



# Interreg



EUROPEAN UNION

## Danube Transnational Programme

### LENA

*Project LENA has covered the half of its two and a half year activities by June 2018, thus it is high time to evaluate whether the continuously formulating initiative has been able to achieve its aims compared to the original objectives, whether they can really affect the life of the main target group; i.e. the citizens. However, the practical activities of the international partnership programme have just started, at the same time when this article is being written, the results of the first partnership meetings, and the professional workshops are quite promising.*



*Target area of E-bike planning in Ciocanesti, Calarasi County, Romania - @Ioana Cenusă*

The LENA Project formulated in the framework of the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme was inaugurated in January 2017 with the main objective of initiating changes in the policies regarding the preservation of protected natural areas, and the economic sectors based on natural resources. I. e. new and supplementary income resources should be available that would be able to contribute to the preservation and usage of our natural and cultural heritage, as well as supplying with economic profit, moreover, more attention should be concentrated on these activities on the decision making levels, too.

The project is being realised by the cooperation of thirteen partner organizations with the participation of the following seven countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia and finally Hungary. The direct target area of the initiative includes eleven protected areas with a total of fifteen Natura 2000 sites.

A number of areas are concerned by the fundamentals of this initiative, and



*Best practices in sustainable soybean production demonstrated in pilot area Gornje Podunavlje in Serbia in the occasion of Danube Soya Field day.*



*Green mobility info point Bohinj – ride for free with e-rickshaw and along the way you will get all the important information about green mobility in Bohinj, Slovenia – ©Franja Gabrovšek Schmidt*

therefore the activities carried out within the framework of the project and the activities to be carried out over the course of the next year are extremely diverse, as can be seen below. The specific feature of INTERREG programmes is to break such large-scale international projects into so-called work packages, grouping the similar activities into one category. In the following, we will look at these packages, looking at how the plans have been implemented over the past one and a half year, what was the reception of these activities, and what is expected in the remaining one year – however, the obvious objective of the initiative is to achieve that they will be able to improve the living conditions of the rural population without

any further external help in the future.

From the practical point of view, perhaps the least important step was to review the relevant national policies, although in fact there is a lot of dependence on the way in which different regulations, laws and operational programmes support - or hinder - the exploiting the potentials of protected areas, sustainable utilization of values there. However, the definitive results will only be apparent in the coming months, it has become clear that such activities are being hampered by bureaucracy in a lot of countries, opposing the common sense and the several century-long, perfectly operating traditions. Based on the experiences, a package of proposals will be set up in the project, which, according to the partners' expectations, will provide an adequate basis for decision-makers to utilize the values in the rural population's environment for their own well-being.



*Participants of the „Danube Guides trainer“ course in the national park „Donau-Auen“ in Orth (Austria) at a training session that focusses on nature experience with all senses – ©response & ability*

Continuing, and most importantly, on a theoretical level, the countries participating in the initiative have reviewed the current nature of the economic activities associated with nature,



*Michael Beck, Lord Mayor of the city of Tuttlingen, and E-Manager, Dieter Schaaf, officially opened the LENA e-bike charging station located at the Danube bike path ©Arno Specht*

natural and cultural values in protected areas. In this regard, there have been several positive results that have led the responsible partner to develop a toolkit that enables the operators of the protected areas to effectively promote natural values, attracting the interest of the enterprising locals providing help in accessing the markets and finances.

Thus we have reached the question of the practical application of the results of the initiative. The INTERREG programmes are fundamentally based on research and international exchange of experience, but they also provide opportunities to try out the small-scale implementation of the

ideas in practice. As the participating countries cover a fairly large area, it is not surprising that they are facing different problems, although similar in their nature, and as a result, naturally, opportunities and answers are different, as well. In the followings, these sample programs are presented schematically, without the need for completeness.

The first practical work package builds on "the human capital". Within the framework of these activities, the use of natural values is not the basis of the sample programmes, but rather the presentation of them in the framework of gentle tourism. In the affected areas of the participating countries - Germany, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia - the terrain conditions currently allow "ordinary" visitors only short-term visits in space. In the meantime, the so-called e-mobility has become increasingly popular, which is summarized briefly as follows: a movement aimed at replacing fossil fuel vehicles with electric drives. Of course, this does not apply to passenger cars, but to the demonstration of the protected areas by means of electric bicycles. In the framework of the package, a cross-border tour guide course has been developed and the transfer of this knowledge has begun, complemented by small-scale infrastructure developments.



*Third group of education for breeders of Black Slavonian pigs were held in Vukovar Srijem County, Croatia, City of Otok.*



*Fruitful discussion and knowledge exchange on jam cooking with local inhabitants in Szatmár-Bereg Nature Park, Hungary - ©Zsombor Aradszki*

The second practical work package has aimed at the direct utilisation of the natural values, however, in this case it combine three rather different areas, and some countries can be involved in several subprograms due to their specific geographical situation. Our Serbian, Bulgarian, Slovenian and Hungarian partners are looking for issues related to sustainable collection and on-site processing of wild plants so that the balance of the protected areas will not be compromised, while in Bulgaria and Romania there will be a training on commercial fisheries along the Danube. The development and completion of existing value chains within the

framework of the third sub-program will be realized by local "brands" or the creation of the brands. In the latter case the bases are provided by the Croatian black pigs, the Serbian soybeans and the local products from the Romanian Comana Nature Park.

For the first reading, our initiative may seem to be confusing because of the wide range and different nature of the activities, however, the objective they set is common, as is the motto of the initiative: *"Connecting nature and people for well-being and prosperity"*.

Should you need up-to-date information on the progress of the initiative or enrich it with your own ideas, please follow our Facebook page or subscribe to our newsletter through our website.



*Wild Plant Training, Bohinj: Learning, discussion and exchange of knowledge on wild plants harvesting for economic purposes in protected nature areas with national and regional stakeholders in Triglav National Park, Slovenia ©Kirsten Palme*

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<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/lena>

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