

Project Name: Development and promotion of certified sustainable tourism destinations in the Carpathians

Project Location: Carpathian Mountains

Originator of Concept: Carpathian EcoRegion Initiative

Total Budget: € 424.625

Proposed Start Date: October 2007

Expected End Date: September 2009

Project Background and Justification:

The Carpathian countries are undergoing a big change in many respects. Current political changes (EU accession) and the increase of economic development are causing major alterations of the livelihoods of the people in the Carpathians. On the one hand, migration to the cities, especially of young people, is the logical consequence of this development. On the other hand, the Carpathians bear a great potential of good opportunities for a positive rural development creating livelihoods that are worth living.

The Carpathians are unique in Europe. It is one of the most extensive areas of both mountain and virgin forests. The mountain range is home to numerous different plant and animal species that cannot be found or are endangered in the remaining parts of Europe. Scientists speak about a 'hot spot of biodiversity'. Additionally, numerous different nationalities have left a rich cultural heritage including buildings, traditions and handicrafts.

This certain combination of a varied landscape, evolved out of rural traditions like grazing and forestry, harbouring wild life unique in Europe, and very characteristic villages and handicrafts, form a brilliant basis for tourist development. Considering the current international trend of an increasing market of nature related tourism, the development of sustainable tourism destinations that includes the aspects of nature conservation is good opportunity to add socio-economic value to the natural heritage. It may become a sustainable tool for long-term conservation and rural development.

As the Carpathian countries underlined sustainable development in the mountain region by signing the Carpathian Convention, supporting the development of ecotourism destinations and following activities is certainly welcome and desirable.

To make ecotourism destinations and offers related to ecotourism more transparent to tourists not only from the Carpathian region itself but also from other regions worldwide, a Carpathian-wide label on sustainable tourism will be developed, starting from what already exists in Romania. The Association of Ecotourism in Romania has developed a certification system for ecotourism destinations, accommodations and tour guides/operators that will function as the basis for the expansion of the label to other Carpathian countries (Serbia and Ukraine), where no such sustainable tourism certification system has been developed so far.

Labels are of no value, if they are not known. Therefore, a directory of labelled/certified destinations, accommodations and tour guides/operators will be posted on the CERI homepage with links to relevant organizations that work at the local level.

Two model sites will be chosen in Serbia and Ukraine to help interested local stakeholder developing and implementing a sustainable tourism destination with certified tourism services and a common marketing strategy.

Importance

- The Carpathians as such are practically not present at the worldwide tourist map of destinations. Furthermore, the project would help to promote the Carpathians' values like beautiful nature and wilderness and would help to create a corporate identity.
- Currently, there is no comprehensive overview of already existing eco-certified tourism services offered in the Carpathians. There are also potential regions that do not yet have any ecotourism labelling system. From other countries we know that a label generates confidence and guarantees a common understanding for tourist offers in any kind (destination, accommodation, tour guides/operators).
- Nature conservation is a hot topic in the Carpathians. By creating ecotourism destinations, nature conservation issues will be supported.
- Additionally, the label offers new job opportunities for the rural population in the Carpathians and will therefore help to stem the migration to the cities or abroad.
- Preparatory work for and implementation of the Carpathian wide label will have an educational component that will create awareness about the natural and cultural values of the Carpathians and nature conservation, both for tourists and local communities.

Objective:

The Project will have the following objectives:

1. To promote the concept and development of ecotourism for the support of nature conservation and local communities in natural areas in the Carpathians with special emphasis on Ukraine and Serbia
2. To put the Carpathian Mountains Region on the world-wide map of tourist destinations promoting the unique natural heritage as an essential element of the Carpathian tourist destination image
3. To support the creation of new jobs for local people and involve them in a wider network of persons and organizations that deal with sustainable tourism

Outputs:

1. Ecotourism certification developed for Serbia and Ukraine according to the national legislation

2. Two model areas, in Serbia and Ukraine each, are developed as ecotourism destinations, where nature conservation is ensured and high quality ecotourism programmes and sound infrastructure is in place
3. Carpathian-wide umbrella label for sustainable tourist services including all existing labels/certifications in the region
4. Directory of eco-certified/labelled destinations and tourism businesses including an interactive online guestbook as contribution to the international promotion of nature as an essential element of the Carpathian tourism destination image

Project Activities and Timing:

1. Develop the Ecotourism Labelling/Certification System for Serbia and Ukraine based on the certification system developed by AER.

- 1.1. Find partners and stakeholders
- 1.2. Discuss and agree upon the certification mechanism with interested stakeholders in Serbia and Ukraine under the lead of AER (electronic consultation process, workshops)

2. Capacity building in 2 model areas in Serbia and Ukraine including assistance in ecotourism development services, ecotourism development infrastructure, tourism marketing, nature conservation policy, project writing & fundraising etc.)

- 2.1. Select 2 model areas and find partners at the local level
- 2.2. Raise awareness about ecotourism development as additional income in the 2 villages
- 2.3. Develop an concept for ecotourism development at the 2 model areas
 - 2.3.1. Analyse current situation
 - 2.3.2. Organize workshops to develop ecotourism infrastructure for the 2 model sites together with local authorities and people interested (What does a village need to be ready as an ecotourism destination? – an overall concept shall be developed including solutions for waste treatment and renewable energy)
- 2.4. Organize trainings on practical issues like how to run a sustainable accommodation that will have an ecotourism certificate and other services (information centre, local and organic food production, tour guides, handicraft workshops etc.), how to gain the certificate
 - 2.4.1. Product development workshop with local and regional tourism operations
- 2.5. Develop a small-grant scheme for local people to support their ideas for ecotourism development at the 2 model sites that fit into the overall concept

2.6. Develop a marketing strategy for the 2 model sites

3. Create umbrella-label for Carpathian sustainable tourism services harmonising with the EU eco-label and create a directory of available certified/labelled sustainable/ecotourism services in the Carpathians

3.1. Collect existing data on certification systems and sustainable/eco- tourism services in all 7 Carpathian countries

3.2. Organize a workshop to discuss basic criteria for the umbrella-label based on the data collected and EU eco-label in tourism

3.3. Create an evaluation and monitoring system for tourism services under the umbrella label to integrate new partners and guarantee good quality of the offers (e.g. progress in improving standards of services, attitude and knowledge change, capacity building, etc

3.4. Integrate existing and newly developed sustainable/eco- tourism services in the Carpathians in a directory including an interactive guestbook on the web that will regularly be updated and post it on the CERI website with links to other important stakeholder websites

4. Promote the Carpathian as a destination through the labelled/certified services and destinations on the international market

4.1. Get in contact and organize meetings with regional and national tourism offices and tourism businesses or other important stakeholders for marketing of the products

4.2. Create a common identity for the certified services in the Carpathian and develop a common web-site;

4.3. Organise familiarisation trips for journalists and your-operators;

4.4. Participation to international travel shows

Timetable:

	07	2008				2009		
	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III
1. Development of certification system	x	x						
2. Capacity building in 2 model areas	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3. Create umbrella label and directory	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4. Promotion and marketing			x	x	x	x	x	x

Project implementation arrangements:

The programme will be coordinated and implemented by the Tourism Working Group within the Carpathian EcoRegion Initiative (CERI), which is a network of

environmental NGOs and research institutes, in close partnership with protected area administrations, tourism associations, non-governmental associations acting in local development and nature conservation and travel agencies.

Key stakeholders are:

- Local communities
- Local NGO's in the field of conservation and ecotourism development, especially CERI members
- Protected areas administrations;
- Forest administrations and hunting associations;
- Ministries (e.g. Agriculture, Food, Forestry and Environment Protection, Transport, Housing and Tourism)
- Tourism business sector
- Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention

Project Budget:

How much will the project cost? Provide a brief budget summary.

Item	Estimated costs (€)
1. Development of certification system	30,000
2. Capacity building in 2 model areas	250,000
3. Create umbrella label including monitoring and evaluation system and directory	35,000
4. Promotion and marketing	20,000
5. Project management	60,000
6. Office running costs and administration (7.5%)	29,625
TOTAL	424,625

The project will be co-financed by the EU Core Grant with approximately € 10,000, if the application will be successful. The EU Core Grant will cover parts of Activity 3 and 4.

Potential partners (they have to be contacted)

- CEEWEB, Hungary
- International Charitable Foundation 'Heifer Project International, Ukraine
- Djerdap National Park Administration, Serbia
- CenOrt, Serbia
- REC, Czech Republic (expertise on branding)
- ECEAT, Czech Republic

Members of the CERI Tourism Working Group

- AER, Romania
- Association of Young Researchers Bor, Serbia
- Ecoclub 'Carpathians', Ukraine
- Ecolibri Bionet, Serbia

- Ecological Society Endemit, Serbia
- Ecological Society Kladovo, Serbia
- EPCE, Czech Republic
- EPCE, Poland
- Foundation for the Support of Ecological Initiatives (FWIE), Poland
- Gorun, Serbia
- Green Dossier, Ukraine
- Green Echoes Association, Romania
- Milvus, Romania
- Slovak Wildlife Society, Slovakia
- WWF DCP

Organisational structure:

