Grassroots Initiatives

Objective: To identify and provide support to grassroots initiatives focused on sustainable tourism development, including community-led projects, eco-tourism, and cultural heritage conservation.

Expected Result: Enhanced visibility and viability of grassroots initiatives through financial support, technical assistance, and promotional efforts, leading to increased community engagement in sustainable tourism practices.

Task 4: Promotion of Regenerative Tourism Practices

Objective: To develop and promote regenerative tourism practices that restore and enhance the natural and cultural environments of the Carpathian region.

Expected Result: Implementation of regenerative tourism projects that demonstrate tangible benefits for environmental conservation and cultural preservation, serving as models for sustainable tourism development in mountainous regions.

Task 5: Integration into the CSTP Work Programme

Objective: To integrate the "Green Tourism Initiatives" into the new Work Programme of the CSTP, ensuring alignment with broader sustainability goals and strategies.

Expected Result: The inclusion of specific actions, milestones, and metrics related to "Green Tourism Initiatives" in the CSTP Work Programme, facilitating coordinated implementation and monitoring of sustainability efforts across the Carpathian region.

Task 6: Reporting and Dissemination

Objective: To document the development process, successes, and lessons learned from the "Green Tourism Initiatives" and disseminate these insights to a wider audience.

Expected Result: A comprehensive report detailing the approach, outcomes, and impact of the "Green Tourism Initiatives," along with recommendations for future actions. This report will serve as a resource for other regions seeking to implement similar sustainability initiatives.

Timeline: For the "Green Tourism Initiatives" under Objective 2 "Green Carpathians," the timeline will start during the project and extend beyond, with initial actions kicking off in 2025. The focus will be on ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of the Carpathian natural heritage. This initiative will be broken down into phases over the first two years, beginning in 2025, with actions planned quarterly to ensure detailed implementation and effective tracking of progress.

This phased approach allows for the gradual development and implementation of "Green Tourism Initiatives," ensuring that each phase builds on the learnings and successes of the previous one. By aligning these initiatives with broader sustainability frameworks and goals, such as the SDGs and



the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, the initiative aims to contribute significantly to the conservation, sustainable management, and appreciation of the Carpathian natural heritage, fostering a more sustainable and resilient tourism sector in the region.

Year 1: 2025

Q1 (January - March 2025)

Stakeholder Engagement and Needs Assessment:

- Conduct comprehensive stakeholder mapping to identify key local communities, tourism operators, environmental organizations, and cultural heritage experts across the Carpathians.
- Initiate a needs assessment to understand the specific requirements and expectations of stakeholders regarding sustainable tourism practices.

Q2 (April - June 2025)

Development of Educational Programs in Sustainable Tourism:

- Based on the needs assessment findings, develop educational programs tailored to various stakeholder groups. This includes curating content, methodologies, and delivery formats (e.g., workshops, online courses, and informational brochures).
- Launch pilot educational sessions to gather initial feedback and make necessary adjustments.

Q3 (July - September 2025)

Support and Promotion of Grassroots Initiatives:

- Identify potential grassroots initiatives focusing on eco-tourism, community-led projects, and cultural heritage conservation that align with sustainable tourism principles.
- Provide support to selected initiatives through financial aid, technical assistance, and marketing efforts to enhance their visibility and impact.

Q4 (October - December 2025)

Implementation of Regenerative Tourism Practices:

- Initiate the development and implementation of regenerative tourism projects designed to restore and enhance the Carpathian region's natural and cultural environments.
- Monitor the progress of these projects, evaluating their initial impact on environmental conservation and cultural preservation.

Year 2: 2026

Q1 (January - March 2026)

Evaluation and Iteration of Educational Programs:

- Assess the effectiveness of the educational programs implemented in the previous year, incorporating feedback from participants and stakeholders.



- Refine and expand the educational offerings based on the evaluation results, introducing new topics and improved delivery methods as necessary.

Q2 (April - June 2026):

Expansion and Diversification of Support for Grassroots Initiatives:

- Extend support to a broader range of grassroots initiatives, leveraging lessons learned from the initial projects supported in the previous year.
- Encourage the development of new projects that demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable tourism and cultural heritage conservation.

Q3 (July - September 2026)

Scaling Regenerative Tourism Practices:

- Based on the success of initial regenerative tourism projects, scale these practices to additional sites within the Carpathians, emphasizing replication and adaptation to different local contexts.
- Engage additional stakeholders, including local governments and international organizations, to broaden the support base for regenerative tourism projects.

Q4 (October - December 2026):

Integration and Reporting:

- Integrate the outcomes and learning from the "Green Tourism Initiatives" into the broader Work Programme of the CSTP, ensuring alignment with the overarching sustainability goals and strategies of the region.
- Compile a comprehensive report documenting the development process, successes, challenges, and lessons learned from the initiative. This report should include case studies of successful projects, educational program outcomes, and recommendations for future sustainability efforts in the Carpathians and other mountainous regions.

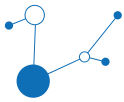
Resources: For the "Green Tourism Initiatives" under Objective 2 "Green Carpathians," which will commence during the CM project but continue thereafter without a pre-allocated budget, a diverse range of resources will be sought. These resources will encompass a wide array of funding sources, personnel, materials, knowledge, and collaborative efforts required to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of the Carpathian natural heritage.

Diverse Funding Sources:

European Union Funds:

- Interreg programs focused on transnational, cross-border, and interregional cooperation, aiming to foster sustainable development and cohesion among European regions.
- National, regional, and local programs that support environmental conservation, sustainable tourism, and community development projects.
- Specific EU funds dedicated to rural development, environmental protection, and innovation in tourism.

Grants and Foundations:



- Applications for grants from international and local foundations that support ecological sustainability, cultural heritage conservation, and sustainable tourism initiatives.
- Engagement with international organizations and agencies, including within the United Nations and other entities with aligned goals.

Private Sector Sponsorships:

- Partnerships with tourism-related businesses, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, and eco-friendly brands interested in supporting sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians.

Essential Personnel and Collaborations:

Project Team:

- A core team comprising project coordinators, environmental experts, sustainable tourism consultants, and community engagement specialists.
- Collaboration with local Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs) for on-ground implementation and coordination.

Educators and Trainers:

- Specialists in sustainable tourism education to develop and deliver training programs and workshops for local stakeholders and communities.

Technical and Creative Support:

- Technical advisors for the development of digital platforms and tools that support grassroots initiatives and educational programs.
- **Creative professionals for marketing and promotional materials to raise awareness about the initiatives and engage broader audiences.**

Knowledge and Skill Development:

Educational Materials:

- Development of comprehensive educational content, including guides, online courses, and workshop materials focused on sustainable tourism practices and environmental conservation.

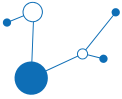
Capacity Building:

- Training sessions, seminars, and exchange programs designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of local entrepreneurs, community leaders, and stakeholders in sustainable tourism development.

Information, Data, and Material Resources:

Research and Data Collection:

- Initiatives to gather and analyse data on local biodiversity, cultural heritage sites, and community-based tourism practices, contributing to informed decision-making and strategy development.



Promotional and Informational Materials:

- Creation of brochures, websites, and multimedia content to promote regenerative tourism practices and highlight the natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathians.

Legal and Administrative Support:

Legal Expertise:

- Consultations to ensure that all initiatives comply with local, national, and EU regulations related to environmental conservation, cultural heritage protection, and sustainable tourism.

Administrative and Coordination Efforts:

- Support for the organization of events, stakeholder meetings, and community engagement activities, ensuring effective communication and collaboration among all involved parties.

Responsibilities: For the "Green Tourism Initiatives" under Objective 2 "Green Carpathians," the assignment of responsibilities is critical to ensure effective implementation and achievement of the initiative's goals. These responsibilities encompass coordination, execution of tasks, stakeholder engagement, and ensuring the sustainability of efforts beyond the project timeline.

Lead Organization and Coordination:

- **Carpathian Euroregion (ACE) as CSTC:** Will serve as the main coordinator for the "Green Tourism Initiatives," leveraging its network and expertise to oversee the initiative's strategic direction, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with broader sustainability goals. ACE will also play a crucial role in monitoring funding opportunities for the region and its partners to support the initiative's activities.

Collaborative Execution and Expertise:

- **National CSTCs:** Other Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres in the region will collaborate closely with ACE, contributing local knowledge, facilitating grassroots initiatives, and engaging community stakeholders in their respective areas.

Stakeholder Engagement and Community Involvement:

- **Stakeholder Engagement Specialist (within ACE):** Responsible for identifying and involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including local communities, tourism businesses, environmental NGOs, and cultural heritage organizations, ensuring their active participation and contribution to the initiative's activities.

Educational Program Development:

- **Sustainable Tourism Educators:** Experts in sustainable tourism and environmental conservation will be tasked with developing and implementing educational programs aimed at enhancing understanding and capacity among local stakeholders, tourists, and the broader community.

Support for Grassroots Initiatives:

- **Community Development Coordinators (across CSTCs):** Will identify, evaluate, and provide support to grassroots initiatives focused on sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, and cultural heritage preservation, ensuring these efforts are integrated into the broader "Green Tourism Initiatives."



Promotion and Marketing:

- **Marketing and Communications Team (ACE and CSTCs):** To develop and execute a comprehensive promotional strategy to raise awareness of the "Green Tourism Initiatives," highlight sustainable tourism practices, and showcase the Carpathian region's natural and cultural heritage.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting:

- **Evaluation Specialist (ACE):** To establish and implement a monitoring and evaluation framework that tracks the progress, impact, and effectiveness of the "Green Tourism Initiatives," facilitating continuous improvement and adaptation of strategies.

Legal and Administrative Support:

- **Legal Advisors (contracted by ACE):** To ensure all activities comply with relevant environmental, cultural heritage, and tourism-related regulations and standards, both locally and internationally.
- **Administrative Staff (ACE and CSTCs):** To provide logistical and administrative support for the initiative's activities, including event organization, stakeholder coordination, and financial management.

Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building:

- **Training Program Leads (CSTCs):** To organize and conduct workshops, seminars, and training sessions focused on sustainable tourism practices, environmental conservation, and cultural heritage preservation, enhancing the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders.

Cross-Functional Teams:

- Regular coordination meetings among ACE, CSTCs, and other key stakeholders to ensure synergy, share progress, and collaboratively address challenges encountered during the implementation of the "Green Tourism Initiatives."

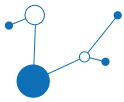
OBJECTIVE 3. INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE CARPATHIANS

Activity 3.1 Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products

Status: Action which will start during the project and end later

For the activity "Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products" under Objective 3 "Integrated Development and Competitiveness in the Carpathians," the aim is to enhance the competitiveness and social cohesion of the Carpathian region as a distinguished destination for sustainable tourism. This activity encompasses the development of the Carpathia Brand by the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion (ACE), the creation of cross-border tourism products, and the establishment of cross-border tourist information and promotion systems.

This comprehensive approach to developing cross-border sustainable tourism products, underpinned by the Carpathia Brand initiative and supported by robust information and promotion



systems, exemplifies a strategic effort to synergize the Carpathian region's competitiveness and social cohesion, making it a distinguished destination for sustainable tourism. The initiative's alignment with the SDGs, the Carpathian Convention's Tourism Protocol, particularly Article 9,⁵ and the Joint Strategy ensures its relevance and potential for significant positive impact on the region's sustainable tourism development.

Alignment with Strategic Documents and the Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): This initiative supports several SDGs, including SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 15 (Life on Land), by promoting sustainable tourism practices that conserve natural resources, minimize environmental impacts, and support local communities.

Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism: The initiative adheres to the Carpathian Convention's emphasis on sustainable tourism development with particular consideration of the Article 9 of the Tourism Protocol encouraging the cooperation on the development of the common Carpathian regional sustainable tourism services, products and packages, including the common Carpathian regional tourist brands, and facilitate cooperation of relevant stakeholders active in the Carpathian region in this respect, including tourism operators and other members of the tourism sector.

Alpine-Carpathian joint strategy: The activity is fully aligned with the Joint Strategy, which advocates for integrated and sustainable development, cross-border cooperation, and the enhancement of the region's competitiveness as a tourism destination. The development of cross-border tourism products and a cohesive brand identity for the Carpathians underpins the strategy's objectives of creating a unified and sustainable tourism offering that leverages the region's unique assets.

Tasks&Results: For the activity "Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products" under Objective 3 "Integrated Development and Competitiveness in the Carpathians," the tasks and expected results, with a focus on the international launch of the Carpathia Brand developed by ACE and the promotion and development of new cross-border tourism products using the potential of Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) with the support of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) and Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTC), can be outlined as follows:

Task 1: Regional Introduction of the Carpathia Brand

Objective: To initiate the unveiling of the Carpathia Brand within the seven Carpathian countries, fostering a collective identity for the Carpathian region that reflects its natural splendour, cultural richness, and dedication to sustainable tourism practices. This regional introduction aims to cultivate a strong, unified foundation for the brand, predicated on collaboration with regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) as a cornerstone of a cohesive marketing strategy.

Expected Result: A well-received regional launch that effectively engages the Carpathian countries, establishing the Carpathia Brand as a beacon of sustainable tourism within the region. This initial launch is anticipated to lay the groundwork for the brand, with its recognition and adoption supported by an integrated marketing and communications plan, collaboratively developed and potentially co-financed by the DMOs across the Carpathian countries. This strategy ensures that all promotional efforts are synchronized and aligned with the collective vision for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians, setting a precedent for future expansions and international campaigns.

⁵ <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/convention/protocols/protocol-on-sustainable-tourism/>



Task 2: Development of Cross-border Tourism Products

Objective: To create and enhance cross-border sustainable tourism products that leverage the unique offerings of the Carpathians, fostering collaboration among the countries in the region.

Expected Result: A portfolio of innovative cross-border tourism products that attract a diverse audience and encourage longer stays, contributing to the economic vitality of the region while adhering to sustainability principles.

Task 3: Implementation of Cross-border Tourist Information and Promotion Systems

Objective: To develop and implement integrated tourist information and promotion systems that facilitate the discovery and promotion of cross-border tourism offerings in the Carpathians.

Expected Result: An efficient and user-friendly information system, possibly digital, that increases the visibility of cross-border tourism products and simplifies the planning process for tourists, thereby enhancing the overall visitor experience.

Task 4: Utilization of CBFA Potential

Objective: To capitalize on the established Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) as platforms for developing and promoting cross-border tourism products, ensuring cohesive and sustainable development across the region.

Expected Result: Strengthened collaboration and resource sharing among CBFAs, leading to the co-creation of unique tourism experiences that highlight the interconnectedness and diversity of the Carpathian region.

Task 5: Engagement and Support from CSTP and CSTC

Objective: To engage the CSTP and CSTCs actively in the promotion and development of cross-border sustainable tourism products, ensuring alignment with regional sustainability goals and strategies.

Expected Result: Enhanced capacity and active involvement of CSTP and CSTCs in supporting cross-border initiatives, resulting in a well-coordinated approach to sustainable tourism development that leverages the strengths of each centre and the platform as a whole.

Task 6: Reporting and Evaluation

Objective: To document the process, outcomes, and impact of the cross-border sustainable tourism product initiatives, providing insights and best practices for future endeavours.

Expected Result: A comprehensive report that details the development and implementation of cross-border tourism products, the effectiveness of the Carpathia Brand strategy, and the contributions of CSTP and CSTCs, along with recommendations for continuous improvement and scalability of successful initiatives.

Tip for Implementation: In the context of Activity 3.1, focusing on the development of Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products, the Central Mountains (CM) project partners have identified two transboundary initiatives that warrant particular attention: the Wallachian Culture Trail and the Green Long-Distance Hiking/Biking Trail. These initiatives are not just tourism products but catalysts for regional integration, cultural preservation, and sustainable development.

The Wallachian Culture Trail offers a unique opportunity to delve into the rich tapestry of Walachian heritage that spans across several Carpathian countries. The potential of this trail to become a certified European cultural heritage trail underscores its significance in promoting cultural tourism that is respectful of traditions and sustainable in practice. It's essential to approach the development of this trail with a deep appreciation for the cultural nuances it represents, ensuring



that it serves as a bridge between communities, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Engaging local communities in the preservation and promotion of their heritage through this trail can lead to a more authentic and enriching experience for tourists, thereby elevating the trail's status on an international platform.

On the other hand, the Green Long-Distance Hiking/Biking Trail embodies the essence of sustainable tourism, appealing to the growing segment of eco-conscious travellers. Developing this trail requires a holistic approach that encompasses:

- Establishing a unified definition of long-distance trails that cater to diverse interests and abilities, from alpine and sub-alpine paths to mountain biking and cycling routes.
- Conducting a thorough evaluation of the existing infrastructure and services, addressing legal frameworks, trail management practices, resource allocation, and other pertinent challenges.
- Mapping the current trail network to identify gaps and opportunities, followed by the creation of a comprehensive master plan for each trail, ensuring alignment with sustainability principles.
- Formulating a collective vision for the management and development of alpine huts and other trail amenities, which includes setting specialized regulations and incentive policies that reflect the unique environmental and cultural contexts of the Carpathians.
- Crafting a tailored action plan for each participating country, rooted in the shared vision, to guide the implementation and management of these trails.

Both the Wallachian Culture Trail and the Green Long-Distance Hiking/Biking Trail have the potential to redefine cross-border tourism in the Carpathians. Their development should be grounded in collaborative efforts, leveraging the expertise and resources of all stakeholders involved. By embracing these initiatives, the CM project can contribute to a more connected, culturally rich, and sustainable tourism landscape in the Carpathian region.

Timeline: For the "Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products" initiative under Objective 3 "Integrated Development and Competitiveness in the Carpathians," the timeline will commence in the 3rd quarter of 2025 and extend through to the end of 2027. This period will focus on developing and implementing cross-border tourism products that enhance the region's appeal as a sustainable tourism destination, supported by the Carpathia Brand and robust information and promotion systems.

This timeline ensures a structured approach to establishing the Carpathian region as a distinguished sustainable tourism destination through the development of cross-border tourism products, supported by the cohesive Carpathia Brand and effective information and promotion systems. By engaging a wide range of stakeholders and leveraging the unique assets of the Carpathians, this initiative aims to contribute to the region's competitiveness, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Year 1: 2025

Q3 (July - September 2025)

Preparation and Strategic Planning:

- Conduct a comprehensive planning session to finalize the strategic direction for the regional Carpathia Brand launch and the development of cross-border tourism products.



- Initiate stakeholder engagement to identify partners and collaborators across the Carpathian region.

Q4 (October - December 2025):

Brand Development and Initial Product Conceptualization:

- Finalize the visual and communicative elements of the Carpathia Brand in collaboration with marketing and branding experts.
- Develop initial concepts for cross-border tourism products, focusing on unique experiences that leverage the natural and cultural assets of the Carpathians.

Year 2: 2026

Q1 (January - March 2026):

Carpathia Brand International Launch:

- Organize and execute a high-profile international launch event for the Carpathia Brand, aimed at gaining widespread recognition and establishing the brand's identity.
- Implement a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy to support the brand launch.

Q2 (April - June 2026):

Development and Testing of Cross-border Tourism Products:

- Further develop and refine the cross-border tourism product concepts, incorporating feedback from stakeholders and potential travellers.
- Initiate pilot projects to test the viability and appeal of selected tourism products.

Q3 (July - September 2026):

Implementation of Tourist Information and Promotion Systems:

- Develop and implement integrated tourist information and promotion systems, potentially through digital platforms, to facilitate access to cross-border tourism offerings.
- Ensure these systems are user-friendly and provide comprehensive information to enhance the visitor experience.

Q4 (October - December 2026):

Expansion and Diversification of Tourism Products:

- Evaluate the success of pilot tourism products and expand the portfolio to include a wider range of experiences.
- Focus on diversifying products to cater to different tourist segments and interests, emphasizing sustainability and cultural authenticity.

Year 3: 2027

Q1 (January - March 2027)

Leveraging CBFA Potential:

- Strengthen collaboration within and across Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs) to co-create unique tourism experiences that highlight the interconnectedness of the Carpathian region.



- Initiate projects that specifically utilize the CBFA framework for developing sustainable tourism products.

Q2 (April - June 2027):

CSTP and CSTC Engagement and Support:

- Engage Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) and Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTC) more actively in the promotion and further development of cross-border tourism products.
- Facilitate workshops and training sessions for CSTC members to align efforts with the Carpathia Brand and sustainability goals.

Q3 (July - September 2027):

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback Incorporation:

- Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation process to assess the impact of the tourism products and the effectiveness of the Carpathia Brand strategy.
- Collect feedback from tourists, local communities, and stakeholders to inform future product development and marketing strategies.

Q4 (October - December 2027):

Reporting and Strategic Review:

- Compile a comprehensive report detailing the development, implementation, and outcomes of the cross-border sustainable tourism products and the Carpathia Brand strategy.
- Conduct a strategic review session to reflect on the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, setting the stage for the continuous evolution and expansion of sustainable tourism initiatives in the Carpathians.

Resources: For the successful execution of Activity 3.1 "Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products," which does not have a pre-allocated budget within the CM project, a multifaceted approach to resource acquisition and collaboration is required. This initiative seeks to develop and promote sustainable tourism across the Carpathian region, enhancing its appeal as a sustainable tourism destination.

Diverse Funding Sources:

European Union Funds:

- Leveraging Interreg programs aimed at fostering cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation to support sustainable tourism development.
- Tapping into relevant EU funding mechanisms focused on regional development, cultural heritage conservation, and environmental sustainability.

National, Regional, and Local Programs:

- Seeking financial support from country-specific programs dedicated to tourism innovation, sustainable development, and rural prosperity.
- Exploring regional and local funding opportunities that align with the goals of enhancing tourism competitiveness and sustainability.

Grants and Philanthropic Contributions:

- Applying for grants from global and regional foundations focused on ecological conservation, cultural heritage, and sustainable community development.



- Engaging with philanthropic organizations and NGOs that have a vested interest in promoting sustainable tourism and cross-border cooperation.

Private Sector and Corporate Sponsorships:

- Establishing partnerships with tourism businesses, eco-friendly brands, and corporate CSR initiatives interested in investing in sustainable tourism projects.
- Collaboration with the hospitality sector, travel agencies, and other tourism stakeholders to co-fund and co-promote cross-border tourism products.

Collaborations and Partnerships:

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):

- Forming PPPs with local governments, tourism boards, and private sector entities to jointly develop and market sustainable tourism offerings.

Academic and Research Institutions:

- Collaborating with universities and research centres for data analysis, trend forecasting, and the development of innovative tourism products and services.

Community and Grassroots Organizations:

- Engaging with local communities, environmental groups, and cultural organizations to ensure that tourism development is inclusive and benefits local populations.

Human Resources and Expertise:

Dedicated Project Team:

- Assembling a project team with expertise in sustainable tourism, cross-border project management, marketing, and digital platform development.

External Consultants and Advisors:

- Hiring subject matter experts in areas such as sustainable business practices, eco-tourism, digital marketing, and legal frameworks for cross-border cooperation.

Technological and Material Resources:

Digital Infrastructure:

- Development of a sophisticated online platform and mobile applications to showcase cross-border tourism products, incorporating user-friendly interfaces, multilingual support, and interactive features.

Promotional Materials:

- Creation of high-quality marketing collateral, including brochures, videos, and digital content, to effectively communicate the unique value proposition of the Carpathian region's tourism offerings.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building:



Workshops and Training Programs:

- Organizing educational initiatives for local stakeholders to enhance their understanding of sustainable tourism practices and their role in promoting cross-border tourism.

Best Practice Exchange:

- Facilitating knowledge exchange platforms to share insights, success stories, and challenges among Carpathian region stakeholders, fostering a collaborative approach to sustainable tourism development.

By leveraging a broad spectrum of funding sources and fostering collaborations across various sectors, the "Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products" initiative aims to create a sustainable, competitive tourism offering that capitalizes on the unique assets of the Carpathian region. This comprehensive approach ensures the development of tourism products that not only attract visitors but also preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the area, contributing to the socio-economic well-being of local communities.

Responsibilities: For the "Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products" under Objective 3 "Integrated Development and Competitiveness in the Carpathians," responsibilities are distributed among various stakeholders to ensure the comprehensive development and promotion of sustainable tourism within the Carpathian region. These responsibilities are detailed as follows:

Lead Coordination and Brand Development:

- **Carpathian Euroregion (ACE):** As the main coordinator, ACE is responsible for overseeing the strategic development of the Carpathia Brand and ensuring its alignment with the initiative's goals. This includes brand conceptualization, marketing strategy development, and coordination of the international launch event. ACE will also spearhead the stakeholder engagement process to ensure broad participation and support across the Carpathian region.

Cross-border Product Development:

- **Participating Project Partners (PPs):** PPs from each country within the Carpathian region will take on the responsibility of developing specific cross-border tourism products that leverage the unique cultural and natural assets of their areas. They will work collaboratively to ensure these products are aligned with the Carpathia Brand and contribute to a cohesive regional tourism offering.

Information Systems and Digital Platforms:

- **IT and Digital Marketing Teams (within PPs and ACE):** Dedicated teams will be tasked with developing and implementing integrated tourist information and promotion systems. This includes the creation of a user-friendly digital platform that showcases the cross-border tourism products and facilitates easy access for potential visitors.

Utilization of Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs):

- **CBFA Coordinators and Local Stakeholders:** Coordinators of established CBFAs will work closely with local stakeholders, including tourism businesses, community leaders, and conservation groups, to develop and promote tourism products that are not only attractive but also sustainable and beneficial to local communities.



Support and Alignment with CSTP and CSTCs:

- **CSTP and CSTC Representatives:** Representatives from the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) and Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs) will play a supporting role in aligning the cross-border tourism products with broader sustainability goals and strategies. They will facilitate knowledge exchange, provide best practice guidance, and assist in the promotion of the initiative.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting:

- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Specialists (ACE):** M&E specialists will be responsible for establishing a framework to track the progress, outcomes, and impacts of the cross-border sustainable tourism product initiatives. This includes data collection, analysis, and the preparation of comprehensive reports that detail achievements and lessons learned.

Legal and Compliance:

- **Legal Advisors (contracted by ACE):** To ensure all activities, especially those involving cross-border collaboration, comply with international, EU, and national regulations and standards, legal advisors will provide necessary guidance and oversight.

Funding and Resource Mobilization:

- **Fundraising and Grant Writing Teams (ACE and PPs):** These teams will identify and pursue diverse funding sources to support the development and long-term sustainability of the cross-border tourism products. This includes drafting proposals for EU funds, national programs, and engaging with private sector sponsors.

Outreach and Community Engagement:

- **Community Engagement Specialists (within PPs):** Specialists will facilitate the involvement of local communities in the development and promotion of tourism products, ensuring that initiatives are inclusive and bring tangible benefits to local populations.

VI. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for the objectives and activities outlined, it's crucial to utilize a mix of performance, result, quantitative, and qualitative indicators. Incorporating these indicators into the monitoring and evaluation framework will provide a comprehensive overview of the progress and effectiveness of each activity. Regular reviews and updates to the framework will ensure it remains aligned with project goals and adapts to evolving challenges and opportunities within the Carpathian region's sustainable tourism development.

OBJECTIVE 1. INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION IN THE CARPATHIANS

Strengthen cross-border and transnational structures for collaboration to address shared challenges in sustainable tourism development.

Activity 1.1 Designing and Testing a New Cooperation System within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP).



<p>Performance Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of strategic planning sessions conducted with CSTP Poland, CSTP Romania and CSTP Slovakia.
<p>Result Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive Work Programme Development: The CSTP will introduce a detailed Work Programme encompassing initiatives for crafting and promoting a unified Carpathian brand. • Integration of Impact Indicators: A Set of Indicators will be embedded within the CSTP's operational framework to assess tourism's varied impacts in the Carpathians, aligning with the Tourism Protocol of the Carpathian Convention. • Strengthened National Committees: CSTC Poland, Romania, and Slovakia will be fortified through the addition of expert groups dedicated to brand development and impact analysis, promoting a comprehensive approach to these emerging priorities. • Enhanced Cooperation Platforms: The existing collaborative platforms will be expanded to include forums and working groups specifically focused on Carpathian brand cultivation and the implementation of tourism impact indicators, encouraging purposeful dialogue and joint efforts. • Expanded Initiative Promotion: Efforts will be made to attract new participants to Carpathian Convention activities, particularly emphasizing the incorporation of branding and impact assessment tasks. • Established Endorsement of New Activities: The extended activities of the CSTP will gain formal acknowledgment and support from key entities, ensuring that the endeavours to create a common Carpathian brand and apply impact indicators receive validation and backing on both regional and global stages.
<p>Quantitative Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of stakeholders actively engaged in CSTP activities. • Number of expert groups established within national committees for brand development and impact measurement.
<p>Qualitative Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and relevance of initiatives for the creation and promotion of a common Carpathian brand. • Stakeholder satisfaction with the participatory governance structures and thematic exchange platforms.

<p>Activity 1.2 Development of Strategy and Operational Model for Cross-Border Functional Areas</p>	
<p>Performance Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the CSTP website and Database on Sustainable Tourism updates. • Number of new features and interactive elements integrated into the platforms.
<p>Result Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User engagement rates with the updated platforms. • Increase in the volume of sustainable tourism case studies and best practices shared.

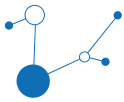


Quantitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of visits to the CSTP website and Database post-re-launch. • Number of stakeholder contributions to the database and website content.
Qualitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User feedback on the usability and usefulness of the updated platforms. • Quality of new sustainable tourism resources and information available.

Activity 1.3 CBFAs goes digital	
Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development milestones for the mobile and web application. • Number of stakeholders involved in content contribution and platform testing.
Result Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of the mobile and web application for CBFAs. • Usage statistics of the application by locals and visitors.
Quantitative Indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of active users of the web application. • Volume of content available on the platform, including maps, events, and local attractions.
Qualitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User satisfaction with the application's features and functionalities. • Effectiveness of the application in promoting sustainable tourism activities.

Activity 1.4 Carpathian Tourism Observatory	
Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of collaborative agreements with statistical offices, universities, and tourism organizations. • Number of research projects and case studies initiated.
Result Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalization of the integrated digital platform for data analysis. • Number of workshops and training sessions conducted for local entrepreneurs and stakeholders.
Quantitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume of tourism data collected and analysed. • Number of educational materials and best practices shared.
Qualitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder feedback on the usefulness of research findings and data analysis. • Impact of capacity-building programs on local sustainable tourism practices.

OBJECTIVE 2. GREEN CARPATHIANS	
Ensure the conservation and sustainable management of the Carpathian natural heritage.	
Activity 2.1 Green Tourism Initiatives	
Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of educational programs in sustainable tourism developed and implemented.

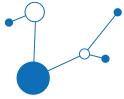


	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of grassroots initiatives supported in the area of eco-tourism and cultural heritage conservation.
Result Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness and knowledge among local stakeholders and visitors regarding sustainable tourism and conservation practices, as measured through pre- and post-educational program surveys. • Tangible outcomes from supported grassroots initiatives, such as the number of conservation projects completed or the extent of area conserved/restored.
Quantitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants in educational programs and workshops. • Amount of funding or resources allocated to support grassroots initiatives.
Qualitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from participants on the effectiveness and applicability of the knowledge gained from educational programs. • Case studies documenting the success stories and challenges of grassroots initiatives, showcasing their impact on sustainable tourism and conservation efforts.

OBJECTIVE 3. INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE CARPATHIANS
This objective aims to synergize the competitiveness and social cohesion of the Carpathian region as a distinguished destination for sustainable tourism.

Activity 3.1 Cross-border Sustainable Tourism Products

Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful completion of the international launch event for the Carpathia Brand. • Number of cross-border sustainable tourism products developed and implemented.
Result Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and recall rate of the Carpathia Brand among target audiences. • Increase in tourist numbers and length of stay due to the new cross-border tourism products.
Quantitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume of promotional materials distributed and marketing reach achieved for the Carpathia Brand and tourism products. • Number of tourists availing the cross-border tourism products.
Qualitative Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder and visitor feedback on the uniqueness and appeal of the Carpathia Brand and cross-border tourism offerings. • Impact of tourism products on local communities and the environment, assessing sustainability and social cohesion.



VII. RISKS AND CONTINGENCIES

In developing the Action Plan for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians, it's imperative to construct a comprehensive contingency plan. This plan serves as a safeguard, ensuring that the progress and implementation of our action plan remain uninterrupted despite potential adversities.

VII.1 Predictable Risks Identification and Risk Prioritization

1. **Environmental Impact Concerns:** High probability and high impact. Environmental sustainability is core to the Action Plan ethos, and any negative impact could undermine the project's legitimacy and lead to significant opposition.
2. **Stakeholder Opposition:** High probability and medium impact. While manageable, opposition can slow down progress and requires effective communication and engagement strategies.
3. **Funding Instability:** Medium probability and high impact. Financial resources are crucial for the project's execution; thus, any instability here can have significant repercussions.
4. **Regulatory and Policy Changes:** Medium probability and medium impact. Such changes are somewhat predictable and can be navigated with proactive planning and adaptability.
5. **Technological Challenges:** Low probability and medium impact. With proper testing and training, technological adoption issues can be mitigated, but they still present a potential barrier to efficiency and user engagement.
6. **Climate Variability:** Medium probability and high impact. Climate impacts can be unpredictable and significantly affect outdoor activities, requiring flexible contingency planning.
7. **Cultural and Social Misalignments:** Low probability and high impact. Extensive stakeholder engagement and cultural sensitivity in the planning phase should minimize this risk, but any oversight could lead to significant backlash.
8. **Health and Safety Risks:** High probability and high impact. Given the ongoing global health context and the nature of outdoor tourism, this area requires stringent measures and constant vigilance.

These prioritized risks guide where to focus mitigation strategies and resource allocation to ensure the project's resilience and adaptability to potential challenges.

VII.2 Emergency Resources Inventory and Solution Development

By meticulously inventorying emergency resources and developing targeted solutions, the project can navigate the challenges of environmental impact concerns, stakeholder opposition, funding instability, and regulatory changes, ensuring the sustainable and successful development of tourism in the Carpathians. Our focus has been specifically on risks categorized as **high and medium probability** with **high and medium impact**, ensuring that our strategies are well-aligned to address the most significant and likely challenges faced by the project. This targeted approach allows for the efficient allocation of resources and efforts towards mitigating risks that have the greatest potential to affect the project's objectives and outcomes.



Environmental Impact Concerns	
Emergency Resources Inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Impact Assessment Experts: Engaging specialists to conduct thorough environmental impact assessments before implementing any project activities to ensure minimal ecological disruption. • Sustainable Technology Solutions: Investment in green technologies and sustainable practices to mitigate adverse environmental impacts. • Community Engagement Teams: Dedicated personnel to facilitate continuous dialogue with local communities about environmental protection measures and adjustments.
Solution Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Adaptive Management Practices: Develop a framework for continuous monitoring of environmental impacts, allowing for real-time adjustments to project activities based on ecological feedback. • Enhance Environmental Education: Launch educational programs for both tourists and locals to foster environmental stewardship, emphasizing the importance of preserving the Central Mountains' natural beauty. • Establish Environmental Safeguards: Integrate strict environmental safeguards into all project activities, including setting limits on visitor numbers in sensitive areas and promoting off-season tourism to reduce pressure on natural resources.

Stakeholder Opposition	
Emergency Resources Inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Liaison Officers: Appoint representatives from within the community to act as mediators and translators of project goals to their peers. • Public Relations Specialists: Experts in handling public communications and crafting messages that resonate with various stakeholder groups. • Conflict Resolution Experts: Professionals skilled in mediation to resolve conflicts that may arise between stakeholders.
Solution Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement: Implement a structured engagement process that includes regular public meetings, feedback sessions, and transparent reporting on project progress. • Co-creation Workshops: Organize workshops where stakeholders can contribute ideas and express concerns, ensuring their voices are heard and considered in project planning. • Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms: Develop mechanisms to ensure that the local communities directly benefit from the project, such as through job creation, infrastructure improvements, or revenue-sharing agreements.



Funding Instability	
Emergency Resources Inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Risk Management Team: A team dedicated to monitoring funding streams and identifying potential financial risks early on. • Alternative Funding Sources: A compiled list of potential alternative funding sources, including grants, private investors, and crowdfunding platforms. • Cost-Effective Practices: Guidelines and training on cost-effective project management to stretch existing funds further without compromising project outcomes.
Solution Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify Funding Portfolio: Expand the project's funding base by tapping into multiple sources, reducing reliance on a single stream that may dry up. • Implement Scalable Project Components: Design project components to be scalable, allowing for adjustment based on available funding without halting progress entirely. • Foster Public-Private Partnerships: Seek partnerships with private entities interested in sustainable tourism, creating win-win situations that can provide additional financial stability.

Regulatory and Policy Changes	
Emergency Resources Inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Policy Advisory Team: Legal experts who can provide insights into potential regulatory changes and their implications for the project. • Policy Monitoring Tools: Systems to keep track of relevant policy developments at local, national, and EU levels. • Advocacy and Lobbying Groups: Partnerships with groups that can advocate for favourable policies or help navigate regulatory changes.
Solution Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive Regulatory Engagement: Establish a dialogue with policymakers to stay informed about upcoming changes and advocate for regulations that support sustainable tourism. • Regulatory Flexibility: Build flexibility into project plans to quickly adapt to new regulations without significant disruptions. • Policy Influence Strategy: Develop a strategy to influence policy-making processes, ensuring that the interests of the project and its stakeholders are considered in regulatory frameworks.



To enhance the contingency plan and ensure a comprehensive approach to managing the identified risks, the following proposals can be integrated into the existing framework:

Evaluation of Proposed Solutions:

- **Performance Metrics:** Establish clear performance metrics for each proposed solution, enabling quantifiable assessment of their effectiveness in real-time.
- **Pilot Testing:** Before full-scale implementation, pilot test solutions in controlled environments to assess their practicality and impact, allowing for fine-tuning.
- **Stakeholder Feedback Loop:** Incorporate a structured feedback mechanism from stakeholders at each stage of solution implementation, ensuring their insights contribute to ongoing evaluation and adjustment.

VIII. REVIEW AND ADJUSTMENT

The dynamic nature of the Central Mountains (CM) WP1 action plans, particularly concerning activities slated for completion within the CM project's timeline, such as the CM WP2 pilot actions, necessitates a flexible approach to management and implementation. This flexibility is vital in responding adeptly to evolving circumstances and unforeseen challenges that may arise during the execution of the action plans and their corresponding contingency plans.

Establishing Procedures for Plan Modification

It is crucial for the action plan Lead PPs, in collaboration with all involved PPs, to formulate commonly agreed procedures for the periodic review, adjustment, or modification of their respective plans. This collaborative approach ensures that all parties have a stake in the plan's success and are prepared to adapt to changes constructively.

Triggers for Adjustments

The need for plan adjustments can stem from various factors:

- Regular monitoring and evaluation might reveal deviations from expected progress, necessitating recalibrations to realign with project objectives.
- Emergent problems, whether from internal project management issues or external factors, could threaten adherence to established timelines or the successful implementation of specific activities. Such scenarios might demand immediate reevaluation and adjustment of the plans.

Flexible and Adaptive Management

Adapting to change is not solely about addressing challenges; it also encompasses seizing new opportunities that could enhance the project's outcomes beyond initial expectations. Adjustments can lead to improved quality results, the discovery of unforeseen opportunities, and the enhancement of the project's positive impacts.

However, it's also important to recognize situations where an immediate response may not be the most prudent course of action. In some cases, patience and a measured approach can be more beneficial, particularly if the issue at hand might resolve itself or if the proposed corrective actions could lead to disproportionate resource expenditure with minimal impact.



Responsive Action

Despite the need for cautious consideration, certain situations will necessitate swift action to mitigate risks that could significantly impact the project's timeline or the successful execution of activities. In such cases, the predefined procedures for plan adjustment must be activated promptly to ensure the project remains on track and achieves its intended objectives.

Emphasis on Operational Flexibility

This section emphasizes that the review, adjustment, or modification processes are applicable only to the operational aspects of the CM WP1 action plans and their corresponding contingency plans. This focus ensures that the project retains its strategic direction while allowing for the necessary operational flexibility to navigate the complexities of project implementation in a dynamic and unpredictable environment.

IX. COMMUNICATION PLAN

In the pursuit of fostering sustainable tourism development within the Central Mountains, the collaboration between project partners (PPs) and engagement with key stakeholders stands as a cornerstone of our collective endeavour. The Central Mountains Action Plan (CM AP), as outlined in the CM Application Form (AF), delineates our commitment not only to the environmental and socio-economic upliftment of the Alps-Carpathian regions but also to the participatory approach that underpins our strategic initiatives. Our communication objectives and strategies are crafted to reflect this ethos, ensuring that every voice is heard, every contribution valued, and every milestone shared.

As we embark on this journey, our communication plan serves as both a roadmap and a covenant, guiding our interactions, ensuring inclusivity, and reminding us of the collective responsibility we bear towards the majestic Mountains of Central Europe. Through effective communication, we aspire to weave a tapestry of cooperation that is rich with diverse perspectives, united in purpose, and resilient in the face of challenges.

IX.1 Internal Communication Objective

To ensure that all Project Partners (PPs) and key stakeholders remain well-informed and actively engaged throughout the project's lifecycle. This internal coherence is vital for maintaining the momentum of our joint efforts, enabling efficient decision-making, and fostering a culture of transparency and mutual support.

Channels and Contact Persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a centralized communication hub (e.g., a digital platform) where updates, documents, and messages can be shared efficiently among PPs and key stakeholders. Designate specific contact persons within each team who are responsible for communication tasks, ensuring a clear line of contact and accountability.
Frequency of Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule regular updates (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly) for routine project progress and immediate communication for urgent issues. Conduct monthly virtual meetings for comprehensive updates and quarterly in-person meetings for strategic reviews and planning.
Content of Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates on project milestones, changes in schedules, and progress in specific action areas.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of best practices, lessons learned, and success stories to foster a learning environment.
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each PP responsible for specific actions must report internally on progress, challenges, and needs, ensuring transparency and collective problem-solving. • The designated internal communication coordinator will oversee the flow of information, ensuring consistency and timeliness.

IX. 2 External Communication Objectives

Stakeholder and Youth Involvement.

By involving stakeholders and the youth from the Alps-Carpathian Mountains in the development of our joint strategy and action plans, we aim to not only enhance the legitimacy of our initiatives but also harness the vibrant energy and innovative ideas of the younger generation. This involvement is crucial for building a future that resonates with the aspirations of those who will inherit these mountain areas.

Collaboration and Empowerment.

The challenges faced by the Mountains of Central Europe are not confined by geographical boundaries or sectoral silos. They demand a collective response, one that transcends individual capabilities and unites diverse stakeholders towards a common goal. Our communication strategy is designed to facilitate this connectivity, fostering collaboration that empowers every participant to contribute effectively to our shared objectives.

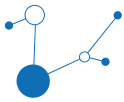
Awareness and Information Dissemination.

The essence of sustainable development lies not just in the actions we take but also in the awareness we spread. Local and regional public authorities, NGOs, civil society organizations, private entities, and the general public are integral to the sustainable transformation of mountain areas in Central Europe. Through targeted communication, we aim to inform these groups about the importance of sustainable development, the challenges at hand, and the roles they can play in this grand vision.

Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the project's commitment to sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians and its positive impact on local communities, economies, and the environment. • Highlight collaborative efforts, innovation, and best practices emerging from the project.
Target Audiences and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Communities and Businesses: Focus on the direct benefits such as economic opportunities, infrastructural improvements, and enhanced tourism services. • Policy Makers and Regulatory Bodies: Showcase the alignment with regional development goals, environmental conservation efforts, and policy impacts.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Public and Media: Highlight the project's contributions to sustainable tourism, conservation efforts, and community engagement.
Communication Channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a mix of digital (websites, social media, newsletters) and traditional media (press releases, public presentations) tailored to the preferences of each stakeholder group. • Leverage local events, workshops, and conferences for direct engagement and dissemination of information.
Frequency and Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for regular updates to keep stakeholders informed about ongoing activities and milestones achieved. • Time-sensitive information related to events, policy changes, or significant project milestones should be communicated promptly.
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each PP responsible for specific actions must also take charge of communicating these actions externally, ensuring that the relevant stakeholder groups are informed and engaged. • The CM Project Communication leader will oversee the external communication strategy, ensuring that messages are consistent, timely, and aligned with project goals.
Resources and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate resources for professional communication materials and activities (e.g., content creation, event organization). • Ensure team members involved in communication have the necessary skills, providing training if needed.
Monitoring and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement mechanisms to gather feedback from both internal and external stakeholders to continuously improve communication strategies and address any issues promptly. • This comprehensive approach ensures that all participants are well-informed, engaged, and actively contributing to the project's success, fostering a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative environment.



X. CONCLUSION

In encapsulating the essence of this Action Plan, we journey back through its foundational pillars: the delineation of goals, strategic and operational objectives, all carefully curated to steer the sustainable tourism landscape within the Carpathian region towards a more interconnected and resilient future. The plan, in its entirety, is a testament to our commitment to tangible outcomes, particularly spotlighting the immediate actionable steps under CM WP2. These pilot actions, meticulously planned within the project's timeline, are not mere activities but milestones signifying progress towards our collective vision.

The resonance of this Action Plan with the broader framework of the "Alpine-Carpathian Joint Strategy for Community-Led Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas in Central Europe" cannot be overstated. It is a harmonious echo of the concerted efforts to forge a sustainable path forward, underscored by the alignment with key legal acts and strategic policy documents. This coherence is not accidental but a deliberate design to ensure that our localized actions contribute to a grander narrative of regional transformation.

At the heart of this plan lies the recognition of the transformative potential it holds for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians. By championing cross-border governance mechanisms and promotional strategies, it aspires to transcend traditional boundaries, fostering a collaborative ecosystem where shared goals and mutual benefits guide our journey. This Action Plan is poised to become a catalyst for change, leveraging transboundary collaboration as a powerful tool for development and promotion, thereby redefining the contours of sustainable tourism in the region.

As we draw this narrative to a close, it is pertinent to acknowledge the myriad contributions that have brought this vision to life. From stakeholders who shared their insights to partners who believed in the cause, this Action Plan is a mosaic of collective wisdom and shared aspirations. It stands as a beacon of hope, signalling a new dawn for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians, powered by the unwavering resolve to nurture and protect the natural and cultural heritage that defines us.

In conclusion, this Action Plan is more than a document; it is a declaration of our shared commitment to the Carpathians, a region that not only captivates with its natural beauty but also inspires with its potential for sustainable prosperity. Let this plan be the lodestar that guides our actions, reminding us that together, we are architects of a sustainable future.