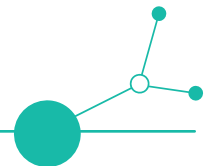


# O1.1.

## Pilot actions for testing the ICTr cycling product and business model



Version 1

10/2025





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# 01.1.

## Pilot action for testing the ICTr cycling product and business model



## 1. About the document 01.1

This document is developed in the frame of Work Package 1 (Developing innovative ICTr cycling product and participatory digital tourism business model) of the Innovative participatory sustainable business model for cycling along the Iron Curtain Trail (ICTr-CE, CE0100401) project, funded by the INTERREG Central Europe programme. The aim of this document 01.1. *“Pilot action for testing the ICTr cycling product and business model”* is to give a comprehensive overview about the pilot action(s) implemented in the framework of Work Package 1. Based on the application form, this document has to contain an overview about:

- Testing the ICTr cycling product and business model in 3 cross-border pilot areas in selected sections of ICTr: Center (AT-CZ-SK), South (SI-HR-HU) and North (PL-DE).
- Evaluation of the participation of the SME tourism service providers and other target groups involved
- Testing a specified 10-stages linear product, based on Explorer Tours with real customers in the pilot areas Center (AT-CZ-SK) and South (SI-HR-HU)
- Testing digital tools and booking system for sophisticated product access of the innovative ICTr cycling product
- Preparation of final guideline for other regions to implement bookable cycling products in CE.

It is important to note at this point that this report for 01.1 *“Pilot Action for Testing the ICTR cycling product and business model”* in various sections overlaps significantly, both technically and in terms of content, with 02.2 *“Pilot Action of Climate Neutral ICTr Travel by Testing the Environmental Footprint Calculator and Cycling Product Impact Measurement System”*. This applies primarily to the chosen methodology (see Chapter 2) and secondly to the course of the Preparatory Phase (see Chapter 3).

The reason for this lies in the integrative design of the innovative ICTr cycling product. It is the firm goal and central cornerstone of the Innovative ICT Cycling Product to link the bookable offers for cycling tours along EuroVelo 13 with the innovative tools demonstrating their sustainability. These tools include the online Carbon Footprint Calculator Carmacal and the specially developed *Impact Measurement System (IMS)* created as part of this project.

The innovation of this project simply lies in the fact that, for the first time, a comprehensive and evidence-based design for sustainable cycling tourism is being developed and implemented. This full integration of cycling travel offers with the digital tools has therefore required a largely identical approach in the selection of methodology and in the preparatory phase.

Where the methodology and approach in the preparatory phase differ substantially in content, these distinctions are explicitly highlighted in the respective chapters.

From the authors' perspective, this introductory explanation is necessary to clarify the fundamental character of this output document: where it is appropriate and meaningful, certain sections of this report are largely identical to those of 02.2. In addition, those sections focusing on the specific objectives of 01.1 are covered as comprehensively as possible and highlighted separately.



In order to comply with the requirement specified in the application form, the O1.1 document has been elaborated in a way to include all information which reflecting the above-described criteria.

This means, a chapter is dedicated to summarizing the methodology of the pilot action activity - how the pilot actions in each region were implemented, the shared responsibilities and tasks among the partners, and what was the timeline of the pilot actions. The detailed guideline which contains the methodology of the pilot action implementation was elaborated in “D2.4.1 - Design of the pilot testing of the environmental footprint calculator and impact measurement system” document together with the LP Westpannon.

After reaching the common understanding about the frameworks of the pilot actions, the ICTr-CE partners stepped into the next phase of the pilot action implementation, which was the preparatory phase - during this phase, several guiding documents, templates, and other important supporting documents were elaborated by the activity leader or work package leader partners.

Of course, the most important phase of the pilot action activity was the testing phase, where together with the ICTr-CE partners and ICTr-CE stakeholders (such as SMEs, tourism boards, Associated Strategic Partners) we tested both the selected (environmental footprint calculator: Carmacal and the tailor-made excel tool) and developed (Impact Measurement System) innovative tools. This chapter presents how the testing procedure was initiated and what kind of steps were taken to implement the pilot action activity successfully in each pilot region.

Finally, the document provides for all Regions a “Step by step implementation guide for bookable ICTr cycling products” for Regions that would like to implement bookable cycling trail products and to be able to learn from the described processes, so it will serve as a guide for the development of integral and bookable cycling tourism products within the CE.

The document contains altogether 3 annexes, namely:

- Annex 1: Detailed questions of the Experience Design Evaluation Form
- Annex 2: Summary form to be completed by the project partner responsible for the output document, including information on the innovative aspects of the output, target group involvement, transferability, sustainability, and potential lasting effects.
- Annex 2: This document ensures the transparency and to ensure the high-quality standards regarding the quality of output document.



## 2. About the methodology

As already outlined in Chapter two of this document, the methodology for the testing phase of the bookable offers along EuroVelo 13 in the selected pilot regions corresponds to that applied in the testing phase of the innovative tools Carmacal and IMS for the evidence-based demonstration of the sustainability of these offers. Due to the fully integrated design of the innovative **ICTr Cycling Product** - which, to our knowledge, represents a true innovation for bookable cycling trails - this approach has been a useful consequence.

Before examining this integrated methodology in detail, the basic design of the ICT cycling product, as well as the Participatory ICT Business Model to be tested, should be explained.

The ICTr cycling products are being developed for three selected pilot regions:

- **Pilot Region North** (Poland and Germany),
- **Pilot Region Central** (Czech Republic, Austria, and Slovakia), and
- **Pilot Region South** (Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia).

In collaboration with all regional project partners, product development was carried out in the following work steps (each of which is described in more detail later on in this chapter):

- **Desk Research** (collection of all relevant data, including on-site research by project partners where necessary)
- **Field Trips** (in-depth evaluation of the collected data on site by selected experts of the regional partners)
- **Guided Explorer Tours** (testing and evaluation of the cycling products and the business model by real guests)
- **Travel Report** (final documentation and evaluation of the results for their practical application in the trail booking system and on the official EV13 landing page).

The entire testing phase focused on these four integrated main modules, with this document covering the first two and document O2.2 covering the last two:

1. ICTr Cycling Product
2. ICTr Business Model
3. CO2 Carbon Footprint calculator Carmacal
4. IMS - Impact Measurement System

### Design of the ICTr Cycling Product

For each pilot region, a section of EuroVelo 13 comprising at least ten daily stages is worked out in detail. In addition to the minimum requirement of ten stages, a transnational character of the trail section is a prerequisite.

The elaboration of these sections through the previously mentioned steps—Desk Research and Field Trips—provides the profound basis for further product development. It is important to note that the data collected must also be usable in the future for all cyclists travelling self-organized (i.e. without booking through the Booking Centre or another tour operator) along EuroVelo 13, too.

This aspect is particularly relevant because, according to the Application Form, bookable offers and the implementation of a Booking Centre are not foreseen for the Pilot Region North. The chosen approach ensures that valuable results are still achieved within the project framework for the northern region, while also creating the basis for scaling the outcomes from the Central and Southern pilot regions to the North.



The results of the Desk Research and Field Trips were utilised to develop bookable offers for the Central and Southern pilot regions. According to the Application Form, these cycling offers must each cover the entire area of the pilot region (i.e. at least ten daily stages). Consequently, three bookable cycling offers must be developed per pilot region.

Based on the experience of the Work Package Leader PP5 Trail Angels in product development for bookable outdoor activities, the following portfolio was created for both pilot regions:

- One comprehensive bookable offer, covering all ten daily stages and thus representing the pilot region as a complete product.
- Two additional bookable offers, each covering five daily stages that complement each other regionally. The configuration of five cycling days, six overnight stays, and seven holiday days reflects the most in-demand format in the market. These offers aim to attract as many cycling tourists as possible to EuroVelo 13.

The following product architecture was chosen for the design:

- Focus of the product design on the needs of self-guided cyclists, as they represent by far the largest target group.
- Consideration of the travel motives of self-guided cyclists, who seek to combine personal freedom with service, safety, and sustainability—reflecting a current megatrend in cycling and hiking tourism.
- Development of the experience design from the outset with the aim of achieving the lowest possible ecological footprint of travellers while generating the highest possible socio-economic impact in the regions along EuroVelo 13. This step is implemented in integration with the previously mentioned online tools for measuring and presenting the scale of sustainability of the developed travel products.

Reflecting on the above-mentioned product architecture for the ICTr cycling products, one key point should be emphasised: the process of integrated product development in combination with the implementation of the sustainability online tools represents a genuine innovation in the travel market. The knowledge and experience gained within this project, coupled with feedback loops and insights for improving the infrastructure along the Iron Curtain Trail in the selected pilot regions, are therefore of major value on its own.

But considering these aspects, it was logical to conduct the testing of the cycling products not with self-guided cyclists but in the form of guided small-group tours. These were organised and implemented by the tour operators selected within this project, who will subsequently act as the official Booking Centres for EuroVelo 13 in the Central and Southern pilot areas. The decision to test the Explorer Tours with guided small groups of real guests was based on two main reasons:

- Firstly, participants in a guided group can focus more effectively on the primary objective of the Guided Explorer Tour - the testing of the product design and the applicability of the online tools - rather than dealing with potential logistical challenges on their own.
- Secondly, the experience gained from guided groups could also pave the way for offering guided group tours on EuroVelo 13 in the near future, thereby expanding the sustainable cycling travel portfolio in a meaningful way.

### ICTr Business Model

The design and implementation of the ICTr business model primarily correspond to Activity 1.4 of the Application Form, “Outlining the innovative sustainable business and digital solutions for ICTr.” In line with this, the following cornerstones for the business model were developed and subsequently integrated:



- Ensuring regional based and self-steered management of the business model within each pilot region by implementing regional tour operators acting as the respective official ICTr Booking Centres
- Integration of the ICTr business model into the European EuroVelo network through the establishment of a EuroVelo 13 Alliance (see also Activity 1.5, “Defining the ICTr Alliance - sustainable ICTr organisational framework”), thereby ensuring that the interests of regional stakeholders are respected while leveraging the expertise of the European Cyclists’ Federation for EuroVelo 13
- Design of the business model based on the following principles:
  - Participatory and inclusive - participation in the business model is open to all motivated and interested local stakeholders;
  - Fair and transparent - the structure of the business model and the distribution of the generated value are based on fairness and transparency;
  - Priority for local SMEs and regional stakeholders - especially through the integration of suitable regional service providers (accommodation, mobility providers, cycling guides, etc.);
  - Sustainable and regenerative - the business model is oriented towards sustainability and resilience, focusing on the organisation and implementation of sustainable cycling trips. Moreover, it includes a regenerative component through the integration of a Good Impact Programme (presented in Output 2.3). A defined contribution from the booking revenues of the Booking Centre will be allocated to this programme;
  - Innovative and digital - through the integrated design of the ICTr cycling products, which feature both easy product access for cyclists and the online tools for evidence-based sustainability measuring (Carmacal carbon footprint calculator and Impact Measurement System), the business model incorporates a highly innovative concept. Furthermore, the business model and its sustainable cycling products are implemented exclusively within the online Trail Info, Booking, and Management System - [bookyourtrail.com](https://bookyourtrail.com), developed specifically for this project. The integration of the above-mentioned tools (Carmacal and IMS) into the booking system represents an additional innovation.

### Timeline of the pilot action implementation

1. May 2025 - Desk Research activity: Identification and mapping of stakeholders along with the collection of relevant data on tourism service providers, route conditions, POIs, etc.
2. June 2025 - Development of the tour script: Partners used the provided tour script template to prepare the script for the planned field trip, based on the outcomes of the desk research.
3. June 2025 - Online meetings organized by PP2 Crost and PP12 OETE introduced partners to the innovative tools developed in the ICTr-CE project and demonstrated how they operate.
4. July 2025 - Following the online meetings on innovative tools, partners started using them to complete the carbon footprint calculator and IMS system for the field trip, drawing on both desk research and direct contributions from the participating service providers.
5. June/July 2025 - Implementation of the field trips: The ICTr-CE partners organized and carried out a five-day, cross-border cycling tour, which was tested using the WP1 evaluation with special focus on validating the results of the desk research. This process was supervised by PP5 Trail Angels to ensure the quality of the experience design.





6. July 2025 - Evaluation of the pilot action activities: basically 3 evaluation forms were filled in:
  - a. WP1 business model and cycling product: the experience design cycling product
  - b. WP2 innovative tool: Carbon footprint calculator
  - c. WP2 innovative tool: Impact Measurement System
7. August 2025 - Preparation of the field trip reports: In accordance with the provided guidelines, three field trip reports (one for each pilot region) were jointly prepared by the respective regional partners of the ICTr-CE project.
8. September/October 2025 - Guided explorer tour: A guided explorer tour was organized by selected booking centers in the Pilot Areas South and Center - the direct feedback of the travellers (guests) with focus on the ICTr product and testing the innovative tools as well as the direct feedback of the selected booking centers was included into the WP1 experience design evaluation form. Under the supervision of PP5 Trail Angels and with support from the ICTr-CE partners, the process ensured a high-quality experience design.
9. October 2025 - Elaboration of the Travel Report: This document provides a comprehensive summary of the desk research, field trip, and guided explorer tour activities, offering an overall overview of these tasks at the pilot region level.
10. October 2025 - Preparing the O1.1 and O2.2: The work package leaders, PP5 Trail Angels and LP1 Westpannon, are responsible for preparing and elaborating the O1.1 and O2.2 project documents.



### 3. Preparatory phase

D2.4.1, developed by Trail Angels in collaboration with WP2 Leader Westpannon and completed by the end of PR4, served as a practical guide for the pilot action methodology, outlining partner tasks, responsibilities, and timelines in a transparent way.

To ensure clarity and a shared understanding among all partners, PP5 Trail Angels, together with LP Westpannon and the host PP7 City of Gdansk, organized the 7th Steering Committee and Partner Meeting on 13-14 May 2025. The meeting focused primarily on the pilot action activities planned in Work Packages 1 and 2. During the session, the implementation plan for the pilot actions was presented, offering a comprehensive overview of the approach, partner responsibilities, detailed tasks, and timeline. The Q&A session proved particularly valuable for both partners and pilot action leaders.

Based on a shared agreement among all partners, supporting documents were prepared and distributed to the ICTr-CE partnership to guide the pilot activities. These included evaluation forms to collect feedback on the ICTr product, the Carmacal Carbon Footprint Calculator and the Impact Measurement System (IMS).

#### **Prepared documents for reference:**

- **Desk research template + joint excel sheet (per pilot area in Google Drive)**

The desk research template offered a structured framework for collecting all inputs relevant to WP1, focused on developing the innovative ICTr cycling product and participatory digital tourism business model. The Excel sheet captured information on service providers, relevant stakeholders (e.g., tour operators), points of interest, general route conditions, and cycling-friendly infrastructure, all documented at the daily stage level. By uploading the sheet to Google Drive, partners were able to collaboratively complete a single joint document, supporting a co-creation process.

- **Field trip Guideline - Organizational tasks**

LP Westpannon prepared a field trip guideline to assist partners in organizing field trips, specifying participant tasks and partner responsibilities. The document outlined all essential steps for successful implementation. Once partners reached a joint agreement on the itinerary and programme, they were able to organize and conduct the tours efficiently. Supervised by PP5 Trail Angels and LP Westpannon, this document ensures the quality of the experience design and the outcome of the digital tools.

- **Travel Report Template + Guideline**

To support the pilot actions, PP5 Trail Angels prepared a template and short guideline for the Travel Report. The document provides an overview of desk research and field trips in all three pilot areas, as well as the results of the guided explorer tours in the Central and South regions. It forms the basis for producing the pilot action outputs O1.1 and O2.2.

- **Preparation for Pilot Area Meetings (Guideline Documents for Carmacal and IMS)**

Guideline documents for the WP2 tools were prepared by PP2 Crost and PP12 OETE to support online meetings. The Carmacal guideline covers user operations, while the IMS guideline details indicators and data collection procedures. These documents were distributed to all partners in advance of the meetings by LP Westpannon



- **Evaluation Forms and Questionnaires (CO2 and IMS)**

Evaluation forms for the Carmacal/CO2 tool (PP2 Crost) and the IMS (PP12 OETE) were prepared prior to the online meetings in each pilot region. The forms were digitized via Google Forms and distributed to ICTr-CE partners after field trip calculations. They served as the main instruments for stakeholder feedback and as primary inputs for the preparation of O2.2 in Work Package 2

- **ICTr Experience design evaluation form**

The ICTr Experience Design Evaluation Form was developed to assess the Experience Design of the ICTr product. The form was prepared prior to the online meetings conducted in each pilot region. Following its development, the form was digitized using Google Forms to facilitate data collection and ease of distribution. After the completion of the field trips, the digital forms were shared with the ICTr-CE partners for completion. With the support of this survey, we collected primary feedback by the partners about the quality of services, quality of route condition and ICT-related attractions. These inputs will be crucial in order to develop the ICTr bookable packages together with the selected booking centers. The collected responses served as the primary source of stakeholder feedback and provided essential input for Deliverable O1.1 within Work Package 1.



## 4. Testing the phase and results of the pilot areas in WP1

### a. Results of the Desk Research activity

#### **Desk Research in the Northern Pilot Area**

The desk research in the Northern Pilot Area was a transboundary effort carried out jointly by one German partner (OeTE) and two Polish partners (West Pomerania Region and the City of Gdańsk). Most businesses in the area are small, often family-run companies that cater to a wide range of customers, including cycling tourists. However, they generally lack the time and resources to follow complex CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction policies, calculate emissions, or provide additional operational details—particularly during the high season. Despite these limitations, all visited places expressed openness to adopting eco-friendly solutions and services.

Some service providers are unaware of their region's connection to the Iron Curtain and therefore do not use this heritage in promoting their products or services. It is important to emphasize and promote the historical aspects of the EuroVelo 13 - Iron Curtain Trail (ICTr) at the local and regional levels to enhance product visibility and availability. Along the route, there are only a few mobility service providers and tour operators offering dedicated services for cyclists.

In the Points of Interest (POIs) section, the route features numerous tourist attractions, both natural and cultural. Many POIs are related to military history, primarily from World War II and the Cold War, making them highly relevant for promoting the ICTr. However, a significant number of cultural attractions—particularly those located in smaller towns and villages—operate only during the summer vacation season, resulting in limited access during other times of the year.

The Route Condition section indicates that, as the most popular cycling route in Poland—and also highly popular in Germany—the trail is generally well-maintained and in good condition. Most sections are separated from car traffic and paved with asphalt, and the route is almost fully signposted, making navigation easy. It offers a relatively flat surface and numerous rest areas, making it suitable for cyclists of all skill levels and any type of bicycle. However, due to its popularity, the trail can become very crowded during the summer months, especially in coastal towns and villages. It can also be challenging on windy days because of its coastal location.

Overall, the desk research provided a clear overview of the ICTr Northern section and highlighted both its strong potential and key challenges for further development.

#### **Desk Research in Center Pilot Area:**

The desk report was prepared by two partners. Ekopolis Foundation covered the Slovak sections and was responsible for overall coordination, and Partnerství o.p.s prepared the Czech and Austrian parts.

Mapping service providers proved challenging, as several long route segments lack adequate accommodation and dining options—particularly certified Cyclists Welcome providers, which would be highly desirable. Many providers were not deeply interested in participating in the survey, as they were busy during the tourist season and not motivated for calls or meetings. The only incentive offered was potential inclusion in a future Iron Curtain Trail (ICTr) product, which was not sufficient to ensure strong cooperation.



Obtaining data for Carmacal and IMS was also difficult. The staff responsible for communication - marketing managers, receptionists -, often lacked the necessary technical or operational knowledge and perceived the task as additional work. Nevertheless, thanks to our experience and reputation, we succeeded in including suitable providers and expect their willingness to continue cooperating in the future.

In the Points of Interest (POIs) section, the focus was mainly on places related to the Iron Curtain, as this is the defining theme of the ICTr. More general POIs, such as architectural landmarks or local museums, were included only when particularly relevant, since information about them is already widely available. Overall, there is a significant number of POIs connected to the Iron Curtain, providing strong potential to shape the product specifically around this theme.

The Route Condition section was of particular importance. The project team has detailed knowledge of the routes in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, allowing for comprehensive input. However, some Austrian segments could only be updated following the field trip. The first two stages of the route require special attention when selecting appropriate paths. During the field trip, several sections were identified as technically demanding or having steep elevation, making them unsuitable for general cycling tourism products—except when using e-MTB bicycles and clearly informing users about the level of difficulty.

Overall, the desk research provided a solid overview of the ICTr Central section and served as a valuable and well-integrated component of the ICTr project.

## **Desk Research in the Southern Pilot Area**

During the desk research phase, it became evident that a significant challenge along the Southern section of the Iron Curtain Trail (ICTr) is the poor infrastructure, particularly in the Croatian-Hungarian border region. In the small settlements located in Hungary's Baranya border area, the number of accommodations, restaurants, and other service providers is very limited.

When contacting the few available service providers by phone, we assessed their willingness to cooperate in the development of the ICTr as a tourism product. During these telephone conversations, all contacted providers expressed interest and enthusiasm for participating in the ICTr initiative. However, approximately 70% did not respond to follow-up data requests sent by email. Consequently, the relevant section of the desk research table for the Croatian-Hungarian route was completed using information available online—primarily from the service providers' websites and from the phone interviews conducted.

This lack of infrastructure also presents practical problems for travellers. If a bicycle breaks down or gets a flat tire, there are almost no repair options along the route. Moreover, refreshment opportunities are limited, as shops are few and far between in these sparsely populated areas.

The main foreign language spoken by service providers is English, though Croatian is also commonly used due to proximity to the border, while German is not widely spoken. All service providers along the route maintain some form of online presence, but only about half use digital booking systems. This reflects the small scale of most businesses in the region, which host relatively few guests and therefore do not require online booking tools.

Mapping the route also presents challenges. Certain sections are not displayed on Google Maps, and no street view is available for verification.



Despite the generally positive attitude expressed during phone conversations, many service providers shared that similar initiatives in the past had led to negative experiences, making them reluctant to engage out of concern for potential obligations. The lack of awareness about international projects and the limited experience of service providers in cross-border cooperation have led to a degree of isolation within the region. Additionally, there is no transfer service available in the area. Only general package delivery companies operate there, and they do not offer same-day delivery, which can be challenging for less experienced cyclists in need of logistical support.

The situation is more positive in terms of Points of Interest (POIs). The region offers a wide range of attractions, including country houses, castles, wine regions, historic towns, and waterfront areas—ensuring that every visitor can find destinations suited to their interests.

## b. Report on the Field Trip activity

Following the field trips carried out by regional partners, an ICTr experience design evaluation form was developed to assess the experience design of the ICTr product. The form was prepared prior to the online meetings in each pilot region, digitized using Google Forms, and distributed to ICTr-CE partners following the field trips.

Regional partners evaluated the Experience Design across several key categories.

- **Services:** This section focused on accommodation and transport services. Partners assessed satisfaction with accommodations (cleanliness, comfort, meals, and communication), availability of cycling-friendly or sustainable certifications, and related services such as bike storage or rentals. They also reported on transport services, including shuttle or luggage transfers, use of electric vehicles, and English communication.
- **Points of Interest (POIs):** Participants evaluated their visits to Iron Curtain Trail-related sights and other local attractions. Feedback covered satisfaction with the experience, accessibility, presence of educational or marketing materials, and alignment with ICTr principles such as sustainability and cultural heritage. Restaurants visited during the trips were also reviewed, with attention to vegetarian and vegan options and overall satisfaction with meals.
- **Infrastructure:** This section assessed the cycling route and related infrastructure. Respondents rated the rideability and difficulty of daily stages, condition of route surfaces, and the proportion of paved versus unpaved segments. Additional questions addressed the presence and accuracy of EuroVelo 13 signage and availability of cycling-friendly infrastructure such as rest areas, e-bike chargers, and repair stations.

The questions to the ICTr Experience design see the ANNEX 1 Questions to ICTr Experience design.

**Conclusion:** All partners completed the ICR Experience Design Evaluation Form, and the data gathered largely confirmed the findings of the Desk research. This consensus confirms the reliability of the Desk research analyses and validates the overall reliability of the evaluation process.

## Field Trip in North Pilot Area:

**Date and location of field trip:** 01.07.2025 - 06.07.2025 between Stralsund and Kolobrzeg

The North Pilot Area field trip, conducted from 1 to 7 July 2025, aimed to test and validate selected stages of the Iron Curtain Trail (EuroVelo 13), focusing on route quality, infrastructure, services, and thematic Points



of Interest (POIs). The transboundary route followed a five-stage plan from Stralsund (Germany) to Kołobrzeg (Poland), coordinated by PP12 OETE in cooperation with PP7 WPZ and PP8 Gdańsk.

The field trip was based on joint desk research and a detailed Tour Script, which outlined daily routes, accommodations, service providers, and key stops. All logistical elements were organized in advance, and a WhatsApp group was established for real-time coordination during the trip.

Each day, participants carried out practical evaluations of the route, infrastructure, and POIs, and completed structured Experience Design evaluation forms (via Google Forms) assessing services, cycling conditions, and the thematic relevance of Iron Curtain-related sites. Daily narrative reports and route condition data were also collected and compiled into the field trip report.

Additionally, the environmental and socio-economic aspects of the pilot were measured using two project tools: the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint calculator (CARMACAL) to assess the environmental impact of travel and service consumption, and the Impact Measurement System (IMS) to evaluate the broader effects of the route experience on tourism, sustainability, and service quality.

Prior to the trip, online training sessions were organized to familiarize all Pilot Area partners with the use of these tools. After the trip, each partner submitted their completed evaluation forms, and the results were compiled to identify key findings and recommendations.

This report summarizes the full field trip implementation and evaluation process for the North Pilot Area and contributes to the overall Travel Report Document developed for the ICTr-CE project.

#### General experiences:

- Section 12: Stralsund to Greifswald: General experience was good, but users pointed out several areas for improvement with ICTR signage and quality of surface.
- S11: Greifswald to Wolgast: Mostly very good experience thanks to dominating smooth surfaces and well-marked trails.
- S10: Wolgast to Swinoujście: Rather good but challenging experience due to elevation changes and mixed surfaces.
- S9: Swinoujście to Dziwnów: Mixed: POI's on the route were interesting and relevant for the ICTr theme but the quality of the route and its signage left much to be desired.
- S8: Dziwnów to Kołobrzeg: General good experience thanks to, mostly good quality of surfaces, flat terrain, good rest places and interesting POI's, but some of the sections were crowded.

#### Weaknesses or what needs improvement:

- S12: Participants noted moderate rideability in some sections due to mixed surfaces: cobblestones, fine gravel, and coarse gravel made parts of the route less comfortable, even on mountain bikes; no ICTr signs.
- S11: After Peenemünde, the surface changed to loose gravel or concrete plates, which made riding less comfortable; no EV13 signs at Greifswald.
- S10: A lot of mixed surfaces of the route and challenging elevation changes. Some signs were missing. Limited bike storage in hotel.
- S9: Overall, the stage was physically demanding due to sandy sections and hilly terrain. Participants noted that deep sand made riding impossible in parts. Some crossings or signposts were missing.





- S8: The section included changing surfaces: paved sections, gravel stretches, and occasional cobblestones. Some sections, especially shared with pedestrians, can be crowded.

Strengths or what has already worked well:

- S12: Generally good signage along a route.
- S11: Sections at the start with smooth surfaces and well-marked trails. The Iron Curtain-related sites were interesting.
- S10: POI's were understandable and interesting, with good educational panels. The sites were accessible and well-integrated into the trail. Coastal POIs were appreciated for combining nature with cultural storytelling.
- S9: POI's on the route were interesting and relevant for the ICTr theme.
- S8: The ride was mostly flat and comfortable. The group highlighted good quality multiple rest places. POI's were found interesting and accessible, with good educational signage. The Monument of Poland Marrying the Sea was a symbolic final highlight.

Recommendations for further developments:

- S12: Consistence of signage for EV 13 and quality of the surfaces should be improved at some sections.
- S11: As above
- S10: As above.
- S9: The trail surface and signage could be improved for smoother cycling.
- S8: The trail surface between Pogorzelica and Mrzezyno is manageable, but it could be improved in the future.

Most accommodations require to work on increasing the satisfaction of cycling tourists (visible cycling-friendly certification, limited or inconvenient spaces for bike storage, not providing dinner for guests and lack of language skills).

## Field Trip in Center Pilot Area:

**Date and location of field trip: 12.07.2025 - 16.07.2025 between Lipno and Drosendorf**

The field trip for the Central Pilot Area took place from 12 to 16 July 2025, covering the cycle route EuroVelo 13 - Iron Curtain Trail along the Czech-Austrian border from Frymburk/Lipno n.Vlt. to Drosendorf (5 stages from 10). The trip was carried out according to the agreed Tour Script and Desk Research, with daily route testing, evaluation of services, and visits to key POIs.

Each day, the route conditions, missing signage, and rideability were documented, and the Experience Design evaluation forms were used to capture feedback on services, infrastructure, and Iron Curtain-related sites. The Field Trip Report for the Pilot Region Central presents dialy summary with key finding from the evaluations, supported by photos and short tables. These tables have been summarized as a condensed overall result table in this Travel Report, as presented above.

The five-day field trip covered a total of 257 km on EuroVelo 13 and took in the Czechia and Austria. Although the field trip was carried out by two cycling experts with decades of experience in cycle tourism, it provided a wealth of experience for the further development of EuroVelo 13 in the Central pilot region.

On the one hand, the field trip highlighted the tremendous potential and attractiveness of EuroVelo 13 in the Central pilot region. This section in particular is able to impressively convey to cyclists both the history of the Iron Curtain and the scenic beauty and cultural richness of this region.





On the other hand, the results of the field trip can be summarized by saying that there are still many challenges ahead for the further development of EuroVelo 13 in this section. For individual sections, this includes improving the cycle route, from improving the surface of the route and avoiding busy roads to optimizing EuroVelo-related signage. In addition, the tourist infrastructure in individual sections still has room for improvement in terms of both quality and quantity. This means that even more accommodation providers need to be inspired by the EuroVelo 13 concept and, above all, improve their services for cyclists.

Another challenge will be to work with the selected EuroVelo 13 booking center to integrate the tools for Carbon Footprint (Carmacal) and sustainability measurement (IMS) into the cycling products and, above all, to improve the associated sustainability indicators step by step. The qualitative improvement of public transport and the increase in the sustainability performance of the service partners involved will certainly be a longer-term challenge.

- Infrastructure:

Some sections are in need of improvement in terms of road surface.

Some sections have to be avoided, because they are public roads with heavy traffic.

Some sections require improved signage, in particular there is often a lack of signage relating to EuroVelo 13.

- Service providers:

It is necessary to integrate more service providers into the EuroVelo 13 concept.

The quality of service for long-distance cyclists must be improved in accommodation facilities.

The quality of information for long-distance cyclists must be improved with regard to the opening hours of attractions and access to services.

The user-friendliness of the digital tools (Carmacal, IMS) was OK but needs to be optimized for use in the booking centre.

- Strengths:

Experience value: the section of EuroVelo 13 covered in the field trip is very attractive in terms of landscape and offers numerous cultural sights. In particular, the diverse facilities relating to the history of the Iron Curtain offer concrete added value for long-distance cyclists.

Service providers: the good quality of the regional food and the hospitality of the service providers tested are particularly noteworthy.

Capacity building: testing Carmacal and IMS improved the environmental and socio-economic assessment skills of the project partners. The Excel version of Carmacal was considered simpler and more user-friendly.

- Key recommendations (Top 5):

1. Improve the quality of the route, by improving the road surface in various sections and avoiding busy traffic roads
2. Improve and implement standardized signage for these sections, communicating EuroVelo 13
3. Increase the quantity of service providers involved in the EuroVelo 13 concept as well as improve the quality of services they provide
4. Implement an online information tool to improve the quality of information for long-distance cyclists on EuroVelo 13



5. Consistent integration of sustainability tools (Carmacal and IMS) to position and profile EuroVelo 13 as a sustainable long-distance cycle route.

## Field Trip in South Pilot Area

**Date and location of field trip: 20.07.2025 - 24.07.2025 between Szentgotthárd (HU) and Durdevac (HR).**

The five-day trip along EuroVelo 13 - Iron Curtain Trail (Szentgotthárd-Durđevac) offered a rich mix of cycling, cultural experiences, and sustainability testing. On the approximately 244 km route spanning three countries, participants were able to discover diverse landscapes, historical heritage sites (e.g. Iron Curtain Museum, Lovászi Bunker, Naive Art Gallery) and authentic gastronomy. Cycling was generally enjoyable, with moderate physical exertion, balanced stages, and e-bikes positively influencing comfort. Swimming in the lake and shaded rest areas contributed to the participants' well-being. The usability of Carmacal and IMS was also tested in practice, providing valuable learning opportunities for future sustainable tourism planning.

Weaknesses or areas for improvement:

- infrastructure deficiencies: several road sections (especially in Croatia) were gravelly or poorly maintained; missing or demolished bridges resulted in unexpected detours
- availability of services: limited access to drinking water, bicycle repair points, and shops made some sections less comfortable and risky in case of breakdowns
- traffic safety: while traffic was low on most sections, some Croatian sections had fast vehicles and agricultural machinery, which reduced safety
- digital tools: Carmacal caused registration/login problems, did not offer an "electric car" option, and required time-consuming data entry. IMS occasionally reported technical errors (e.g., "500 server error") and offered limited filtering and display options.

Strengths and what already worked well:

- route experience: participants unanimously rated the cycling conditions highly (average score 4.6-4.8), even though in several places the road was not of the best quality and there were also some busier sections. Overall, however, they appreciated the well-marked, mostly paved roads, picturesque landscapes, and low-traffic sections.
- cultural and natural stops: there was very positive feedback on museums, monuments, towers, river confluences, and local heritage sites. Swimming opportunities (Kistolmács, Šoderica, Cingi Lingi lakes) were particularly appreciated.
- accommodation/catering: hotels and restaurants provided high-quality local food (including vegetarian options), secure bike storage, and charging stations. Tour guides and hosts were friendly and knowledgeable.
- Capacity building: Testing Carmacal and IMS improved the environmental and socio-economic assessment skills of the project partners. The Excel version of Carmacal was considered simpler and more user-friendly.

Recommendations:

- Infrastructure development: Invest in consistent asphalt pavement, reliable bridges, and wider bike lanes where possible. Expand shaded rest areas with drinking water.
- Cycling services: Encourage local service providers to install bike repair stations and provide bike-friendly facilities (secure storage, charging, tool kits).



- Sustainability tools: Develop Carmacal by adding electric car option, simplifying data entry, and resolving login issues. For IMS, provide filtering, sorting and visual improvements.
- Safety: Improving route planning to avoid busy sections and raising awareness of cycle tourism among local drivers.
- Tourism product development: Continue to combine cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and gastronomy into cross-border packages to reinforce the unique selling points of the Iron Curtain Trail.



## c. Report on Testing the ICTr Cycling Product

The most essential element in the impact chain of a long-distance cycling route - one that aims to generate a tangible and sustainable benefit for the regions it traverses - is undoubtedly the bookable product. This bookable product forms the foundation for the further implementation of a sustainable and resilient business model for the trail (see also the “Report on Testing the ICTr Business Model”).

Developing a coherent product architecture for a transnational long-distance cycling route such as the EuroVelo 13 already represents a major challenge. Borders must be crossed, and the products must be designed in such a way that customers perceive them as a single, unified product. Based on our experience, this is a key prerequisite for customer accessibility and, consequently, for the success of the overall product portfolio.

The ambition and challenge for the Innovative ICTr Cycling Product is even higher. It always has been a joint project goal to which the partners committed, to enhance the cycling product with measurable and evidence-based climate neutrality and sustainability. This represents a deliberate decision to operate at the forefront of innovation within the tourism sector.

Following an integrated approach, product development was undertaken holistically: the experience design and the implementation of a coherent service chain for the cycling products were closely coordinated with the integration of the selected online tools (CO<sub>2</sub> Footprint Calculator Carmacal and Impact Measurement System IMS). It is therefore important to view Output Report 2.2 in direct connection with this current report.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the integration of such a complex and innovative product design requires ongoing and intensive support for the selected booking centers, as they will ultimately be responsible, beyond the official project end, for ensuring that this pioneering product concept is implemented consistently in their daily booking operations.

### Approach to Product Development

The approach to product development was described in detail in the Methodology chapter and is briefly recalled here:

1. **Desk Research** - Collection of all relevant data by regional project partners, supported by selective on-site surveys.
2. **Field Trip** - Verification of the data collected during desk research through a complete in-depth on-site inspection of the respective trail sections by experts from the regional project partners.
3. **Product Development** - Creation of a bookable package covering at least five daily stages in the pilot regions Central and South, to be tested with real guests and organised by the selected tour operators, who will later act as booking centers.
4. **Guided Explorer Tours** - Execution of guided group tours with real guests in order to test the developed products under practical conditions.
5. **Evaluation and Product Refinement** - Based on the results of the guided field trips, the bookable products are finalised and have to be scaled (three bookable products have to be developed for each pilot region).



This report focuses on the results of the Guided Explorer Tours, which were conducted specifically to test the initial bookable offers for the ICTr Cycling Product.

During the Guided Explorer Tours, the tested bookable products had to meet the following requirements:

- Coverage of at least five daily stages within the respective pilot region
- Transnational design (each tour had to take place in at least two partner countries)
- Integration and testing of the planned experience design and route
- Integration and testing of the digital tools (see Output Report 2.2)

## Implementation of the Explorer Tours

### Guided Explorer Tour - Pilot Region Central

Organised and implemented by **AktivBike Radreisen** (Booking Centre Pilot Region Central) in coordination with project partner **Trail Angels**.

- **Date:** 15. - 19.09.2025
- **Number of participants:** 5
- **Trail section covered:** Covered trail section: Hardegg (AT) - Bratislava (SK)

#### Experience Design:

- Day 1: Hardegg (AT) - Znajm (CZ)
- Day 2: Znajm (CZ) - Retz (AT)
- Day 3: Retz (AT) - Laa an der Thaya (AT)
- Day 4: 18.09. Valtice (CZ) - Grub an der March (AT)
- Day 5: Grub an der March (AT) - Bratislava (SK)
- 







## Guided Explorer Tour - Pilot Region South

Organised and implemented by **Helian NaTour Ltd.** (Booking Centre Pilot Region South) in coordination with project partner **CROST**.

- **Date:** 3-7 October 2025
- **Number of participants:** 6
- **Trail section covered:** Đurđevac (HR) - Mohács (HU)
- 

### Experience Design:

- Day 1: Đurđevac (HR) - Koprivnica (HR)
- Day 2: Koprivnica (HR) - Barcs (HU)
- Day 3: Barcs (HU) - Szaporca (HU)
- Day 4: Szaporca (HU) - Villány (HU)
- Day 5: Villány (HU) - Mohács (HU)





## Testing Results

During the Guided Explorer Tours, participating guests evaluated three thematic areas using structured questionnaires:

### 1. Cycling Infrastructure and Division into Daily Stages

- General accessibility of the long-distance cycling route
- Quality of signage and signposting, with particular reference to the EuroVelo 13
- Condition of the cycling path (especially surface quality) and evaluation of different trail types (designated cycle paths, public roads, unpaved sections, etc.)
- Physical and technical requirements of the daily stages for guests

### 2. Integrated Experience Design for the Bookable Product

- Quality of accommodations and food
- Specific services for cyclists (e.g. lockable bike storage, battery charging facilities for e-bikes, etc.)
- Attractiveness of the accompanying programme (with special reference to Iron Curtain historical sites, as well as cultural and culinary experiences)
- Overall satisfaction with the programme

### 3. User-Friendliness of the Integrated Online Tools

(see Output Report 2.2 for details)



## Summary of Results

The evaluation results of the Guided Explorer Tours in the two pilot regions differ only slightly, with the results in the southern pilot region tending to be somewhat more critical. In summary, the following findings can be highlighted:

- **Signage and Signposting:** These still require improvement, particularly in the southern pilot region. A concerted effort will be necessary, as high-quality signage and waymarking are of course important for effectively positioning EuroVelo 13 as a leading cycling product.
- **Trail Condition:** The condition of the cycle paths remains inconsistent in both pilot regions. Perfectly developed cycle path sections alternate with stretches on public roads and, at times, unpaved surfaces. Gradual improvement of trail quality, along with better signage, represents a major future requirement for the development of EV13.
- **Stage Division:** The division into daily stages was rated positively overall, indicating that a wide range of potential guests, in terms of fitness and technical ability, can be targeted with the developed cycling products.
- **Service Quality:** Service quality was generally rated as satisfactory in both regions. Identified shortcomings mainly concern the availability of specific services for cyclists. However, it should be noted that these deficiencies were more than compensated by the hospitality and willingness of hosts to provide individualised guest care. This is a key finding, as it demonstrates the high potential and motivation of local SMEs involved in the project.
- **Experience Design:** The integrated experience design received the highest ratings in both Guided Explorer Tours. Guests were particularly impressed by the landscapes, the memorials of the former Iron Curtain, and the included cultural and culinary programme. This confirms both the potential of EuroVelo 13 in the pilot regions and the professional competence of the selected tour operators in organising and delivering experiential cycling tours. This provides a strong foundation for establishing effective and professional booking centers in both pilot regions.

## Final Evaluation

It may be surprising that guest evaluations of the bookable products during the Guided Explorer Tours were, overall, more positive than the findings from the preliminary analyses conducted by selected experts of the responsible project partners during desk research and field trips. This can be attributed to the fact that the partners naturally focused more on infrastructural deficiencies, whereas the guests experienced a highly coherent and enjoyable experience design.

This observation also provides the basis for the final summary assessment:

- EuroVelo 13 demonstrates high tourism potential in the tested pilot regions.
- The developed product design for experiencing EuroVelo 13 in the pilot regions has proven effective.
- The selected booking centres have demonstrated competence and reliability in organising and implementing the Guided Explorer Tours.
- The testing results enable refinement, optimisation, and finalisation of the product portfolio for both pilot regions, making it accessible to guests through the booking centres.
- Certain deficiencies in signage, trail conditions, and specific service quality have been identified. Addressing these will require a long-term process, but they do not constitute a significant obstacle to implementing the ICTr Cycling Product.





## d. Report on Testing the ICTr Business Model

As explained in Chapter 2 (*Methodology*), the ICTr Business Model is based on several key pillars designed to enable the sustainable and participatory management of EuroVelo 13 within the individual pilot regions. The purpose of the testing phase was to evaluate this design, to complement and improve the business model with the findings of the evaluation, and ultimately to finalise it. This process aims not only to ensure the model's sustainability and resilience, but also to strengthen its innovative character, its practical applicability, and its scalability to further sections of EuroVelo 13.

The results of this evaluation are presented below in condensed form, structured according to the following main areas:

1. Regional-based and self-steered management
2. Integration into the European EuroVelo network
3. Local stakeholder and SME orientation
4. Integration of digital tools and booking system

The testing phase of the ICTr Business Model was primarily based on the work **steps Desk Research, Field Trips and the Guided Explorer tours**. These three steps, carried out with great dedication by the regional project partners and the official ICTr booking center, provided valuable insights into whether—and to what extent—the planned ICTr Business Model could be implemented in the individual pilot regions.

The results of the Desk Research and Field Trips led, in certain areas, to additional work steps, such as the public tender for the selection of regional Booking Centres. These subsequent steps are presented in more detail below.

### 1. Regional-based and self-steered management

A business model for a long-distance cycling trail can only be sustainable if its management is regionally anchored. In other words, only when local stakeholders take responsibility and actively shape and steer project management and product development can the development of the trail be positively influenced in the interests of the involved regions.

In contrast, there are many examples where large tour operators dominate booking activities on long-distance trails without regional participation. This results in externally controlled systems that prevent the value creation from being optimised for the benefit of the regions themselves.

In the present project, therefore, ensuring regionally managed steering and control was one of the key tasks in the design of the business model.

To achieve this goal, it was necessary to establish an **official ICTr Booking Centre for EuroVelo 13 in both pilot areas (Central and South) in the form of motivated tour operators, and subsequently to train them through a capacity building programme**.

The first step, through Desk Research and Field Trips, was to identify the potential and motivation of interested tour operators to participate in the ICTr Business Model.

Following this screening, which revealed promising interest, each pilot region issued a public tender for the respective ICTr Booking Centre based on a defined set of selection criteria.

On this basis, the following tour operators were selected as the official ICTr Booking Centres:



- **Pilot Region Central:** Aktivbike Radreisen, 8344 Bad Gleichenberg, Bernreither Straße 45, Austria
- **Pilot Region South:** Naj Tura d.o.o., Maistrova 2A, SI-1234 Mengeš, Slovenia

Unfortunately, after the selection process, the agency Naj Tura unexpectedly withdrew its participation from the project. As there were three applicants for the ICTr Booking Centre, we jointly decided to award the contract to the second-placed applicant in order to achieve our business model objectives:

- **Pilot Region South:** Helian NaTour Kft., 7634 Pécs, Hungary

Helian NaTour has agreed to be trained as an official ICTr Booking Centre and to operate the guided explorer tour.

It should be noted that this process caused some delays, and that a few pending test results will be included in the final report. Despite these delays, it will still be possible to achieve all planned project objectives by the end of the project and to ensure the sustainable management of EuroVelo 13 beyond its completion.

In summary, the testing phase for the ICTr Business Model in relation to securing regional management can be assessed as successful. During the testing period, qualified and motivated tour operators were found for each pilot region who are committed to actively contributing to the objectives of the ICTr project.

## 2. Integration into the European EuroVelo network

The second cornerstone of the ICTr Business Model concerns the linkage of regional business models with the **European EuroVelo network**. This aims both to strengthen regional management and identity and to take advantage of the benefits of a European framework.

For this component, the project partner **European Cyclists' Federation (ECF)** developed a management structure in the form of the ICTr Alliance under Activity 1.5.

Although this pillar was not directly included in the present testing phase, it is important to emphasise that the successful implementation of the ICTr Alliance will be crucial for the long-term viability of the business model. Only if the project and its business model are firmly embedded within a broader European context will it be possible to generate sufficient demand and, consequently, to achieve tangible, sustainable impact in the regions along EuroVelo 13.

## 3. Local stakeholder and SME orientation

This third cornerstone is also essential for the success of the ICTr Business Model. It represents the participation and inclusion of as many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and regional stakeholders as possible within the model.

Accordingly, the design of the business model placed great emphasis on its participatory and inclusive nature, the fair distribution of value creation, and the transparent management of financial flows.

During the Desk Research and Field Trips, the motivation of SMEs along EuroVelo 13 in all three pilot regions was examined. In the first stage, businesses were asked about their general willingness to cooperate with a Booking Centre for EuroVelo 13. In cases of positive feedback, additional criteria were evaluated to assess their suitability as partner enterprises within the ICTr Business Model.



These included basic indicators such as:

- willingness to accept guests for one-night stays,
- compliance with essential requirements for cycle tourists (e.g. secure bike storage, e-bike charging facilities, etc.),
- and the possession of recognised sustainability or cycling-friendly accommodation certifications.

In summary, the testing results show that in all three pilot regions enough potential partner businesses interested in participating in the ICTr Business Model and cooperating with a Booking Centre were identified. This partner pool is promising, as it was possible to find at least one potential service provider in every stage location along the selected trail sections of EuroVelo 13 (ten daily stages per pilot region).

Thus, the fundamental implementation of the ICTr Business Model in all pilot regions can be considered feasible. However, it must also be noted that, in coordination with the selected Booking Centres, significant work remains to be done to improve overall quality along EuroVelo 13.

This primarily involves:

- strengthening the service chain in certain sections where only one or two service providers are currently available, and
- improving overall service quality.
- 

Deficiencies in service quality were observed not only during the Field Trips but also during the Guided Explorer Tours. This result was, however, expected—since in a project of this size and complexity, it would be unrealistic to assume that a fully developed, high-quality service chain already exists at the outset.

#### 4. Integration of digital tools and booking system

The fourth and final cornerstone concerns the integration of digital tools and the booking system for EuroVelo 13 into the ICTr Business Model.

Regarding the test results for the integration of the online *tools (Carmacal CO<sub>2</sub> Footprint Calculator and Impact Measurement System - IMS)*, reference is made to O2.2

A modern business model for a long-distance cycling trail naturally requires the integration of an online booking and management system. For this purpose, the proven *Trail Info, Booking, and Management System - bookyourtrail.com* was provided.

During the testing phase, again based on the Desk Research and Field Trips, the digital skills of potential partner businesses were evaluated, as well as their willingness to work with a digital booking and management system within the business model.

The overall results were **positive**. Although there are significant differences in the level of digitalisation among potential service providers -ranging from basic skills (e.g. responding to e-Mail inquiries) to advanced multi-channel management - none of the potential partners refused future cooperation with the online system, particularly with support and coordination from the respective Booking Centre.

Therefore, the fourth cornerstone of the planned ICTr Business Model can also be considered feasible. Nevertheless, as with the previous point, further development work will be necessary to strengthen the digital skills of Booking Centres and partner businesses.



## Final evaluation of testing results

Based on the four presented pillars of the ICTr Business Model, and reflecting on the results for the tested pillars (1, 3, and 4), a fundamentally positive outcome was achieved.

In no pilot area did the test results indicate that implementation of the designed ICTr Business Model would be impossible due to major deficiencies. In other words, the ICTr Business Model can be implemented in the Central and Southern pilot regions as planned, and—if required - transferred to the Northern pilot region.

### In summary:

- In both pilot regions (Central and South), Booking Centres for the ICTr Business Model were successfully established.
- In all three pilot regions, a sufficient number of motivated SMEs were identified as potential partners, willing to cooperate with the booking centers as well as willing to participate in the ICTr business model
- All three regions demonstrated at least a basic level of digital competence and a willingness to use the developed digital tools and to operate with the selected booking system.
- 

As expected, the testing phase also revealed that further development work will be required—particularly to strengthen the service chain, improve service quality, and enhance digital capabilities.

This process must be viewed as long-term; however, it is essential to meet the standards required of the innovative ICTr product. Only in this way can it be ensured that guests' expectations of a sustainable and innovative cycling product are met, and that the impact of the business model on the regions along EuroVelo 13 will be genuinely sustainable and perceptible.



## 5. Step by step implementation guide for bookable ICTr cycling products

This guideline provides a comprehensive overview about the methodology how could the pilot activity “testing the cycle product and business model” be transferred to other cycling destinations or EuroVelo routes. It is based on the experiences gained during the implementation of the pilot action launched and is intended to support the transfer and adaptation of the tested activities and results. These are the process of product development and bookable cycle products as result and the design and implementation of a trail business model.

The process follows a structured, eight-step guide that should support an applicable implementation by enabling active stakeholder involvement, and ensuring the long-term sustainability and resilience of the results. As also mentioned in the “Step by Step Implementation Guide of O2.2”, the adaptation of the guide to the regional specifics is obligatory.

This implementation guide is designed as an overlook and easy understandable milestone plan, that the responsible trail organisations can follow step by step. If certain steps require more in depth expertise the responsible ICTr project partners and on the long term the team of ECF can support the implementation process. Based on this topical and organizational framework the transferability of the core results of the ICTr project to other destinations and/or long distance cycling trails will be enabled.

- **Step 1: Identify the destination and an organisation responsible for trail management**

As pointed out in the implementation guide for O2.2. too, the identification for the organisation responsible for trail management is crucial. It may seem obvious that a complex tourism product such as a long-distance cycling trail should have a responsible trail organization. However, this is by no means the case for every trail. If no responsible trail organisation exists, a process must be initiated to develop and establish an appropriate structure. It should be clearly noted, however, that without such a structure, any further implementation of measures for the trail’s development would be meaningless.

- **Step 2: Development of an effective management structure**

The mere existence of a responsible trail organisation does not automatically mean that it covers all the tasks required for further trail development. All too often, these organisations cannot fully perform these duties due to limited resources -tasks which range from project steering to infrastructure maintenance, product development, sustainable booking management, and quality assurance.

As a second step, therefore, it is necessary to build an **effective management structure** composed of all relevant regional and local tourism organisations. Key pillars of this structure include the specification of tasks to be performed, the definition of responsibilities, rights and duties, allocation of resources, and decision-making processes.



- **Step 3: Joining international networks**

Ensuring a regionally anchored and effective project management is therefore a fundamental prerequisite for further implementation steps. A project such as a long-distance cycling trail, particularly if it has a transnational character and forms part of the EuroVelo trail system, can gain additional momentum if it successfully integrates into the international EuroVelo network. The EuroVelo Alliance model provides a strategic framework, ensuring that the competent team of the **European Cyclists' Federation (ECF)** manages and drives the technical implementation at a European level and ensures networking in European level.

- **Step 4: Design of the trail business model**

An important part of the overall trail management structure is the **trail business model**. This model should generate direct value for the region and, in addition, contribute financially to clearly defined tasks for the trail through a predetermined share of booking revenues (as is the case with the Good Impact Programme in this project).

It is essential that the business model is **sustainable and participatory**, enabling the involvement of as many local SMEs as possible while providing a clearly visible and tangible benefit to the region. It must also be ensured that the design and management of the business model remain under the responsibility of the official trail organisation.

- **Step 5: Identification of the official booking center**

The **official booking center** is licensed by the trail organisation to implement the business model. A public tender is recommended to select the most suitable tour operator for the trail or respective trail section, based on the established criteria for implementing an innovative, participatory, and sustainable business model.

The responsibilities of the official booking center are highly demanding and require the trust of both the trail organisation and the guests. To ensure this, a **licence agreement** between the trail organisation (as licensor) and the selected tour operator (as licensee) is recommended for a fixed licence period of three to five years. The licence agreement should also specify the tasks to be performed and the associated documentation obligations.

- **Step 6: Training and management of the official booking center**

The tasks of the official booking center go far beyond that of a conventional tour operator. It encompasses: implementation of the innovative and participatory business model,

- development of sustainable and regenerative cycling products,
- management of an online trail info-, booking- and management system, and
- integration of the specialised online tools described in Output 2.2.

This requires intensive trainings provided by the trail organisation or experts appointed by it. The trail organisation is also responsible for the ongoing supervision and development management of the booking center.





- **Step 7: Product development and booking management**

The core tasks of the booking center are **product development** and the subsequent professional management of inquiries and bookings. This involves creating a product portfolio that meets the innovation and sustainability standards defined by the trail organisation.

Another requirement is that the product portfolio covers the **entire trail or respective trail section**, preventing the frequently observed segmentation of trail projects, where many tour operators focus only on the most attractive sections.

In order to ensure competent and effective inquiry and booking management, the licensee must provide sufficient personnel resources, which must also be trained. This includes managing the online trail info-, booking- and management system, as well as using the online tools presented in Output 2.2.

- **Step 8: Evaluation, impact measurement, and quality improvement**

For the further development of the trail and its business model, **continuous evaluation of implemented measures and assessment of their impact**—both quantitative and qualitative—is essential. A transparent reporting and documentation system has to be established, and the licensee must be obliged to report regularly.

It is then a joint task of the licensor (trail organisation) and licensee (booking center) to evaluate the results achieved and to implement any necessary measures to improve quality.



## 6. Annexes

### a. Annex 1 Questions to ICTr Experience Design

Following the field trips conducted by the regional partners, an ICTr Experience Design Evaluation Form was developed to assess the Experience Design of the ICTr product. The form was prepared prior to the online meetings in each pilot region and later digitized using Google Forms. After the field visits, the digital version was distributed to the ICTr-CE partners for completion.

The following questions were evaluated by the regional partners for each stage of the process:

#### 1. Services:

- Accommodation:
  - Name of the accommodation:
  - How satisfied were you with the accommodation (clean, comfort etc.) (bad:1, good 5)
  - Did you see any certification (cycling-friendly, green) in the accommodation?
    - If possible, please try to categorise the type of certification (on topically, and the type of certification: international, national, regional)
  - Did you discover any cycling-friendly related service related to the accommodation during your stay (e.g. bike rental, laundry service, bike storage)? If yes, please specify
    - Did you need any cycling friendly services? If yes, what kind of?
  - Communication in English (1: bad, 5: very good)
  - Did the accommodation provide dinner at the day of arrival?
    - If yes, did they offer vegetarian option?
    - If yes, did they offer vegan option?
    - In general, how satisfied you are with the dinner/breakfast (1: not satisfied, 5: very satisfied)
- Transport service
  - Did you need any transport-related service (e.g. shuttle service or luggage transfer)? If yes, please specify the details.
    - If yes, was it an e-car?
    - If yes, did they speak English?



## 2. POIs

- Did you visit any Iron Curtain Trail-related sight? (in case of multiple sights, please describe all)
  - If yes, please name it
    - how satisfied are you with the guide/sight? (1: not satisfied, 5: it was really great experience)
    - How accessible was this sight? (e.g. easily accessible for all, or it is not accessible for people with disabilities etc.)
    - Did you see any educational/touristic information (e.g. info board related to the sight/POI) in the close vicinity of the visited sight?
    - Did you see any marketing material (brochure, leaflet etc.) at the sight?
  - Other attractions:
    - Did you visit any important, additional sights?
      - If yes, please name them (in case of multiple sights, please describe all)
      - how satisfied are you with the guide/sight? (1: not satisfied, 5: it was really great experience)
      - How accessible was this sight? (e.g. easily accessible for all, or it is not accessible for people with disabilities etc.)
      - What do you think about the additional sights: Did you know more about the region and its cultural history thanks to visit the attraction?
      - What do you think about the additional sights: The attraction you visited is representing the general principle of the ICTr cycling product (sustainability, local traditions etc.)
  - Restaurants:
    - Did you have a lunch during the trip?
    - If Yes, please name them
      - If yes, did they offer vegetarian option?
      - If Yes, did they offer vegan option?
      - In general, how satisfied you are with the dinner/breakfast (1: not satisfied, 5: very satisfied)



### 3. Infrastructure:

- How rideable was the daily stage in general? (1: not really rideable, 5: very well rideable)
- How challenging was the daily stage (e.g. due to ascend-descend etc.)? (1: very challenging, 5: not challenging at all)
- How satisfied are you with the general condition of the route surface? (1: not satisfied, 5: very satisfied)
- Could you estimate the following characteristics of the route surface per stage in %:
  - % of the trail on public roads
  - % of the trail on gravel and/or dirt roads (unpaved)
- Did you experienced major differences regarding the route surface, the rideability compared to the received desk research document?
- Was the route signposted with EuroVelo 13 signs?
  - If yes, were the signs installed correctly? Did you face any challenge to follow the route?
- Did you see/use any cycling-friendly infrastructure along your journey (e.g. roofed resting place, e-bike charger, bike repair station, etc.)? If yes, please specify.



## b. Annex 2 01.1 Output factsheet



### c. Annex 3 01.1 Output quality report