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Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable
Development of the Carpathians**

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**STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT OF THE CARPATHIANS**

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1 INTRODUCTION and RATIONALE

The basis for comprehensive international cooperation in the Carpathians was laid down by “**The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians**” (Carpathian Convention), which was adopted and signed by the seven Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine) in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine, and entered into force in January 2006.

The purpose of the Strategy for sustainable tourism development of the Carpathians is to determine common actions and measures in order to value and sustainably use the outstanding natural and cultural assets for sustainable tourism development of the Carpathians. This mountain range covers a large part of Central and Eastern Europe and it will become an attractive and sustainable tourism destination that contributes to the quality of life of the local population and to the protection of local cultural and natural heritage.

Seven countries share the Carpathians, each of them having a different approach to tourism development. They follow different strategies and use different methods, which can limit the expected positive contributions from tourism and may allow tourism to have a negative impact on local communities and the mountainous landscape they are living in.

This strategy aims at harmonizing and coordinating country-specific approaches by providing a common understanding and umbrella platform for planning and management. The strategy is not a stand-alone activity; it is part of the comprehensive effort of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention to coordinate the responsible use, protection and promotion of the Carpathians as a tourism destination.

In line with the objectives of the Carpathian Convention, the 3rd Conference of the Parties adopted in May 2011 the **Protocol on Sustainable Tourism** for the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians. In this Protocol, which is in force since May 2013, the Parties decided the following in Article 27 (Implementation), Paragraph 3:

The Conference of the Parties shall develop and adopt the Strategy on Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians, which will accompany the implementation of this protocol.

The Strategy for the Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians is therefore directly interlinked with the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism in order to contribute to its implementation. The most relevant chapters in the Protocol set out the fundamentals of the Strategy and are translated into a common action plan, e.g. Article 6: Participation of stakeholders, Article 7: International cooperation, Article 8: Promotion of the Carpathian region, Article 9: Development of regional sustainable tourism products, Article 10: Ensuring common high quality standards, Article 11: Enhancing the contribution of tourism to local economies, etc.

The Strategy for sustainable tourism development of the Carpathians is to be implemented within the administrative units indicated by each Party. Annex 1 of the Strategy contains an indicative map of those administrative units.

2 VISION and OBJECTIVES

While being aware of the challenges ahead, the Carpathian stakeholders strive to make tourism more sustainable. The vision encompasses three dimensions – competitiveness, conservation and cooperation, which are fundamental to adding value to tourism, agreed by the Parties of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians:

The Carpathians are a top competitive sustainable tourism destination in Europe, based on its unique natural and cultural heritage preserved and maintained on large integral areas

The people in the Carpathians are successful in, and proud of, maintaining their local authentic traditions, cultures, and landscapes, which contribute to unique tourist experiences

Good cooperation, local management and partnerships contribute to the high quality of responsible tourism and ecosystem services, which ensures continuous benefits for local communities and economies

In order to become a top sustainable tourism destination the Parties agree that the following three objectives form the targets to accomplish the vision by 2024:

Objective 1

Establish supportive conditions for sustainable tourism products and services, including development of a marketing scheme for the promotion of the Carpathians as a unique sustainable destination

The unique offerings of the Carpathians when it comes to visitor experiences are the cultural and natural assets. Surviving authentic features make this mountain range very different to other destinations in Europe. However, this unique authenticity needs to be reflected in products and services, which can compete on the international market. The first objective will ensure that sustainability guidelines and standards are developed and implemented and that products and services are put on the market effectively.

Objective 2

Develop innovative tourism management, fully integrating the needs of local people and economies and other supporting sectors, and respecting the preservation of natural and cultural heritage

Balancing the needs of local people with the goals of conservation through careful management at local, national and Carpathian level is one of the main pillars in sustainable tourism development. The second objective establishes a system of management tools respecting the objectives of the Carpathian Convention while up scaling communication on sustainable tourism throughout the Carpathians. This innovative management approach sets new standards of sustainable tourism in destinations and protected areas and also contributes to enhancing the performance of other economic sectors.

Objective 3

Establish a continuous process of awareness raising, capacity building, education and training on sustainable tourism development and management at all levels

Creating an enabling environment for the implementation of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians is crucial for success. Enhancing the knowledge of tourism stakeholders with regards to developing and managing tourism in a responsible way creates the fundamentals for reaching our vision of the Carpathians becoming a top sustainable tourism destination by the year 2024. Institutions involved in training and education should work together to create efficient methods ensuring mainstreaming of sustainable practices throughout the Carpathians.

The objectives form the path for the implementation of the two action plans in Chapter 3. The first is to be implemented by each Party of the Carpathian Convention and the second one is to be coordinated by the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention. If so decided at a later stage, a Carpathian Coordination Platform might be established, depending on available resources.

3 ACTION PLAN

3.1 Country Action Plan for the Parties to the Carpathian Convention

Objective 1: ESTABLISHING OF SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, INCLUDING DEVELOPMENT OF A MARKETING SCHEME FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE CARPATHIANS AS A UNIQUE SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION	
Activities	Proposed start¹
Initiate destination and/or country specific tourism product development (e.g. rural tourism, slow tourism, heritage tourism, ecotourism in protected areas, spa tourism, dark sky parks, social tourism and handicapped tourism), focusing on all seasons	Year 1
Identify and support the establishment of Carpathian wide authentic clusters of sustainable tourism products , e.g. thematic tours (e.g. architecture, cuisine, landscape, mixed cultural/technical heritage etc), agritourism, hiking, cycling, ski touring	Year 1
Identify, assess, and where applicable, remove conditions unfavorable for the development of sustainable tourism	Year 1
Set principles and develop guidelines on sustainable tourism infrastructure and activities	Year 1
Support rural tourism which is maintaining traditional land-use (e.g. beekeeping, food production)	Year 2
Support the establishment of regional Carpathian touristic (destination) brands contributing to the preservation of landscape character and tangible/intangible cultural heritage, possibly connected to a Carpathian brand	Year 2
Support the development of cross-border tourism cooperation , favorable visa regime where applicable, and linking of trails-implementation to joint cross-border tourism products	Year 4
Establish incentive measures for local tourism businesses developing and implementing sustainable tourism products, incl. measures for removing barriers to effective sustainable business operations	Year 4
Ensure participatory involvement (e.g. workshops, online consultations) of local communities in regional product development	Year 5
Develop programs for promoting and funding the preservation of local cultural and natural heritage through tourism	Year 6

Objective 2: DEVELOP INNOVATIVE TOURISM MANAGEMENT, FULLY INTEGRATING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND ECONOMIES AND OTHER SUPPORTING SECTORS, AND RESPECTING THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE	
Activities	Proposed start
Establish the Sustainable Tourism Task Force as part of the Sustainable Tourism Working Group of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians	Year 1
Enhance the national coordination structure and encourage establishment of management centers on sustainable tourism, if applicable, in the Carpathians	Year 1

¹ Proposed start of the activities is after the adoption of this strategy at COP 4, e.g. Year 1 is 2014.

Support the integration of the Carpathian dimension into the national and regional coordination of sustainable tourism	Year 2
Zone the key touristic areas with a focus on carrying capacity issues, and implement assessment measures based on EIA process principles	Year 3
Contribute to a common set of indicators on the effects of implemented policies and strategies to develop sustainable tourism in the Carpathians	Year 3
Develop programs for promotion of local cultural heritage tourism in the Carpathian countries taking into account the specificity and diversity of all the regions and sub-Carpathian areas	Year 3
Enhance and support trans-boundary cooperation by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organizing „both-sides“ events (fairs, exhibitions, workshops, etc.) design trail network from „both-sides“ perspective introducing non-Schengen border crossings solutions for tourist movement (if applicable) new tourism border crossings, new bridges and footbridges over border rivers tourist business initiatives 	Year 4
Establish a working group for assessing tourism impact on natural and cultural heritage (including Protected Areas), also using the results of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) processes and other tools	Year 4
Support the establishment of destination management organizations (DMO) in key touristic areas (if applicable) to implement sustainable tourism management schemes with local stakeholders	Year 5
Develop a system of incentives to support the improvement and use of local supply chains to and from tourism	Year 6
Establish and support a Carpathian Coordination Platform , if applicable and based on available funding	Year tbd
Revise National Tourism Development Strategies by incorporating the principles of sustainable tourism and the Carpathian dimension	As appropriate

Objective 3: ESTABLISH A CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF AWARENESS RAISING, CAPACITY BUILDING, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS

Activities	Proposed start
Establish a system of continuous education and training for relevant target groups on sustainable tourism development, e.g. education programs at schools, raising awareness of the public in regards to natural and cultural heritage	Year 2
Enhance international cooperation of entities responsible for sustainable tourism development in individual member states	Year 3
Implement campaigns , especially in the Carpathian part of the country, to raise the awareness among local population of sustainable tourism and the Carpathian Convention	Year 3
Contribute to a common Carpathian education, interpretation and awareness raising program	Year 6
Create a platform for cooperation of farmers linked with tourism entrepreneurship (to be integrated into the common online Carpathian platform on sustainable tourism)	Year 1

3.2 Joint Action Plan of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention

Objective 1: ESTABLISH SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, INCLUDING DEVELOPMENT OF A MARKETING SCHEME FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE CARPATHIANS AS A UNIQUE SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION	
Activities	Proposed start
Create a Carpathian identity and make use of a logo/slogan compulsory for all those service suppliers who joined and were labelled under the Carpathians product-line	Year 2
Initiate and possibly create a certification and/or labelling system for sustainable tourism for the Carpathian Brand, supported by a Carpathian-wide marketing strategy	Year 3
Develop a Carpathian-wide quality standard system, local products and local services (e.g. “Local food”, “Local accommodation”, “Local experience – how to guide tourists”, “Code of Conduct for Tourists in the Carpathians”)	Year 4
Develop common principles and guidelines on tourism infrastructure and activities to make them sustainable	Year 4
Establish a tour operators cooperation platform	Year 4
Design, where applicable, a common system of marking trails throughout the Carpathians	Year 5
Develop, maintain and keep up to date a common online Carpathian platform on sustainable tourism, including products and services database, trans-boundary products and mapping, as well as good practices, with continuously updated information, and including the preparation of a Carpathian touristic map	Year 1
Develop, maintain and keep up to date an online platform promoting labelled products , linking with the websites of NTOs	Year 6

Objective 2: DEVELOP INNOVATIVE TOURISM MANAGEMENT, FULLY INTEGRATING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND ECONOMIES AND OTHER SUPPORTING SECTORS, AND RESPECTING THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE	
Activities	Proposed start
Initiate resource mobilization for the implementation of the strategy at national and international level involving all relevant stakeholders	Year 1
Develop a common communication paper on the Carpathian Brand	Year 3
Define the use of the Carpathian Brand and its management structure with relation to other sectoral or geographical brands	Year 3
Analyze the touristic resources of the member-countries based on research, to identify the key-areas and products to be involved, and undertake further detailed research	Year 3
Develop guidelines for contributions by the tourism sector to the conservation of natural and cultural resources	Year 4

Develop a methodology for monitoring the impacts of existing and planned tourism development on biodiversity and landscapes, including the social, economic and cultural impact	Year 4
Define and implement a common set of indicators on the effects of implemented policies and strategies for developing sustainable tourism in the Carpathians	Year 4
Initiate the establishment of an organizational unit (Carpathian Observatory on Sustainable Tourism) , contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Protocol and this Strategy by monitoring and evaluation of tourism activities in the Carpathians	Year 4
Develop methods for the protection of „brand-making“ elements of the Carpathians cultural heritage by implementing common projects on preservation of cultural heritage	Year 5
Support setting up of a common mechanism for the implementation of the strategy	Year 5
Develop common guidelines for the support of sustainable local supply chains	Year 6
Develop common guidelines for a monitoring system scheme on traffic to destinations and the flow of visitors within destinations	Year 6
Initiate the exchange of good practices and lessons learned from the operation of DMOs in terms of sustainable tourism in the Carpathians	Year 1

Objective 3: *ESTABLISH A CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF AWARENESS RAISING, CAPACITY BUILDING, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS*

Activities	Proposed start
Create an online platform for education, training and sharing of best practices available to all stakeholders	Year 4
Create a program of workshops & conferences and study visits in order to exchange innovative experience on sustainable tourism development	Year 5
Exchange know-how on the contribution of tourism to biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation with other destinations	Year 6

4 IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Institutional Arrangements

- ⇒ With reference to the Terms of Reference of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism (CC-WGST), each Party appoints one or more members for the CC-WGST responsible for coordination and information sharing of Carpathian sustainable tourism specific topics at the national and international level. The objective is to avoid overlaps and to create synergies with other initiatives wherever possible.
- ⇒ Each Party establishes a national Sustainable Tourism Task Force in order to communicate Carpathian Sustainable Tourism initiatives to the wider governmental structure and bodies. Stakeholders' institutions working in different fields (e.g. tourism development, education, culture or business) may be invited to join this task force. The aim of the task force is to strengthen and monitor the effective implementation of the Strategy for sustainable tourism development of the Carpathians and the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism and to formulate recommendations to the CC-WGST.
- ⇒ The Parties to the Convention mandate the Carpathian Convention – Working Group on Sustainable Tourism to oversee and guide the implementation of the Strategy, specifically its Joint Action Plan, and to report periodically to the Conference of the Parties on the progress. The CC-WGST further specifies the action plans (e.g. guidelines, indicators) in order to streamline measures to be taken on the national and Carpathian-wide level.
- ⇒ The Parties in cooperation with other major stakeholders in the Carpathians may consider setting up a common international mechanism to support the implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Protocol and this Strategy if funding is available. Modalities and functioning of this common mechanism are to be agreed upon and overseen by the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee. The common mechanism might focus on:
 - Developing, maintaining and keeping up to date a common online Carpathian platform on sustainable tourism
 - Resource mobilization
 - Exchange of good practices
 - Product Development
 - Branding and Certification
 - Marketing and Promotion
 - Capacity Building of stakeholders, businesses and destinations

4.2 Financial Arrangements

- ⇒ The Parties are exploring the possibilities for **project based funding** from national or international sources in order to implement the strategy on their territory and/or in trans-boundary or multi-national cooperation with other Parties.
- ⇒ The Parties request the Carpathian Convention – Working Group on Sustainable Tourism and the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention to cooperate on resource mobilization and to share information with relevant stakeholders.

4.3 Time Frame and Reporting

- ⇒ A ten-year time frame (2014 – 2024) is envisaged for the Strategy implementation (see 8.4 Monitoring and Evaluation).
- ⇒ Both *Action Plans* in chapter 3 cover a time frame of 1-6 years, allowing for periodic review and necessary adjustments of the implementation progress.
- ⇒ Based on a common format developed by the CC-WGST, each Party prepares on a three yearly basis, in English language and if possible in national language, a progress report on the implementation of the Protocol for Sustainable Tourism and the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians. This aims to inform national stakeholders. This report is submitted to the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Tourism.

4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Measuring the progress of Strategy implementation

The Strategy outlines a vision, objectives and activities to be accomplished in a given period of time. These activities represent the milestones for achieving the Strategy partly or as a whole.

The strategy implementation progress is measured by a set of milestone indicators. Parties shall report on progress based on these indicators and review the Strategy when needed. The CC-WGST is responsible for the development of the set of indicators and sub-indicators.

The CC-WGST might use the following set of progress indicators as a future reference:

Progress Indicators as guidance for the development of specific indicators as per activities in the Action Plans	Target Year
1. A coordination platform for product development, promotion, marketing and monitoring is established and operational.	tbd
2. Small and micro businesses are supported by organizational systems and incentive policies.	2016
3. Governments adjust their voluntary and legal frameworks for the support of sustainable tourism based on common assessments. *	2017

4. A properly managed network of hiking, biking, skiing and horse riding trails is established.	2017
5. Products and services follow common quality standards and are integrated into a labelling system (The Carpathian Experience).	2017
6. A network of ecotourism destinations is established.	2017
7. A common brand is created for touristic products and destinations in the Carpathians.	2017
8. All destinations in the Carpathians have an effective management and DMO following a set of sustainability criteria (tourist hubs).	2019
9. A number of products (STP – sustainable tourism products) are promoted in the regional as well as global tourism-related markets.	2018
10. A governmental support scheme for the sustainable use of authentic landscapes and wilderness areas, with associated tourism infrastructure, which forms the foundation of any tourism operations.	2020
11. An information system is established throughout the Carpathians providing online solutions, and data for monitoring and for visitors at the same time.	2020
12. A number of Carpathian service providers are successfully communicating to tourists the value of this mountain region based on a code of practice.	2022
13. A number of laboratories and incubators are established as learning institutions on sustainable tourism practices for providers and communities.	2023

For indicator 3 the “Methodology for the Assessment of National Tourism Strategy” (CEEweb; 2013) might be used. The methodology can be found on http://www.ceeweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/CEEweb_STWG_NTDS-Assessment-Methodology-final1.pdf

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In the years 2013 and 2014 more than 800 individuals and organizations provided feedback on the strategy during a number of country consultation meetings. Thanks to the Centrum Veronica Hostetin/Czech Republic, the Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development Miskolc/Hungary together with the Ekocentrum SOSNA/Slovak Republic, the Naturalists Club/Poland, the Association of Ecotourism/Romania, OZ Pronatur and Jantarova Cesta/Slovak Republic, the Association FAUNA/Ukraine and Vavel Pozlovi Turizma/Serbia, the stakeholders in the seven countries provided valuable inputs to the strategy.

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