Marketing and Promotional Guidelines

Marketing and Promotional Guidelines for a Cross-Border Tourism Brand in the Project AT@AT.CB

Project AT@AT.CB
HUHR/1901/2.1.2/0074

A cross-border region where rivers connect, not divide

Hungary-Croatia
Cross-border Co-operation Programme

Interreg
European Regional Development Fund
EUROPEAN UNION

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1. Introduction

Within this project, AT@AT.CB, the main focus is on promoting tourism in Croatia (Varaždin County) and Hungary (Csurgó and Nagykanizsa) as a unified brand, i.e., "*Off Main Road*". The marketing and promotional processes for this new brand are detailed in this document along with guidelines for the visual identity in various situations. Each partner in the project strives to position its destinations as attractive, interesting and memorable. They aim to have the tourist wanting to return for another visit. Croatian and Hungarian stakeholders have already made strides over the past 10 years to promote their regions as destinations, in particular as diverse tourism destinations offering visitors cultural, nature-based, adventurous and spiritual experiences. In order to ensure that this can happen, the document has been organized with the following contents:

- Overview of tourism markets and trends; focusing on Croatia and Hungary
- Defining the brand and positioning goals
- Defining market segments and how to reach out to them (with the brand)
- Guidelines for the use of the visual identity
- Considerations per market
- Key promotional and marketing activities (SEO – Search engine optimization guidelines are provided as annex I)
- Action plan for the promotion of the brand (a detailed budget is provided as Annex II)

By taking the contents of this document into account, the partnership of the project (In Croatia - Varaždin County and Varaždin County Tourist Board; In Hungary; Municipality of Csurgó and the University of Pannonia) will accomplish the main goals over the long-term which are:

- Integrating cross-border cultural and natural heritage by developing a joint tourism attraction;
- Developing new tourism concepts based on the Project area's natural and historical heritage which integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) to a high degree;
- Increasing awareness among targeted stakeholders in the cross-border area of the commercial, social and tourism value of natural and cultural heritage.

2. Overview of markets – Croatia and Hungary

The following provides an overview of the tourism markets in Croatia and Hungary, with specific focus on the regions covered in the project. It aims to add to the information detailed in the document "*Analysis Document on Natural and Cultural Heritage in the Project Area.*" It serves as the basis for defining tourist segments, promotional and marketing activities and the development of the action plan in further sections.

a. Croatia – Focusing on Varaždin County

For Croatia, tourism is a crucial sector for economic development. There are approximately 25,000 enterprises in Croatia that are providing tourism-related services (hotels, tour operators, restaurants, cafes, etc.). In 2019, 17.3 million tourists visited Croatian destinations and revenues generated by tourism activities accounted for 24.8% of GDP (Statista 2022). Compared to the rest of Europe, Croatia is most reliant on tourism for economic development, as shown below:

Table 1. Tourism as a percentage of GDP in Europe[1]

Country	2019	2020	2021
Croatia	*24.8%*	*13.2%*	*16.1%*
Greece	20.7%	9.2%	14.9%
Portugal	17.1%	8.7%	10.9%
Cyprus	13.7%	3.7%	9.3%
Italy	10.6%	6.1%	9.1%
Luxembourg	10.3%	7.9%	8.6%
Spain	14.0%	5.9%	8.5%

*(Statista 2022)

In terms of employment, it is estimated by Eurostat (2012) that 75% of persons employed in tourism are working in restaurants (as waiters/servers and kitchen staff) or hotels (as cleaning staff, at reception desks, etc.).[2] Overall, tourism accounts for 13% of total employment in Croatia in any given year (Eurostat 2020).[3]

The main attraction bringing tourists to Croatia is the Adriatic Coast. Mass tourism based on "sea and sun" bring tourists from all over the world to these destinations. According to July 2022 statistics (on both foreign and domestic tourists), apart from Zagreb (the main airport hub and capital of Croatia) coastal destinations

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[1] Statista, "Share of travel and tourism's total contribution to GDP in European Union member countries (EU 27) and the United Kingdom (UK) from 2019 to 2021"; www.statista.com/statistics/1228395/travel-and-tourism-share-of-gdp-in-the-eu-by-country/ (2022); Last accessed on November 1st, 2022

[2] EUROSTAT, Tourism statistics for Croatia, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Tourism_statistics_for_Croatia (2012); last accessed on November 6th, 2022

[3] EUROSTAT, Tourism industries – employment; https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tourism_industries_-_employment (2020); last accessed on November 1st, 2022

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were the most visited. The top three locations were Rovinj, Dubrovnik and Split. In Rovinj alone, there were 112.000 arrivals and 703,000 nights recorded[4].

The vast majority of revenue generated, registered tourist arrivals and stays, and employment connected to tourism take place in coastal destinations. As a result, regional development disparities exist in tourism development. Although local, regional and national authorities and connected stakeholders in continental regions in Croatia (i.e., the northern regions of Croatia and Eastern Croatia/Slavonia) have launched actions to develop new destinations, tourism in these regions account for only a small portion of the local-regional economy mainly due to the allure and reputation of the Adriatic Coast globally.

Varaždin County can be considered a case in point. In total, there are 4,506 businesses that have their main offices registered in Varaždin County. The vast majority of GDP, revenues and employment are connected to traditional manufacturing activities (food processing, textiles, metal processing, etc.) and ICT (Information and communication technologies).[5] Varaždin County has a strong, diverse and robust economy that is not reliant on tourism revenues. However, tourism activities are recognized as a driver of future growth in terms of new jobs and revenue. Over the past 4 years (2018-22), there were 603,545 registered overnight stays, and 272,679 registered arrivals. Although there was a dip in the numbers in 2020 due to the pandemic, once restrictions were lifted the numbers almost returned to 2019 levels, which were the highest recorded.

Table 2. Tourism statistics for Varaždin County

Year	Number of overnight stays	Number of arrivals
2018	169,983	71,653
2019	187,803	81,720
2020	92,450	45,696
2021	153,309	73,610
Total	**603,545**	**272,679**

*Figures provided by the Varaždin County Tourist Board (2022)

The tourists coming to Varaždin County are mainly domestic, i.e., Croatians. They account for 314,322 arrivals over the 2018-22 period. The other important markets include Germany (47,428 overnight stays), Poland (47,428 overnight stays), Austria (16,311 overnight stays) and Italy (13,285 overnight stays). Other regional markets such as Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Serbia also account for a high number of overnight stays (Varaždin County Tourist Board; 2018-21).

The Varaždin County government with the Varaždin County Tourist Board have promoted tourism to further diversify the regional economy. This is being done by focusing on developing the region as an "active" tourism destination that incorporates natural landscapes, culture, religion, sports and story-telling concepts. The

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[4] Schengenvisa, "Tourism in Croatia Officially Surpassed Pre-Pandemic Levels in the First Half of 2022;" 10.08.2022; www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/tourism-in-croatia-officially-surpassed-pre-pandemic-levels-in-the-first-half-of-2022/ (last accessed on October 1st 2022)

[5] HINA "Poduzetnici iz Varaždinske županije u 2021. ostvarili milijardu i pol neto dobiti", 13.9.2022; www.24sata.hr/news/poduzetnici-iz-varazdinske-zupanije-u-2021-ostvarili-milijardu-i-pol-neto-dobiti-859901 (last accessed on November 8th 2022)

county government is actively promoting new investments in hotels, health tourism, and holiday homes with a story. One of the main means has been to promote the county at international trade fairs. At the time of writing this document, Varaždin County is preparing to promote investment in health tourism and holiday homes with a story at the Foreign Direct Investment Expo in London, UK (in November 2022). Another way in which the County is enhancing its tourism potential is via the development of new technologies. It aims to boost its web presence and its reputation globally as a destination. It has been proven in nearby continental destinations such as Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria and Germany that tourists can be drawn in to locations that have a rich offer, effective marketing mix, and a wide variety of events, social activities and rich stories. By replicating these approaches and making them their own, Varaždin County aims to have similar results (i.e., more tourist arrivals, new revenue, new jobs generated by tourism and a more diversified economy).

b. Hungary – Focusing on Csurgó and Nagykanizsa

In Hungary, tourism plays a less important role in terms of GDP, employment and revenue compared to Croatia. In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism activities accounted for 8.3% of GDP, and even though a recovery in the sector is underway, tourism's contribution to GDP is still considerably lower compared to pre-pandemic levels (4.6% of total GDP in 2021) (Statista 2022).

Table 3. Tourism as a percentage of GDP for Hungary[6]

Country	2019	2020	2021
Estonia	12.1%	6.1%	6%
United Kingdom	9.9%	4.3%	5.7%
Finland	7.9%	4.9%	5.5%
Sweden	7.2%	4.7%	5.3%
Bulgaria	9.9%	4%	4.9%
Hungary	***8.3%***	***4%***	***4.6%***
Denmark	6.5%	4.8%	4.3%

*Statista 2022

According to KSH – Hungarian Central Statistics Office, from January to July 2022, >14.5 million overnight stays were recorded. 47% of stays were recorded in Budapest, making it the dominant tourism destination. Tourism generated net revenue amounting to >€763 million. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on tourism, Hungary's revenue from tourism is expected to reach about €1 billion by the end of 2022. In terms of employment, it is estimated that 410,000 persons (2019) have a job in tourism, which has been determined by measuring the number of persons working in food and catering, hotel services and specialized tour services. Due to the travel and safety restrictions in place from 2020-21, persons working in these positions were the first to face the economic consequences. Unemployment rose considerably. Although

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[6] Ibid, Statista 2022

Hungary, like many other European countries, is seeing a return to pre-pandemic levels, employment in tourism remains far lower in 2019 (about 250,000 persons employed currently).[7]

Unlike Croatia, which has relied heavily on mass tourism based on "sea and sun," Hungary has focused on attracting tourists to destinations by promoting diversity. Natural landscapes (e.g., Lake Balaton), cultural elements (e.g., food & wine, music, folklore, etc.), history (e.g., Szigetvár focusing on the legacy of Suleman the Magnificent and Nikola Subić Zrinski during the siege of Szigetvár), and health (e.g., promotion of thermal spas throughout Hungary) have been promoted to show that Hungary has something for any tourist. Budapest and the Central Danube, Lake Balaton and Western Transdanubia are Hungary's most popular destinations, attracting millions of travellers per year who visit the diverse attractions and experience the various elements.[8]

The main regions targeted in the project, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa, have taken similar approaches by promoting culture and heritage (e.g., food, culture and history). Although statistics are not available for these areas, the figures from Somogy County (where Csurgó is located) and Zala County (where Nagykanizsa is located) regarding overnight stays show that from 2018-21, tourism had a major impact on local economies. Both regions annually record over a million overnight stays.

Table 4. Overnight stays recorded in Somogy and Zala Counties, Hungary

Year	Somogy County	Zala County
2018	1,829, 651	2,743,060
2019	1,756,080	2,743,084
2020	1,104,112	1,408,142
2021	1,190,324	1,556,518

*Based on figures provided the University of Pannonia (2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted tourism in Csurgó and Nagykanizsa, as shown by the massive drop in overnight stays in the 2020 period (i.e., more than 1.3 million fewer for Zala County and 651,000 fewer for Somogy County). Tourism has yet to rebound despite the lifting of restrictions.

Another factor impacting Csurgó and Nagykanizsa 's prospects in tourism is that these towns are off the beaten path and unknown to tourists. With this project, the Municipality of Csurgó and the University of Pannonia in Nagykanizsa have focused on developing a new smartphone application that promotes the lesser-known areas of the cross-border area, and have invested into developing a visitor centre that incorporates Tourism 4.0 concepts such as augmented reality. In addition to improving information services, Csurgó has also undertaken the expansion of its thermal pool facilities to become a wellness destination. The multi-million Euro project foresees an increase of accommodation capacity (to hold >1000 persons at any given moment), the construction of new pools, and the establishment of wellness services and a high-end restaurant. The new facilities should be operational by May 2023. By offering contents in a unique and interactive manner and

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[7] KSH – Hungarian Central Statistics Office, Tourism, catering; September 2022 (www.ksh.hu/tourism-catering); (last accessed on September 16, 2022),

[8] Schengenvisa, "Hungary Marks 15% Increase in Number of Tourism Nights in July", September 8, 2022, www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/hungary-marks-15-increase-in-number-of-tourism-nights-in-july/ (last accessed on October 1st 2022)

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expanding on current offers, the Hungarian partners aim to raise tourists' awareness about the area and persuade them to choose it as their next holiday destination. By accomplishing this, there will be new employment opportunities and revenue streams in Csurgó, Nagykanizsa and other surrounding areas.

3. Trends impacting tourism development in Croatia and Hungary

This section details what opportunities exist on the market, what factors could contribute to enhancing tourism development in the Hungarian-Croatian Cross-Border area, as well as what issues can negatively impact tourism. The following trends have been identified, which impact tourism development in the partners' regions:

a. Fear and caution among tourists in a Post-COVID era

It is being predicted by health authorities, including the WHO – World Health Organization, that COVID-19 as a global threat is slowly coming to an end (October 2022). The number of reported COVID-19 cases is at its lowest since March 2020. Despite the lifting of restrictions (i.e., lockdowns, social distancing, travel restrictions, wearing facemasks, etc.) and the unlikelihood that they will be reinstated, the pandemic's legacy will linger over the long-term, especially in terms of tourists' mindsets and mental health. Overall, citizens are wary, pessimistic and mentally exhausted. To understand how citizens have come to this state-of-mind, we need to revisit how citizens were living day-to-day during the pandemic. Here is a possible scenario:

On day one, citizens can go to work, visit their grandparents, go to the gym and eat at a restaurant. The number of reported COVID-19 cases are low. The next day though there is a sudden spike in the number of COVID-19 cases regionally. Suddenly, citizens' normal activities are forbidden or heavily restricted. A few days later, the conditions are lifted and activities are allowed like they were on day one. No one really knows why this has happened.

This is the reality that citizens have faced globally since March 2020. Everyone is still reeling from the pandemic and the return to normal will take place over the long-term. In March 2022, the WHO determined that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a 27.6% increase in the number of cases of depression and a 25.6% increase in the number of anxiety disorder cases globally reported compared to 2020 levels.[9]

The impact of the pandemic on tourism globally was staggering. It is estimated by the UNWTO that the tourism sector shrank by 60-80% by the end of 2020 compared to 2019 figures. Furthermore, it is estimated that $2 trillion USD was lost in revenue, there were 1 billion fewer tourists, and 100-200 million jobs were put at risk.[10]

Although tourism is on the rebound, it needs to be noted that due to the pandemic tourists are now closely examining the medical infrastructure of destinations. In short, they need assurances that if they were to be

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[9] Michael Dalya and Eric Robinson, "Depression and anxiety during COVID-19", Feb 3 2022, Lancet, vol 399. P.518 (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8813060/#bib1), last accessed on November 8th 2022.
[10] United Nations, "COVID-19 impact on tourism could deal $4 trillion blow to global economy: UN report"; (https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1095052), 29.6.2021; last accessed on October 2nd 2022

infected, they would be able to receive treatment.[11] It has been found that travel is regarded as a means of mental healing. In order to account for the medical dilemma, destinations should use new technologies (such as virtual reality and virtual tours as teasers) to provide visitors a glimpse into what is being offered. In that way, tourists are aware in advance that the destination is not only enjoyable but safe. As well, Central and Eastern European countries (including Hungary and Croatia) are proposing to establish tourist corridors. In that way, the same health and safety standards apply to various destinations. Lastly, tourism service providers and promoters need to move towards contactless information services (under Tourism 4.0.). Moreover, destinations with lower possibilities of COVID-19 outbreaks, such as rural destinations and natural parks, should be promoted better as continental destinations.

b. Perceived proximity to the war in Ukraine

Apart from the fallout of COVID-19, tourism in Eastern Europe has been hit hard by the war in Ukraine. Immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, tourists saw travel as a dangerous activity. No one knew how far the war would spread. International arrivals to Europe decreased by 15% in EU-27 countries in March 2022, and in most Eastern European destinations the number of overnight stays decreased by 12-14% in comparison to March 2021 figures.

As the war has become a common theme in the daily news, more and more tourists are examining the geopolitical situation in Europe closely before finalizing travel plans. According to TCI research (2022), 33% of travel conversations related to Europe include questions about a destination's proximity to the war and whether the location will be encompassed by war. According to questions being asked on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) and travel web portals (e.g., TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Expedia, etc.), the net sentiment index[12] for European destinations dropped by 15 points in March 2022. It should be noted that the destinations that were most impacted by the war in terms of reputation were in Eastern Europe (Baltic states, Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Serbia, etc.). Hungary as a destination experienced a 10-point decline in reputation.[13] What this indicates is that due to the war tourists regard Eastern Europe as being more dangerous and less desirable as a travel choice. Although figures from July 2022 show that international arrivals, registered overnight stays, and tourism revenue have rebounded and have in fact surpassed figures for 2021, tourism promoters need to be mindful of tourists' perceptions about the location.

One thing in particular is that many international travellers coming to Croatia and Hungary lack any knowledge about Eastern European geography. One survey taken in the United States and Europe in 2018[14], showed that 75% of Americans surveyed were unable to locate specific countries outside the US. Europeans did not fare

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[11] Tatiana V. Skryl & Marina Gregoric, "Tourism in the Post-COVID Age", 12 February 2022, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83566-8_15

[12] The Net Sentiment Index measures the polarity (as a percentage of positive vs. negative conversations) of destinations related web social conversations. This is compiled based on the top regional destinations consolidated (TCI Research)

[13] Oliver Henry, "Impact of the Ukrainian War on European tourism," TCI Research, March 2022, presentation for the European Travel Commission

[14] The Daily Mail, "The U.S vs Europeans interactive test that shows that Americans really AREN'T very good at geography," Oct 18th, 2018 (www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-6289667/The-U-S-vs-Europeans-interactive-test-shows-Americans-really-ARENT-good-geography.html), accessed on Sept 17, 2022

much better. Only 43% could locate specific countries considered important geopolitical locations. In all of this Croatia was actually the least recognized country. Only 21.1% of respondents could locate Croatia on a map.

What does this mean for tourism in the cross-border area? It means that tourists could associate Hungary and Croatia as countries on the war front. There are many persons outside of Eastern Europe who are aware of where Croatia and Hungary are and how they stand geopolitically. Some of the questions that a tourism promoter may hear from potential visitors about Croatia and Hungary include:

- "Croatia? Hungary? That's on the Russian border, right?"
- "I've heard about Croatia and Hungary! How is the war going with Ukraine?"
- "Isn't there fighting in Croatia too?"

This means that tourists will have initial doubts about making reservations and planning trips to Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa. Promotional efforts need to take the war in Ukraine into account. Tourists need to be aware that they would be nowhere near a conflict zone and that the destinations of the cross-border area are attractive, interesting, engaging and memorable.

c. Tourism 4.0. – massive shifts towards digitalization in tourism

Tourism 4.0. is a paradigm that is closely linked to Marketing 4.0 and Industry 4.0. Under this term, the aim is to improve tourism through innovation, knowledge, technology and creativity. The application of new technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), advanced computing and connectivity between devices and systems, non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and artificial intelligence (AI) are crucial elements under this paradigm.

Tourism 4.0. envisions systems in which "devices communicate independently with each other along the value chain."[15] Computer-controlled systems that are connected track physical processes, gather data and patterns in purchasing and consumption. They enable decentralized decisions (often without a physical person present) to be made concerning the content, offers and services being offered to tourists. The goal is to ensure that tourists can access and consume tourism products and services in the most efficient manner. Tourists participate in the process by providing their data, making specific selections for services, rating the delivery of services, etc. This is done via tablets, smartphones and accessing products via the Internet. By tracking the purchasing and preferences of tourists, tourism service providers can adjust their approaches, which can result in sustainable revenue streams coming from tourism; identifying and mitigating risks, and providing a particular tourist offers in line with their needs and desires.[16]

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[15] Adapted from the presentation by Krisztián Attila Bakon, University of Pannonia Nagykanizsa - University Center for Circular Economy, Hungary; at the AT@AT.CB conference "Modern IT Technologies and Applications in Tourism" in Varaždin, HR on 15.09.2022

[16] Urška Starc Peceny, Jurij Urbančič, Simon Mokorel, Vesna Kuralt and Tomi Ilijaš, "Tourism 4.0: Challenges in Marketing a Paradigm Shift", 18.09.2018, https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/65836 (last accessed on September 25, 2022)

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In addition to the previously described trends above, Tourism 4.0 can also be used to address two critical economic issues currently plaguing the tourism sector:

1) <u>Labour shortages</u>: With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions earlier this year, there was a sudden rise in the number of reservations, international arrivals, and overnight stays. However, many opportunities to generate revenue from tourism were lost in the past year due to the fact that many persons that were in food and catering, hotel services and tour agencies lost their jobs at the start of the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, it is estimated that 62 million tourism-related jobs were lost. Due to the uncertainty surrounding tourism, these persons were forced to find work in other sectors.[17] Tourism service providers are open for business once again and are searching for staff; however, they have been unable to fulfil the gap.

2) <u>Rising inflation</u>: Over the past two years, inflation has jumped globally. In August 2022, the annual inflation rate for Croatia stood at 12.3% and at 15.6% for Hungary.[18] Due to supply chain issues and the war in Ukraine, the price of fuel, maintenance services, rents, recreational services, food and beverages increased. The price of tourism offers have also increased sharply. This means that tourists are closely examining prices before traveling to a destination. They want the offer with the best value for money.

Via effective communications and connectivity, Tourism 4.0. can address labour shortages by allowing tourism service providers to see which services are the most demanded; which contributes to hiring the right people for positions. A major issue is that many job seekers no longer see some positions as desirable, such as receptionist on the night-shift or waiter at a busy restaurant. By establishing systems based on AI, AR and online integrated solutions, check-in at a hotel or attraction can be automated, food can be ordered via an app, information on specific sites can be done without a guide, etc. meaning that fewer staff are needed. Although the downside to this is that the "human-touch" is lost, it allows businesses to continue operations and even grow.

Concerning inflation, Tourism 4.0 allows tourism service providers to see which sites are being visited the most and how price impacts the number of visits. By gaining information via tourism 4.0 approaches, data is made available allowing tourism service providers to adjust their offer and marketing approach. This allows them to develop advertising campaigns, tour packages, and other offers that fit the needs of specific segments. This in turn sustains revenue generated via tourism and ensures that a service or offer remains competitive.

Tourism 4.0 is also being used for marketing efforts. The applications developed for the visitor centres in Varaždin County and Csurgó incorporate augmented reality and hologram technology (just to name a few), and the AT@AT.CB project emphasizes the use of advanced technology and online solutions in order to enhance user experiences and provide accurate information about tourism offers. Augmented reality is used for story-telling in both regions. That means the visitor coming to the centres in Varaždin and Csurgó not only

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[17] Voyagers Voice, « Technology and Labor shortages of the Tourism industry », February 10, 2022, https://voyagersvoice.com/technology-and-labor-shortages-of-the-tourism-industry/, last accessed on 30.9.2022

[18] Trading Economics, "Croatia Inflation rate", "Hungary Inflation Rate", October 2022, https://tradingeconomics.com, last accessed on November 3rd 2022

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gain information about certain locations, but gain new perspectives, knowledge and can become immersed in the location. This will contribute to enhancing the attractiveness of the cross-border area to any tourist.

It should be mentioned that although there are efforts in Croatia and Hungary to achieve the aims of Tourism 4.0, Croatia and Hungary are ranked 21st and 22nd respectively under the Digital Economy and Society Index of the EU (DESI 2022)[19]. Many SMEs in both countries lack integrated business solutions and e-services. In many cases, businesses prefer paper solutions rather than ICT solutions and lack an online presence. The impact of this on tourism is that digital tools that could be used to reach out to various target groups/segments remain largely unexploited, and thus, affecting the competitiveness of the tourism sector in the cross-border area.

4. Positioning the brand on the open market

a. Describing the product and the unique selling proposition (USP)

To achieve the aims of this document, it is important to define what the partnership intends to place on the market, the brand that the partnership aims to create, and why tourists will consider purchasing it. First, what is the product in question? What is the unique selling proposition (USP)?

In short, the product is the services, sites and offers targeting tourists in the cross-border area (Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa). In the analysis document (*Analysis Document on Natural and Cultural Heritage in the Project Area*) the key tourism assets in the cross-border area have been identified and combined into a unified, yet diverse, product to maximize the appeal of the area as a tourism destination, and increase the number of overnight stays. By combining various services and offers in the area as tour packages, and emphasizing that the destinations in the area provides an engaging, unforgettable, and restorative experience to tourists, the partnership will be able to reach out effectively to tourists and convince them to choose the area. The vast mosaic of natural landscapes and locations are categorized in the Analysis as:

- 'Must-see sites' (Including the UNESECO sites and those with fully developed infrastructure)
  *It is emphasized that these sites will broaden perspectives, provide that key moment of calm and relaxation, and ensure that the unforgettable experience sought by the tourists is delivered.
- 'Burgs and Castles'
- 'Shared History' (i.e., elements that are relevant to both Hungary and Croatia)
- 'Religious heritage'
- 'Naturalist experiences'
  *Please consult the analysis document, p.54-55 for details on the tourism assets per category.

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[19] European Commission, "The Digital Economy and Society Index — Countries' performance in digitization", 16.09.2022, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/countries-digitisation-performance; last accessed on October 10th 2022.

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In addition to the elements included in the document, other elements have been identified that could be added to further enhance offers in Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa. These additional elements can be used in tour packages:

Table 5. Additional elements identified as tourism resources

Element	Varaždin County, HR	Csurgó & Nagykanizsa, HU	Applicable segment
Food	Varaždin Klipič, Bednja Turkey, Pumpkin seed oil, vineyards throughout the county (Kopjar, Šafran), Cabbage from Vidovec, Porcini mushrooms from Novi Marof	Donuts in Nagykanizsa, Regional wines (e.g., Tokaj & others), goulash & other dishes made from peppers;	All segments (families, empty nesters, Millennials & GenZ, nature enthusiasts, religious tourists)
Festivals	**Varaždin**: Špancirfest (one of Croatia's largest street festivals), Trash Film Festival (celebrating amateur film), Baroque Evenings in Varaždin (celebrating classical music), the advent fair every year; International New Year's Race **Lepoglava**: International Lace Festival in Lepoglava, where one can experience art of lace making and learn about the history of Lepoglava lace. **Ludbreg**: Holy Sundays in Ludbreg in September; celebrating the miracle of the appearance of the blood of Christ in the chalice. **Varaždinske Toplice**: Aquafest in Varaždinske Toplice, to celebrate the town's Roman heritage; **Vidovec**: The Cabbage festival "Zeljarijada" **Novi Marof:** Days of Porcini Mushrooms and black truffles in Paka; Rabuzin's day celebrating Ivan Rabuzin's art;	**In Nagykanizsa:** City Day, Dödölle Festival (a street fair over 2 days), National Carnival Donut Festival **In Csurgó:** Csusza fesztivál (Csurgó Festival), which celebrates the town's medieval heritage;	All segments * Religious tourists would mainly be interested in Holy Sundays in Ludbreg.
Nature	**Mountain landscapes:** Ivanščica, Ravna Gora, Grebengrad, Trakošćan Lake, Kalnik	**In Csurgó**: Lake Zis, which is known for fishing and picnics;	Families, empty nesters, Millennials and GenZ, Nature enthusiasts
Sports	**Adventure sports & outdoor activities** - Rafting and canoeing along the Drava River, hiking and paragliding at Ivanščica or Ravna Gora, biking through the county along the marked trail system, Fishing on the Drava River, hunting activities, etc.	**Thermal pools in nearby areas**: Zalakaros, Lenti, Kehidakustány,	See "nature"
Historical & religious sites	**Lepoglava** – The legacy of Archbishop Stepinac, who was jailed in the prison. He is considered a Catholic martyr.	**In Csurgó**: The archives at the Csonkonai Vitez Mihaly Reformed Grammar School,	Empty nesters and religious tourists

Varaždin – Franciscan pharmacy at the covenant of St. Ivan. **Kalnik:** The Castle of King Bela IV; Bela IV sought refuge from Mongolian invaders. Legend has it that he lived off of plums for months due to no supplies.	the Csurgó Community centre;	

In order to attract the market segments to the product, promotional efforts will appeal to their emotion and rationale. The story behind these assets will attract tourists because will provide them something that is missing psychologically. The main elements that will attract tourists are the nature elements (mountainous and hilly areas such as those promoted in Holiday Homes with a story, and the Mura-Drava Regional Park, forest parks in the area, etc.) combined with cultural assets (e.g. traditional music, the history of the Ottoman Empire and Hapsburgs in the area, architecture, cuisine, crafts, etc.), religious assets (the diverse religious landscape in Hungary and the pilgrimage for the Eucharistic Miracle), wellness opportunities (e.g. thermal pools in Csurgó and Varaždinske Toplice) and sports (various hiking, biking, rafting, fishing and other activities). Therefore, the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of the cross-border area will be based on the tourist segments' longing for a closer connection to nature and traditions, culture and history, and on the comfort and escape that the area's environment provides from loud, busy and overwhelming urban environments. Considering the mental trauma, anxiety and stress that most people are facing due to the growing economic problems, COVID-19 and the fear of war, gaining a sense of calm is ever more important in citizens' lives. It needs to be emphasized that the cross-border area's offer will bring this to them.

With this being said, the USP is emphasized within the **slogan** of the cross-border area: *(Re)connect with nature, culture and harmony.*

This slogan will be combined with the name of the brand "*Off Main Road*", which will be used in promotional activities.

b. Defining the brand and positioning goals

With the brand, the partnership aims to define how the cross-border area is perceived as by tourists. To add to the previous section, the partnership wants tourists to perceive the cross-border area **as a destination**:

- Of peace and calm; a place where one can escape from their daily problems; (for all segments);
- Where one can disconnect from their busy lives (for all segments);
- Where one can be active, engaged and grow personally (For young generations, empty nesters and nature enthusiasts);
- Of excitement and adventure (Nature enthusiasts, families, and young generations);
- Where one can connect spiritually and heal; (Religious tourists);
- Where nature and culture come alive (for empty nesters and nature enthusiasts);

Certain messages will be adapted to the specific market segments detailed below, but the overall perception (**the brand**) that the partnership wants each and every tourist to have before, during and after visiting is that the cross-border area is:

> *A **destination where one gains <u>peace of mind and relaxation</u> through <u>interesting, engaging and unique</u> experiences (Branding statement).***

It will be shown in the findings per segment below that the partnership needs to increase promotional efforts to make this brand a reality. Overall, the level of buyer readiness among tourists is low in comparison to other destinations in Croatia and Hungary (and globally). With this situation in mind, this document has established the following positioning goal (overall aim) for the brand:

> *To position the brand "Off Main Road" in Croatia, Hungary and abroad as a sustainable, distinctive, engaging, memorable and diverse product based on local heritage and the natural environment;*

In line with this, these specific aims need to be accomplished over the next 6 years (the end of 2028) along with the indicators:

- To increase the awareness of potential tourists of the various natural, cultural and religious assets, recreational facilities and quality accommodation available within the cross-border area;
  <u>Indicators:</u>
  o 10.000 direct inquiries about various tourism-related services are received by the Varaždin County Tourist Board and the Municipality of Csurgó;
  o At least 100.000 tourism-related web-hits are recorded on the websites of the partnership;
  o At least 1.000 downloads of the smartphone application detailing destinations in the area;
- To persuade potential tourists to choose the cross-border area as their next holiday destination and have them commit to overnight stays in accommodation facilities in the vicinity;
  o Indicators:
    ▪ A 20% increase in the number of registered overnight stays (base line statistics: 2021; end point: 2028) in the cross-border area
    ▪ A 30% increase in the number of tourist arrivals in the cross-border area (starting point: 2021; end point: 2028);
      *Measured by the Varaždin County Tourist Board and the Municipality of Csurgó;

The key promotional and marketing activities as well as an action plan are detailed in the latter sections of this document, but before this takes place it is necessary to define which type of tourists should be targeted (i.e., segments), what their preferences are, what content they should be exposed to, and what messages they need to receive in order to be convinced to take in the brand.

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5. Market segments targeted

a. Defining the segments and how to reach out to them

This document adds on to the work already done by answering the questions: 1) Who is interested in experiencing these stories, places and locations as a tourist? 2) What contents should be promoted to them? 3) How can the partnership connect with specific segments and achieve the brand, USP and positioning goals? Firstly, the main segments are defined. Particular attention is put on their needs and what they seek as tourists. Itineraries are presented (as destination packages) to provide the partnership and other tourism service providers connected with the brand a clear picture of how to create/combine contents for specific segments, and how to present the area as a competitive destination. Each package has been designed to position the brand as a product where tourists will gain *peace of mind and relaxation through interesting, engaging and unique experiences.*

In total, five segments have been identified:

- Families
- Empty nesters (married couples that have had their kids leave home and/or are retired, +40 years of age)
- Young persons (millennials and GenZ) looking for an escape
- Nature enthusiasts
- Pilgrims and religious tourists

i. Families

Family tourism accounts for 30% of the global leisure travel market.[20] Families regard travel as an important means to connect on a deeper level with their loved ones. It represents a way to reunite the family and for family members to spend time with each other. Holidays are often the only time the whole family spends together for an extended period without distractions of work and school. Holidays are considered a symbolic time out of the normal daily-grind and are used for generating social identities. Basically, traveling with the family is a means to relax, reunite, unwind and de-stress.

Traditionally, family travel meant that the immediate family (i.e., the father, mother and 1-3 children) would go for a vacation; however, with the changes in the demography and social structures of families, it is becoming more likely to see family travel include multi-generational members (i.e., grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.). As grandparents, relatives and parents have missed out on many family celebrations over the past few years, it is likely that multi-gen holidays will be an increasingly popular way to mark milestones in long-term. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, families are more than ever trying to re-connect and make up for lost time that happened due to health and safety restrictions. It is estimated that 68% of families in Europe are more likely to plan a multi-generational vacation. Millennial (young) families are also an important

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[20] Condor, „Family Travel Statistics 2020-21", 2020; www.condorferries.co.uk/family-travel-statistics (Last accessed on October 12th 2022)

demographic. 64% of such families surveyed in Europe had taken at least one international vacation in the past year. [21] Based on the inputs from the partnership, the typical family that visits the cross-border area is middle-class with 3-4 members. They mainly come by car within a 700 km radius (2–8-hour drive from various surrounding markets). The characteristics of visiting families are provided below.

General characteristics:
- A family of 3-4 members (i.e., a typical nuclear family with up to 2 children)
- The grandparents and/or other relatives may be included to make up for lost time and opportunities during COVID-19;
- Income between €2,000 – 7,000 per month.
- The age of the parents is typically +30 years of age; however, millennial families are also common
- Highly educated persons – parents have a high level of education (at least a university degree)

Geographical characteristics:
- Regional tourists within a few hours' drive (i.e., within a 700km radius of the area)
- In Croatia and Hungary (primary market: +80% of targeted visitors):
- *Croatia:* from Zagreb, Sisak, Krapina, Slavonski Brod, Osijek, Virovitica, Koprivnica (continental area); *Hungary:* from Budapest, Pecs, Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc, etc.,
- From Germany, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia and other regional markets (secondary markets: 20% of targeted visitors):
- Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Cologne, etc. in Germany
- Graz and Vienna and other urban centres in Austria
- Prijedor, Banja Luka and other urban centres in BiH;
- Ptuj, Maribor, Ljubljana, Lendava and other urban areas in Slovenia;

Travel behaviour
- They travel using their own vehicle (car, recreational vehicle, camper);
- They are repeat users if the destination is enjoyable;
- They intend to stay overnight for 1-2 nights and then move on;
- They use smartphones to gain information, navigate and learn more about a particular destination; they gain most of their information via the Internet and web portals;

Motivations for traveling (psychological profile)
- They want a holiday away from the "hustle and bustle" of their urban home, and to be active;
- They want to reconnect with their family members on a deeper level and put COVID-19 behind;
- They regard the area as safe, clean, and as an area that has adequate healthcare infrastructure;
- They are interested in learning about the natural environment. The parents are motivated to expose their children to natural and cultural elements;
- Recommendations from family and friends re: the location, as well as positive WOM (Word of mouth) created by travel critiques, news, social media and magazine articles (mainly online media) are the sources of information convincing them to come;

Activities that can experienced by families
- Visiting museums and taking part in interactive workshops;

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[21] Ibid, Condor

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- Hiking along the marked paths along the Drava River, Trakošćan, Ivanšćica, Ravna Gora, or Grebengrad, visiting Csurgó along the Mura-Drava Regional Park and Nagykanizsa's arboretums
- Exploring the various historical and natural sites (Trakošćan Castle, Gaveznica-Kameni, Vindija Cave, Stari Grad Varaždin, the historic centre in Nagykanizsa and the historical park in Csurgó)
- Visiting locations where advanced technologies are being used (AR, VR, QR code apps, etc.), experiencing domestic cuisine, exhibitions, etc. (in Varaždin, Csurgó, or Varaždinske Toplice)
- Demonstrations of traditional music and dress
- Participating in major festivals such as Špancirfest in Croatia or Csusza fesztivál in Hungary
- Swimming at the Hot Springs of Varaždinske Toplice or Csurgó

The following activity schedule provides a clear picture of how to organize contents for families. It shows how they could experience the brand. The schedules provide a suggested framework of activities over a 2-night stay period, and serve as the main offer for this market segment:

Example of a schedule - Croatian family visiting the cross-border area

Schedule	
Day	**Description**
Day 1: Getting to know Varaždin County	7 – 9h - Departure from Zagreb by car; arrival at Varaždin County Tourism Information Centre at 9h 9 – 11:30 – Experiencing content at the Centre; walking through streets and sites of Old Town Varaždin (Vatroslav Jagić Park, Stari Grad Castle, seeing the parade of the Varaždin Town Guard; eating Klipič and having a meal); 11:30 - 12:15 – Travel from Varaždin to Trakošćan 12:30 – 15:30 - Visit to the castle museum and short walk along the lake – taking photos and experiencing the history and natural elements of the area; 15:30-19:30 – Check-in at Hotel Trakošćan – Rest & relaxation; the visitors use the spa facilities and enjoy local cuisine at the hotel restaurant
Day 2: Visiting Ludbreg, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa	7-8:30 – breakfast at hotel 8:30 – 10h – Travel to Ludbreg; 10–12:30 – Visiting Roman cultural heritage site Iovia, Batthyany Castle, and the Holy Trinity Church; 12:30 - 14 – Travel to Csurgó (Via Koprivnica) 14–17h – Lunch and tour of Csurgó – visiting the tourism information centre, historical park, and Memorial and Cultural centre Mihaly Csokonai 17-18h – Travel to Nagykanizsa 18– 19h – Check-in at hotel 19h: Short walk to the historical centre of Nagykanizsa; and small meal to end the day with local cuisine
Day 3: Miklósfai arboretum and Varaždinske Toplice	7-8h – Breakfast at the accommodation 8-11h – Visit to Miklósfai arboretum near Nagykanizsa 11h–14:30 – Travel to Varaždinske Toplice – Visit to Roman ruins, City Park & town centre; lunch 14:30– Return to Zagreb

*To provide options to families, addition elements can be considered. Please see *Table 5. Additional elements identified as tourism resources.*

Key messages for families

It is assumed that families decide to travel to:
- expose the children to nature, arts and new cultures,
- escape from the urban environment and enjoy picturesque landscapes,
- gain new knowledge and perspectives, while also (re)connecting with family members
- Be physically active; especially the case for families with young children
- Relax in a comfortable and pleasant setting.

Apart from that, easy access by car, weather conditions, the quality of restaurants and accommodation, the quality of roads, hiking paths and other tourism infrastructure are also important aspects for this market segment. This is especially important for the parents who are looking for an opportunity to relax from the everyday "hustle and bustle" of home.

In order to raise the current levels of awareness about the brand, and ensure that the segment is persuaded and eventually convinced that the area is the best destination for a family, the <u>following messages need to be connected to the goals listed above and shall be disseminated through various means</u>:
- The Cross-Border area (Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa) has natural and cultural assets that cannot be found anywhere else;
- The quality accommodation, restaurants, recreational facilities and visitor centres have the people and infrastructure to make any family holiday enjoyable, active, and authentic at competitive prices;
- The region/area is close to many major European centres and it is easy to access by car via highway and state roads;
- The area's environment puts visitors back in touch with nature – back in touch with themselves;

By embedding these messages in promotional efforts, the partnership will be able to convince families to choose the brand over others.

ii. Empty Nesters

According to recent statistics, the main type of tourists visiting continental European destinations are those that want to immerse themselves into the culture and history of a destination. These tourists are classified as "empty nesters" (i.e., their children have left home, they are +40 years of age, highly educated - university degree or higher; they are retired and married). They are motivated to visit locations that not only offer relaxation; but also, interesting stories connected to the culture, heritage and natural elements of the destination (as cultural tourist destinations).

Cultural tourism is major generator of growth. Each year millions of tourists travel to various locations globally for the sole purpose of learning about culture. They not only want to experience European culture, but they want to show to their friends, colleagues and even rivals that they have seen places that are considered

legendary. They want to show how cultured they are, and experience the renowned sites in-person.[22] This means that the stories per site are crucial to this segment.

France, Italy, Germany and Spain (the most popular destinations for empty nesters currently according to expedia.com; especially among travellers +65 years of age) have had considerable success in generating revenue from these activities, as shown by France. In Paris, the main attractions are museums and monuments; which are considered "must-see" places. Prior to the pandemic, 18 million visitors came to the city annually.[23] (Paris Tourism Bureau 2020), accounting for a major share of the city's revenue streams. Throughout France, tourism generated €7.5 billion in revenue streams in July 2022 alone.[24]

Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa have identified assets that offer these tourists interesting stories, opportunities to experience new cuisine, as well as relaxation. Historical assets linking the cross-border area have not been exploited to their full potential. By combining the shared stories, culture and history of the region into the brand, the partnership will be able to attract this segment. Persons within this market segment have the following characteristics:

General characteristics:
- Age: +40 years of age
- Married, but their children have left home and are living on their own
- Highly educated, over 75% of persons will have a university degree or higher
- Roughly 40% of the persons in this group are retired or are about to retire
- Mainly upper middle-class persons, earning at least +3,000 EUR per month (domestic markets)
- Foreign visitors: earning +€50,000/year either as retirees or professionals

Geographic characteristics:
- The majority are from the wider region; tourists that are within a few hours' drive (i.e., within a 700km radius)
- Croatia and Hungary (primary market: +60% of targeted visitors):
    - from Zagreb, Koprivnica, Virovitica, Bjelovar, Rijeka, Slavonski Brod, Osijek, etc. in Croatia
    - In Hungary, tourists are coming from Budapest, Pecs, Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc, etc.
- 10% of the segment are from foreign countries; main markets are France, UK, Germany & the Netherlands.

Travel behaviour
- They travel using their own vehicle (car, recreational vehicle, camper)
- They intend to stay overnight for at least 2 nights.
- Technology savvy – use ICT to research destinations, navigate and gain information; * It should be noted that for the +65 sub-demographic, the preference is for paper-based information such as brochures and travel guides
- Wellness facilities are considered a plus as they contribute to healthy and relaxed lifestyles;

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[22] Impactful Tourism Consultancy "Why Baby Boomers are Essential to Tourism Recovery Efforts," 2021, https://impactfultourism.com/2021/03/04/silvermarkettourism/ (Last accessed on September 30th 2022)
[23] Paris Tourism Bureau, 2020, https://en.parisinfo.com (Last accessed on October 3rd 2022)
[24] Trading Economics, "France Tourism Revenues", October 2022; https://tradingeconomics.com/france/tourism-revenues; (last accessed on October 3rd 2022)

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- Foreign tourists travel to the sites on their own using a car.
- Rarely travel in groups with more than 10 people. They prefer smaller groups.

Motivations for traveling (psychological profile)
- They want to see various cultural sites, learn about them, and even record them in personal records
- They want to be removed from the urban environment (i.e., stay in hotel or holiday home in a rural area)
- They have conducted research on locations and know what is offered at sites; they are certain that the experience will be worthwhile, interesting and memorable.
- They have active lifestyles and aim to have new experiences
- They plan their holidays on their own; they prefer not to be in groups
- Recommendations from family and friends, as well as positive WOM created by travel critiques (on TV, social media, internet), news and magazine articles (mainly online media) are the information sources;

Activities that can experienced
- Visiting museums and interactive exhibitions (e.g., at the tourism information centres)
- Exploring historical, religious and natural sites (Trakošćan Castle, Stari Grad Varaždin, Arboretum Opeka in Vinica; Historical centre of Nagykanizsa, and the Historical Park in Csurgó)
- Visiting ethno-collections where there are advanced technologies being used (AR, VR, QR code apps, etc.), domestic cuisine, exhibitions, etc. (in Varaždin, Ludbreg, Csurgó, or Varaždinske Toplice)
- Demonstrations of traditional music and dress and festivals/events
- Swimming at the Hot Springs/thermal pools of Varaždinske Toplice or Csurgó in Hungary

Based on the segment's preferences, the following tour package/schedule could be organized as the main contents and used as a basis of promoting the brand.

Empty nesters from Hungary visiting the cross-border area

Activity schedule	
Day	**Description**
Day 1: Visiting Nagykanizsa and Csurgó	07:00 – 09:30 - Departure from Budapest by car; arrival in Nagykanizsa 09:30 – 12:30 - small meal with local cuisine, visiting Nagykanizsa's historical centre and Batthyány castle, 12:30 – 14:30 - Travel and visit to Miklósfai arboretum; 14:30 – 17:30- Travel to Csurgó – Visiting the tourism information centre at the Historical Park; Check-in and lunch at the hotel 17:30 – 20:00 – Swim at the local pool/hot spring/terme of Csurgó 20:00 – onward – free-time
Day 2: Exploring Csurgó, Ludbreg and Trakošćan	08:00-09:30 – breakfast at the accommodation in Csurgó 09:30 – 13:00 – Travel to Ludbreg (Visiting the Parish church of the Holy Trinity, the museum about Iovia; the ancient Roman settlement in Ludbreg; strolling around Batthyány castle and the city centre; lunch 13:00 – 14:30 – Travel to Trakošćan 14:30 – 16:00 – Visiting Trakošćan castle museum and the lake; 16:00 – 19:30 – check-in at hotel in Trakošćan, Enjoying the pool and spa facilities at the hotel, enjoying locally served cuisine
Day 3: Visiting the city of Varaždin	07:00-08:00 – Breakfast at the accommodation and check-out 08:00 - 10:00 – Short visit to Arboretum Opeka and castle in Vinica

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	10:30 – 13:30 – Visit to Varaždin; accessing the Varaždin County Tourism Information Centre; exploring old town Varaždin; enjoying local cuisine based on recommendations given at the visitor centre; 13:30 - onward – Return to Budapest

*Addition elements can be considered as shown in *Table 5. Additional elements identified as tourism resources*

Key Messaging for Empty Nesters

The messages for this segment need to reflect their travel goals which include:

- Experience new cultures, gain new knowledge and perspectives;
- Use their free-time in the most enjoyable way possible;
- escape from the urban environment and enjoy picturesque landscapes;
- Be active; especially the case for persons that are retired;
- Relax in a comfortable and pleasant setting and enjoy life;

Similar to families, they expect to have easy access by car, quality of restaurants and accommodation, quality infrastructure (including tourism infrastructure such as access provided to persons with disabilities), but the most important aspect is to ensure that these tourists gain accurate information on the offer (e.g. information on hours of operation of sites, information in their language, information on health and safety requirements, contact information of operators, etc.) via online & offline channels (printed materials).

To raise current levels of awareness about cross-border area as a tourist destination, and ensure that persons in the segment are persuaded that they need to visit, these messages will be disseminated through various means in line with their travel goals:

- The area's (Varaždin County, Csurgó, and Nagykanizsa) environment is a history book come alive; it opens visitors to new perspectives and stories;
- The quality accommodation, restaurants, recreational facilities and visitor centres have the people and infrastructure to make any visit enjoyable, interesting and authentic;
- The area is close to many major European centres - easy access by car via highway and state roads;
- 'Off Main Road' is a great way to spend your newly found free time;

The partnership will be able to convince empty nesters to choose 'Off Main Road' over other brands by considering these messages as a basis in promotional efforts.

iii. Young persons (Millennials and Gen Z) looking for an escape

Young persons are classified as Millennials (i.e., persons born in the early 1980s – mid 1990s) and Gen Z (i.e., persons born in the late 1990s to 2010). These persons are now considered the largest growing demographic market. The needs, concerns and aspirations of this market differ greatly from older generations. According to Deloitte (2022), 46% of Gen Zs and 47% of millennials live pay-check to pay-check and worry they cannot cover their living expenses. About 33% of persons in this group believe that they will not retire with a suitable pension, or be able to afford their own home. Although the COVID-19 Pandemic is coming to an end, it still weighs on this segment's decision-making and well-being. 46% of Gen Zs and 45% of millennials feel burned out due to the demands of their working environments. About 25% of these persons regard health care,

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mental health and disease prevention as major concerns. Often when they travel, they just want to unplug from the office (55%), which has become more intrusive due to digital technology.

Even prior to the pandemic, these persons had very different priorities. In 2019, it was found by Deliotte and the UNWTO that 57% of persons in this demographic considered "seeing the world" as a top priority. In the same survey, 46% of respondents stated that making positive impacts (e.g., via volunteering in social and environmental projects) was also a factor that would lead to a good life. Concerning the environment, these persons are willing to make sacrifices by consuming less, taking on green solutions, etc. 75% of Millennials and Gen Z persons globally believe that the world is an important junction regarding climate change and that they need to take actions to preserve the world for future generations. Overall, the traditional paradigm of finding happiness through a good career, buying a house, getting married and having children is all but an after-thought for this segment. In fact, 40% of persons considered millennials and Gen Z are likely to reject a job that does not fit their values and lifestyle.[25]

Apart from their preferences, these persons are tech-savvy and get the majority of their information via the internet (mainly via social media). Millennials and Gen Z often travel not only to explore and sightsee, but also express themselves through images and stories. This mix is exactly what social media platforms can offer. As found in the analysis document, 85% of travellers use the Internet as a means for planning and managing their trips (Euromonitor International, November 2021).[26] They rely on their smart devices to research locations, find reviews of restaurants and hotels, contact/connect with tourism providers, navigate, etc. Without these devices, the modern traveller would be lost and confused in a new destination. They, Millennials and Gen Z especially, gain information via online advertising. It was found that 72% of millennials learn about locations via online advertising campaigns. 92% of millennials report that they will not finalize their booking until they feel they have the best deal possible.[27]

In the post-pandemic era, it should be noted that these persons are wary of traveling due to rising inflation, precarious living arrangements, fears about COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. It is believed that anxieties remain high, i.e., 48% of Millennials and 35% of Gen Z are still very concerned about the risk of contracting COVID-19.[28] They are looking at destinations where there are lower health and safety risks. Concerning the war in Ukraine, 58% of tourists are concerned that the war will spread to other parts of Europe. Despite being safe and secure destinations epidemiologically and security-wise, Croatia and Hungary have both been impacted by the war in terms of reputation. By taking these factors into account and emphasizing the safety and security of Croatia and Hungary in promoting the brand, the partnership should overcome these challenges with this segment. Based on the findings, the following profile for Millennials and Gen Z travellers has been determined:

General characteristics:
- Age: 18-39 years of age, most of whom are not married or with children
- Highly educated, over 75% of persons will have a university degree or higher

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[25] Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited., "the Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial Survey," 2022, P.7-20; www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/deloitte-2022-genz-millennial-survey.pdf, (last accessed on October 20th 2022)

[26] The statistic is taken directly from the analysis document

[27] Bogdan SOFRONOV, "MILLENNIALS: A NEW TREND FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY", Issue 3/2018, Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series, 18(3), 109-122,

[28] Ibid, Deloitte

- They are concerned about the environment and want to take part in activities with lower CO_2 emissions (e.g., hiking and biking rather than touring by car)
- Precarious employment conditions – they are not bound to their jobs and are prone to leave their jobs if the conditions don't match their lifestyle
- Traveling on a "shoe-string" – lacking steady income; they are looking to save money and get the best deals; likely to spend more money on getting to the destination and trying to save money after arriving.

Geographic characteristics:
- The majority are from the wider region; within a few hours' drive (i.e., within a 700km radius);
- In Croatia and Hungary (primary market: +50% of targeted visitors):
- Mainly coming from Zagreb, Koprivnica, Virovitica, Bjelovar, Varaždin, Rijeka, Slavonski Brod, Osijek, etc. in Croatia; *In Hungary*; from Budapest, Pecs, Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc, etc.;
- Regional markets: Slovenia, Austria, BiH, Serbia and other regional markets are included (30%);
- 20% from foreign countries; the main markets are France, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands; North America (Canada & the US), China, South Korea and Japan can be considered as long-haul markets

Travel behaviour
- They often travel using their own vehicle (car); but are also using public transport and other options;
- Intend to stay overnight for at least 3-5 nights;
- Technology savvy – They use mobile technology to research destinations, navigate and gain information;
- Foreign tourists from long-haul destinations travel to the sites using a rented car or public transport;
- Rarely travel in groups with more than 10 people. They prefer smaller groups

Motivations for traveling (psychological profile)
- They are looking to "unplug"
- Travel is seen as a means to develop and become a better human-being
- Interested in seeing "alternative" locations that are lesser known, learning about them, and even recording/streaming about them via mobile devices & social media (e.g. storytelling on Facebook)
- They want to remove themselves from the office
- Conducted extensive research about the locations; they believe they are going to have an excellent experience at the best-price;
- Reviews on social media, recommendations from family and friends (including online), positive WOM created by comments from influencers (clips of locations on social media, YouTube videos, internet, posts on social media), and targeted advertising are the sources of information convincing them to come;

Activities that can experienced
- Participating in festivals, concerts and events, e.g., Špancirfest in Varaždin;
- Visiting museums and interactive exhibitions in the cross-border area (For example, at the tourism information/visitor centres and other sites in the region)
- Exploring the various historical and natural sites (Trakošćan Castle, Ivanščica, Ravna Gora, the Mura-Drava Regional Park, Arboretums in Nagykanizsa, Vindija Cave, Grebengrad, etc.)
- Visiting sites where there are advanced technologies being used (AR, VR, QR code apps, etc.), domestic cuisine, exhibitions, etc. (in Varaždin, Csurgó, or Varaždinske Toplice)
- Demonstrations of traditional music and dress
- Swimming at the thermal pools of Varaždinske Toplice or Csurgó in Hungary
- Participating in sports activities – E.g., Rafting, biking and/or fishing along the Drava River.

Based on the profile and characteristics of the segment, the following schedule has been developed:

A small group (3-4 people max.) on an extended 4-day weekend traveling by car (starting point: Zagreb)

Activity schedule	
Day	**Description**
Day 1: Getting to know Varaždin County	7h– 9h-Departure from Zagreb by car; arrival in Varaždin at 09:00 9–12:30–Visiting the Varaždin County Tourism Information Centre; Walk through Old Town Varaždin (Vatroslav Jagić Park, tasting local wine and/or beer & having a meal); 12:30–14h–Excursion to Arboretum Opeka; exploring the area; 14–17h–Travel to Trakošćan and taking a short walk along the lake 17–19h–Travel to Lepoglava, exploring Gaveznica – Kameni vrh + dinner at local restaurant 19h–Check-in at local accommodation
Day 2: Hiking and sports in Ivanščica, exploring Varaždin County	7-8:30 – breakfast at the accommodation 8:30– 13h–travel to Prigorec/Ivanec; hiking at Ivanščica along the trail "Mrzljak" known for stories about fairies and dotted with wood sculptures; Lunch at the hiking hut of Ivanščica; 13:30–15h–Paragliding lessons at Ivanščica 15–17h–Return and rest at accommodations in Lepoglava; 17–21h– Wine-tasting at local vineyards (Cestica, Lepoglava, or Ivanec) and dinner (booked in advance)
Day 3: Exploring the Drava River and Csurgó	7-8h– Breakfast at accommodation 8-13h–Travel to Varaždin to take part in a rafting tour in the Mura-Drava Regional Park; picnic lunch along the way; 13–14:30–Travel to Csurgó; visit to the historical park and information point; visiting local museum 14:30–16:30– Check-in at accommodation 16:30–19h–Visiting the thermal pools in Csurgó 19–21h–Dinner; experiencing local cuisine;
Day 4: Exploring Nagykanizsa	8–9h–Breakfast at accommodation 9–11h–Exploring the vicinity of the Miklósfai arboretum 11–14h– Travel to the city centre of Nagykanizsa (Tripammer Gyula u. walking garden, Batthyány castle, exploring the viewpoints, lined shops, etc.); lunch in town 13:30–Traveling back to Zagreb

*Regarding options, please see *Table 5. Additional elements identified as tourism resources*

Key Messaging - Millennials and Gen Z

Their goals while traveling are to:

- Relax and unwind; they want to disconnect completely from the office;
- Experience new cultures, gain new knowledge and perspectives; and be able to share these experiences with friends, family and followers via social media – This is a priority;
- Experience nature and contribute to sustainable tourism;
- Be active;

A key factor that influences whether these visitors come to a destination is the availability and accuracy of information. They use online tools (travel apps, navigation, social media) to gain information about specific sites and connect with other fellow travellers via social media (Instagram, snapchat, Facebook, etc.) to determine whether or not a trip is worthwhile. Advertising campaigns (online) are also essential and the overall price of a vacation is important for this group; meaning that emphasis needs to be put getting the best value for money as a result of visiting/experiencing the brand. If the information is incorrect or considered false, they will share their negative experience with other potential users, which would severely impact future efforts to attract this group (and others) to the region. It is essential to ensure that accurate information is readily available and it is easy to understand. Concerning domestic & regional tourists and their transport needs, they will likely come by car, but they aim to make sustainable decisions. For them, access to public transport (e.g., buses, trains) and carbon-free solutions (e.g., electric scooters to travel in cities, bikes, etc.) also influence their decision to visit.

Each year, persons from these groups take 26-35 vacation days; and have been known to change their plans on the fly. If they are having a great experience, they will turn a short-stay in into an extended trip. To raise awareness among the segment about the brand, and ensure that they are persuaded, the following messages will be used:

- The cross-border area is a place to unplug
- Experience the history, culture and cuisine of Europe with some money left over for more; we offer you more for three times less.
- Experience nature as it is meant to be
- Easy to access and easy to see
- Challenge your senses with new experiences;

By incorporating these messages in efforts to promote the brand, the partnership will be able to convince these groups to purchase offers within the brand.

iv. Nature enthusiasts

The cross-border area is renowned for its vast wetlands, various protected tree species, endangered bird and animal species, natural landscapes and vistas, etc. Various sites stick out as attractive destinations for persons that travel to experience nature, i.e., nature enthusiasts. Please see *Table 5. Additional elements identified as tourism resources* for more details.

The biodiversity found in the region is immense, which can be emphasized by the flora and fauna in the Mura-Drava Regional Park (i.e., Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, Croatia/Hungary). According to UNESCO, the diversity recorded in the area includes: 400 plant species, 400 invertebrate species, 44 fish species, 293 bird species (of which 141 nest permanently or temporarily) and 55 mammal species[29].

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[29] UNESCO, "Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, Croatia/Hungary," https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/eu-na/mura-drava-danube (accessed on Sept 27th 2022)

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Considering these characteristics plus the forests and mountainous terrain, the cross-border area has exceptional characteristics that can be considered attractive to nature enthusiasts. Various studies indicate that bird watching (avitourism) is the biggest attraction for most national parks and nature reserves. As well, nature elements outside of an urban realm are considered a plus for any tourist aiming to disconnect from the stress of everyday life. It has also been found that more often, tourists are seeking an active vacation where there are physical activities such as hiking, biking, rafting, fishing, etc. Based on these trends, nature enthusiasts have been included as a tourist segment.

Based on market research and feedback from the partners, the following profile was created for this segment. It has been noted that some characteristics are similar to those of "empty nesters":

General characteristics:
-   Age: +30 years of age;
-   For those +40 years of age: married, but their children have left home and are living on their own. Nature expands their horizons;
-   For those <40: So-called "weekend warriors"; they have an office job, and experience nature as a means to escape from daily routines;
-   Highly educated, +75% of persons will have a university degree or higher; enjoy learning about the environment and nature;
-   In good physical condition; they enjoy long hikes and physical activities;
-   Upper middle-class persons, >€3,000.00/month income; exploring nature via hiking, biking, etc. is a hobby;
-   Foreign nature enthusiasts: earning at least €50,000/ year as retirees or professionals;
-   Willing to stay longer to experience natural elements to the fullest;

Geographic characteristics:
-   The majority are from the wider region; tourists within a few hours' drive (i.e., within a 700km radius)
-   *In Croatia and Hungary (primary market: +60% of targeted visitors)*: Croatia: coming from Zagreb, Koprivnica, Virovitica, Sisak, Slavonski Brod, Osijek; Hungary: coming from Budapest, Pecs, Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc, etc.
-   From Germany, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia and other markets (secondary markets: 15% of targeted visitors
    o   Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Cologne, etc. in Germany
    o   Graz and Vienna and other urban centres in Austria
    o   Prijedor, Banja Luka and other urban centres in BiH;
    o   Ptuj, Maribor, Ljubljana, Lendava and other urban areas in Slovenia;
-   *25% from foreign countries*; from France, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands; other potential markets could be from further away, i.e., North America, Japan, and China;

Travel behaviour
-   They travel using their own vehicle (car, recreational vehicle, camper);
-   They intend to stay overnight in the area for at least 3 nights;
-   Often travel with their own equipment to the destination (e.g., cameras, hiking equipment, etc.);
-   They research the destinations in advance to find places giving them the most authentic experience;
-   Foreign tourists travel on their own using a car; those from long-haul markets may travel in a small group;
-   They prefer small groups or traveling alone; large groups mean fewer chances to enjoy nature;

Motivations for traveling (psychological profile)
- Interested in seeing various species, learning about them and keeping personal records (via social media and IT tools for younger persons; through journals and written records for older generations)
- They know what is offered at each site; they want to see it in-person
- They have active lifestyles and aim to experience new places/sites;
- Rain, snow and other weather does not demotivate them. If they see wildlife and have access to facilities (accommodation, dining, marked trails, watchtowers, trained guides, etc.), they will travel;
- They plan their holidays on their own; without agencies
- Recommendations from family, friends, fellow enthusiasts, as well as positive WOM created by travel critiques, social media (growing in importance), news and magazine articles (mainly online) are the information sources;

Based on these characteristics, this schedule has been developed, which provides the segment a unique and engaging experience:

Schedule - 5-day trip by car (starting point: Budapest)

Activity schedule	
Day	**Description**
Day 1: Exploring Nagykanizsa and Csurgó	7–9h-Departure from Budapest by car; arrival in Nagykanizsa 9–12:30–Exploring Nagykanizsa town centre (Tripammer Gyula u. walking garden, Batthyány castle, exploring the viewpoints, lined shops, etc.); 12:30–13:30–Lunch- Experiencing local cuisine 13:30 – 15h - Exploring the Miklósfai arboretum 15–15:30–Travel to Csurgó 15:30–17h–Arrival at the tourism information centre in Csurgó; & exploring Csurgó (museum, castle and mansions, cultural centre); 17–18:30 – Lunch in Csurgó; experiencing local cuisine 18:30 – check-in at accommodation in Csurgó
Day 2: Exploring the Mura-Drava Regional Park and Csurgó thermal pools	7-8:30 – breakfast at accommodation 8–13h–Organized tour at Berzence along the Drava River; stops organized to allow visitors to take in to the elements, taking pictures and gaining a sense of calm; Lunch organized for the tour; 13–14h–Free-time 14–17h–swimming and wellness at the thermal pools of Csurgó; 17h – dinner; free-time at the hotel
Day 3: Kalnik and Varaždin	7-8h – Breakfast at accommodation 8-10h– Travel to Kalnik; 10–13h-exploring the ruins of the castle; hiking at the "teeth" of Kalnik; having lunch at the mountain house; *Taking part in rock climbing activities is an option 13–14h–Travel to Varaždin; 14–17h–Check-in at the hotel and visiting the Varaždin County Tourism Information Centre; Strolling around Varaždin; 17–18h – Dinner in Varaždin;
Day 4: Exploring Ravna Gora and Trakošćan	7–8h– Breakfast at accommodation 8–9h–Travel to the trailhead for Ravna Gora in Bednja; 9–14h- Hiking along the trails at Ravna Gora; lunch at the mountain hut; taking pictures of the view from the top of the mountain; return to Bednja;

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	14–16h-Visiting Trakošćan and taking a short walk along the lake and castle; 16–17h– Return to Varaždin; 17h – Dinner
Day 5: Enjoying Varaždinske Toplice and returning to Budapest	7–8h– Breakfast and departure 8–10h–Exploring the Roman ruins of Varaždinske Toplice, the city park and St. Martin Church; 10–13h– Enjoying the thermal pools of Varaždinske Toplice; 13–14h– Lunch at Varaždinske Toplice and returning to Budapest;

Key messaging for nature enthusiasts

Although the area has numerous cultural and natural elements that have the potential to attract this segment, this segment is unaware of what is offered and where it is. Therefore, the messages that will be conveyed to this segment will focus on natural elements such as the landscapes and wildlife. The key messages include:

- High concentrations of rare endemic and endangered species right at your doorstep;
- The cross-border area is a place where one can (re)connect with nature;
- The marked trails and information boards at sites make sure that all visitors see what is offered;
- Quality traditional food and accommodation at competitive prices year-round;
- The cross-border area is near major centres and is easily accessible by car, but remains far removed from busy cities giving visitors peace of mind;

By disseminating these messages via promotional activities to nature enthusiasts, interest in the brand will increase, which will then lead to them preferring it over other alternatives and convince them to organize excursions (up to 5 days) to the area.

v. Religious tourists and pilgrims

The cross-border area has a vast array of churches, chapels, cathedrals and monuments of religious significance that could be used to promote religious tourism. Within Croatia, the main monuments relate to Catholicism; while in Hungary there are important sites connected to Catholicism, Judaism, and Protestantism (e.g., the Reformist church in Csurgó and Lutheran parishes in Nagykanizsa). One site of particular importance is the Church of the Holy Trinity, which is in Ludbreg, HR. 200,000 visitors come to the town to participate in the holy masses every September dedicated to the Eucharistic Miracle that took place in 1411; where wine in a chalice, which was found embedded in the church altar, turned into the blood of Christ.[30]

Pilgrimage has existed for millennia, but religious tourism as a concept has only recently been seen as a way to generate revenues for the regional economy. It is focuses on travel directed to important religious sites (whether as a pilgrim or someone aiming to learn more about their faith). Persons that take part in this tourism are often persons in search of answers to spiritual issues. They not only aim to learn about the history, legends

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[30] Unlike Međugorije, the Eucharistic Miracle is recognized by the Vatican. Oddly though Međugorije has more notoriety and is known by pilgrims globally as a "must-see".
Source: Paul Bradbury, "Ludbreg, Croatia's Miracle Town: Vatican-Recognised Unlike Medjugorje," November 2019, Total Croatia News; www.total-croatia-news.com/travel/39375-ludbreg (Last accessed on October 15th, 2022)

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and miracles that have taken place at sites, but they regard visiting them as a way to cleanse their souls and become a better human being. Apart from visiting strictly religious sites, these persons are also interested in learning about the families, nobles and historic events that shaped the religious landscapes of Europe; meaning that museums, castles of noble families and other sites could be included in offers for these tourists.

Religious tourism in Eastern Europe is a recent phenomenon that can be attributed to geopolitical shifts. Hungary and Croatia both endured two world wars, dictatorships and the establishment of the socialist systems. This had significant consequences for the Catholic Church and other religions. With the fall of the Iron Curtain in the 1990s, there was a revival in religious practices in Eastern Europe. Currently, it is estimated that >300 million persons travel as religious tourists, which represents 27% of all international arrivals (WTO, 2014); most of whom are persons over 50 years of age, and consider themselves devoted to their faith. This shows that religion is a reason for travel for many; however, in the cross-border area, the potential for developing religious tourism has hardly been tapped. [31] A detailed study in 2010 showed in Croatia that 0.3% of arrivals are motivated to travel due to religious reasons.[32]

With the lifting of COVID-19, more people reporting mental health issues, the war in Ukraine, and ever more uncertainty, people are looking to the spiritual, mystical and supernatural elements for answers and salvation. During the pandemic, religious sites were gravely impacted. There was a 90% drop in the number of pilgrims globally in 2020 due to the fear of contracting COVID-19, social distancing regulations, travel restrictions, etc. Religious tourists were able to access some sites as a result of the digitalization of contents and some sites implementing AR and VR contents, but it could not replace in-person visits.[33] Sites have now implemented measures to ensure health and safety, and have seen an increase in the number of visitors in 2021-22. In general, after traumatic world events, including the global pandemic, people are looking for comfort and to take part in activities that they feel will lift their spirits. For some, an escape to nature is enough, but for this segment, relief can be found in connecting with their faith.

The following provides a profile for the segment:

General characteristics:
- Age: mainly persons +50 years of age; 75% of persons in the segment
- They are religious; mainly persons practicing Catholics or Christians
- Levels of education vary; but it is expected that at least 50% will have graduated from university; 75% will have graduated from at high school/secondary school
- In good physical condition; however, due to their age, they may require access to infrastructure that ensures their access to sites (ramps, support rails, elevators, etc.)
- Aim to fulfil a spiritual need: a gap in their life that is impacting them negatively;
- They expect that the basics are available (accommodation, signage, interpretation, etc.); luxury packages are not a high priority;
- Interested in visiting other sites connected to the history and culture (e.g., museums and castles)

Geographic characteristics:
- The majority of persons are from the wider region; a day's drive (i.e., within a 700km radius)

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[31]Razaq Raj, Kevin A. Griffin, " Reflflecting on the Impact of COVID-19 on Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage,"
International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage, Vol. 7, issue 7, 2020
[32] Rot, Eddy, Kresimir Mikinac, and Sinisa Bogdan. "General characteristics of religious tourism in Croatia.", 2014, UTMS
- University of Tourism and Management, Skopje; Journal of Economics 5 (1): p.84.
[33] Ibid, Razaq Raj, Kevin A. Griffin

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- *In Croatia & Hungary; (primary market: +60% of targeted visitors*): mainly coming from Zagreb, Koprivnica, Virovitica, Sisak, Slavonski Brod, Osijek; from Hungary (major centres): Pecs, Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc,
- From Germany, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia & regional markets (secondary markets: 15%):
    o Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Cologne, etc. in Germany
    o Graz and Vienna and other urban centres in Austria
    o Prijedor, Banja Luka and other urban centres in BiH;
    o Ptuj, Maribor, Ljubljana, Lendava and other urban areas in Slovenia;
- 25% of persons in the segment are from foreign countries that profess to Catholicism or Christianity; the main persons are from Italy, France, and Germany; other potential markets could be from further markets such as North America (Canada, the United States and Australia);

Travel behaviour
- Using various means: They may travel using their own car; they may hike along a pilgrimage trail; and travel on buses with large groups;
- They intend to stay overnight for at least 2 nights; the visit to the region could be a part of a larger trip where they aim to visit religious sites in various regions, such as Međugorije;
- Often travel with their own equipment (e.g., cameras, camping equipment, backpacks, etc.);
- They have a set itinerary in advance regarding the sites that they must-see, but may require additional information on the supporting points of interest;
- Travel with smartphones and similar technology, but persons from older generations rely on more traditional information sources (printed materials, or travel guides/agencies)
- They travel in larger groups; that means more chances to connect with others sharing the same faith, spiritual doubts and beliefs;

Motivations for traveling (psychological profile)
- They are religious and seek answers to spiritual questions (e.g., what is the afterlife?); they travel understand more about who they are and their relationship with God;
- Many of these persons have faced mental and emotional trauma (due to the loss of a loved one, difficulties at home, stress related to COVID-19, etc.) and seek spiritual solutions;
- They are interested in learning about the miracles and history of Christianity (and other religions) and they want to understand the stories connected to them;
- They have studied the sites in advance (via online applications, reading about the sites, TV documentaries, etc.) and are aware of what is offered; they want to experience sites in-person;
- They are open to connecting to similar-minded travellers and are willing to travel in tours;
- For those devoted to their faith, they are willing to visit sites no matter what the weather conditions are;

Based on these characteristics, an example schedule has been developed so that the partnership has in mind how religious tourists may plan their travel to the cross-border area.

3-day journey for religious tourists as a group (Starting point: Zagreb)

Activity schedule	
Day	**Description**
Day 1: Touring the sites of Varaždin	7– 9h-Departure from Zagreb by bus; arrival in Varaždin 9–11:30–Visiting the Varaždin County Tourism Information centre; touring the city centre (Stari Grad; Vatroslav Jagić Park, the renovated Synagogue, etc.) 11:30–13h–Lunch in Varaždin; experiencing cuisine of Varaždin County

	13–14:30 – Guided tour of the churches of Varaždin (Sv. Nikola, the Cathedral Sv. Marija; and ending at Sv. Ivan); Free time provided to allow worshippers to pray and find spiritual solace 14:30–15:30–Guided tour of the Franciscan monastery's pharmacy 15:30–18h– Free time; 18h – Dinner
Day 2: Exploring Ludbreg and traveling to Hungary	7-8h– breakfast at accommodation 8:45–12h – Travel to Ludbreg; Tour of the Church of the Holy Trinity and interpretations of the Eucharistic Miracle; Tour of the Batthyány castle; touring the town centre - emphasis on how the Catholic church's findings played a key role in making the town the "Centre of the World"; *Free time provided to tourists to worship and pray at churches; 12–13h– Lunch in Ludbreg 13–14h–Travel to Csurgó 14–16:30–Visiting the tourism information centre at the Historical Park in Csurgó; tour of the museum and town - emphasis on the town's various Christian religions; tour of the archives at the Reformist Grammar School 16:30 – 17:30 – Check-in at accommodations 17:30 – 18:30 – Traditional Hungarian dinner and free time;
Day 3: Nagykanizsa and exploring the religious mosaic of the town	7-8h– Breakfast at accommodation 8–9:30 - Exploring the vicinity of the Miklósfai arboretum 9:30–11h – Exploring the centre of Nagykanizsa; Touring the churches and castles (e.g., Batthyány castle) of the city - emphasis on how the town found salvation via religion during Ottoman invasions. 11–12h-Exploring the Reformed Church and Jewish Synagogue - showing how religious diversity is upheld in the town; 12h– Lunch in Nagykanizsa and return to Zagreb

***Additional contents that could be added to these packages are mentioned in *Table 5. Additional elements identified as tourism resources.*

Key Messaging - Religious tourists and pilgrims

The cross-border area has assets that can be converted into religious tourism offers. By providing tour packages to pilgrims and religious tourists, the partnership can reach out to these groups and attract them to the brand. In order to attract them, the key messages should be:

- The cross-border area is a place where the mind, body and soul come connected;
- The cross-border area makes spiritual healing possible
- The less frequent visits make the area calm (for the mind and soul); a place to connect with God
- Interpretation services, tour guides, support infrastructure and use of advanced technologies ensure that any visitor can be engaged with the sites and have a full experience;

These messages need to be imbedded in promotional activities targeting these persons in order to get their attention, build their awareness and convince them to choose the brand for a pilgrimage or religious journey. The 3-day schedules could be combined with other regional religious sites (e.g., Marija Bistrica); within a 100 km. By taking that approach, a minimum of 3 days in the area is feasible.

b. Level of buyer readiness for the identified segments

To determine the level of buyer readiness per segment, web searches were conducted to see if Varaždin County, Nagykanizsa and Csurgó came up as search results. Terms such as "Must-see sites for….(nature, families, culture, pilgrims….) in Croatia (and Hungary)" were used to conduct searches. Searches were conducted in English to gauge foreign markets. For all segments, it was found that tourists lack awareness on the tourism offers in the cross-border area, meaning that the starting point for the brand is almost at zero/null. When it came to searches for the identified segments, the main tourist-related searches gave results for Zagreb, the Adriatic Coast and Plitvice Lakes in Croatia; and Budapest and Lake Balaton (for Hungary). Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa did not appear in the main results.

Based on this finding, it can be concluded that the overall level of awareness about the cross-border area as a tourism destination is extremely low. Firstly, effort needs to be invested into raising awareness. The following image shows the overall level of awareness. To achieve success with the brand, segments need to reach the level "conviction", which means they are ready to purchase offers included in the brand. The action plan in this document intends to achieve that.
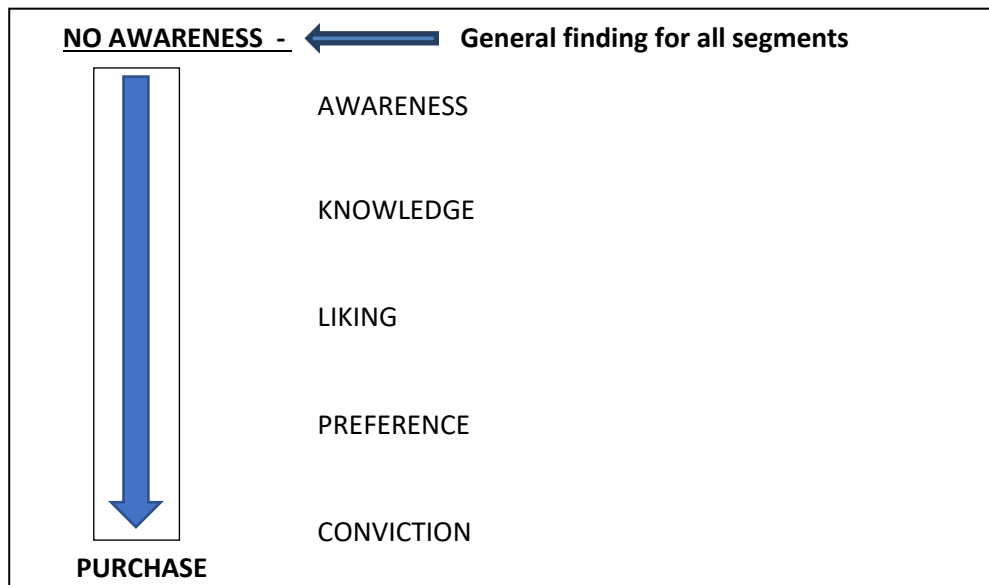
c. Guidelines on how to use the AT@AT.CB visual identity in different situations

The main guidelines for the cross-border tourism brand logo and how to use it in different situations are provided in the document "AT@AT.CB BrandBook." It includes details on how promotional materials should be designed and how to apply the logo properly. It also describes acceptable colours and patterns to be used in promotional or dissemination activities. The following images show the acceptable patterns and colour schemes for the AT@AT.CB visual identity. While executing any promotional activity for the brand, these visual specifications need to be respected. For more information, please consult the document and the images below.

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Image 2. Main logo of the cross-border tourism brand

Image 3. The logo with the acceptable color schemes in the background (green, red, blue and black)
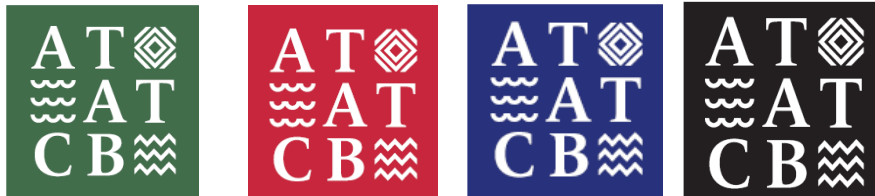
Image 4. Acceptable patterns that can be used in the background of materials. The colours can be changed per image to blue, red, green, white (clear) or black.

Image 5. Acceptable fonts for the letters and images of the logo with a clear background

Within this document, the partnership aims to provide guidelines to promoters of the AT@AT.CB tourism brand ("Off Main Road") on how they should use the visual identity when targeting segments and when they are promoting specific elements of the product. It has been found via research and examining other tourism campaigns that specific colors are more effective in drawing the attention of specific groups. It has also been found that specific imagery and colors suit some offers better than others.

The following tables show how colors and patterns should be applied to promotional efforts targeting the segments and oriented towards certain parts of the offer under the brand:

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Segment	Findings[34]	Recommended logo types	Recommended patterns[35]
Families	They are multigenerational. They aim to connect and interact with family members. They want to access offers relating to sports/activity, culture and nature. <u>Younger members</u> are more engaged with <u>red and green</u> colors as they emphasize activity and nature. For older members such as the <u>mother and father</u>, <u>green and blue</u> are recommended. Blue is often associated with culture, tradition & calm. Green is connected with health & well-being.	With backgrounds, white font: No background, different letter fonts:	For nature: For culture: For active holidays/ sports:
Young persons (millennials and GenZ)	As this group seeks to be engaged and take part in nature-based activities, red and green are recommended as the colour schemes.	With backgrounds, white font: No background, different letter fonts:	For nature and active offers: For culture and events:
Empty Nesters	Color schemes vary based on the offer that is being promoted to them. For offers relating to traditions and culture, <u>blue</u> is recommended. Blue denotes calmness and tradition. For nature-based offers and active tours, <u>green</u> is considered the best color scheme as it denotes healthy living and nature.	With backgrounds, white font: No background, different letter fonts:	For nature and active holidays: For culture:
Nature Enthusiasts	As this group is aiming to be active, engaged and in natural environments, <u>red and green</u> should be used. Red communicates energy and engagement. Green is associated with the environment.	With backgrounds, white font: No background, different letter fonts:	For nature and active holidays:

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[34] Based on best practices provided by experts in marketing; **sources**: Amy Wax, "Generational Colors: How to Attract Various Demographics Via Color", 02.10.2019; https://amywax.com/generational-colors-how-to-attract-various-demographics-via-color/ ; Daniel Disney "The Top 10 Colors That Increase Sales", 2015; https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/top-10-colors-increase-sales-daniel-disney (Last accessed on October 25th 2022)

[35] For the patterns, the colors provided in the table can be adjusted to suit the color schemes identified for the segment.

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Religious tourists and Pilgrims	These persons value traditions, heritage and spiritual connections. The main colors used are black and blue. Blue denotes traditions and heritage. Black denotes seriousness and traditions. These colours are also more favourable to older audiences (+50) as they are associated with conservative views.	With backgrounds, white font: No background, different letter fonts:	For culture and religion:

The table should not be considered binding. Promoters need to take other factors into account to ensure that the visual identity complements offers within the brand. For example, consideration needs to be put on using high-quality images of sites and activities, placing eye-catching and attractive titles and headlines, using short descriptions that get to the point quickly, etc. For other considerations, the BrandBook should be consulted.

Besides the cross-border tourism brand logo and its use, additional elements can be added over the long-term in order to appeal to a wide variety of segments. "Off Main Road" can be seen as a slogan in this regard, and a logo for the slogan should be considered. In order to appeal to various groups, and ensure that the brand is considered sophisticated and appealing, it is recommended to have a logo for the slogan that emulates handwriting using the font "Indonesia Script." The following image below shows how it may look:

Image 6. Suggested logo for the slogan (additional content for the brand logo – to be considered)

This logo for the slogan will need to be developed over the long-term by a graphic designer. What is presented in the document only serves as a starting point.

6. Considerations per market

In this section, recommendations, considerations and guidelines on how to approach tourists from domestic markets (Croatia and Hungary), regional markets (i.e., From at least a 700 km radius covering countries in Europe), and long-haul/International markets (i.e., North America – Canada and the United States, Australia, Asia – Japan, China, South Korea, etc.) are described.

a. Domestic markets (Croatia & Hungary)

More than 50% of the tourist arrivals and registered overnight stays in Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa represent tourists from Croatia and Hungary. This indicates that domestically, the level of buyer readiness is higher than the overall level recorded in the previous section. These tourists are aware of where the destinations are located. To a certain degree they are aware of the culture, history and geography of the cross-border area from school, media and/or university studies. Various campaigns have been launched regionally (e.g., Holiday Homes with a Story – in Varaždin County; or the "WOW Hungary" brand to promote tourism in Hungary). They have reached tourists on domestic markets via social media pop-ups, news coverage, advertisements on TV and YouTube, etc. As a result of stimulating their interest in certain locations, they have conducted further research on what is available and what can be experienced – in terms of culture, nature, sports, religion, etc. During the pandemic, domestic tourists were the main arrivals in Croatia and Hungary. They were the tourists facing the least restrictions. They were encouraged to consider local destinations and more willing to explore them. This contributed to boosting awareness about regional offers.

Although *the pandemic had opened domestic tourists to the opportunity of traveling to destinations that they previously had not known or even considered*, for the most part the pandemic took a toll on tourism and the mental well-being of citizens in domestic markets. In Croatia, there were health and safety restrictions that were being constantly eased and then tightened. Travel restrictions in 2020 meant that many families were unable to connect and visit their loved ones. Lockdowns, social distancing and restrictions on events prevented many large-scale events from being organized. In Hungary, citizens also had to endure difficult circumstances; especially strict health and safety measures which were arguably much tougher than those in Croatia. Citizens were not allowed to be outside without a face mask. At the beginning of the pandemic, citizens were fined if they were outside for purposes other than accessing essential services (i.e., buying food, seeing a doctor, etc.). This resulted in increased stress and anxiety for all citizens. With the pandemic slowly disappearing, domestic tourists are looking to travel to put their COVID-experiences behind them*. Offers are packaged in a way that ensures they are (re)connected with nature, culture and they gain that missing harmony.* By providing tourists a sense of disconnect and calm, the brand is appealing to them.

One aspect that appeals to them and makes traveling easier is the *lack of language barriers*. The main information at sites is available in Croatian (in Varaždin County) and Hungarian (in Csurgó & Nagykanizsa). AS a result, these tourists can immerse themselves into the stories, history and facts per site; ensuring that they can engage and interact with the contents provided at destinations. One issue concerning cross-border travel though is the lack of interpretative services available (e.g., online or info panels - Croatian to Hungary and vice-versa). In Croatia, there is a lack of information per site available in Hungarian. In Hungary, most signage and interpretation at museums, sports facilities, restaurants and other sites are only available in Hungarian. This barrier needs to be addressed over the long-term. No tourist wants to have a misunderstanding due to language barriers. They need accurate and clear information available when deciding on destinations.

The average salary of the tourists from domestic markets needs to be considered. In Hungary, the average net monthly salary is €1,000. In Croatia, citizens earn €900/month after deductions. Inflation rates and the prices of essential goods continue to increase. Salaries remain relatively static. Households are becoming cash-strapped. This means that *the price of services is crucial* (e.g., accommodation, tours, souvenirs, food at restaurants, etc.). Tourists from domestic markets need relaxation, but they do not want to go broke from a single trip. They indeed consider the price when they are reviewing a destination. Offering quality services at a fair price is an advantage that the cross-border area has.

Compared to destinations on the Adriatic Coast, Zagreb, Budapest, Balaton and other popular destinations in Croatia and Hungary, *the cross-border area has prices that are in some cases 30-40% less expensive* than those for items at heavily visited destinations. This is especially the case in terms of accommodation. Three and four-star accommodations (e.g., holiday homes with a story being promoted in Varaždin County) can be found at €60-100 per night whereas the price in other destinations can start at €110-130 per night. This is also true for restaurants. An excellent meal with local cuisine can be purchased for €15-20; whereas in tourist traps, that would only cover the drinks. By taking in the conditions facing domestic tourists into account in the messaging, the brand will be considered attractive, unique and appealing to them and they will commit to purchasing tourism offers.

b. Regional markets (within a 700 km radius)

This includes bordering countries such as Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and countries within driving range; such as Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Italy. The most numerous tourists coming to the area are those from German-speaking markets (Germany and Austria), followed by Poland. It is estimated that tourists from these markets account for about 40% of tourist arrivals and registered overnight stays. They are coming to the area mainly by car or camper. They are looking for peace and calm; as well as connections with nature. Some important statistics connected to that include the following:

- 32% of travellers are willing to pay more to avoid overcrowded destinations;
- 44% of travellers are considering off-season travel to avoid crowded destinations;
- 25% of tourists would rather have a rural holiday rather than a holiday in an urban area;[36]

As is the case with domestic travellers, the pandemic has made citizens in Europe re-evaluate their priorities. With the gradual lifting of restrictions, more Europeans are looking to travel as a means to enhance their well-being and make up for lost time. 40% of Millennials and Gen Z tourists are looking to take the trip that was impossible during the pandemic (to other European destinations)[37] and persons with higher incomes (empty nesters) are also likely travellers. Travel related to nature is considered the most favourable in the coming years where families and older generations will prefer organized packages and Gen Z and Millennials prefer to explore destinations on their own. The other factors that should be considered when addressing these travellers are:

- *A fast Wi-fi connection*. This allows them to research sites and make travel decisions.
- **Environmental conscientiousness and sustainability.** Travellers are willing to stay in one destination, avoid air travel, and participate in carbon-free activities such as hiking and biking;
- **Price matters**. Inflation, price increases for essential goods and stagnant salaries are making tourists look closely at prices before committing. They want relaxation, but not at a high price;
- **Clean and safe locations**. The pandemic is passing, but tourists are wary of COVID-19. Destinations need to have appropriate health measures in place (i.e., regular cleaning, available sanitizer, etc.)

Based on these findings, the brand can attract more tourists from these areas. Many of the destinations being promoted in the area are rural and nature-based. The price-competitiveness of the area is also a strength.

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[36]Adam Leposa, "Stats: 32% Willing to Pay More for Sustainable Vacations", Travel Agent Central, 09.01.2020 www.travelagentcentral.com/your-business/stats-32-willing-to-pay-more-for-sustainable-vacations
[37] Condor, "Millennials Travel Statistics & Trends 2020-2021", 2021; www.condorferries.co.uk/millennials-travel-statistics-trends (Accessed on October 20th, 2022)

Tours and food are 30-40% less than those offered in similar continental European destinations. The activities in the project related to developing new information service approaches, and renovating the tourist information centres ensure that information on the sites is readily accessible and available in English, Croatian, Hungarian and other languages (such as German). This will make the area more attractive, raises awareness and bring in more tourists from nearby areas. Tilting promotional activities so that they highlight the attributes of destinations in the area will result in an increased number of overnight stays and arrivals.

c. Long-haul/international markets

This includes tourists arriving by air from faraway destinations (e.g., China, South Korea, Israel, Canada, the United States, Australia, etc.). Based on the figures on international arrivals and registered overnight stays, they make up about 10% of tourists visiting the area. Due to the long distances that they travel, they are looking to see as much as possible during their vacation. They may travel in tour groups as a means to navigate and enjoy a destination, as well as spend more than tourists from domestic and regional markets.

Despite the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, arrivals in Europe from long-haul destinations have rebounded. According to UNWTO, Europe showed a fast recovery in January-July 2022, with arrivals reaching 74% of 2019 levels. Europe welcomed almost three times as many international arrivals as in same period in 2021. The results were boosted by strong regional demand and travel from the United States. As of now, 44 countries in Europe, including Croatia and Hungary, have lifted COVID-19 travel restrictions.[38] New issues though loom over the tourism sector in the short-term; mainly, inflation and rising prices for flights. Compared to 2021, prices have increased by 20-40% for flights. The price pressures may make tourists think twice before committing to traveling long distances to destinations such as those in the cross-border area.

Like regional and domestic tourists, price, the environment, connection to internet/Wi-Fi and accessing the areas that are more rural and nature-based (lesser known) are also important for tourists from these markets as they can show that they gone somewhere unique. However, there are some factors that the partnership and other tourism service providers need to take into account with international tourists from long-haul markets. The main one being **that _they have committed to coming to a tourist destination that is difficult to travel to._** They could have chosen the destination because of family heritage, they found that the area has some special bird or animal only found there, or they were drawn in because of the stories per site. It is crucial for tourism service providers to deliver on what they have promoted or even promised. Failing to do that can result in negative WOM and easily turn a positive reputation into a negative one (thanks to social media).

Tourism 4.0. has a huge role in convincing international travellers to commit to the brand; through the development of the tourism information centres, applications and use of advanced technology (holograms, AR, VR). Travellers want to be able to personalize their packages/trips and gain a clear picture of what is being offered. AI, virtual tours of sites, AR and targeted marketing for specific segments are potential tools that can tip a potential traveller to choosing the brand. <66% of consumers prefer to buy brands that deliver a personal experience and customized purchasing options.[39] By tapping into this, brand awareness can increase quickly; meaning more international arrivals over the long-term.

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[38] UNWTO, "International Tourism Back to 60% of Pre-Pandemic Levels in January-July 2022," 26.09.2022; www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-back-to-60-of-pre-pandemic-levels-in-january-july-2022
[39] Nicole Martin, "Bridging the Gap: Personalized Marketing," 27.09.2018, TedxTalks; https://youtu.be/vPo-WqkwVoY (Last accessed on October 20th 2022)

7. Key promotional and marketing activities

a. Channels to be used to reach potential visitors

In order to communicate the key messages for each of the identified segments, reach appropriate audiences and ensure that the partnership achieves the set objectives and aims (concerning branding and positioning), direct and indirect marketing channels have been identified. Direct channels are those that the partnership has control over. Indirect channels are those that are not under the partnership's direct control.

i) Direct Channels

These direct channels will be used to reach the segments:

1. Online tools

These are the most important tools as the majority of tourists, no matter which segment, are now obtaining information on tourist destinations via the Internet (e.g., tourism-specific website sites and portals), social media, smartphone applications, etc. The tools that the partnership will use particularly are:

1.1. Websites and portals of the partnership and AT@AT.CB project :

The websites in question are:
- AT@AT.CB website: https://tourism-meets-tech.eu/
- Varaždin County web portal – www.vzz.hr;
- Varazdin County Tourist Board web portal - www.turizam-vzz.hr;
- Municipality of Csurgó: www.csurgo.hu/hu/
- University of Pannonia: https://eng.uni-pannon.hu

After the project ends, the project website (https://tourism-meets-tech.eu/[40]) is intended to be the main site (the base point) where information on the brand "Off Main Road" will be published and accessible. Besides details on what different visitors can experience, the site needs to include video content, links to the downable app (via Google store), pictures and maps in an easy-to-follow format (based on UX/UI concepts). Links to the partnership's websites will be provided as well as they directly promote the brand. In that way, the partnership can present the brand well. Finally, the website is currently in Croatian, Hungarian and English. Adding a link for German is recommended because many tourists coming to the area from German-speaking areas.

The partners' websites serve as important backlinks to the main site, as they will include web tabs and links to the brand. The partners have their own websites and they are regularly updated with news and information relating to tourism; however, with the exception of the Varaždin County Tourist Board, the partners' activities do not solely focus on tourism. Concerning _Varaždin County (a regional government) and the University of Pannonia (a higher education institution)_, it is recommended to add a web tab to the current websites/portals. On a tab titled "Off Main Road" or similar, a short description of destinations will be provided with pictures and a trailer in line with the visual identity. As well, a clearly placed link to the main site will be made available.

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[40] If possible, the URL name should be changed to match the brand name.

For the *Municipality of Csurgó*, there is a tab on their site for tourism called "Turizmus". On that tab, a link to the brand will be added which will contain details, including video and pictures, about the nearby destinations and offers within the brand. For the *web portal of the Varaždin County Tourist Board*, a similar approach will be taken. Unlike the others, this portal is oriented to tourists and drawing them to the region; therefore, the web tab on their page will contain more detailed information oriented to the identified segments, photos of the destinations, videos of specific areas, etc.

For all of the partners' sites, content about the brand needs to be added in English, Croatian, Hungarian and German. That will ensure that brand awareness builds locally, regionally and internationally.

1.2. Social media (pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, channels on YouTube)

Besides websites, all of the partners have a social media presence. They regularly post news and information on social media to inform the public (including tourists) about developments in their regions. It should be noted that the posts on the social media are currently only done in their own languages (Croatian or Hungarian). One tool that gives tourists a clear picture of what is available in cross-border area is the *YouTube page of the Varaždin County Tourist Board*[41]. It has content relating to the project and tourism assets in Varaždin County. By including links to these videos via social media channels (e.g., Facebook and Instagram), awareness about the brand would increase. A similar YouTube Channel should be made by the Municipality of Csurgó to promote the brand in Hungary. By having these channels/pages regularly updated, the partnership can reach domestic audiences.

Having these channels made available in multiple languages would be a tremendous task. It would not be cost-effective due to the high number of hours needed to monitor and develop contents. To reach international audiences, the partnership will focus on ensuring that offers and content are picked-up and made available on already existing various pages/channels dedicated to travel. This can be done by creating a post within the partnership's current network and channels (in Croatian, Hungarian and/or English), providing a specific link to the offer on the main site for the brand, and encouraging followers to share them. This will contribute to creating WOM. Another strategy can be for the partnership to join groups (as individuals) that actively showcase tourism in Croatia and Hungary on Facebook and Instagram and post about specific destinations in the brand.[42]

The following describes groups (in English) that could be used to promote the brand thoroughly:

Social media channel	Groups for Tourism in Croatia	For Tourism in Hungary

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[41] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKoGuYFQnrzbheSHEN8IoBg (Website for the Varazdin County Tourist Board)
[42] Attention needs to be paid to the terms of use. Many groups forbid advertising. Individuals that join such groups should simply post about why places in the area are worth visiting, with a link to the specific brand site. Posting content that is considered an advertisement could result in users being banned.

Facebook	• Croatia Travel Community[43]: This group targets younger and adventurous travellers. Travelers post about locations and describe why it is worth visiting them; • Croatia travel - 2022[44]: Individuals can post questions and comments about the places they visited on Croatia; • Travel Croatia[45]: A group for travellers looking for advice and information about travel requirements and destinations; *It was found that the majority of destinations were coastal areas. Overall, there is a lack of content on continental destinations.	• **Travel to Hungary**[46] - This group provides advice, travel tips and information on destinations throughout Hungary. *This was the only group found focusing on traveling in Hungary in English. There is one other group, but it only focuses on Budapest.
Instagram	Posts with photos are being made via the "*tzzVaraždinska*" account. The posts could be extended to other accounts such as "**Croatiafulloflife**" (official Croatian Tourism Board account), "*Croatia Tourism*" or "*tourismincroatia*". Content relating to the cross-border brand can be easily disseminated via such channels allowing for a wide reach to various interested tourists.	The Municipality of Csurgó and the university of Pannonia do not have an Instagram account. By creating an account and posting various pictures and sites regarding Csurgó & Nagykanizsa on "**Visithungary" (official Hungarian Tourism Agency account)**" & "**#tourismhungary**", a wide audience abroad could be reached and made aware of offers.
Twitter	*Twitter has also been researched as a potential channel. None of the partners operate a feed on Twitter. It could be beneficial to open an account so that specific information can be posted by using specific hashtags such as **"#OffMainRoad"** or **"#TravelOffMainRoad"**. But Twitter should be avoided as a channel. When examining Twitter, the first post that came up for the search "Varaždin Tourism" was a complaint from 2014 about how museums close too early. Twitter is regarded as a channel where users post negative comments. Those comments get attention.		

To provide users a framework for posting on social media, the following examples from other travel groups could be used as a basis for social media communications:

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[43] Croatia Travel Community (Facebook group) www.facebook.com/groups/197455150667185 (Last accessed on October 23rd, 2022)

[44]Croatia Travel Community (Facebook group) www.facebook.com/groups/1129306787213399/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalinks=28 67277140083013 (Last accessed on October 23rd, 2022)

[45]Croatia travel (Facebook group) www.facebook.com/groups/TravelCroatia/ (Last accessed on October 23rd, 2022)

[46] Travel to Hungary (Facebook group) www.facebook.com/groups/2593433697589635/ (Last accessed on October 23rd, 2022)

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Image 6. Social media post examples[47]
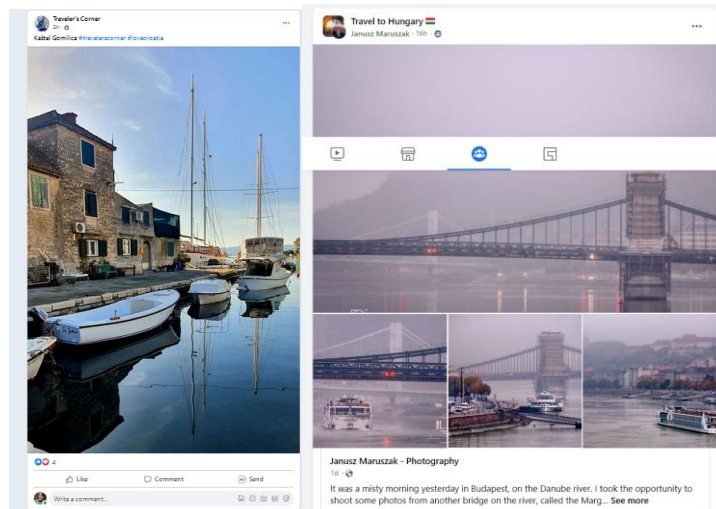
Explanation: The post on the left is from the group "Travel Croatia" and the one on the right is from "Travel to Hungary". For both posts, the photos draw in the user. Hashtags, source websites and descriptions provide additional information to get them interested in the particular sites.

Apart from taking advantage of the existing groups on social media, the partnership should create a group on Facebook and Instagram to promote the brand. A simple title such as "**Off Main Road Travel**" could attract tourists looking to access continental Croatia (Varaždin County) and areas other than Budapest in Hungary (i.e., Csurgó & Nagykanizsa). Certain parameters can be setup so users looking for European vacations get redirected to the main the site; meaning that awareness among the segments (especially among Millennials and Gen Z) increase significantly. Descriptions need to be short and to the point where Croatian, Hungarian and English are used as the main languages.

1.3. Tourism application for smartphones and tablets

Within the AT@AT.CB project, the partnership has developed a smartphone application that provides tourists with information about the destinations. Religious sites, castles and burgs, mountainous areas and others are detailed in English, Hungarian and Croatian. The application also provides games to visitors at specific sites. When the application is activated and the location preferences are allowed at a particular site, a visitor can play a game based on the culture and history of the location. The games function only at particular sites. This is considered as a way to push tourists to visit sites that are lesser-known.

The application allows visitors to gain basic information on the offer, but it still needs to be upgraded as a tool. Concerning the locations and sites included, there is no contact information or hours of operation listed. Some major sites are missing as well. For instance, in Varaždin County the application lacks information on Ivanščica and Ravna Gora, and in Hungary there is no information provided about the Mura-Drava Regional Park. These sites are important to the brand and need to be added to the application. In addition to that, the application is only available on Android systems, which means that the users of iPhone are currently unable to access and

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[47] Travel Croatia (Facebook Group) https://www.facebook.com/groups/feed/ (posts were taken from Patrick Galeski's web feed on November 1st, 2022)

use the application. Over the long-term, the partnership will need to continue to upgrade the application so that it is universally accessible, remains relevant and contains better information on the area's sites and offers.

Guidelines for SEO have been provided as ANNEX 1 - Guidelines for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and positioning the web portal.

2. On-site tools at the Tourism Information Centres:

One of the main outputs of the project is the establishment of visitor centres, which will be used to provide tourists (and others) information about the cross-border area, sites of interest and insights into the cultural and natural assets of the area.

The **centre for Croatia** will be located in Varaždin in the basement of the Varaždin County Palace. The use of augmented reality (AR) and holograms to promote Varaždin County and the cross-border area is considered a major leap. There will be 17 stations where visitors will be exposed to the entire history of Varaždin County, spanning from the Big Bang to modern times. Each station uses holographic images, audio and information panels to provide visitors a unique experience. Instead of just getting information and going onward, tourists will be immersed into the story of Varaždin County and that will in turn result in curiosity and openness to what is being offered. The **centre for Hungary** will be in Csurgó at the Historical Park, managed by the Municipality. There will be an exhibition related to the history of Csurgó. Additionally, a tunnel will be built in the Historical Park, which will be equipped modern IT technologies such as infographics with sounds, photoboxes and android games. Specific stations will be set up giving visitors the chance to learn and experience the area's culture and history.

In order to connect the two visitor centres and promote the brand, *a live camera feed* will be installed which will allow visitors at both centres to see the other side and interact with other tourists. Potentially, tourists could talk to each other, describe their visits, and recommend places to visit.

During and after the project, these centres will be further upgraded to ensure that contents remain relevant and that the brand becomes stronger and recognized. One of the ways in which the camera feed could be built on is by allowing tourists to film their reviews or experiences on-site. This could be built on the concept of "*Speaker's Corner*"[48]. This is used by CityTV in Toronto, Canada. It gives citizens the chance to voice their opinions about any topic. An adapted concept for the visitor centres over the long-term could be "**Tourist's Corner.**" Under this concept, a tourist at the visitor centres would have 30 seconds to mention what they visited and what they thought about sites and services (in English, Croatian and Hungarian). The content would be reviewed by staff at the centres. The comments considered beneficial and helpful would be made available at the centres for other visitors via a smart TV display at the exits. Certain measures would need to be made regarding GDPR (the General Data Protection Regulation). Despite that, such a tool could enhance the experience at the visitor centres.

3. Press conferences and releases (with specific tours for media – including travel writers, representatives of national tourism bodies, travel agencies and tourism service providers)

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[48] "Speakers Corner (TV series)", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speakers_Corner_(TV_series); accessed on 01.11.2022.

Press conferences and releases are already being used regularly by the partnership. They serve as a way to inform the media and the public of events, news and developments relating to tourism. However, it is not enough on its own to gain additional partners and create publicity for the brand. Within the conferences, organized tours can be organized with media, representatives of travel agencies and tourism service providers with the aim of getting them "on board" with the brand. The tours will show them what is being, how it gives tourists that missing-something they are looking for, and emphasize how cross-border cooperation creates benefits (in tourism) in Croatia and Hungary. By having media outlets publish articles connected to these activities, awareness among domestic and regional markets about the competitiveness of the brand will increase. This will contribute to persuading tourists to visiting the area and purchasing offers.

4. Printed materials, publishing and broadcasting

The Varaždin County Tourist Board and the Municipality of Csurgó have published *brochures, travel guides, and leaflets* to provide information to tourists (Available in local languages and English). These materials will provide details about specific locations (e.g., hours of operation, contact details, brief descriptions, etc.) and they will be available online as well. An important addition to the materials will be *a short-trailer* (30-45 seconds) that highlights the destinations included in the brand. It would be embedded in the main site for the brand, available on YouTube and on the partners' websites.

Advertisements in newspapers, travel magazines and television (if budgets are available) should also be used to reach a wide audience in Europe and international markets. They are an effective tool that can be used to directly communicate key messages to the segments. Publishing an article or TV report in specialized media (e.g., travel specific magazines, travel shows or portals) on European markets would also be considered beneficial to building awareness about the brand. Even a 1-page article about specific events, shared identity and culture in the cross-border area in a European-wide publication/program could be used to effectively grab the attention of visitors looking for a unique holiday. There could also be a specific TV report on programmes about tourism in Croatia and Hungary.

5. Organizing and presenting at conferences and seminars

The partnership will regularly organize conferences and seminars in its visitor centres to exchange know-how with its counterparts. Within these events short day trips will be organized which ensures that all participants are made familiar with the brand and its attributes. Crucially, representatives of the partnership (and other stakeholders) will disseminate key messages and developments about tourism (and the brand) at these events.

Partnership representatives will participate in conferences and seminars related to tourism (organized by other bodies) to inform market segments and the public about the assets and developments in cross-border area. Such seminars and conferences can be domestic, regional and transnational and attended by organizations and stakeholders that promote tourism (e.g., publicly-owned tourism associations, local/regional authorities, tour operators and agencies, etc.). By telling them about the assets and offers under the brand, these tools can contribute to building brand awareness among important groups that can connect the partnership with various segments.

6. Staff at sites and tourism information centres

The staff and representatives of the partners and those at sites need to recognize that their attitude and work performance is always under scrutiny. When tourists come to tourism information centres, they expect access to accurate and clear information. As COVID-19 made us more isolated, tourists tend to seek information and interactions more with people rather than machines. Despite advancements in AI and other technologies, tourists want a "human-touch". The overall perception, especially among empty nesters, is that another person will understand the tourist better and be able to offer services that match tourists' demands. Therefore, people need to be available on-site when promoting the brand to tourists. [49]

The personnel/staff and other representatives operating the visitor centres need to be knowledgeable, open and responsible. Some complaints that were encountered on social media sites via research concerning the provision of tourism services included comments about centres not being opened when they should have been, staff not being knowledgeable about sites, lack of communication skills in foreign languages, negative attitudes to tourists, etc. In a world where social media dominants, and where mainly the negative points get noticed, the operators of the visitor centres need to be aware that the personnel on-site need to be trained and ready to provide answers to questions ranging from the cost of food, hotels or accommodation, how to get to certain sites, etc. With the properly trained and committed staff, tourists will feel more welcomed and the brand will be able to fulfil its goals.

ii) Indirect Channels

The following indirect channels will be used to reach the market segments:

1. Travel agencies and guidebooks

Travel agencies will sell tour packages directly to potential visitors under the brand. Travel guidebooks and portals (e.g., TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, Expedia, Travelocity, etc.) will provide information to potential tourists about what the area has to offer under the brand. They will be reached directly via organized tours specifically for them organized as a part of press events and conferences (under the leadership of the partnership). After the events travel agencies will be contacted directly (via phone, email) to provide follow-up information and have tours within the brand included in their offers. Travel writers will also be contacted in order to provide follow-up information and details regarding "Off Main Road".

2. Public bodies promoting Croatian and Hungarian tourism abroad

This refers to national and international bodies (including the Ministry of Tourism & Croatian Tourism Board in Croatia, and the Hungarian Tourism Agency in Hungary; UNESCO, partners at the local and regional level – e.g., tourism associations in the area, municipalities, etc.) that provide information on the various touristic, natural and cultural assets in the cross-border area. They will be informed of the attributes of the brand and be encouraged to come to press events and conferences, and encouraged to include the brand in their promotional efforts.

3. The press

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[49] Nagaraj Samala, Bharath Shashanka Katkam, Raja Shekhar Bellamkonda and Raul Villamarin Rodriguez, "Impact of AI and robotics in the tourism sector: a critical insight" 2019, JOURNAL OF TOURISM FUTURES; P.81-82.

Information will be provided to the market segments via news reports, newspaper and online articles, television specials, etc. Press conferences and press releases sent directly to outlets and posted on the main site serve, plus engagement during organized tours, are the main ways to engage the media and ensure publicity. If these efforts are performed well, they will write articles about the brand, which will build awareness.

4. Previous tourists

If tourists have had a pleasant, enjoyable and memorable trip, studies have shown that they will tell their friends and family about it. This has traditionally been done verbally (via conversations), email and written texts. However, more often this is being done via social media; where individuals that are connected to specific groups post, comment and tell stories about the places they have visited. Depending on the degree of satisfaction, they may express positive opinions about specific locations and sites, and provide backlinks. This creates WOM about the area and the brand and can lead to new visitors and interest.

5. Local residents

They will inform tourists about the sites, cuisine and events in the area and what they can see and do. This is done on the spot, i.e., a tourist is searching for a site and needs directions from someone on the street, or a tourist asks a person to take picture of them with their family). The way they conduct themselves (i.e., they are pleasant and friendly) is important in conveying key messages and characteristics of the brand to tourists.

8. Action Plan for the Promotion of the Brand

a. Stages for the Promotion of the Brand

The following provides a detail plan of how the objectives will be achieved. It serves as a basic framework. The plan can be altered in order to account for new conditions impacting tourism in the cross-border area. As stated in the previous sections, awareness of the product (the brand) is extremely low. Therefore, the stages described in this plan will establish awareness and inform segments of the product first; develop their liking and preference for the product; and convince them to purchase it. The stages are described as follows:

> **i) Stage 1: "Starting from zero" raising the awareness of the market segments; Timeframe: 2023-2028**

From 01.01.2023 until 31.12.2028. (Full period), various activities will be implemented and tools will be developed to build awareness among the segments and the general public of the brand (re: nature, culture, religion, sports, food, etc.) and achieve the positioning goal; i.e. *to position "Off Main Road" in Croatia, Hungary and abroad as a sustainable, distinctive, engaging, memorable and diverse product based on the local heritage and the natural environment.*

These activities will be implemented resulting in the following outputs:
i) 50 press releases about tourism related activities/year: The partnership will create press releases, post them on their web portals and social media channels, and send them to media outlets in Croatia and Hungary to facilitate public relations and establish positive WOM about the brand.

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ii)   4 Meetings with local residents and businesses every 6 months: locally, it is important to have stakeholders on board. Therefore, the partnership will organize meetings (every 6 months) where the partnership's plans will be discussed and issues about brand development are expressed.

iii)   3 seminars (training) for local businesses involved in tourism per year: To ensure positive WOM and that local businesses can contribute to the partnership's promotional efforts; they require the skills and know-how to do so. These stakeholders will participate in training focusing on marketing, customer service, business development, the use of new technologies, etc. organized by the partnership. They will gain necessary information on the brand and its offers via this approach. A short tour of the sites promoted could be included.

iv)   New online tools developed and used regularly – social media profiles, websites developed/adapted for the brand (by July 2023): The partnership will create a Facebook group and Instagram profile for the brand, adjust their websites – 5 in total (in line with the recommendations in the direct channels section and SEO guidelines in Annex 1), and post trailers on YouTube and their websites to highlight the brand's attributes. This will generate awareness and interest in the brand among the segments and general public.
Concerning the websites, the partnership will hire a web design expert to make their webpages user-friendly, easy to navigate and enhance SEO. Websites should be completed by the end of the second quarter in 2023.

v)   Meetings with potential partners and stakeholders essential for promotion: Each year the partnership will organize at least 50 meetings with travel agencies, public bodies, media outlets, local residents, and local businesses regarding the provision of tourism-related services in order to ensure that the brand gains partners for promotion, and that all essential stakeholders work with the partnership to promote it.

vi)   2 conferences focusing on the brand/year: They will be organized annually to highlight tourism developments in the area and its natural/cultural assets (tours included). Conferences will show how new technologies are being developed and used under the brand. They will also give Croatian and Hungarian stakeholders the opportunity to meet, exchange know-how and network;

ii) Stage 2: "Going all-in" Aggressive promotion; timeframe: September 2023-December 2028

Although awareness will still be relatively low at the start of this stage, by having it implemented in combination with the other phases, the segments will build their liking and preference towards the brand and will become convinced that the area is worth visiting. The activities that will be implemented include:

- Designing and distributing brochures, travel guides, maps, and other promotional materials for tourists: It is expected that 21,000 brochures, 12,000 travel guides, 12,000 tourism maps (total, 50/50 split for HR and HU) and various smaller items such as pens, USB sticks, key rings, posters, hats, t-shirts, bicycle bags, wristbands, etc. will be created and distributed to tourists and visitors to promote and create positive WOM about the brand. These would be distributed at the visitor centres, at events organized by the partnership, and through partner entities such as travel agencies, the Croatian National Tourism Board, Hungarian Tourism Agency, etc.

- Creating a trailer: This will include footage from the cross-border area covered by the brand. It will display natural and cultural elements, show people being active, and be designed to instil a sense of curiosity.

- Travel agencies selling packages: Thanks to partnerships emerging from stage 1, travel agencies will be selling specific packages under the brand to tourists.

- National bodies in Croatia & Hungary promoting the brand in national/international marketing efforts: The brand is included in their key product and mentioned in their advertisements on international

television networks, travel magazines, promo films, etc. as an attractive destination. Also, special brand features will be on the UNESCO sites (e.g., Mura-Drava Regional Park, Lepoglava Lace).

- Specialized reports: At least 2 reports on the brand are produced by the partnership in cooperation with a major outlet (e.g., tourism-specific programme on HRT or Hungarian national television, specialized travel magazine such as National Geographic, etc.) to show the brand's assets and features. The content of reports will be uploaded to the YouTube channels of the partnership.
- Advertising: This includes travel magazines, radio, newspapers and online media. Due to the high cost of advertising, television will not be included. Magazines will not be used until January 2026. The number of advertisements and the form of media used will depend on budgetary resources. It is expected that there will be online advertisements via aggressive campaigning, magazine commercials, and radio advertisements. Online media and radio are considered as a low-cost alternative that is equally as effective as television. It will be in use by the early stages of promotion. Regarding online advertisements, on search engine sites such as Google, when someone enters "Travel continental Europe" or a related search, an ad linking them to tourism service providers and the brand should pop up. The partnership will procure the necessary expertise.

As a result of this stage of the plan, it is estimated that:
- A 20% increase in the number of registered overnight stays (starting point: 2021; end point: 2028) in the cross-border area
- A 30% increase in the number of tourist arrivals in the area (starting point: 2021; end point: 2028);
*Measured by the Varaždin County Tourism Board and the Municipality of Csurgó;

iii) Stage 3: "Building on progress," Testimonials and generating positive WOM from previous visitors; Timeframe: September 2023-December 31st 2028

Once awareness of the brand and its USP has increased, the partnership will launch efforts to gain repeat visitors and ensure that there is positive WOM. The following activities will be launched:

- Testimonials: In cooperation with local businesses, the partnership will gather testimonials from tourists that have experienced the brand and had a pleasant experience. These testimonials can be collected from the guest books of restaurants, social media channels, hotels, etc.
  *New technologies at the visitor centres could be used for this aim. The Tourist's Corner feature (pending), where visitors can provide 30 seconds of feedback by filming themselves, ensures that tourists from various markets provide direct feedback on specific sites. By presenting the most positive comments on the partnership's social media channels, websites and YouTube channels, and at displays at the tourism information centres, tourists will be aware of what can be experienced and how it is worthwhile to purchase offers within the brand.

- Keeping in contact with previous visitors: Visitors that provide their e-mail addresses via guestbooks at the visitor centres, using the smartphone applications in the project, and via data collected from social media and other online methods will be sent a quarterly newsletter on news and events in the cross-border area in order to keep them informed of future events, activities, and developments. The newsletter will be kept to 1-page in length in order to put attention on the most important elements. Reference information to certain elements via web links will be provided so that interested persons can investigate other content. At least 4,000 e-mails of this type will be sent each year.

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iv) Stage 4: "Keeping the train on track," Monitoring progress and making adjustments to the plan; timeframe: January 2023-December 2028

The purpose of this stage is to monitor the implementation of activities, and provide the means for adjusting activities accordingly. The following methods will be applied to the implementation of activities in this plan, and **will be used to measure progress on indicators and results**:

- Questionnaires: They will be distributed to visitors, tour operators, owners of local businesses and other regional stakeholders to assess the impact of promotional activities relating to the brand. They will be designed by the partnership in the first quarter of 2023.
- Records of local businesses and the visitor centres: The records will be examined jointly by partnership to determine whether or not more tourists are visiting the area under the brand.
- Public statistics: Annual reports, publications and statistics released by public bodies in Croatia and Hungary such as:
  - In Croatia: Varaždin County, CROSTAT, Ministry of Tourism, Croatian National Tourism Board, etc.
  - In Hungary: Zala & Somogy County records, Municipality of Csurgó, Hungarian Tourism Agency, etc.

    *These records will be used to measure the impact of promotional activities for the brand.
- E-mail records, web-hits, social media stats (followers, subscribers, etc.) and recorded number of telephone calls from potential tourists: To determine the number of inquiries from potential tourists, e-mail records of the tourism information centres in Varaždin and Csurgó (and local businesses if allowed), web-hits on the websites, number of followers, members of groups, subscribers, etc. to brand specific social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube; and telephone inquiries from tourists will be analysed to determine if awareness about the brand is increasing.
- Radio, television, internet sites, and newspaper records: The number of websites, newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, social media posts/comments and television programmes mentioning the positive aspects of the cross-border area as a tourism destination will be analysed to determine whether awareness is increasing.

At the end of each year (end of December), the partnership will prepare assessment reports for Croatia and Hungary. The reports (1 for Hungary and 1 for Croatia) will detail the number of visits and overnight stays; the number of persons informed of the area, the brand and its activities for tourists; the number of articles, news reports, posts/followers/subscribers on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, etc. The figures compiled each year will be compared to previous years to determine whether or not progress is being made. Changes will be made to promotional activities based on the findings. In the final report in December 2028, recommendations for the next 6-year period will be made to ensure that further progress is made on attracting tourists to the area.

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b. Timeframe and financial plan for the implementation of the action plan

To provide a clear picture of how the action plan should unfold, this Gantt chart has been drafted:

Schedule of promotional activities according to stages																								
Year	**2023**				**2024**				**2025**				**2026**				**2027**				**2028**			
Quarter	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Stage 1: "Starting from zero" ; Continuous activities during the period meetings with potential partners and stakeholders, seminars and training for local stakeholders, press releases, and its activities, 2 conferences/ year, presentations at various regional, national and international conferences	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
a) subcontracting for the development of the web contents and SEO – Search-Engine Optimization	█																							
b) Development of Online tools (YouTube Channel, Facebook group and instagram profile, adjusting partner websites to the brand)	█																							
the period: Travel agencies selling travel packages, National bodies in Croatia & Hungary promoting the brand in its national/international marketing efforts,		█																						
a) designing promotional materials (brochures, travel guides, maps, USB sticks, pens, key rings, posters, hats, t-shirts, bicycle bags, wristbands, etc.)		█																						
b) Creating a 30-45 second trailer		█																						
c) Distributing promotional materials			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
d) Specialized media and broadcasts			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
e) advertisements in magazines,													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
f) online advertising			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
g) Radio advertising			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Stage 3: "Building on Progress"; Continuous activities: gaining testimonials, e-mailing previous visitors about ongoing events and activities in cross-border area		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Stage 4: "Keeping the train on track," monitoring and evaluation; Continuous activities: distributing questionnaires and gathering feedback, montoring statistics, newspapers, radio reports, television reports; e-mail records; web hits; adjusting activities according to findings to ensure efficiency in implementation	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
a) Designing standard questionnaire format for visitors	█																							
b) Annual assessment reports			█				█				█				█				█				█	
c) Final assessment report																								█

The proposed budget for the action plan from 2023-28 amounts to **€793.040,00**. Within the budget the following costs were included:

1. Staff costs: For the 2023-2028 period, 2 part-time marketing managers (1 in Croatia and 1 in Hungary) will be coordinating promotional/marketing efforts for the brand, and 2 marketing assistants (1 for Croatia and 1 for Hungary) will be working with the managers part-time. The costs are evenly distributed over the period of the plan.
2. Promotional material costs: The costs for the design and production of brochures, travel guides, maps, pens & USB sticks, t-shirts, hats, posters, trailer/video and the improvement of the websites are included in these costs. Most of the costs are incurred in year 1 (2023). The only cost that is distributed over different time periods are those for website hosting and maintenance. The Varaždin County Tourist Board and Varaždin County will be responsible for activities in Croatia. The Municipality of Csurgó and the University of Pannonia will be responsible for activities in Hungary.
3. Travel costs: Each year it is estimated that the marketing manager and marketing assistants (on both sides) will travel to 50 meetings within a 300km radius of the cross-border area. An average cost of €110 per trip has been used to calculate the costs of travel to these meetings. Travel to regional conferences was also

included. It is estimated that the marketing manager will travel to 5 regional conferences per year at an average cost of 250€ per trip.

4. <u>Advertising and specialized media</u>: The costs for advertisements in magazines, specialized media radio and online advertising were included in the budget. Specialized media refers to the creation of a feature TV report and/or magazine article for the brand in 2024. Radio advertising would begin in late 2023, magazine advertisements would be considered once a fair level of awareness is achieved (i.e., 2026). Online advertising begins in the first quarter of 2024.

5. <u>Conferences to promote the brand</u>: 2 conferences per year (in Hungary and 1 in Croatia) are foreseen where 50 participants will attend. The average cost per conference is estimated to be €3,000.

   The following table describes the overall costs according to category:

Category	Total costs for 2023-2028 (in EUR)
Staff Costs	302.400,00
Promotional material costs	166.040,00
Travel costs	81.000,00
Advertising costs	207.600,00
Conferences	36.000,00
TOTAL COSTS	**793.040,00**

The following table describes the costs per year and shows the division of total costs for the partnership.

year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	Total
TOTAL COSTS per year (EUR)	108.840,00	143.240,00	123.240,00	139.240,00	139.240,00	139.240,00	**793.040,00**
For HR partners	57.220,00	71.620,00	61.620,00	69.620,00	69.620,00	69.620,00	**399.320,00**
For HU partners	51.620,00	71.620,00	61.620,00	69.620,00	69.620,00	69.620,00	**393.720,00**

*Annex 2 – Action Plan Budget has been prepared to show the breakdown of costs.

9. Conclusions

As it stands, the cross-border area (Varaždin County, Csurgó and Nagykanizsa) covered in the AT@AT.CB project is not recognized as a tourist destination on the open market. Most tourists are not even aware of these locations. However, the area has unique natural assets (Mura-Drava Regional Park, Ivanščica, etc.); cultural, historical and religious assets (Holy Trinity Church in Ludbreg, Trakošćan, Batthyány castle & Miklósfai arboretum in Nagykanizsa, Historical Park in Csurgó, etc.), unique food and cuisine (various wines, desserts, recipes, etc.), events (Csusza fesztivál, Špancirfest in Varaždin, National Carnival Donut Festival in Nagykanizsa, etc.), as well as a shared history/stories that give it the potential to emerge as an attractive and desired tourist destination on the open market.

Under the brand "Off Main Road," the cross-border area will gain recognition on the market. By organizing the various assets into tour packages that appeal to the identified segments (including families, empty nesters, Millennials and Gen Z, nature enthusiasts and religious tourists), tourists will see that there are offers off the "main road;" offers that can bring them the emotional, physical and psychological fulfilment. Basically there is something for any tourist under the brand.

By following these guidelines for developing the brand, which include details on current markets and trends, descriptions of market segments and key messages for them, visual identity guidelines, considerations for specific markets, the use of online and offline marketing channels/tools, and the action plan; the partnership will be able to sustain the results of the AT@AT.CB project, further develop new and attractive tourism offers and deepen its cross-border relationship.

The annexes enclosed with this document are considered as a means to supplement the document and allow the partnership to further develop tourism offers in their areas.

Annex I - Guidelines for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Positioning the web portal

I. Introduction

The purpose of this annex is to provide clear recommendations and guidelines on how the partnership should develop the website/portal for the brand so that it remains relevant, accessible and visible on the Internet. These recommendations should be applied to the online tools used in promotion as detailed in the document.

II. Specific Guidelines and Recommendations

1. Ensuring that the web portal and webpages are functional, accessible and user-friendly - Incorporating UX and UI principles

The web portal for the brand and the partnership's websites must be in a format that makes content easily accessible from any device with Internet access (laptop and desktop computers, smartphones – Android and iPhone, and tablets). Websites that use **UX design** (User experience design) and **UI** (User interface) concepts are most recommended as they ensure universal accessibility. UX focuses on usability, design, navigation, and impression. UX gives you the plan on how to help people get in and out, and from one page to the next. UI refers to the commands or menus that help a user communicate with the program. UI determines how easily a person achieve their aim with a site. The web portal for the brand needs to present contents for each segment in a manner that attracts them. Certain attention needs to put on placement of images, wording, basic information per offer, etc.[50] Presenting contents incorrectly or in a hard-to-understand manner only hurts the reputation of the brand, and lowers the probability of web hits/clicks on content as they would be unattractive, complicated and uninteresting universally.

2. Keeping contents accurate, trustworthy and relevant - depending on season and developments in tourism

Regular updates are crucial.[51] On the one hand, this refers to the content of offers. When a user gains information about a site such as telephone number, email address, hours of operation, cost of entrance, etc. they expect that information to be correct. If something changes, whatever it may be, the information on the web portal promoting the brand also needs to reflect that.

One offer in particular that reflects this is Trakošćan in Varaždin County. Trakošćan is considered one of the most beautiful castles in Croatia. At the castle, there is a pristine manmade lake; home to many endangered and endemic species. Many iconic photos of the castle include the lake. However, the lake has been drained to repair the infrastructure. Currently, it looks like a giant mud pit. The staff at the Trakošćan museum have received complaints from tourists. They expected to see the castle plus the lake based on the information

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[50] Val Razo, "UX Vs. UI: How They Work Together in Web Design," Forge and Smith, 08.01.2021., https://forgeandsmith.com/blog/ux-vs-ui-how-they-work-together-in-web-design/ (Accessed on October 23rd 2022)

[51] Delante Research, "SEO in the Tourism Industry – How to Do It?", 14.11.2019, https://delante.co/seo-tourism-industry/ (Accessed on October 24th 2022)

available. The castle is an excellent attraction on its own, but tourists have been disappointed due to no lake. This has resulted in lowering the reputation of the site. Social media posts have described how it was disappointing to see a drained lake. Simple updates to contact information, descriptions of the contents and hours of operation ensure that the brand is trusted and attractive over the long-term by consumers.

Secondly, it must be mentioned that in ICT products/services come and go quickly. There are constantly new technologies and concepts. To remain visible and accurate on the Internet, the partnership needs to adapt the web portal and associated pages to new formats in web design (i.e. adapting the web structure and interface). By making these adjustments, contents will remain visible, accurate, accessible and attractive to tourists, and web hits will remain constant. [52]

3. Backlinking with reputable sites and social media

Backlinks refer to other sites and social media channels providing external links to a main website or portal serving a specific purpose. In this project, backlinking refers to other websites in the field of tourism that cite the web portal for the brand. As a result of being cited, users from other sites can click and view content linked to the brand.

This can be done via links on the partnership's regular websites (e.g. a link on the Varaždin County website to the brand's contents), the websites of organizations linked to tourism in Croatia and Hungary (e.g. the Hungarian Tourism Agency includes the brand link as a site of interest on its portal), news articles on portals (that include reference to the brand's web portal), and social media posts including URLs for specific brand contents. To ensure that this happens, internal links to other organizations relevant to the brand need to be made on the web portal (e.g. links to existing tourism content and external organizations for tourism in Csurgó and Varaždin County).

By having the brand web portal backlinked to other sites, the brand can obtain more hits via Google. This is because the URL is more visible and visited in comparison to not doing this. It was actually found in 2021 that the most highly ranked Google search results (regardless of search criteria) were the ones that had a higher number of back-links. On average, the first result in Google has an average of 3.8x more backlinks than positions 2-10[53]. The partnership needs to inform its external partners about the brand and get them to cite the URL for the brand in their regular posts. Social media posts containing external links relating to brand content (posted by representatives of the partnership and others) also help to create more hits on a Google search. By taking this approach, more persons within the segments will be made aware of the brand and its attributes, visit the web portal connected to the brand and be convinced to purchase the offers.

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[52] One group to show this case in point is a post on the Facebook Group "Tajanstvena Hrvatska" from November 7th 2022, https://www.facebook.com/groups/blagamisterije

[53] Brian Dean, "Here's what we learned about SEO," 28.4.2020; Backlink; https://backlinko.com/search-engine-ranking (Last accessed on October 24th 2022)

Google is by far the most important search engine globally and dominates over other rivals such as Yahoo, Bing and DuckDuckGo. One Google programme/application that is dedicated to SEO is Google Ads. It allows promoters to create campaigns and gain more clicks on their website or portal. Once the content on the portal has been finalized, the partnership should access Google ads via their Gmail or work email accounts and setup the parameters so that the web content is widely available to anyone looking to have a relaxing vacation.

Google ads allows promoters to refer to the specific homepage of a portal, add keyword searches for the content, target specific markets and segments. This in turn allows the promoter to reach audiences of interest. Parameters can be added to a campaign via clicking "**switch to expert mode**" and then clicking "create a campaign without a goal's guidance" or "search".

One advantage of Google Ads is that it provides users with recommendations for keywords, allows you to target specific locations, set the languages of preference, and shows what other sites have appeared when specific keywords are used. It is highly recommended to use "**long-tail keyword searches**", which means that instead of having Google refer to a specific word or set of words (e.g. "tourism in Eastern Europe", "Holiday Croatia Hungary" , there should be a key phrase or word that connects to the areas (e.g. inland Croatia, outside Budapest, etc.). Here are some examples that could be potentially useful for the brand:

- Holidays in inland Croatia
- Holidays outside of Budapest (or holidays outside of Zagreb)
- Active vacations inland (or Continental) Croatia
- Religious journey inland Croatia
- Wellness vacation in rural Croatia (or Hungary)
  It should be noted that the more keywords you use with Google Ads, the higher the estimated costs.

Certain keywords have been identified as more important to promoting the brand in comparison to others. For instance, while using the words "tourist" or "tourism", most of the search results were referring to academic articles on the topics. While using the words or phrases, "travel", "destinations", "holidays," offers for tours, hotels and other sites came up as well as sites providing information on potential sites of interest.

It should be noted that to use Google Ads, billing information of the user is required. This is not a free service. The billing is made according to the number of clicks on the site that come in through Google. After providing an estimated daily budget and the revenue generated per click, Google Ads provides an estimated total cost per month. It has been recommended that for users starting with Google Ads, the budget is not higher than €30/day and the revenue generated per click should not be higher than €2 /click. That puts an estimated monthly budget at €900 per month or €10.800,00 per year.

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[54] Various tutorials showing how to use Google Ads are available on YouTube; sources: Santrel Media "Google Ads Tutorial 2022 (step-by-step) AdWords; 2021; www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNjqe9GT9mw; Metrics Media, "Google Ads Tutorial 2022 (Simple Step-by-Step Guide); May 2022; www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ltubLHI1w&t=380s

Another important aspect to understand is that Google Ads needs to be monitored. Tweaking or changing the keywords, target markets, budget, *etc.* will need to happen regularly to account for changes in the markets, new trends, new offers on the market, etc. That means that partnership representatives (e.g. marketing manager or staff in the partnership) need to monitor the Google Ad settings on a weekly basis. In this way, the partnership can see what keywords are working and which are not, and necessary changes can be made.

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Annex 2- Action Plan Budget

*All figures are expressed in EUR

		Budget for activity schedule							
Godine/year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	**Total**		
1. Staff costs									
For Croatian Side									
1.1. Marketing manager (50% of working time), gross salary of 1500€/month	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	**108,000.00**		
1.2. Marketing assistant (50% of working time), gross salary of 1200€/month	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	**43,200.00**		
For the Hungarian side									
1.3. Marketing manager (50% of working time), gross salary of 2100€/month	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	18,000.00	**108,000.00**		
1.4. Marketing assistant (50% of working time), gross salary of 1600€/month	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	7,200.00	**43,200.00**		
							Total staff costs over 2023-2028 period		302,400.00

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	Total	Justification
2. Promotional material costs								
For Croatian Side								
2.1. design and printing of brochures (subcontract for design + printing); 500€ for design, 2€ per piece for printing*10500 pieces	4,000.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	**21,500.00**	Justification: printing 1750 copies per year at €2/copy. 500 EUR in subcontracting.
2.2. design and printing of travel guides (subcontract for design + printing); 700€ for design, 2€ per piece* 6000 pieces	2,700.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	**12,700.00**	Justification: printing 1000 copies per year at €2/copy. 700 EUR in subcontracting.
2.3. Design and printing of maps (subcontract for design + printing); 500€ for design, 2€ per piece*6000 pieces	2,500.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	**12,500.00**	Justification: printing 1000 copies per year at €2/copy. 500 EUR in subcontracting.
2.4. design and production of promotional pens and USBs (subcontract for design + printing); 2€ per piece* 1500 pieces	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00	**3,000.00**	Justification: printing 250 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.5. Design and production of posters (subcontract for design + printing); 400€ for design, 600 pieces*3€ for printing per piece	700.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	**2,200.00**	Justification: printing 100 copies per year at €3/copy. 400€ in subcontracting
2.6. Design and production of t-shirts (subcontract for design + printing); 3€ per piece*1500 pieces	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00	**4,500.00**	Justification: printing 250 copies per year at €3/copy.
2.7. Design and production of hats (subcontract for design + printing) 2€ per piece*1200 pieces	400.00	400.00	400.00	400.00	400.00	400.00	**2,400.00**	Justification: printing 200 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.8. subcontracting of web design expert; per contact	3,500.00						**3,500.00**	Justification: for adjusting the TZ VZZ website and the website of VZZ to the brand
2.9. web maintenance (20 hours/year*40€ per hour)	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	**6,000.00**	Web maintenance relating to the websites for the brands
2.10. web site hosting (35€/month*12 months/year)	420.00	420.00	420.00	420.00	420.00	420.00	**2,520.00**	
2.11. production of specialized media repport (per contract) for the brand		10,000.00					**10,000.00**	
2.12. Production of 30-45 sec trailer	5,000.00						**5,000.00**	

For the Hungarian side								
2.12. design and printing of brochures (subcontract for design + printing); 2€ per piece for printing*10500 pieces	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	3,500.00	**21,000.00**	Justification: printing 1750 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.13. design and printing of travel guides (subcontract for design + printing); 700€ for design, 2€ per piece* 6000 pieces	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	**12,000.00**	Justification: printing 1000 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.14. Design and printing of maps (subcontract for design + printing); 500€ for design, 2€ per piece*6000 pieces	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	**12,000.00**	Justification: printing 1000 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.15. design and production of promotional pens and USBs (subcontract for design + printing); 2€ per piece* 1500 pieces	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00	500.00	**3,000.00**	Justification: printing 250 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.16. Design and production of posters (subcontract for design + printing); 400€ for design, 600 pieces*3€ for printing per piece	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00	**1,800.00**	Justification: printing 100 copies per year at €3/copy.
2.17. Design and production of t-shirts (subcontract for design + printing); 3€ per piece*1500 pieces	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00	750.00	**4,500.00**	Justification: printing 250 copies per year at €3/copy.
2.18. Design and production of hats (subcontract for design + printing) 2€ per piece*1200 pieces	400.00	400.00	400.00	400.00	400.00	400.00	**2,400.00**	Justification: printing 200 copies per year at €2/copy.
2.19. subcontracting of web design expert; per contact	3,500.00						**3,500.00**	Justification: for adjusting the Municipaity of Csurgo website and website of Uni-panonia the
2.20. web maintenence (20 hours/year*40€ per hour)	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	**6,000.00**	Web maintenance relating to the websites for the brands
2.21. web site hosting (35€/month*12 months/year)	420.00	420.00	420.00	420.00	420.00	420.00	**2,520.00**	
2.22. specialized media (per contract) for the brand		10,000.00					**10,000.00**	
2.23. Translation costs (for the trailer)	1,500.00						**1,500.00**	
							Total cost for promotional materials over 2013-2014	**166,040.00**

3. travel costs								
For Croatian partners								
3.1. Travel to meetings outside Varazdin county in Croatia (50 meetings per year*average of 110€ per trip)	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	**33,000.00**	
3.2. Travel to regional conferences and meetings (5 per year*250€ per trip for conferences, includes hotel, per diems, km)	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	**7,500.00**	
For Hungarian partners								
3.3. Travel to meetings outside Csurgo in Hungary (50 meetings per year*average of 110€ per trip)	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	5,500.00	**33,000.00**	
3.4. Travel to regional conferences (5 per year*250€ per trip for conferences, includes hotel, per diems, km)	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	1,250.00	**7,500.00**	
							Total travel costs over2013-20 period	**81,000.00**

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4. advertising									
For Croatian partners									
4.1. radio advertisements in Croatia (4 months per year 200€ per month)	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00	**4,800.00**		
4.2. Magazine advertisements + publishing costs over 4 months per year*2000€ per month				8,000.00	8,000.00	8,000.00	**24,000.00**		
4.3. publishing in online media (2500€ per month over 6 months per year)		15,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	**75,000.00**		
For Hungarian partners									
4.1. radio advertisements in Hungary (4 months per year 200€ per month)	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00	800.00	**4,800.00**		
4.2. Magazine advertisements + publishing costs over 4 months per year*2000€ per month				8,000.00	8,000.00	8,000.00	**24,000.00**		
4.3. publishing in online media (2500€ per month over 6 months per year)		15,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	**75,000.00**		
								Total travel costs over 2013-20 period	**207,600.00**

5. Conferences									
For Croatian partners									
5.1. Organizing 1 conference per year in Croatia on the cross-board brand (catering for 50 persons, travel allowances, rental of space)	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	**18,000.00**		
For Hungarian partners									
5.2. Organizing 1 conference per year in Hungary on the cross-board brand (catering for 50 persons, travel allowances, rental of space)	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	**18,000.00**		
								Total travel costs over 2013-20 period	**36,000.00**

year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	total
TOTAL COSTS per year	108,840.00	143,240.00	123,240.00	139,240.00	139,240.00	139,240.00	**793,040.00**
Touirst Board of Varazdin county	57,220.00	71,620.00	61,620.00	69,620.00	69,620.00	69,620.00	**399,320.00**
Municipality of Csurgo	51,620.00	71,620.00	61,620.00	69,620.00	69,620.00	69,620.00	**393,720.00**

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