



“Sustainable Tourism and Mobility in Rural Areas: Environmentally-Friendly Transportation Options”

Third Meeting, Municipality of Podstrana, Croatia



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Our area's tourism profile - key attractions

- ▶ Modrý Kameň Castle and the Museum of Puppets and Toys - an interactive museum in a historic building with an interesting exhibition, including an exhibition of ancient dental technology



Our area's tourism profile - key attractions

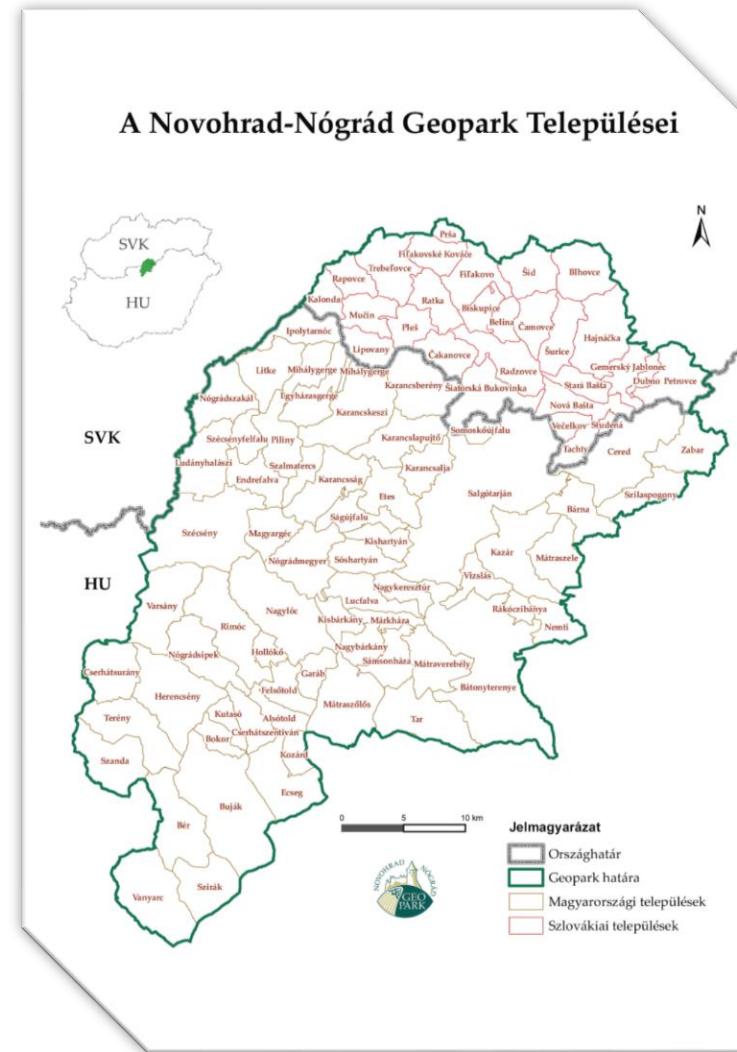
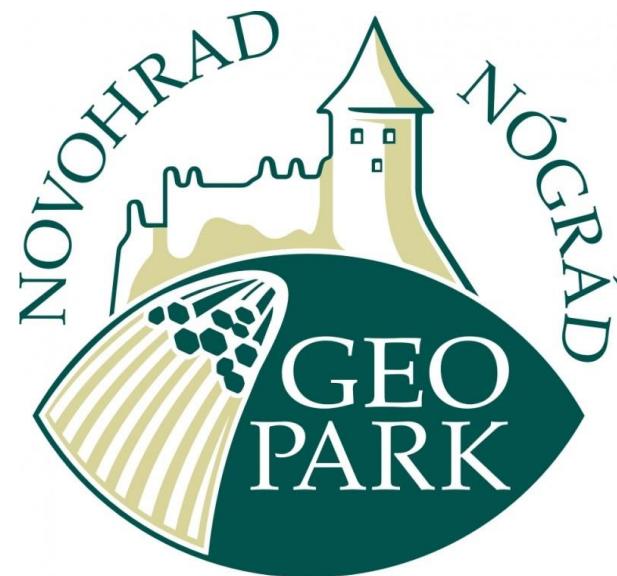
- ▶ Šomoška - castle and a natural geological phenomenon with a "stone sea", a basalt waterfall and castle ruins, accessible via a thematic nature trail



Our area's tourism profile - key attractions



- ▶ Novohrad Nógrád Geopark (UNESCO Global Geopark) - a unique geological landscape rich in volcanic formations, castles and nature reserves



Our area's tourism profile - key attractions



- ▶ Other historical monuments: Fiľakovo, Divín, Čabrad', Halič - castles and chateaux, culturally and naturally important places





Our area's tourism profile - key attractions



- ▶ Bio swimming pool Krtko in Veľký Krtiš - natural swimming pool without chlorine with a plant biosystem, environmentally friendly and original experiences with frogs in the pool
- ▶ Aquatermal in Dolná Strehová - wellness, spa and aquapark
- ▶ Miraj Resort in Lučenec - wellness, spa and aquapark

Our area's tourism profile - demographic data



- ▶ Currently there are no visitor statistics specifically for our area, but the geopark covers an area with approximately 150,000 inhabitants on both sides of the border (Slovakia + Hungary)
- ▶ Typically, regional tourism from the interior is directed here - visitors from the surroundings of Lučenec, the Banská Bystrica region or near the border, especially in seasons with favorable weather.
- ▶ Seasonal trends:
- ▶ Summer months (June - September) are active for swimming pools like Miraj Resort or Krtko bio swimming pool, Aquatermal Strehová
- ▶ Warm sunny days attract tourists to sand pools, old castles, nature trails and excursions - ideal season for geopark sites and castle trails.

Top 3 mobility challenges for tourists and locals in our area

1. Lack of passenger rail transport:

Veľký Krtiš does not have a passenger railway station - the nearest is in Lučenec. Local transport is based on bus connections, which limits the accessibility of the region

2. Dependence on car transport:

Due to limited public transport, visitors and residents are often dependent on private cars, which can reduce accessibility for those without a car and increase traffic congestion

3. Poor infrastructure for ecological or alternative transport:

There is a lack of cycle paths, shared transport systems or regular ecological shuttle services to tourist sites - these are currently underdeveloped or missing altogether



How does your community currently address environmental impacts from tourism-related transportation?

- ▶ The Geopark and its management association (Novohrad - Nógrád) cooperate with the local government, schools and entrepreneurs for sustainable development and environmental education
- ▶ The Krtko Bio Swimming Pool demonstrates an environmental approach in tourism by using a biosystem instead of chemicals, thus minimizing the environmental impact of the facility
- ▶ However, regional ecological development initiatives seem to be more project-oriented (geo-economy, nature, education) and specific measures in the field of ecological transport are still at the beginning or missing



Eco-friendly transport options in our area

- ▶ Hiking trails and nature trails - e.g. Šomoška, Šomošská nature trail or visits to castles are accessible on foot and support low-carbon movement
- ▶ The organization of the geopark supports education in the field of sustainability, which may be the basis for future ecological transport solutions such as cycling initiatives or electric shuttles, but they are not yet officially implemented



Innovative project in our region which promotes sustainable tourism mobility



- ▶ In the summer of 2024, a large-scale reconstruction project was completed in the Veľký Krtíš district:
 - 31 km of second-class roads with 19 bridges, footbridges
 - 74 culverts
 - 14 barrier-free pedestrian crossings
 - new two-way bus stopsAn investment of €17.5 million from EU funds and the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region's own resources significantly improved the infrastructure for residents and tourists
- ▶ The project also included the introduction of a new direct bus lines to bigger cities. These line ensures better connection of the region to long-distance connections, thus supporting more environmentally friendly public transport in tourism

Innovative project in our region which promotes sustainable tourism mobility - barriers

► **Financial barriers:**

High investment costs, even if financed by funds, may not be sufficient to further expand sustainable mobility (e.g. cycle paths, eco-friendly vehicles). The need for additional resources, maintenance and installation may hinder further development.

► **Cultural barriers:**

Traditional car use is deeply rooted in the daily life of the region - due to a history of reliance on individual transport, the acceptance of alternatives may be less evident for residents and visitors.

► **Logistical barriers:**

Lack of other alternatives - cycle paths, shared services or eco-friendly shuttles are missing. And although the infrastructure has been renovated, the systemic integration of eco-friendly solutions such as car sharing or public bicycles is not yet ready.



How are local businesses involved in sustainable tourism/transport initiatives?



- ▶ **Tourism through wine (Veľký Krtíš Wine Route):**
The Veľký Krtíš Wine Route Association unites nine local winemakers (family and established brands), who together create a regional wine-tourism offer. They organize thematic events such as tastings, open cellars or grape festivals. Through culture, tradition and products, regional entrepreneurs mutually support the sustainable development of tourism.
- ▶ Although it is primarily a cultural-economic project, it also has a mobility dimension - tourists often travel between winemakers within the region on foot, by bicycle or in small groups, which supports low-carbon tourism.
- ▶ **Pilot project KLIMASKEN for adaptation to climate change:**
The city of Veľký Krtíš cooperated with the Union of Cities of Slovakia and the Institute of Circular Economy (INCIEN) on the Klimasken project. Although the goal was a comprehensive assessment of climate risks, the project also supported the foundations of planning for mobile and environmental measures in the city - including mobility and public space.

Describe a successful community-led mobility/tourism project in your area. What made it effective?

- ▶ In publicly available sources, there is no specific community project led directly by residents or tourists focused on mobility (e.g. shared bikes, carsharing, community shuttles).
- ▶ Nevertheless, we can highlight a collaboration through the Velký Krtiš Wine Route
- ▶ Although it is not a pure “transport” initiative, wine tourist routes have established themselves in a community way - winemakers cooperate on events that naturally mobilize visitors between the municipalities of the region. This format requires coordination, transportation planning, often providing micro-transport services or group visits, which in practice means community mobility.
- ▶ The success of this initiative brings several efficiencies: connecting the cultural identity of the region, experiential events, supporting the local economy and more sustainable ways of visiting - often outside the main car routes.



What demographics face mobility exclusion in your area, and how could this be improved?

- ▶ Seniors and people with disabilities
- ▶ In smaller municipalities such as ours and the surrounding municipalities buses are rare, often with inadequate stops and infrastructure without barrier-free adaptations. This significantly limits their access to basic services - shops, healthcare and social life.
- ▶ People on low incomes
- ▶ The lack of connections means that without their own vehicle, people are dependent on expensive taxi services or are forced to limit their travel, which worsens their access to education, work or services.



What demographics face mobility exclusion in your area, and how could this be improved?

- ▶ Residents without a car
Research shows that parts of the region are excluded from accessing regional centres during the working day - if someone does not have a car, visiting e.g. the districts capital city is often a problem
- ▶ Possible solutions:
 - Introduction of micro transport on demand (e.g. a smaller electric minibus for seniors and disabled people)
 - Establishing a community bus or bike sharing system, especially during peak times and cultural events
 - Introducing low-income transportation vouchers or discounts, supported by the municipality or state



How does cultural/heritage tourism influence mobility demands in our area?



- ▶ Tourist sites such as Divín Castle, the Renaissance Manor House - the museum of the history of the village of Divín, or the churches and manor houses bring a seasonal increase in visitors
- ▶ As a result of:
 - Higher number of cars - villages often lack parking capacities and public transport alternatives, which leads to traffic jams and congestion of narrow roads
 - Festival or event organizers are forced to solve transport individually, usually by car, which does not take into account the ecological dimension
- ▶ Improvements would be brought by:
 - Cooperation with regional carriers on seasonal shuttle connections
 - Coordination between villages in organizing "park and ride" points near the main attractions

Describe one unique cultural asset in your region that could attract tourists if better connected via sustainable transport.

- ▶ Renaissance manor house in Divín (Zichyovský manor house) + museum of local history
- ▶ The manor house is an interesting cultural destination within Novohrad; it has been restored and offers exhibitions on the history and nature of the region.
- ▶ If it were accessible by ecological transport - for example, by bicycle shuttles, or by regular electric minibus - its reach among tourists, school groups and families could be significantly increased.
- ▶ Improved access would also reduce the pressure of individual cars and support sustainable tourism.



What seasonal trends (e.g., summer coastal overcrowding, rural winter isolation) impact transport sustainability?

- ▶ In winter, connections tend to be reduced (less tourist interest, higher operating costs)
- ▶ This leads to the isolation of residents, especially seniors and families without a car, worsens access to services and increases the need for individual transport.
- ▶ Global context:
 - Research shows that residents of rural areas lack access to public transport and social exclusion occurs - the daily regional centre is not accessible even for those with a train, let alone without a car.



What seasonal trends (e.g., summer coastal overcrowding, rural winter isolation) impact transport sustainability?

- ▶ Impacts on the rural region:
 - Growing emissions in winter (by cars), as the public has no alternatives
 - Infrastructure (roads, sidewalks) is often poorly maintained in winter, which reduces the safety and usability of sustainable forms of transport (e.g. walking, cycling)
- ▶ Suggestions for improvement:
 - Seasonal overhead connections - introduction of a winter public transport regime also in the off-season
 - Subsidized mobility services for critical groups (seniors, disabled people)
 - Cooperation between municipalities to form winter community driving groups or volunteer carriers



What local/national policies support (or hinder) sustainable tourism mobility?



- ▶ Supporting policies:
- ▶ Regional Strategy of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (BBSK)
 - BBSK is actively developing regional infrastructure, including road reconstruction, modernization of bus stops and expansion of suburban transport
 - In the Veľký Krtíš district, for example, a project to modernize 31 km of roads was completed in 2024, including stops with barrier-free crossings and the introduction of a new Veľký Krtíš - Nitra line, which significantly improved the accessibility of the region.
- ▶ National Mobility Plan (Slovakia 2030)
 - Supports electromobility, cycling and sustainable regional mobility. Allows municipalities to apply for subsidies (e.g. for cycling infrastructure)
- ▶ Rural Development Programme of the Slovak Republic 2014 - 2022 and its follow-up
 - Allows for the drawing of support for small transport infrastructure, road renovation and linking tourism with green forms of transport (e.g. agro-tourism connected to cycle routes)

What local/national policies support (or hinder) sustainable tourism mobility?



- ▶ Policies that hinder development:
- ▶ Weak legislative support for “transport on demand”
 - Laws in Slovakia only allow municipalities or partnerships to operate flexible community transport (e.g. minibuses for seniors or tourists outside peak hours)
- ▶ Low integration of transport and tourism in policy
 - Tourism and transport are often planned separately. For example, events in the region (festivals, exhibitions, vintage) rarely consider ecological transport as part of the planning - which leads to a high share of cars
- ▶ Complex and slow absorption of EU funds
 - Municipalities often do not have the capacity (personnel, expertise) for complex mobility projects that would combine tourism and green transport

What lessons from your region could benefit other rural areas in the GreenMove network?



- ▶ 1. Linking infrastructure investments with transport and tourism
 - An example is BBSK's investment in roads and bus stops in the Veľký Krtíš district, together with a new bus lines - this model strengthens the accessibility of the region for both visitors and residents
 - GreenMove could be inspired by how to link transport investments with regional development and tourism offer.
- ▶ 2. Culture as a catalyst for mobility
 - Festivals, wine routes and historical monuments in Novohrad (e.g. Modrý Kameň, Dolná Strehová) can be a trigger for ecological transport - if they are well connected.
- ▶ • Other rural regions can use cultural events as a reason to introduce seasonal shuttles, cycle buses or shared services.
- ▶ 3. Potential of micro-solutions in small villages
 - In small municipalities like Glabušovce, large transport projects will not work, but small, flexible solutions (e.g. community minibus, electric bike rental)
- ▶ This is an important lesson: sustainable mobility in rural areas must be tailored - according to population, topography and target group (seniors, tourists, families)

What data or metrics do you use to measure the impact of sustainable transport initiatives?

- ▶ Regional and local projects often use the following indicators:
 - Number of users of new transport options - for example, number of users of electric cars, e-buses, cycle buses, minibuses
 - Frequency and volume of passengers - how the use of public transport is changing on routes that have been modernised or subsidised
 - Changes in the number of cars used and emissions - measuring the reduction of individual car transport, the effort to achieve low-carbon movements
 - Awareness and education - number of graduates of training events, participation in educational programmes
 - Information tools - monitoring the use of cross-border travel information systems, digital mobility maps and their impact on user behaviour



What EU funding gaps or bureaucratic hurdles hinder local sustainable mobility projects?

- ▶ Complex and lengthy process of drawing EU funds - small municipalities often lack the capacity (personnel or expertise) to prepare and implement projects linking mobility and tourism
- ▶ Limited dedicated funds for transport innovation in rural areas - the EU provides funding through ERDF or Interreg, but very little is specifically dedicated to sustainable rural mobility
- ▶ Limited support for electromobility - despite the Recovery Plan (RRP), the deployment of infrastructure for electric vehicles and its availability in the region lags behind; in 2023, zero-emission vehicles accounted for only 2.9% of new registrations



How could GreenMove collaborate with existing EU projects in your area?



- ▶ Data sharing:
 - GreenMove could use or integrate results from “Clean Mobility” - for example cross-border mobility maps, travel information, methodologies for multipliers.
- ▶ Pilot projects in rural areas:
 - Be inspired by models from successful projects - shared EV vehicles, booking, charging networks, Mobility as a Service platforms
- ▶ Capitalization and partnerships:
 - share experiences from projects and build new partnerships between municipalities, institutions, carriers through workshops, study visits and joint pilots
- ▶ Integration into national strategies:
 - Using the Slovak Mobility Strategy 2030-2050 (SMART, resilient, sustainable), GreenMove could gain political support for innovations such as a single travel ticket, intelligent systems or off-season connections



Thank you for your
attention!



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