



The Brand4Talents project has officially kicked off, marking the beginning of an exciting journey for our partnership under the Interreg Central Europe Programme.

This is a special call supporting shorter, high-impact projects with strong upscaling potential and smaller, focused partnerships. This means we are working in an intensive and dynamic framework – with the ambition to deliver meaningful results in a relatively short time.

Our first in-person meeting in Derecske provided an excellent starting point to build a common understanding around key concepts such as talent attraction and place branding, and to explore how these can be effectively applied in smaller communities. Through inspiring discussions, masterclasses, and study visits, partners have already begun to align their approaches and exchange valuable insights.

In the coming months, partners will further develop their ideas, identify potential talent-related interventions, and lay the groundwork for future pilot activities. This early phase is crucial in ensuring that our solutions are both strategic and rooted in real local needs.

We are excited about the journey ahead – working fast, learning together, and creating solutions that can be scaled and transferred across Central Europe. Stay tuned as the Brand4Talents story unfolds!

BRAND4TALENTS  
E-NEWSLETTER

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial P. 1

Partner meeting • P. 2

Partners' news • P. 3-7

Join us! • P. 8

# MEETING #1



The partnership is on the move!

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The Brand4Talents partnership has gathered in Derecske, a welcoming town in eastern Hungary, located near Debrecen. We were honoured to receive a personal welcome from the Municipality of Derecske and our host partner. A special thank you to Anikó Rácz, Mayor of Derecske, who greeted the partnership and welcomed us to the town. It is a great honour for us to start our journey here.

During our meeting in Hungary, the Brand4Talents partnership had the opportunity to participate in a very important study tour. The project focuses on how smaller towns and rural areas can attract and retain talents, supported by a strong governance model that brings together local actors and stakeholders. To develop effective solutions, it is essential for us to learn from places that are already leading the way in creating attractive environments for talents in smaller communities. Our partnership had the chance to experience exactly this – discovering inspiring practices and gaining valuable insights.

One of the most important elements of our current meeting is a three-part masterclass, designed to build a strong common foundation among partners. In projects of this scale, it is essential to create a shared understanding of key concepts. What do we mean by talent attraction? What exactly is place branding? And just as importantly, what do we not mean by these terms? The sessions were led by Béla Kézy, an internationally recognised expert in the field, who delivered a highly engaging and insightful masterclass. The programme went beyond knowledge transfer: partners also took part in interactive group work, where the concepts were applied in practice to the contexts of the pilot partners.

We also had the opportunity to hear a highly insightful presentation from János Aranyász, a practitioner with extensive hands-on experience in place branding. In his presentation, he shared how place branding works in practice, presenting the concrete activities he has implemented and the strategic logic behind them. His work on Derecske's place branding is based on a well-structured and carefully designed strategy aimed at strengthening the town's identity and attractiveness.



Derecske  
10-11 March 2026

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# 10-11 MARCH DERECSKE

# PARTNERS' INTRO

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CENTRE BISTRA PTUJ (SRC BISTRA PTUJ) (SLO)

Scientific Research Centre Bistra Ptuj (SRC Bistra Ptuj) is a public research and development organisation based in Ptuj – the oldest town in Slovenia, with a history of more than 2,000 years. Ptuj is not only rich in history but also offers a high quality of life, combining a human-scale urban environment with strong cultural identity and natural surroundings. Its compact size, active community life, and growing focus on innovation make it an attractive place for both residents and newcomers.



**Rok Vrban**

The city's ability to balance tradition with modern development creates a unique atmosphere where heritage and future-oriented thinking coexist, supporting long-term sustainability and local vitality. While the city is known for its Roman past, medieval streets, and vibrant cultural life (including one of Europe's most famous carnivals, Kurentovanje), it is also a place that is actively looking toward the future. SRC Bistra Ptuj plays a key role in this transformation by connecting local authorities, businesses, schools, and communities, and by bringing European projects into the region.

With strong experience in international cooperation, innovation, and regional development, the organisation focuses on improving quality of life and creating opportunities for people to live, work, and grow in the region. The combination of rich heritage and a strong development mindset makes Ptuj a unique place to test new ideas around talent attraction and community-driven development.

Within the Brand4Talents project, SRC Bistra Ptuj acts as the Lead Partner, coordinating the entire partnership and ensuring that activities are delivered smoothly across countries. Beyond coordination, the team is highly motivated to implement the project locally, as the region faces real challenges such as young people leaving in search of better opportunities. The project offers a chance to turn this around by making Ptuj more visible, more attractive, and more connected. Through local events, storytelling, and collaboration with citizens and stakeholders, SRC Bistra Ptuj wants to show that smaller cities can offer not only a high quality of life, but also meaningful professional and personal opportunities. The motivation is simple: to make people not only visit Ptuj, but choose to stay, return, or build their future here

# PARTNERS' INTRO

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## NETWORK FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION – HÁRFA (HUN)

Some organizations exist to write reports. The Network for Regional Development Foundation – HÁRFA for short – exists to make things actually happen in Hungarian cities and regions. Based in Nyíregyháza, we have spent years working alongside local authorities, communities and innovators in some of Hungary's most challenged areas: places where demographic decline is not a statistic, but a daily reality felt in emptying schools, quieter streets, and young people who leave and don't come back.

We are a foundation with a wide reach and a focused mission. Through our membership in TINLAB – Hungary's National Laboratory for Social Innovation – we sit at the intersection of research, policy and practice, helping to translate good ideas into real governance change.



We have delivered projects on sustainable urban development, social innovation, pilot-based community interventions, and multi-level governance reform. What connects all of it is a stubborn belief: that the quality of life in a city is not predetermined by its size or location. It is shaped, every day, by the decisions of the people who govern it and the communities who inhabit it.

That is why we are proud to work in Brand4Talents alongside our associated partner, the Municipality of Derecske: a small city of around 8,600 people in Hajdú-Bihar County, sitting just 15 minutes from Debrecen yet facing the familiar pulls of outmigration and demographic pressure. Derecske is the kind of city that often gets overlooked – too small to make headlines, too important to ignore. It is a district centre with real administrative responsibilities, a community with deep local identity, and a leadership with the courage to ask: what if we stopped waiting for things to improve and started building the conditions for improvement ourselves?

That question is precisely what Brand4Talents is designed to answer.

In Brand4Talents, HÁRFA leads Work Package 1 – the capacity building and planning backbone of the project. We are responsible for training all territorial partners through the Brand4Talents Masterclass, co-developing the governance methodology and strategy paper, and supporting each city in building its own Local Action Plan and place brand. This is not a passive coordination role. We bring methodological expertise, creative facilitation, and a deep familiarity with what actually moves local stakeholders from awareness to action.

In Derecske, we go further: we are the territorial partner on the ground, implementing a co-working space pilot and a place branding campaign designed with – not just for – the people who live there.

Our motivation is simple. We have seen what happens when small cities are left without tools, knowledge or support. We have also seen what happens when they get them. Brand4Talents is our chance to prove, in Derecske and across Central Europe, that the second story is always possible.

# PARTNERS' INTRO

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY IN BIELSKO-BIAŁA - ARR SA (POL)

We are the Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biała (ARR SA) - a public development organisation supporting regional growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship in southern Poland. We operate in the Silesian region, an area with strong industrial traditions that is currently undergoing dynamic transformation towards a modern, knowledge-based economy. Our mission is to strengthen the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises by providing access to financing, advisory services, and innovation infrastructure.



We actively support business development, promote entrepreneurship, and facilitate cooperation between the public sector, academia, and industry. With extensive experience in international cooperation, ARR SA has participated in numerous EU-funded projects focused on regional development, innovation ecosystems, and skills development. We contribute to building resilient local economies by adapting global trends—such as digitalisation, green transition, and talent development—to regional needs. In the Brand4Talents project, ARR SA acts as an active project partner contributing to the development and implementation of innovative solutions aimed at improving talent attraction and retention in lagging regions. Our role focuses on:

- supporting the development of local action plans,
- engaging regional stakeholders (businesses, institutions, and communities),
- participating in pilot activities testing place-based solutions,
- contributing to knowledge exchange and co-creation of governance models.

We bring strong expertise in regional development, stakeholder cooperation, and entrepreneurship support, which allows us to effectively connect different sectors and translate project outcomes into practical, sustainable solutions at the local level.

Our motivation for participating in Brand4Talents stems from our commitment to strengthening regional attractiveness and creating better conditions for talents to live, work, and develop. We believe that improving governance, fostering cooperation, and building strong place brands are essential to counteracting outmigration and unlocking the full potential of our region.

Through this project, we aim to exchange experiences with international partners, co-develop innovative approaches, and implement solutions that will have long-term impact both locally and across Central Europe.

# PARTNERS' INTRO

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## EMFIE (HUN)

EMFIE specializes in the practical implementation of responsible innovation, focusing on communicating and developing various innovations, with particular emphasis on urban development and sustainable urban mobility. As the idea owner, developer, and implementer of the RegioStars Awardwinning CityWalk project, EMFIE has significant experience in delivering high-quality EU projects.

Having served as WP leader in several previous projects, EMFIE ensures all activities are precisely planned and executed, with strict adherence to deadlines. As a Communication WP leader in several previous projects, EMFIE played a key role in crafting engaging, easy-to-understand project content that reached wide audiences and target groups.

Specific to Brand4Talents, EMFIE will serve as a knowledge provider on talent attraction and retention, leveraging both scientific and practical expertise. This includes insights into the behaviour of talented individuals, psychological factors influencing their decisions, and best practices worldwide. The team has conducted extensive research on the success factors of talent attraction and retention in cities, capitalizing on results from the TalentMagnet Interreg Danube project, where EMFIE was also a WP leader. Additionally, EMFIE has direct experience with Interreg Central Europe Programme, including the development of a governance model. The expertise gained in these areas will directly contribute to the Brand4Talents project, ensuring innovative, high-quality deliverables that align with EU regional policy goals.

In the Brand4Talents project, EMFIE will be a knowledge provider - leading WP2, and be responsible for project level communication.

As a knowledge provider, our primary responsibility will be to lead and support the place branding campaign at the project level. We will actively assist in designing the place branding campaign and supporting the implementation of place branding pilots for territorial partners. Additionally, we will participate in developing the assessment methodology for evaluating the campaign's success and guide partners in measuring the outcomes. Feedback from these evaluations will contribute to refining and finalizing the Brand4Talents Governance Model. Furthermore, we will actively participate in thematic discussions, brainstorming sessions, and the creation and review of deliverables and outputs alongside other knowledge providers.

As communication leader, we will implement a new-generation communication approach to maximize reach, add value, and enhance the effectiveness of communication and dissemination. Our approach centers on creating innovative and visually engaging content using digital tools such as infographics, animations, and videos, combined with storytelling techniques. This content will be disseminated effectively to the target audience, ensuring sustained attention through the regular delivery of compelling materials.



# PARTNERS' INTRO

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## LANDKREIS VORPOMMERN-GREIFSWALD (GER)

The district of Vorpommern-Greifswald is located in the north-east of Germany, along the Baltic Sea and the border with Poland. Our region is characterized by a high quality of life, beautiful natural landscapes, and strong local communities. At the same time, like many rural areas in Europe, we face structural challenges such as demographic change, a shortage of skilled workers, and the need to strengthen our economic resilience.

As a public authority, we work closely with municipalities, businesses, and regional stakeholders to support sustainable economic development and improve living conditions. Our experience includes the development and implementation of regional innovation projects, especially in the context of European funding programmes such as Interreg. We focus on creating practical solutions that are transferable and provide long-term value for rural regions.

## LANDKREIS VORPOMMERN-GREIFSWALD

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**SUSANNE**



**OLLI**



**OLGA & JENNY**



**MALTE**

Within the Brand4Talents project, our main goal is to strengthen the attractiveness of our region for skilled workers and to improve talent retention. We see place branding not only as communication, but as a strategic process that connects services, infrastructure, and real experiences with the image of a region.

Our key contribution to the project is the development of a digital "Landkreis-App" as a pilot action. This app aims to bundle relevant services, information, and opportunities in one place - making it easier for citizens, newcomers, and potential talents to access what the region has to offer. By combining digital tools with participatory approaches, we want to create a user-centered solution that reflects real needs and improves everyday life.

We are particularly motivated by the idea of developing solutions that go beyond our region and can be transferred to other rural areas in Europe. Through cooperation with our international partners, we aim to exchange knowledge, learn from different approaches, and jointly create innovative governance models for talent attraction and place branding.

# PARTNERS' INTRO

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## OPOLSKIE CENTRE FOR ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT (POL)

We are the Opolskie Centre for Economy (OCRG) - a regional development institution of the Opolskie Voivodeship in south-western Poland ([ocrg.opolskie.pl](http://ocrg.opolskie.pl)). We support economic growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the region, working closely with SMEs, public authorities, academia, and local stakeholders. The Opolskie region is characterised by a strong industrial and agricultural base, a multicultural identity, and significant demographic challenges, including youth outmigration and labour market shortages.



Unit of Self-Government  
of the Opolskie Voivodeship

Our mission is to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the Opolskie region by supporting SMEs, fostering entrepreneurship, and improving access to financing, advisory services, and development opportunities. We focus on building a modern regional economy by connecting stakeholders and adapting key European trends such as digitalisation, green transition, and skills development to local needs. We actively participate in EU-funded projects that support regional transformation and innovation ecosystems.

In the Brand4Talents project, OCRG acts as an active partner contributing to the development and implementation of place-based solutions for talent attraction and retention. We support action plan development, engage regional stakeholders, participate in pilot activities, and contribute to knowledge exchange and governance models. Our motivation is to strengthen regional attractiveness and create better conditions for people to live, work, and develop in Opolskie, while sharing and implementing effective European practices.



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