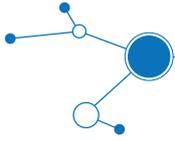**Central Mountains**

CENTRAL MOUNTAINS

D.3.2.2
Transnational structures for long-term cooperation in mountain areas

The CSTP Solution: Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs) as a governance mechanism to secure lasting cooperation on sustainable tourism in the Carpathian region.

SOLUTION 3.2.2.

THE CARPATHIAN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
PLATFORM (CSTP) – CROSS-BORDER
WORKING TEAMS – THEMATIC IN-DEPTH
PAN-CARPATHIAN COOPERATION.

1. Rationale: CSTP Cross-Border Collaboration Strategy: Method, Milestones and Implementation Path.

1.1 Purpose and Framework

The proposed mechanism for transnational cooperation under the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) represents a structured approach to transforming the principles of the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism into operational, long-term governance tools. Building upon the results of the pilot actions (Romania, Poland, Slovakia) and regional consultations throughout the pilot action, this model establishes Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs) on each of the four thematic pillars of sustainable tourism:

1. Ecotourism Destinations
2. Long-Distance Trails
3. Local Gastro Venues
4. Sustainability in Mountain Destinations

The CBWTs will serve as the core operational units of the CSTP cooperation mechanism, driving coordination, implementation and policy alignment across borders. Their creation responds to the identified need for a permanent, participatory and scalable governance structure that ensures coherent, sustainable tourism development across all Carpathian countries. The CBWT structure functions as a multi-level cooperation tool, linking local actors and national institutions through thematic, cross-border teams. It facilitates the joint implementation of the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and
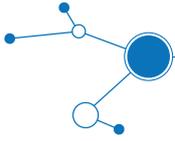
supports the creation of a coherent, long-term framework for sustainable tourism governance beyond project cycles.

Within each National Tourism Task Force (NTTF), national thematic structures support the CBWTs by contributing relevant information and expertise, as well as fostering a common basis for understanding and decision-making.

Anchored in the institutional framework of the Carpathian Convention, the CBWT model guarantees policy endorsement, durability and scalability, with results feeding directly into the Convention's Tourism Working Group and NTTFs. The mechanism aims to institutionalize cooperation, enabling sustainable tourism to evolve from isolated pilot projects into an integrated, Carpathian-wide practice supported by a shared vision and brand.
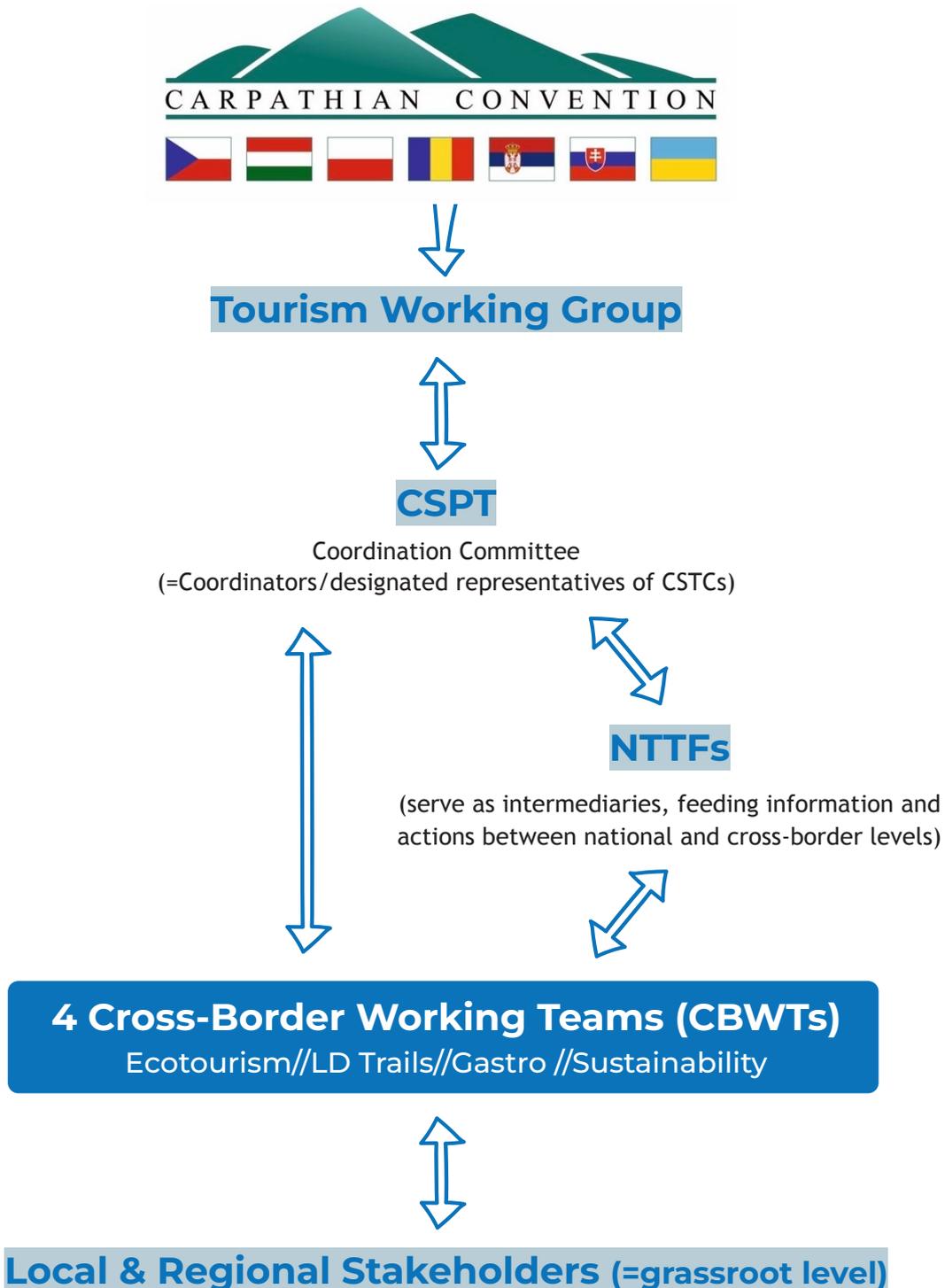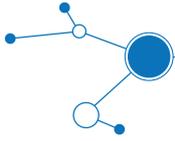
1.2 Methodology: Establishing and Operating Cross-Border Working Teams

The methodology combines multi-level governance, participatory engagement and thematic alignment under the CSTP umbrella. It draws from the CSTP's newly proposed cooperation model, validated through consultation with national stakeholders (in Romania and Poland), regional experts and the Carpathian Convention Secretariat.

1.2.1 Multi-Level Governance Model

The CBWT system operates through three interconnected levels:

1. Transnational Coordination – ensured by the CSTP Coordination Committee (CSTP Centres and Carpathian Convention Secretariat), which defines shared thematic priorities and provides policy guidance.
2. National Implementation – managed by each country's NTTF, responsible for contextualizing the CSTP framework, nominating experts and aligning actions with national tourism policies.
3. Local Activation – driven by stakeholder networks (protected areas, SMEs, NGOs and public entities) implementing tangible actions for each pillar at the destination level.

CARPATHIAN CONVENTION

Tourism Working Group

CSPT

Coordination Committee
(=Coordinators/designated representatives of CSTCs)

NTTFs

(serve as intermediaries, feeding information and actions between national and cross-border levels)

4 Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs)
Ecotourism//LD Trails//Gastro //Sustainability

Local & Regional Stakeholders (=grassroot level)

The structure establishes a dynamic feedback mechanism, where CBWTs promote cross-border coordination and innovation, NTTFs facilitate national adaptation and integration, and local actors ensure effective implementation and evaluation.
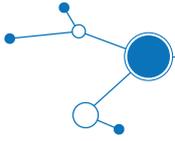
1.2.2. Thematic Structure and Functioning

Each CBWT corresponds to one of the four CSTP pillars and is composed of nominated experts from participating countries, endorsed by national authorities through the NTTFs. Their operation follows a harmonized process:

1. Common Framework Definition – CSTP Coordination Committee defines priorities, governance rules and reporting mechanisms.
2. National Alignment – NTTFs identify national objectives, experts, and stakeholders for each pillar.
3. Formation of CBWTs – multinational teams are established with designated coordinators and secretariats.
4. Joint Work Planning – each CBWT drafts a transnational work plan (objectives, indicators, deliverables) aligned with CSTP and Carpathian Convention priorities and agree on the trans-Carpathian objectives and work plan.
5. Implementation and Monitoring – teams launch pilot initiatives, collect data and report to both CSTP and the Carpathian Convention Tourism Working Group.
6. Scaling and Policy Uptake – outcomes are compiled into toolkits and guidelines to facilitate replication in other Carpathian countries.

## 1.2.3. Operational Guidelines — The "How-To"

To ensure consistency and transparency, the following procedural steps guide the CBWT operations:

1. Preparation and Mandate:
   - Formal endorsement by NTTFs and the Carpathian Convention Secretariat.
   - Designation of coordinators and definition of terms of reference.
   - Initial stakeholder mapping and engagement at the national level.

2. Stakeholder Engagement:
   - Inclusion of relevant public, private, academic and community actors.
   - Emphasis on youth, NGOs and professional associations.
   - Use of participatory tools (surveys, consultations, workshops).

3. Work Planning:
   - Alignment of national and transnational objectives.
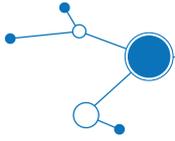
- Definition of common ground.
- Development of measurable indicators and shared templates.
- Integration of activities into the CSTP Work Plan and Convention agenda.

4. Implementation:
   - Launch of cross-border initiatives under each pillar (e.g. transnational trails, Carpathian gastro network).
   - Align and stimulate national initiatives to feed into the cross-border objectives.
   - Application of shared branding ("Carpathia Brand") to ensure coherence.
   - Use of digital collaborative tools for continuous coordination.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation:
   - Adoption of a unified monitoring framework using common sustainability indicators.
   - Reporting cycles to CSTP Coordination Committee (=Coordinators of CSTP National centers), NTTFs and Convention Working Groups (Tourism, cross-sectoral).
   - Annual review and feedback loops ensuring continuous improvement.

6. Knowledge Sharing and Scaling:
   - Annual workshops and CSTP events for capacity building and visibility raise.
   - Development of toolkits and replication guides.
   - Promotion of results via CSTP and Carpathian Convention communication channels.

This operational logic transforms CBWTs into permanent coordination tools, fostering joint planning, shared standards and policy alignment across borders.
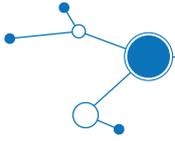
1.3 Timeline for Implementation and Expansion

The establishment and scaling of the CBWTs follow a phased approach, ensuring progressive institutionalization and policy anchoring within the Carpathian Convention framework.

CARPATHIAN CBWT DEVELOPEMNT PHASES OVERVIEW

Set-Up
Dec 2025 - Mar 2026

- Formation of pilot CBWTs in Romania and Poland (optionally Bloyakia)
- National endorsement by NTTEs
- Appointment of coordinators and efinition of ToR
- Consultation with and validation by the Carpathian Convention Tourism Working Group

Pilot Operation
Apr 2026 - Dec 2026

- Launch of thematic work plans for all four pillars
- Implementation of pilot initiatives (e.g., E8 trail development, gastro networks)
- Establishment of digital communication reporting systems (make good use of existing)
- First round of monitoring and progress reporting

Evaluation and Scaling
Jan 2027 - Jun 2027

- Evaluation report submitted to the Carpathian Convention Secretariat
- Presentation at the Tourism Working Group and Implementation Committee
- Development of replication toolkits for new enfants

Long-Term Integration
Post-2027

- CBWTs institutionalized as permanent structures under CSTP
- Recognition by all Carpathian Convention signatories
- Integration in to national tourism strategies
- Continuous policy alignment and funding coordination/EU and national schemes

By 2027, this timeline leads to full regional endorsement, positioning the CSTP mechanism as a Convention-anchored and widely recognized transnational framework for sustainable tourism governance.
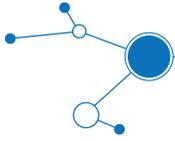
1.4 Endorsement, Uptake and Scalability

The CSTP–CBWT model is formally anchored in the Carpathian Convention and its Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, ensuring that it moves beyond project duration toward permanent institutionalization. Endorsement and scaling are secured through:

- Policy Alignment – integration of CBWT outcomes into the Convention's Working Group agendas, ensuring endorsement at the intergovernmental level.
- Shared Mission and Ownership – joint coordination by CSTPs and NTTFs, promoting co-responsibility among all signatory countries.
- Scalability and Replicability – design of standard methodologies and toolkits to facilitate rapid expansion to other mountain areas and all Carpathian states.
- Visibility and Branding – integration into the Carpathia Brand, enhancing the identity and market recognition of sustainable tourism products developed under the four pillars.

Through its endorsement by the Convention and its implementation across multiple governance levels, the CBWT model fosters durable transnational cooperation, shared learning and institutional continuity, positioning the Carpathians as a leading example of integrated sustainable mountain tourism governance in Europe.

1.5 Long-Term Vision and Impact

By 2027, all Carpathian countries will participate in the four CBWTs, forming a permanent, cooperative ecosystem for sustainable tourism development. The results will include:

- Institutionalized coordination and policy coherence under the Carpathian Convention;
- Strengthened capacity of CSTPs and NTTFs to manage transnational initiatives;
- Measurable sustainability and competitiveness improvements in mountain destinations;
- Enhanced identity and global visibility of the Carpathia Brand.

The CSTP–CBWT mechanism thus ensures that sustainable tourism in the Carpathians is not a project outcome, but a shared, evolving mission — rooted in the Carpathian Convention and scaled across borders through continuous collaboration, innovation and policy alignment.
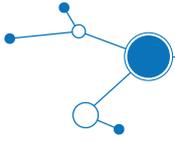
2. Solution Introduction

THE CSTP SOLUTION: CROSS-BORDER WORKING TEAMS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE CARPATHIANS

The Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWT) model, developed under the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP), is designed to strengthen regional cooperation through thematic working teams. These teams address four specific priorities:

1. Ecotourism Destinations
2. Long-Distance Trails
3. Local Gastro Points
4. Sustainability in Mountain Destinations

These pillars were identified through the Central Mountains Project and CSTP pilot action D.2.2.1. and are fully aligned with the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism.

The proposed CSTP governance framework is structured as follows:

- **CSTP Coordination Committee** – provides strategic oversight and cross-country alignment, working closely with the National Tourism Task Force (NTTF).
- **Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs)** – four thematic groups dedicated to each priority area.
- **National CSTP Centers** – ensure country-level implementation and stakeholder engagement.
- **Carpathian Euroregion** – acts as an informal backbone coordination platform host.
- **Carpathia Brand** – to serve as a joint identity and communication framework.

The Carpathian Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs), established within the framework of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP), serve as transnational coordination mechanisms for sustainable tourism development. Comprising national experts and diverse stakeholders, each CBWT is guided by a designated coordinator, appointed on a rotating or agreed basis, and operates through regular quarterly meetings complemented by structured annual reporting.

- **Anchored in the CSTP Work Plan** – Their tasks derive from the CSTP strategic agenda and its new 4-pillar approach.
- **Linked to the National Tourism Task Forces (NTTFs)** – Each CBWT connects directly with the respective NTTFs in participating countries, ensuring that local/national priorities feed into cross-border collaboration and that CSTP strategies are implemented consistently.
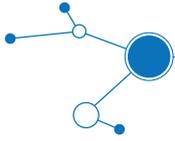
- **Collaborative Structure** – CBWTs bring together authorities, protected areas, DMOs, NGOs, academia and private stakeholders from mountain regions to design and implement joint initiatives and projects.

The Cross-Border Thematic Working Teams (CBWTs) are established to coordinate and monitor progress in the four priority areas of sustainable tourism. They aim to revitalise the role of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platforms (CSTPs) and strengthen stakeholder engagement in implementing the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and its action plans. By providing a structured governance mechanism, CBWTs enhance transnational coordination, reinforce CSTP activities and foster broad stakeholder participation across the Carpathians.

The four thematic pillars emerged from consultations, surveys and inter-regional workshops (e.g., Brasov March 2024, July 2025). Participatory tools ensured broad engagement through:

1. **Consultations (national and inter-regional)** – to co-define objectives and actions.
2. **Surveys** – mapping capacities, frameworks and stakeholder needs.
3. **Interviews and thematic consultations** – in-depth input from organizations and local actors.
4. **Draft plan consultations** – iterative meetings leading to a shared work plan.

This inclusive process balanced technical expertise with local realities and established iterative feedback loops, onto strategic relevance:

- **Alignment**: Fully compatible with the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism.
- **Carpathia Brand**: Defines products that maintain quality standards and promote regional identity.
- **Economic Value**: Supports small-scale businesses, gastronomy, ecotourism sites and long-distance trails that stimulate local economies while preserving cultural heritage.
- **Climate Adaptation**: Responds to changing mountain tourism trends (e.g., four-season alternatives to ski resorts).

These pillars create opportunities for shared decision-making and cross-border cooperation while reinforcing sustainable practices.

The pilot phase actively engaged the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centres (CSTCs) from Romania and Poland (and Slovakia was also invited in the testing part, with stakeholders present at the interregional meeting in Brasov, July 2025, considering that the Slovak CSTC is emerging and undergoing formalization), with the support of the Carpathian Convention Secretariat. The
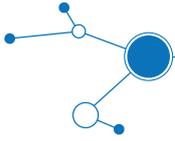
Interregional Meeting held in Brașov served to test the proposals outlined in the Work Plan and reinforced the following key outcomes of the proposed solution:

- Establish functional CBWTs in each thematic area.
- CSTP will coordinate and build the agenda for each working team.
- Ensure CBWTs are reflected in the composition of the NTTF.
- Involve professional associations at all levels, where relevant.
- Ecotourism destination approach to involve the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA).
- Address sustainability across both large and small-scale destinations.
- Secure permanent CSTP staff for continuity.
- Develop tangible cross-border projects (e.g., the E8 long-distance trail).
- Build in capacity to access funds for project financing.

The CSTP pilot aimed to:

- Design and test the new organizational structure of CSTP, aligned with NTTFs.
- Build a common understanding of the four pillars.
- Produce jointly accepted initiatives, projects and products:
  - A network of ecotourism destinations, local gastro venues, and sustainable mountain resorts.
  - A connected system of long-distance trails with reliable infrastructure and information.
  - Comparable quality and sustainability standards across the region.
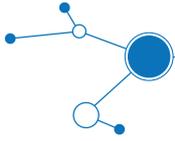
3. Target Groups

The **CSTP-derived solution** is designed to serve a **diverse audience of institutional and local actors** who play complementary roles in advancing sustainable tourism in the Carpathians (see D.2.2.1). Its core target groups include:

- **National, regional and local authorities**, especially ministries of tourism, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and local tourism offices, who hold responsibility for policy, coordination and public investment.
- **Tourism entrepreneurs and SMEs/such Associations**, with emphasis on ecotourism operators, local food producers and rural hospitality providers, whose services define the visitor experience and anchor the Carpathian tourism brand.
- **Protected area managers and NGOs**, whose stewardship of natural and cultural resources ensures the ecological integrity of tourism products.
- **Local communities, youth groups and Local Action Groups (LAGs)**, whose participation guarantees that tourism development reflects local values and creates inclusive opportunities.
- **University and technical experts**, who contribute to the development of evidence, monitoring tools and sustainability standards.
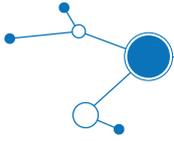- **Local communities (representatives)**, advancing sustainable development from within.

The solution empowers these actors by embedding them in thematic decision-making and shared initiatives development.

Local actors gain visibility for their initiatives (e.g., gastro points, trails, ecotourism networks) and access to cross-border learning platforms. **Institutional actors** benefit from coordinated frameworks to implement the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism, aligning national strategies with transnational priorities.
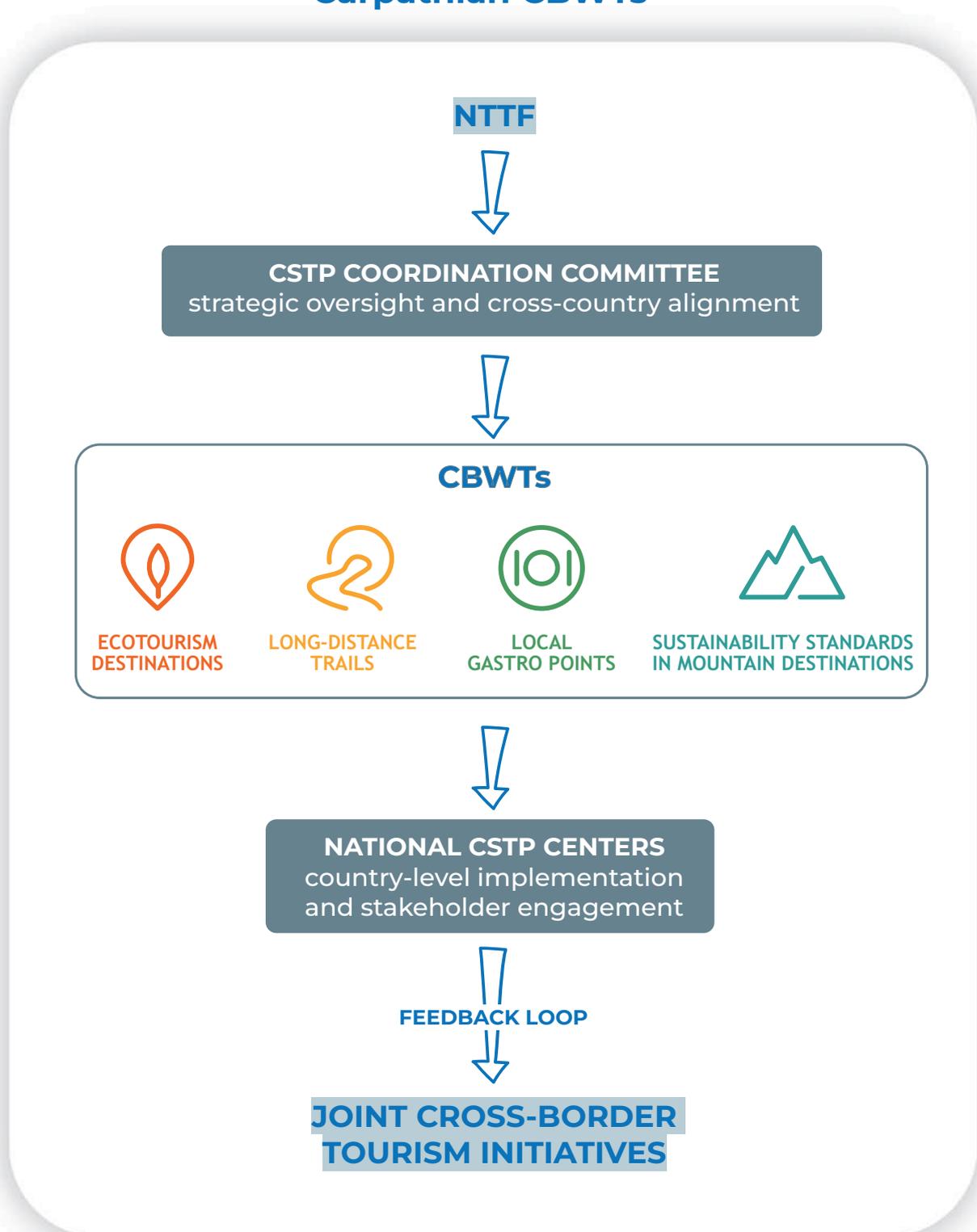
Together, these groups co-create and co-develop tourism networks, initiatives and products that respect ecological limits, strengthen cultural identity and deliver direct economic benefits to communities.
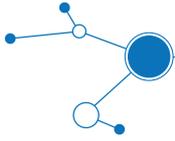
The design process relied on participatory tools to ensure inclusiveness and ownership:

- **Workshops** to define long-term aspirations and identify shared challenges.
- Mapping exercises **to inventory existing tourism capacities and community initiatives, clarifying on some gaps and synergies.**

Mechanism of Functioning Carpathian CBWTs

NTTF

↓

CSTP COORDINATION COMMITTEE
strategic oversight and cross-country alignment

↓

CBWTs

ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS

LONG-DISTANCE TRAILS

LOCAL GASTRO POINTS

SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS IN MOUNTAIN DESTINATIONS

↓

NATIONAL CSTP CENTERS
country-level implementation and stakeholder engagement

↓

FEEDBACK LOOP

↓

JOINT CROSS-BORDER TOURISM INITIATIVES

- Surveys **to gather data on governance gaps and stakeholder needs**.
- Interviews and focus groups **with SMEs, associations and technical experts to capture practical barriers and opportunities**.

These methods ensured that the solution reflected in-depth **expertise and local realities**, balancing formal policy input with grassroots perspectives.

Active involvement will continue through:

- **Regular workshops** (national and inter-regional) for monitoring progress and refining action plans.
- **Regular CBWTs meetings** (online and in-person) to coordinate across countries.
- **Participatory evaluation exercises**, where stakeholders review achievements and propose adjustments.
- **Annual reports and peer-learning events**, fostering accountability and shared learning across the Carpathians.
- **Community-level events** (e.g., local food fairs, trail festivals) to strengthen visibility and connect residents directly with the Carpathian brand.

This inclusive and multi-level governance approach ensures that the CSTP solution remains co-created, community-driven and institutionally supported, thereby building resilience and long-term ownership of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians.
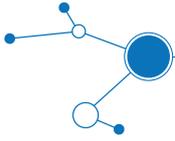
4. Methods/Tools: The solution

THE CSTP SOLUTION: CROSS-BORDER WORKING TEAMS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE CARPATHIANS

As acknowledged, the **Carpathians**, stretching across seven countries, face a dual challenge: 1) **protecting biodiversity and fragile ecosystems** in one of Europe's largest mountain ranges; 2) **generating sustainable economic opportunities** for local communities through tourism.

Tourism development is currently fragmented, with limited cross-border coordination, inconsistent sustainability standards and uneven visibility of the Carpathian identity. Climate change pressures, seasonality of mountain resorts and the need for diversified tourism products amplify this challenge.

To address these issues, the **Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP)** has designed a solution: the creation of **four Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs)**, each dedicated to one of the four thematic pillars identified in the CSTP Work Plan and to be endorsed/consulted with the **Carpathian Convention mechanism and Protocol on Sustainable Tourism**:

- Ecotourism Destinations
- Long-Distance Trails
- Local Gastro Points
- Sustainability Standards in Mountain Destinations

The **CBWTs mechanism** establishes permanent, transnational structures that enable in-depth knowledge sharing, joint planning and pilot implementation. Each CBWT consists of national experts, stakeholders and representatives appointed by the CSTCs and/or National Tourism Task Forces (NTTFs), ensuring both bottom-up participation and high-level coordination.

- CSTP sets a common framework → **based on 4 pillars.**
- NTTFs translate framework nationally → **adapting to local needs.**
- CBWTs coordinate cross-border actions → **joint initiatives, harmonized standards, coordinated events, shared communication on best practices and common needs.**
- Feedback loop → **CBWTs report progress to CSTP → CSTP consolidates and relays to NTTFs**

This mechanism ensures bottom-up engagement **(specific stakeholders) and** top-down alignment **(CSTP and national), creating a** multi-level governance model **for sustainable tourism in the Carpathians.**
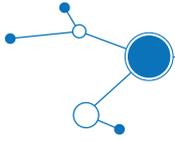
Key tools of the solution include:

- **Thematic coordination**.
- **Multi-stakeholder consultations and workshops** for participatory planning.
- **Surveys and needs assessments** to identify barriers, opportunities and governance gaps.
- **Joint monitoring frameworks** to track progress with shared indicators.
- **The Carpathia Brand** as a unifying communication and visibility tool, positioning the Carpathians as an integrated tourism destination.

The CSTP solution will deliver concrete, measurable results:

- At least **one ecotourism destination** developed **per pilot country (Romania, Poland, Slovakia).**
- Transnational **long-distance trails mapped, with shared signage and information infrastructure (including the E8 trail).**
- Launch of the **local gastro networks, highlighting traditional food and linking small producers to tourism supply chains.**
- **Sustainability standards** defined and tested **in both large-scale mountain resorts and small-scale ecotourism operations.**
- **Cross-border governance system** established**, with four CBWTs operating through quarterly meetings and annual reports, that are also to be sent to the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee, NTTFs, CSTP Coordination Committee.**
- **Monitoring and evaluation framework** including **indicators for environmental impact, local participation, and visitor satisfaction.**
- **Presenting the progress to the relevant Carpathian Convention bodies, including the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee and Working Group on Sustainable Tourism for consultations and review.**

The solution was co-created through **participatory planning and cross-border collaboration** between Romanian and Polish CSTCs, Central Mountains Project Partners (and Slovakian stakeholders), under the umbrella of the **Carpathian Convention**, to the **scope** that the pilot will test the CBWT model in **Romania, Poland (and Slovakia)**, ensuring transnational cooperation and showcasing tangible proposed results.

Timeline:

- **2025**: Formation of CBWTs, stakeholder consultations, definition of objectives and pilot actions.
- **2026**: Testing of pilots, monitoring and cross-country evaluation.
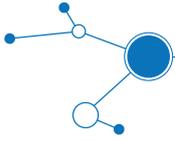
To fully integrate CBWTs within CSTP and NTTFs, a structured process is proposed:

1. Assess expertise within NTTFs and invite additional stakeholders as needed.
2. Appoint national representatives to CBWTs.
3. Define national objectives for each pillar.
4. Develop common Carpathian objectives.
5. Endorse objectives at the CSTP and NTTF level.
6. Translate objectives into national action plans.
7. Coordinate and launch implementation.
8. Monitor implementation and outcomes.
9. CBWTs consolidate progress at the Carpathian level and report back nationally.
10. Adjust action plans based on achievement reports.

In the framework of the Central Mountains Project, a pilot phase is to target:

- to test the new model of in-depth cooperation and dynamics of CSTP and NTTF.
- to start building a common understanding of the 4 pillars for all participating countries.
- to come up with a first initiative/attempt of a shared network/product/project.

The pilot actions may include:

- **Co-creating sustainable itineraries** with SMEs and guides, integrating local gastronomy and cultural heritage.
- **Testing a visitor app** to provide information on ecotourism sites, trails and gastro points, with feedback gathered via surveys and analytics.
- **Promoting local food networks**, linking them to tourism packages and branding.
- **Developing sustainable resort guidelines**, responding to climate change and demand for green products.
- **Launching awareness campaigns**, highlighting the Carpathians as a model for transnational sustainable tourism.

Ultimately, the CBWT mechanism ensures that transnational structures for long-term cooperation in mountain areas are operational, participatory and capable of delivering measurable outcomes for both people and nature.
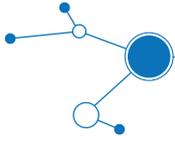
5. Added Value & Uptake Potential

The added value of the CSTP solution lies in its **specificity of cooperation, in-depth thematic focus and transnational governance model.** By aligning national tourism strategies and diverse stakeholders under a shared **Carpathian framework and *modus operandi***, the solution strengthens institutional cooperation, fosters active stakeholder engagement and increases the visibility of sustainable tourism as a strategic development lever for the entire mountain region.

The solution is **innovative** in that:

- It focuses on **specific thematic areas** (ecotourism, trails, gastronomy, sustainability) that are directly linked to local livelihoods and nature diversity.
- It introduces **joint monitoring frameworks**, enabling evidence-based policy adjustments across borders.
- It balances **institutional engagement** (authorities, conventions' bodies) with **community-led initiatives**, ensuring both top-down and bottom-up ownership.

The CSTP solution is designed for **scalability and long-term integration**. Its uptake potential lies in:

1. **Institutional** anchoring **through National Tourism Task Forces and the Carpathian Convention.**
2. Replication across all Carpathian countries**, beyond the pilot phase.**
3. Integration with EU tourism and climate adaptation policies**, ensuring additional funding streams.**
4. Integration within the Carpathia Brand**, fostering a recognizable identity that unites diverse tourism products under common sustainability standards.**

As for the scaling beyond the project, the **pilot actions**—covering ecotourism destinations, long-distance trails, local gastro points and sustainability standards—are designed as **transferable models** that can be replicated in other Carpathian countries and regions, while the **Carpathian Convention** ensures political endorsement and alignment with international commitments.

The solution already shows strong potential for integration into **national and regional strategies**:

- In **Romania**, ecotourism destinations are already embedded in national and local legislation, and all four pillars are reflected in current tourism development priorities.
- In **Poland and Slovakia**, the pilot provides a pathway to embed gastro networks, trail development and sustainability standards into tourism and regional development strategies.
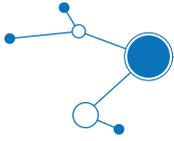
- At the **Carpathian level**, the platform aligns with the **Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Tourism**, ensuring long-term policy integration.

Catalysing Knowledge Exchange, cross-border cooperation will accelerate progress by enabling **mutual learning** among Carpathian countries and the solution will generate significant long-term benefits:

- **At the national level**: countries will strengthen their capacity to develop sustainable, resilient and competitive tourism sectors based on the four thematic pillars.
- **At the Carpathian level**: The coordinated approach stands to contribute to the building up of a Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Brand, bringing together destinations, gastronomic venues, trails and resorts under a shared identity and quality standard. This brand—already referred to in the CSTP work plan as the existing Carpathia Brand—is intended to become the recognizable and visible identity of the Carpathian mountain range.
- **For stakeholders and communities**: SMEs, protected area managers, local communities and youth groups will gain visibility, access to new markets and tools to operate under sustainability principles.

Sustainability of the Solution: Because of its structured governance model, stakeholder ownership and policy alignment, the CSTP solution is expected to be endorsed by relevant organisations and institutions, incorporated into their action plans and scaled beyond the pilot countries. This will secure long-term continuity, making the Carpathians a recognized model for transnational sustainable tourism.
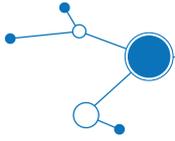
6. Risk Management Plan

The implementation of the CSTP solution engages multiple cross-border stakeholders and relies on effective coordination. Although the approach is solid, several risks could hinder progress if not adequately managed. These risks are assessed according to their potential impact, with corresponding corrective measures identified and subject to continuous adjustment based on lessons learned from the pilot phase.

Risk 1: Low coordination capacity of CSTP

Impact: High

Description: CSTP is expected to manage complex processes involving National Tourism Task Forces (NTTFs), Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs) and diverse stakeholders. Limited staff, insufficient budget or unclear mandates could weaken coordination and delay implementation.

Mitigation Measures:

- Allocate clear resources (dedicated staff and budget) for CSTP coordination from the start.
- Strengthen ties with the Carpathian Euroregion for institutional support and continuity.
- Provide training and capacity-building for CSTP coordinators.
- Establish monitoring systems to identify coordination bottlenecks early.

Risk 2: Low stakeholder engagement (SMEs, local authorities, tourism associations)

Impact: Medium

Description: Local tourism actors may show limited engagement if tangible benefits are not evident or if participation is perceived as administratively burdensome. Insufficient involvement would risk undermining both the legitimacy and the overall impact of the solution.

Mitigation Measures:

- Organize early engagement workshops to co-define benefits.
- Use local ambassadors and associations to mobilize interest.
- Promote and ensure the four pillars are reflected in tourism policies, making engagement relevant.
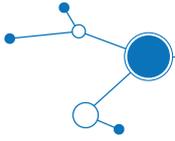
- Link participation to capacity-building opportunities and potential access to financial schemes.
- Set aside a budget to cover any expenses for essential staff travel and training
- Provide incentives such as visibility under the Carpathia Brand, training opportunities and promotion in joint campaigns.

Risk 3: Legal and administrative barriers

Impact: Medium

Description: Differences in regulations and administrative systems across Carpathian countries may slow down cross-border cooperation and project implementation.

Mitigation Measures:

- Anchor the process in the Carpathian Convention framework for legitimacy.
- Act as a bridging mechanism between territories, helping to overcome legal and administrative differences and fostering the development of shared governance across the Carpathian region.
- Promote bilateral and multilateral agreements that support cross-border tourism initiatives.

Risk 4: Political and geopolitical instability

Impact: High

Description: Political changes at national or regional level—or broader geopolitical instability—may affect the commitment to transnational cooperation.

Mitigation Measures:

- Diversify funding sources (EU, national, private) to reduce dependency on a single political framework.
- Keep CSTP and CBWTs anchored in multi-stakeholder governance to ensure continuity beyond political cycles.
- Emphasize local and regional ownership to maintain momentum even in times of political change.

Mitigation strategies will be continuously adapted based on pilot-phase feedback. Regular risk assessments will be integrated into CSTP coordination meetings, ensuring corrective measures are responsive to emerging challenges.
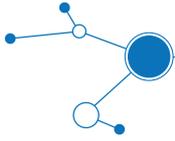
7. Post-Project Output Ownership & Durability Checklist

Long-Term Ownership and Institutional Anchoring

The durability of the solution rests on long-term ownership by the CSTP Centres, in close partnership with the Carpathian Euroregion, the Carpathian Convention and national governments, as well as various associations and NGOs. These institutions will ensure continuity of operations, coordination of the four Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWTs) and integration into strategies and action plans.

Responsible entities:

- CSTP Centres – primary coordinators, responsible for daily operations, monitoring and reporting.
- National Governments (through tourism ministries and boards) – integration of the four pillars into national strategies and co-funding responsibilities.
- Carpathian Euroregion – non-formal backbone structure providing transnational coordination and administrative hosting.
- Carpathian Convention – umbrella framework ensuring alignment with the regional commitments within its Protocol on Sustainable Tourism.
- Associations and NGOs (e.g., ecotourism associations, gastro networks, mountain trail federations) – sectoral partners ensuring stakeholder ownership and outreach.

However, involving already existing bodies and associations appears crucial to secure resources for sustainability, which are required at three different levels of coordination and implementation:

1. CSTP Coordination – operational staff, office resources and capacity for analysis and monitoring.
2. CBWTs – dedicated staff time, facilitation of cross-border cooperation and expert input.
3. Pillar-Specific Initiatives – projects at the national and local levels with tangible outputs (e.g., ecotourism product development, gastro events, trail infrastructure, sustainability standards).

Potential funding sources include:

- EU Programs: Interreg, Horizon Europe, LIFE, Erasmus+ (for training).
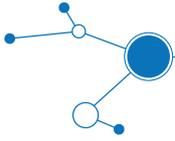
- National and Local Budgets: Ministries of Tourism, Regional Development Agencies and municipalities.
- Hybrid Models:
  - Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to fund infrastructure (e.g., trails, visitor centers).
  - Membership contributions from SMEs and professional associations, linked to benefits such as promotion under the Carpathia Brand.
  - Crowdfunding and sponsorships for visible, community-based initiatives (e.g., trail festivals, local food fairs).

A dedicated Carpathian Financial Mechanism for Sustainable Tourism should be developed and discussed at the EU level. The CSTP solution directly contributes to the goals of the EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy (currently in consultation), particularly in:

- Promoting sustainable practices.
- Improving cross-border mobility and connectivity.
- Strengthening the global competitiveness of the European tourism sector.

To ensure shared ownership and accountability, CBWTs have to fulfil:

- Annual Meetings:
  - At the National Tourism Task Force (NTTF) level in each country.
  - At the CBWTs level, bringing together cross-border teams for each thematic pillar.

- Working Meetings: Regular coordination sessions (quarterly, online or in person) for operational planning and monitoring.
- Carpathian Convention: consultations in the framework of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism and reporting on activities to the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee.
- Integration into National Tourism Boards: representation of CSTP in national/regional tourism governance ensures coordination, continuity and relevance.

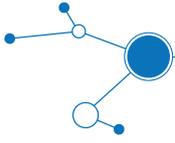Sustainability will also rely on systematic learning and adaptation:

- Periodic Evaluations: CSTP will conduct evaluations regularly to assess effectiveness, stakeholder engagement and financial predictability.
- Successor Projects: Based on evaluation results, follow-up initiatives will be launched under EU and other programs.
- Stakeholder Networks: Local and regional actors will be continuously engaged to ensure grassroots ownership and broad-based support.
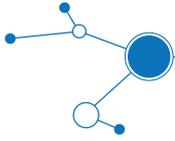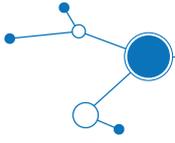
Through this sustainability framework, the CSTP solution will:

- Maintain and enhance functional transnational governance structures for sustainable tourism.
- Empower local actors, SMEs, associations and communities to benefit directly from sustainable tourism development.
- Build a strong, recognized Carpathian Brand supported by networks of ecotourism destinations, gastro venues, trails and sustainable mountain resorts.

This plan ensures that the CBWTs solution, operationalizing the CSTP cooperation, is not just a pilot but a durable, well-structured framework, capable of evolving with funding, policies and stakeholder needs.