Strengthening **Governance and Stakeholder Participation** under the Carpathian Convention through the **Central Mountains** Project.

Workshop – D.3.4.3

Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee | Belgrade | 03 December 2025

Isidoro De Bortoli, Agnese Brigatti

Institute for Regional Development - Eurac Research

eurac
research

OUTLINE

The Central Mountains project

Solutions for long-term cooperation in mountain areas

Next steps

The Joint Strategy report

We want your **feedback!**

Interactive section

2

The
project

What do
we do?

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11 PARTNERS

Countries and regions

AUSTRIA	Kärnten, Voralberg
CZECHIA	Střední Čechy
HUNGARY	Észak-Magyarország
ITALY	Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, Friuli-Venezia Giulia
POLAND	Dolnośląskie Podkarpackie
ROMANIA	Bucarest
SLOVAKIA	Bratislavský kra
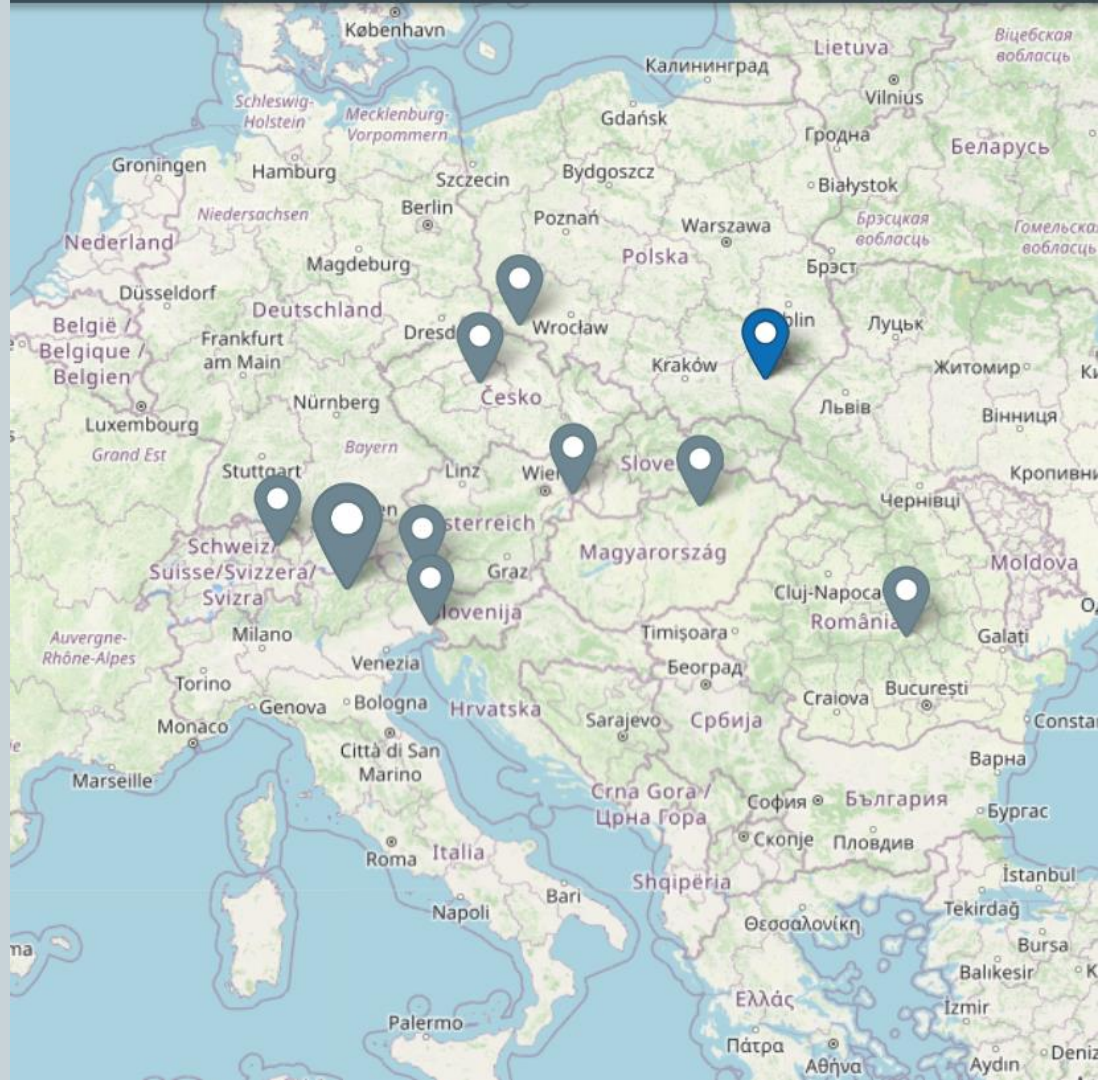
Partnership

LP - Rzeszów County (PL)

PP2 - Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland (PL)

PP3 - Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (SK)

PP4 - Carpathian Foundation – Hungary (HU)

PP5 - Association of Regional Brands (CZ)

PP6 - Foundation of Landscape Protection (PL)

PP7 - Eurac research (IT)

PP8 - Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (IT)

PP9 - EGTC Alpine Pearls (AT)

PP10 - CIPRA International Lab (AT)

PP11 - Brasov County (RO)
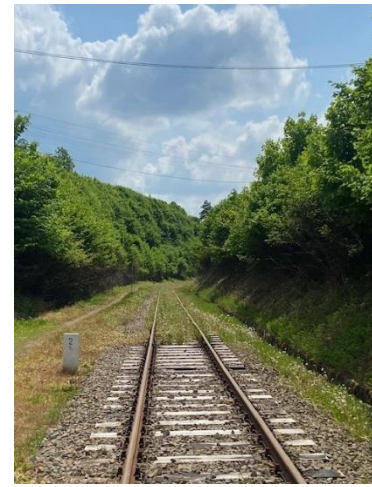
CENTRAL MOUNTAINS – GENERAL INFORMATION

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

Co-funded by the European Union

Central Mountains

Implementation period

01.04.2023 – 31.03.2026

Total value of the project

2 334 902,00 EUR

Amount of co-financing

1 867 921,60 (80%)

CENTRAL MOUNTAINS – PROJECT GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Achieving

Long-lasting, sustainable cooperation ▫across borders

in mountain areas

through improved **governance structures** and **processes**

Strengthening
regional development and
cohesion beyond borders
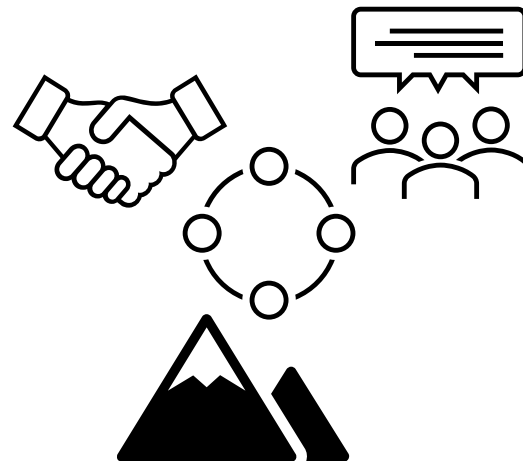
Main project objectives

- Strengthening and improving governance models in the Alpine-Carpathian mountain areas of Central Europe

- Enhance cross-border and transnational cooperation structures

- Solve common challenges for the sustainable development of mountain regions.

Project structure

WP1

JOINT PERSPECTIVE for **better cooperation governance** in mountain areas in Central Europe

WP2

JOINT ACTIONS across borders for better cooperation and **testing governance structures and processes**

ACTIONS PROVE
WHO SOMEONE IS.
WORDS PROVE
WHO THEY
WANNA BE

WP3

JOINT SOLUTIONS and **territorial uptake**

!

Project outputs

WP1

MARCH 2023 – MARCH 2024

1 Joint strategy
4 Action plans

WP2

MARCH 2024 – SEPTEMBER 2025

6 Pilot actions

WP3

MARCH 2025 – MARCH 2026

7 Solutions

+ POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
+ JOINT STRATEGY REFINEMENT

Expected results_ Carpathians

Action Plan for sustainable tourism development

A participatory, multisectoral and multi-level sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians

Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) and Civil Society Platforms (CCSP)

Improving existing CSTP centres in Poland (ACE) and Romania (Brasov), and new CCSP governance

Cross-border Functional Areas (CBFA)

Creation of a strategy for 3 CBFAs in the Carpathians in the PL/SK/UA border

Feedback session (1)

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Joint
Strategy
Report

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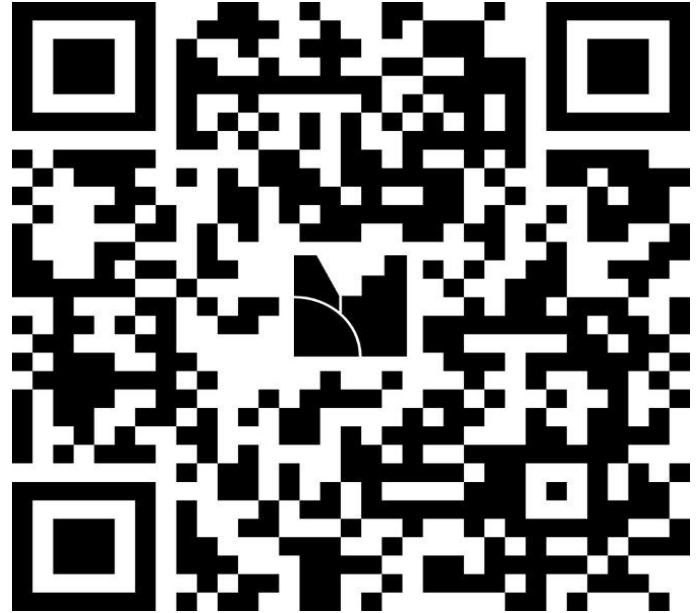
CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS

Where do we stand in community-led sustainable development of mountain regions?

Data Analysis & Needs assessment. 3 chapters:

1. **Taxonomy** – Central Mountains' Ground

2. **Lessons learned**: a results' capitalization for the premise of better cooperation governance in CE Mountain Areas

3. The Central Mountains **outlook on the future of community-led sustainable development** of mountain areas

(1) TAXONOMY

How does sustainable change happen?

Community-Led Initiative (CLI)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Community-Led Sustainable Development (CLSD)

Within the project: Focus on Sustainable tourism development

Governance

Cross-border cooperation

Stakeholder involvement

Youth engagement

(2) LESSONS LEARNED

Results' capitalization for better cooperation governance in CE mountain areas

Evaluation of **59 projects**

offering **governance** solutions

carried out in the **Alps, Carpathians, and beyond**

54% funded by **Interreg**

Funding Programmes distribution

46%   54%

Interreg
Other
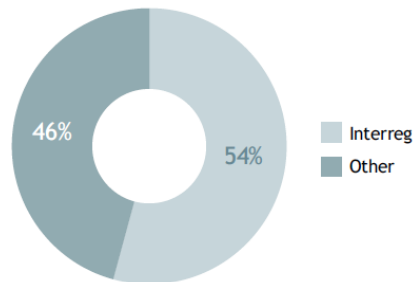
Trends

1. Establishment of **transboundary institutions;**
2. Utilization of existing frameworks;
3. Experimentation of **local-level coordination** and **citizen's involvement**;
4. Creation of **Cross-Border Mechanisms** combining Coordination and Participation;
5. Projects focusing exclusively on fostering citizen participation.

Common challenges

1. Shortage in **projects that promote participation**;
2. Language & geopolitical barriers;
3. Lack of **follow up and capitalization**;
4. Rare active **involvement of young people**;
5. Lack of **Cross-Border Functional Areas** (CBFAs).

(2) LESSONS LEARNED

Strategic actions required

1. **Moving away from centralized decision-making approaches** in promoting initiatives addressed to project-linked communities and stakeholders;
2. Localizing sustainability patterns through the settlement of **short-term goals first**, and long-term goals then;
3. Embedding **participatory governance** approaches in bottom-up decision making.

Stakeholder engagement

CM has listed **more than 80 stakeholders** so far, and the process is ongoing; stakeholder engagement is a core element of community-led sustainable development

Taxonomy	SHs
Business support organisation	17
General public	
Higher education and research organisation	1
Local Public Institution	
Media	
Municipality	2
National Public Institution	3
National-Regional Park	4
NGOs	19
Protected Area	
Regional Public Institution	13
SMEs	2
Student Association	2
Tourism Board	8
University	1
Other	12

Level of impact	SHs
Low	5
Medium	39
High	38

(2) LESSONS LEARNED

Central Mountains' action

1. Empowering and promoting a **dedicated mechanism for the active engagement of local stakeholders** in the most relevant decision-making processes;

2. **Advocating existing dedicated platforms and encouraging the creation of new ones** for cooperation and thematic exchange among relevant target project groups;

3. **Sustaining the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions, the EUSALP and the EUSDR** institutional context as the official framework to address and implement the obligations under other practices or agreements.

(3) WHAT NEXT?

A **co-design collective approach** to the future of Community-led sustainable development of mountain areas

Data collected through a working module distributed to the **Carpathian partners** of CM.

Learnings from the Alpine region

(I) effective operation of direct democracy within **local participatory processes**, coupled
with the development management process;

(II) the **non-hierarchical institutional and organizational richness** covering crucial fields, fostering genuine partnership and cooperation among stakeholders;

(III) Proficient management of territorial brands, along with tourism development strategies focusing on cultural and natural heritage.

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(3) WHAT NEXT?

Cross-Border Functional Areas (CBFAs)

Possible **Cross-Border Functional Areas**:
- **Poland/Slovakia border**
  - Tatra Mountains region.
  - Beskid Niski region.
  - Prešov area (Presov and Podkarpackie region).
- **Poland/Ukraine border**
  - Brama Przemyska region.
- **Poland/Slovakia/Ukraine border**
  - Kremenaros area.
  - Spiš region.

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(3) WHAT NEXT?

Key actors and local stakeholders

- **Destination Management Organisations** (DMOs)
- **Local** and **regional authorities**
- **NGOs** and **CSOs**
- **Youth organisations**
- **Local communities**
- **Business associations** and **entrepreneurs**
- **Cross-border associations**

(3) WHAT NEXT?

Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

CORE

IMPORTANT

(3) WHAT NEXT?

Risks !

Associated with the implementation of the strategy.

1. **Context**: political instability, deteriorating environment for civil society organizations, legislative constraints and institutional gatekeepers;
2. **Willingness to participate**: passivity and lack of interest by local population and authorities;
3. **Contents and their communication**: misunderstandings, low level of identification;
4. **Availability of resources**: lack of financial resources.

Resources 👍

For addressing barriers and mitigating risks.

1. **Existing cooperation programmes**;
2. **Shared knowledge base:** robust research and data for informed decision-making;
3. **Sharing of experiences** supported by professional facilitators;
4. **Multi-level cooperation schemes**;
5. **National and regional schemes and funds** to address obstacles.

(3) WHAT NEXT?

Elements for success

- **Preliminary activities** (e.g. need analysis, mapping stakeholders & target groups);

- **Guaranteeing equal access to all stakeholders** in the participatory process;

- **Reflecting local needs** and **mobilising resources** for implementation;

- **Support of higher authorities** for local strategies of socio-economic development;

- **Access to financial resources**.

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(3) WHAT NEXT?
Advantages of participatory & inclusive governance

- ❑ **Better understanding of local context** and its cross-border needs;
- ❑ **Guaranteeing equal partnership** between different actors, contributing to social cohesion;
- ❑ **Advancing environmental sustainability** by incorporating diverse perspective and local knowledge;
- ❑ **Supporting, enhancing and modernising existing decision-making processes;**
- ❑ **Proposing integrated projects** with a wide impact;
- ❑ **Tangible impact** on the quality of life of the territories**.**

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(3) WHAT NEXT?

Motivation to engage

Why would local communities actively engage in local governance processes?

- ❑ **Participatory nature** of the process;
- ❑ **Financial benefits**;
- ❑ Willingness to **influence local authorities' decisions**;
- ❑ Willingness to **protect local material and intangible heritage**;
- ❑ **Capability of local governance systems** to set clear goals and demonstrate a capacity to solve problems.

Feedback session (2)

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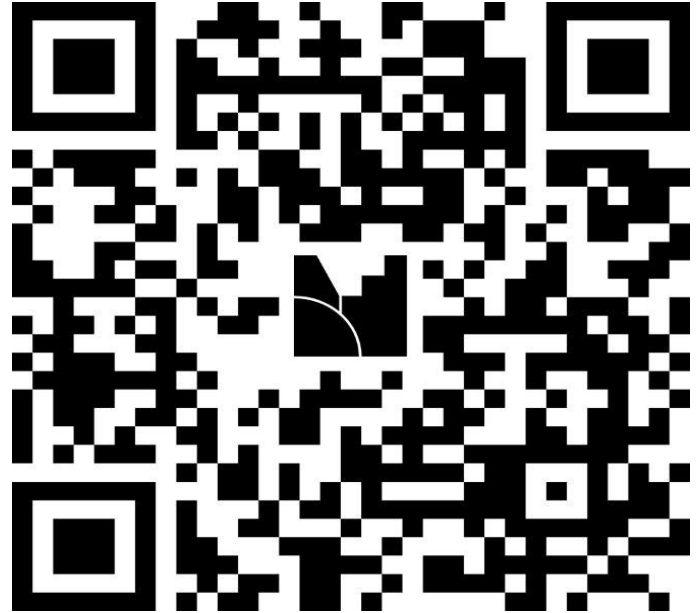
Solutions

For long-term transnational cooperation

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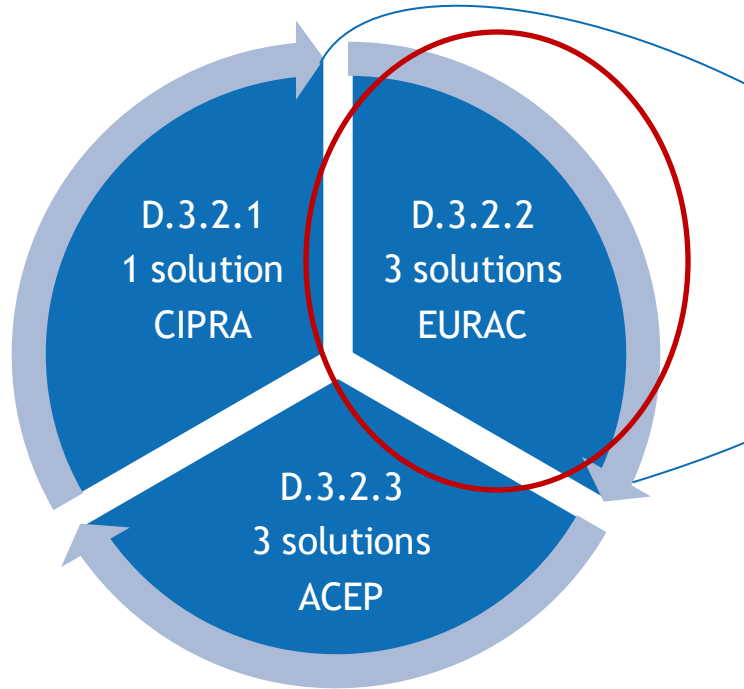
WP3 SOLUTIONS
Transnational structures for long-term cooperation

3 developed solutions:

(A) **Cross-Border Working Teams** (CBWTs) as a governance mechanism to secure lasting cooperation on sustainable tourism in the Carpathian region within the CSTP
(Brasov County)

(B) **Renewed governance** for the Alpine Pearls EGTC
(Alpine Pearls)

(C) Improved structure for CSO cooperation in the Carpathian Region: the **Carpathian Civil Society Platform** (CCSP)
(Carpathian Foundation)
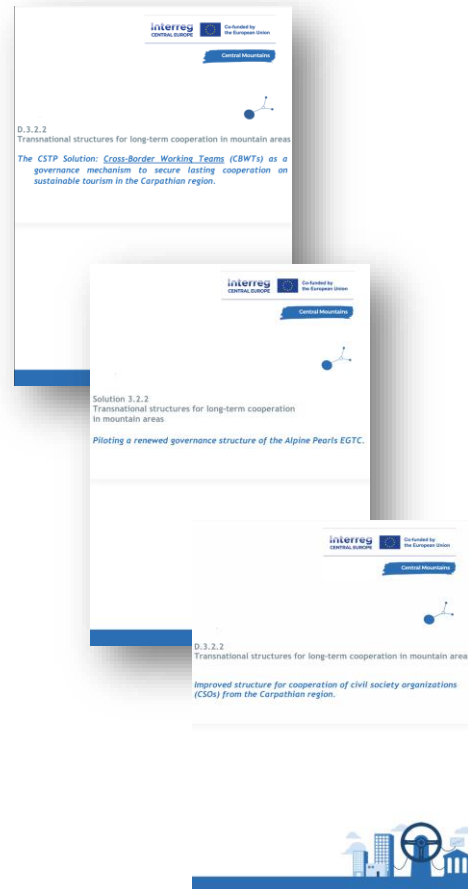
(A)
Cross-Border Working Teams (CBWT)

The Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) solution

Pilot Work Plan: A Roadmap for Cooperation

We aim to build a **shared, functional model** for regional cooperation.

Goals:

✔ Test real coordination across countries 2025 - 2026

✔ Strengthen CSTP Centers and partners

✔ Focus on tangible tourism results

D.2.2.1. – Designing and Testing A New Cooperation Mechanism for the CSTP
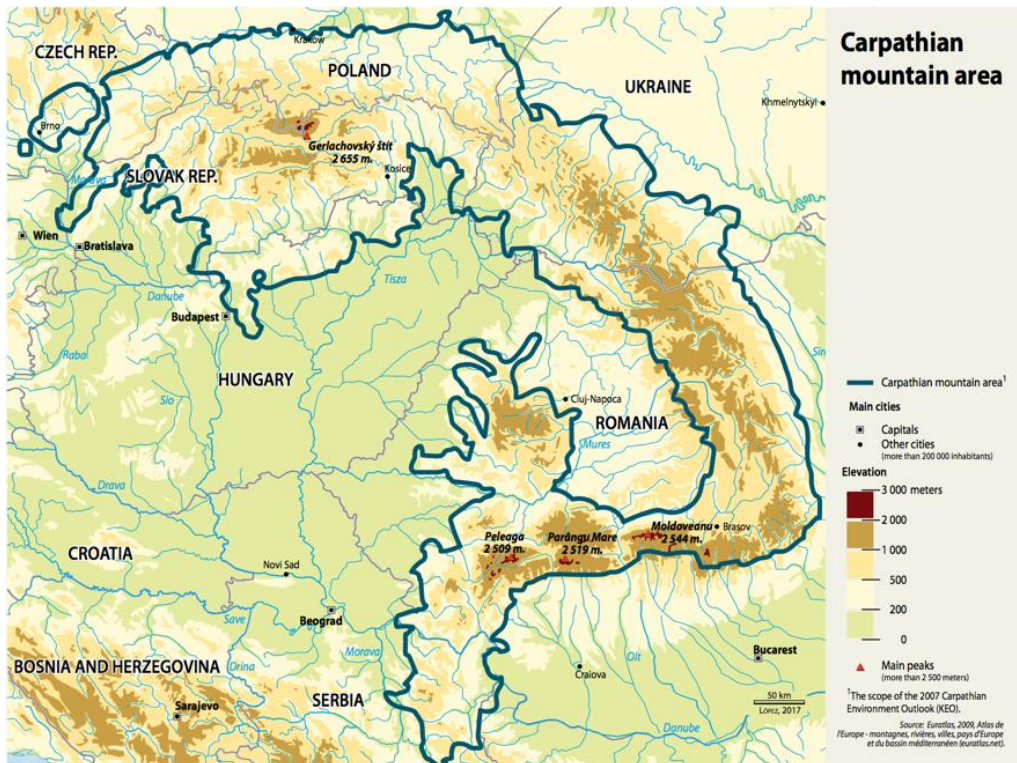
CARPATHIAN CONVENTION'S SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLATFORM

CCIC, Belgrad
December 3, 2025

**ALINA DRĂGAN,
Brasov County Council
CSTP_RO**

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Actions deriving from CARPATHIAN CONVENTION

➢ The Parties shall actively participate in implementation of the Tourism Protocol and the Strategy for the Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians;

➢ The Secretariat shall elaborate collaborative agreements with the CENTERS of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP);

➢ WG Tourism, the CSTP and its Centers shall contribute to the Carpathian wide report on the implementation of the Carpathian Convention and its Protocols;

➢ CSTP and its Centers shall further elaborate on the development of the common Carpathian brand

➢ WG Tourism shall consider the Set of Indicators for measuring the positive and negative effects of tourism in the Carpathians as a useful source for the implementation of Article 24 of the Tourism Protocol;

CSTP

➢ Promote intensive **cooperation of tourism stakeholders** from all Carpathian countries in the implementation of the tasks listed in the strategy through an active network of relevant partners (countries, stakeholders or external experts).

➢ **Platform for common understanding of sustainable tourism** planning and management.

➢ **Comprehensive efforts** of the countries that have ratified the Carpathian Convention to coordinate the responsible use, protection and promotion of **the Carpathians as a sustainable tourism destination.**

➢ An **information hub** to ensure the flow of information in the following area: **development, maintenance and updating of a common online database** on sustainable tourism in the Carpathians; **mobilisation of resources**; **exchange of best practices; product development; branding and certification; marketing and promotion; capacity building of stakeholders, businesses and destinations.**

CSTP Ukraine

CSTP Slovakia

CSTP Romania

CSTP Poland

CARPATHIAN CONVENTION'S SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLATFORM

2016

Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform CSTP

CSTC Ukraine CSTC Poland **CSTC Romania**

2017

2018

Work Programme 2018 – 2020

Reporting Format

Database Sustainable Tourism

CSTC Ukraine **CSTC Poland** CSTC Romania

2020

2020 - 2023

Work Programme 2020-2023 Carpathian Route

Central Mountains

2024 - 2026

GOAL: Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform shall support cooperation between stakeholders and enhance implementation of the Carpathian Convention provisions on Sustainable Tourism

Key Priorities and Actions

The 4 Pan-Carpathian Priorities

1. **Ecotourism Destinations** – natural & cultural places to protect and promote

2. **Long-Distance Trails** – hiking, biking routes across borders

3. **Local Gastro Points** – authentic food meets local economy

4. **Sustainability Standards** – facilitation of common criteria for tourism quality & eco-responsibility

Ecotourism Destinations

Long-Distance Trails

Local Gastro Points

Sustainability in Mountain Destinations

...connecting nature, culture and community

How We'll Work?

Pilot Countries (2025-2026):
Poland | Romania | Slovakia |Czech Republic|Hungary|Serbia |Ukraine

➢ **CSTP Coordination Committee** (strategic lead)
➢ **4 Cross-Border Working Teams** (1 per priority)
➢ **CSTP Centers & NTTFs /national organizations** (local anchors)
➢ **Diverse audience of institutional and local actors (**local authorities, DMOs, tourism entrepreneurs and SMEs, Protected area managers and NGOs, Local communities, youth groups and Local Action Groups (LAGs), University and technical experts, Local communities
➢ Support from the **Carpathian Euroregion as a coordinating backbone.**

CROSS-BORDER WORKING TEAMS
AS A TOOL FOR
THE CARPATHIAN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLATFORM

We aim to build a **shared, functional model** for regional cooperation - a stepwise structure:

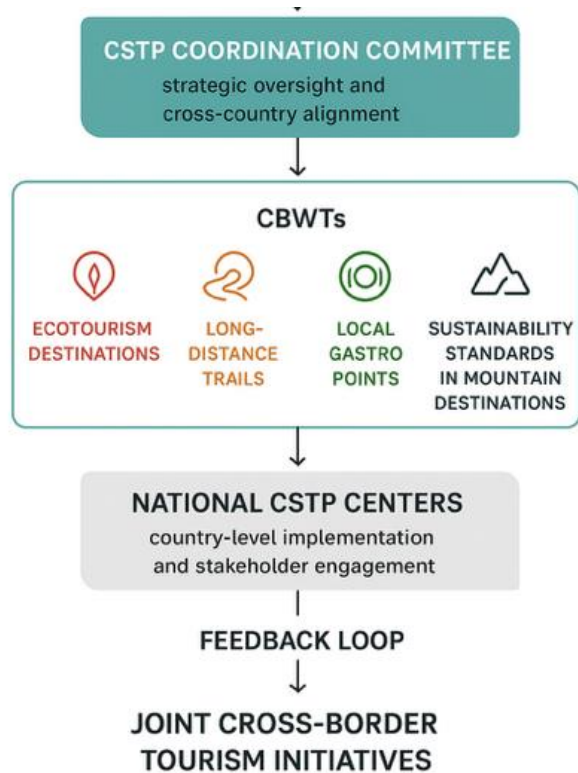**2025 kick-off**

✅ Shared SMART objectives

✅ Rapid national assessments

✅ Launch working teams

2026:

📦 Full pilot implementation

📈 Evaluation & recommendations

🧭 Scaling to other Carpathian countries

By 2026, we'll know **what works and how** to expand it further.

CBWTs mechanism

- ✓ establishes permanent, transnational structures that enable in-depth knowledge sharing, joint planning and pilot implementation
- ✓ ensures both bottom-up participation and high-level coordination
- ✓ accelerate progress by enabling mutual learning among Carpathian countries
- ✓ provide training and capacity-building
- ✓ diversify funding sources (EU, national, private) therefore reduce dependency on a single political framework
- ✓ joint initiatives, harmonized standards, coordinated events, shared communication on best practices and common needs
- ✓ CBWTs report progress to CSTP → CSTP consolidates and relays to NTTFs and CC WG Tourism & CC Secretariat

What Success Looks Like…

Tangible Outputs by 2026:

🌲 Ecotourism destinations identified
🍽️ Local food networks launched
🥾 Trail routes mapped
✅ Sustainability criteria models shared along Mountain Destinations

A functioning CSTP coordination model

CSTP recognized and supported across the region

…thematic priorities correspond to Protocol's objectives

fragile but powerful in fragrance
...uniquely Carpathian

Just like the *Garofița Pietrei Craiului flower* — rare, resilient, and rooted in mountain strength — CSTP stands out as a **bold force** for sustainable tourism across the Carpathians.

➤ **Sustainable Destination Development:** creating ecotourism destinations and long-distance trails - **joint tourism products and ecologically responsible tourism offers relieve pressure on sensitive areas while highlighting the region's biodiversity and landscapes.**

➤ **Governance and Cooperation:** a Coordination Committee and Cross-Border Working Teams - **cooperation, stakeholder engagement and capacity building.** The proposed role of the Carpathian Euroregion as a coordination backbone - **strengthening transboundary institutions to facilitate dialogue, communication and resource pooling across borders.**

…where Mountain Communities Lead the Way

Just like this young guardians of tradition, CSTP empowers the people of mountain destinations to carry the harvest of heritage, resilience and cross-border unity into a sustainable future

> **Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Local Economies:** Local Gastronomic Points, local food networks and authentic cultural experiences - **valorising traditional knowledge, gastronomy and crafts as integral elements of Carpathian tourism** bringing **community-based economic benefits, cultural preservation and local empowerment.**

➤ **Common Standards and Impact Management:** sustainability standards for destinations, services and infrastructure - **quality frameworks and impact management;** shared criteria and monitoring tools - **harmonized standards across the Carpathians**; quarterly and annual reporting mechanisms - **monitoring and evaluation provisions.**

➤ **Branding, Communication and Awareness:** Integration of Carpathia Brand, providing a unified marketing and identity tool - **promoting the Carpathians as a sustainable tourism destination, coherence in external communication and enhances the region's visibility**

Soaring above the Carpathians ... CSTP aims to be our guide to successful sustainable landings

Thank you!

Alina Dragan
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www.carpathianconvention.org

(B)
Renewed EGTC governance

The Alpine Pearls EGTC solution

(B) RENEWED GOVERNANCE FOR ALPINE PEARLS

What is an EGTC?

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) allows different **Member States' public entities** to come together under a **new entity with a legal personality**. The EGTC Regulation was established in 2006 and it gave the possibility to create the first European cooperation structures with legal personalities, defined by European law.

There are currently 92 EGTCs.
Alpine Pearls was registered in 2022.

ALPINE PEARLS
eco-friendly escapes

European Committee of the Regions

(B) RENEWED GOVERNANCE FOR ALPINE PEARLS

Challenges and Motivations

➢ **Fragmented governance** and **high operational costs**.

➢ **Limited internal ownership** and **uneven member participation**.

➢ **Lack of technical capacities** in smaller municipalities.

➢ **Low involvement** of youth and the private sector.

(B) RENEWED GOVERNANCE FOR ALPINE PEARLS

New governance structure

I. Presidential role strengthened through **directorship**, ensuring cohesive and streamlined leadership;

II. **Optimized task allocation within internal staff**, significantly reducing reliance on outsourcing;

III. **Flexible and modular Local Action Plans** (LAPs) tailored to diverse local contexts;

IV. **Integrated digital platform** enhancing coordination, transparency, and knowledge sharing;

V. **Alpine Pearls Academy**, fostering continuous training and capacity development;

VI. **Adaptive project pipeline** aligning emerging needs with funding opportunities.

Target groups & engagement

➢ **Primary users**: local/regional governments, policymakers, NGOs, youth, SMEs

➢ **Participatory tools**: visioning workshops, stakeholder interviews, digital platform

➢ **Cross-border collaboration** with Carpathian Euroregion, Weissensee, TourCert, etc.

(B) RENEWED GOVERNANCE FOR ALPINE PEARLS

© Alpine Pearls

Expected tangible outcomes

- ✓ Strengthened **internal governance and management** structures;

- ✓ Jointly developed **Local Action Plans** fostering cross-municipal collaboration;

- ✓ Deepened **stakeholder engagement** at the transnational level;

- ✓ Expanded **capacity-building initiatives** with higher participation rates;

- ✓ Increased **project development** through the pipeline tool.

(B) RENEWED GOVERNANCE FOR ALPINE PEARLS

©Alpine Pearls

Added value & scalability

- **Formal commitment** by members secured with Letters of Commitment

- **Integration with regional and national policy** frameworks

- **Replicable model** for other EGTCs and mountain cooperation networks

- **Diverse funding sources and partnerships** ensuring sustainability

(C)
Improved structure for cooperation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from the Carpathian region

The Carpathian Foundation solution

(C) IMPROVED STRUCTURE FOR COOPERATION FOR CSOS FROM THE CARPATHIANS

Challenges and motivations

- **Growing social and regional disparities** between the most developed part of the Carpathian region and border areas;

- **Lack of systemic solutions** for integrating the development potential of the Carpathian borderlands;

- **Low level of community-driven development solutions** and **cross-sector cooperation**;

- **Limited organizational capacity**, restricted access to information, and scarce funding opportunities;

- **Isolation**, lack of a supportive transnational network, an enabling environment, or institutional backing.

(C) IMPROVED STRUCTURE FOR COOPERATION FOR CSOS FROM THE CARPATHIANS

Goals

- **Networking** and **mobilizing civil society actors** within the Carpathian Euroregion

- **Promoting citizen participation** in policy and decision-making processes;

- Strengthening **social cohesion** and civil society;

- Offering a **framework for cross-border partnerships**;

- **Synergizing** the **efforts** of CSOs, amplifying the impact of their activities;

- **Generating, supporting, disseminating, promoting, and mainstreaming solutions** to socio-economic and ecological challenges;

- Unleashing and supporting the **innovative capacity** of CSOs.

(C) IMPROVED STRUCTURE FOR COOPERATION FOR CSOS FROM THE CARPATHIANS

Tangible outcomes

- ✓ **Physical Platform meetings** that provide opportunities for CSOs to share experiences, build partnerships, and plan joint projects.

- ✓ **Digital platform** to help CSOs find partners for joint cross-border cooperation projects and funding opportunities.

- ✓ **Local workshops** addressing the organizational capacity of CSOs and networking local CSOs around local focal points in each Carpathian subregion.

- ✓ Launching **grant programs** to support small-scale cross-border cooperation initiatives addressing the financial needs of CSOs

- ✓ Introducing the **Social Innovation Award** to recognize CSOs' solutions to local challenges

- ✓ Concept note of CARLA, a comprehensive **educational program** for emerging young leaders from the Carpathians

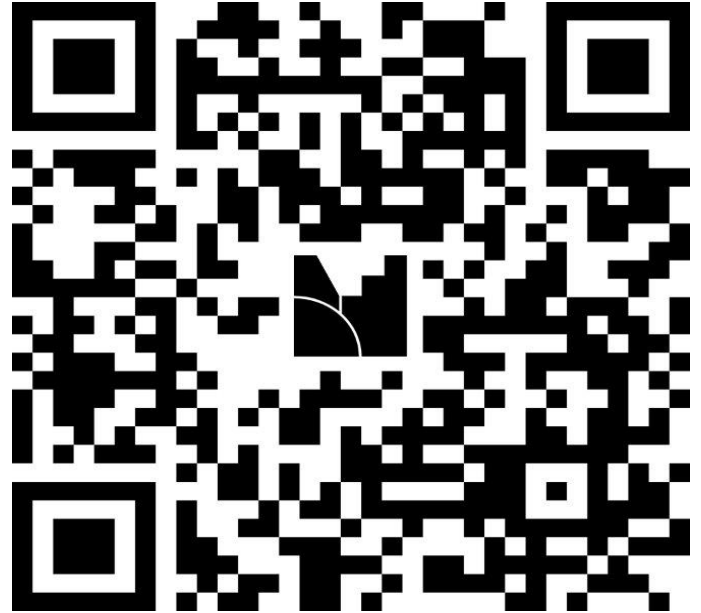# (C) IMPROVED STRUCTURE FOR COOPERATION FOR CSOS FROM THE CARPATHIANS

Building blocks of the Platform

- ❑ **Focal points** (five experienced NGOs, partners to CF, in each subregion)

- ❑ **Hublets** (local CSO networks)

- ❑ **Platform Council** (advisory body to support the transition to self-propelling organizatiom)

- ❑ **Transnational working groups** (youth, Roma, refugees, culture, community development, environment etc.)

- ❑ **Ad-hoc groups** for cross-cutting strategic and policy issues

Feedback session (3)

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Next steps

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From Pilot to Policy: Ensuring Sustainability through Governance Structures in Central Europe

In dialogue with the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions

Vienna, 16 December 2025

Final Project Conference

+ CSTP CBWTs workshop

Rzeszow, 11-12 March 2026

End of the project

March 2026

Thank you
for your attention
and partecipation!

CENTRAL MOUNTAINS
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