



ECO-ROUTE Project – Leonardo da Vinci Programme

4th Regional Workshop 18 March 2005, Győr, Hungary

The workshop attracted about 35 participants, coming mainly from local and regional associations of rural tourism development, as well as local authorities' consortiums in the pilot region, county officials involved in tourism development and entrepreneurs involved in catering, accommodation, horse-riding and cycling tours.

Brief summary of the opening, presentations and discussion:

Irén Szörényiné Kukorelli, Project Coordinator in Hungary, greeted the participants. Opening and greetings by Prof. János Rechnitzer (Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre for Regional West-Hungarian Research Institute), who had highlighted the importance given by the Institute on the scientific base of the project.



Eszter Serfőző (tourism Consultant of Local Government Office of Győr-Moson-Sopron County) discussed the role of Győr-Moson-Sopron County in tourism, especially in ecotourism. Ms Serfőző presented the institutional and organisational background of the County, which aims to fulfil tasks in the field of tourism. The characteristic of the region's tourism and possible ecotourist connection points were also presented. A local eco-like festival -Cheese Fair- was

mentioned as an example of how the resources of the County are used to create good basis for ecotourist development.

Mátyás Fekete (President of Rural Tourism Association of Győr-Moson-Sopron County) discussed that role of the Rural Tourism Association of Győr-Moson-Sopron County as the supporter of sustainable tourism. Mr Fekete gave a historical background of the topic. Spoke about the last 15 years: the foundation of rural tourism in Hungary and the changes made in the system since. Also introduced the actors and organisations, their connections to each other and their roles in the field of rural tourism.

The audience asked if it is good to have so many organisations working for the same region and for the same cause, given that it seems there is no exchange of information among them? It was noted that there exists truly a big chaos because there are many not active organisations, or active but not cooperative organisations in the region, but transparency in supporting system and ample information on regulations and the role of each organisation, can solve this problem.



Kornél Szelle (entrepreneur - Szelle Horse Ranch) talked of the chances and conflicts observed in horse-riding tourism in Szigetköz. Mr Szelle talked about the potential of the region in horse-tourism. He used examples from his everyday routine to show that wide consensus and respect of other's interests are key factors in an enterprise's smooth operation. Also, he discussed about the foundation and the operation of Hungarian evaluation system of enterprises dealing with horse-tourism (the Equestrian Horseshoe label).

The audience asked if there is a chance to combine the region's ecotourist programmes and make a compact programme offer for tourists. Mr Szelle responded that there is hardly any chance to make this all inclusive offer, because the capacity of each enterprise is small and the needs of their guests can be generally fulfilled at one place.

Zoltán Fűzfa (Leader of Trout Association of Szigetköz) Ecotourism activities in practice explained that the Trout Association runs a so called "Forest School" in Szigetköz. Mr Fűzfa presented some facts about the system of Forest Schools in Hungary, their evaluation methodology and other activities - taking part in tenders, canoe-tours, lectures on nature - carried

out by the Association. The presentation included a magnificent slideshow of the river Danube from its source to Szigetköz.

Zoltán Kun (Director of PAN Parks Programme in Hungary) presented the viewpoint of the involvement of nature conservation organisations in ecotourism development. The speaker pointed to the harmful effects of tourism and the chances of promoting the principles of sustainability in tourism. The PAN Parks Foundation is an international network and he focused on describing the efforts made in the national context to protect and manage in a sustainable way the Hungarian National Parks.

The audience asked what is the reason why an important international organisation is almost unknown even to the professionals in the city where its headquarters are based in, given that it appeared that most of the workshop participants never heard of this Foundation? It was explained that the Foundation worked mostly on the evaluation of National Parks abroad. They had been working with Duna–Dráva National Park and are trying to build partnerships with Aggteleki National Park at present. Unfortunately, administrative barriers in operating National Parks in Hungary (finance, bureaucracy) cause unnecessary burdens. The foreign participants of the workshop noted that the ECO-ROUTE project and other initiatives dealing with ecotourism should be supported by the Foundation which brings in a great deal of international experiences and good practice.



Lőrincné Tamás (President of the Association of Local Governments in Szigetköz) described the tasks of the Association for ecotourism promotion in Szigetköz. The speaker presented briefly the history of the Association and their recent projects related to tourism. For example the Marco Polo programme. This project aimed to design integrated tourist packages and was implemented in the neighbouring Zala County, with only one entrepreneur from Szigetköz actually invited to participate because of coincidental good personal contacts.

He explained that promoting ecotourism is essential for the region because Szigetköz is not capable to operate in the longer term as a mass tourist receiving destination.

Bélané Mayer (entrepreneur Kont Pension, Hédervár) talked of the ecotourism opportunities as seen through the eyes of an entrepreneur. After the transition, when most of the small tourist

enterprises were founded, she stressed the importance of partnership among entrepreneurs in order to promote an integrated tourist product in their area.

The audience inquired about the training courses delivered through the ECO-ROUTE project in Szigetköz. Mrs Mayer told that the three day workshop proved very beneficial for her, because she could meet other entrepreneurs and discuss common problems shared among them. Also, she noted that joint actions are more effective in solving problems and the new acquaintances made helped greatly to get more information about the region and share the know-how gained by several successful businesses involved in tourism services.

Finally, Attila Babos (Mayor of Dunaszeg) stressed the commitment of the Municipality to the development of local tourism. Mr Babos presentation was an introduction of the local government of Dunaszeg and the tourist approaches of the Regional Development Association of Local Governments of Alsó-Szigetköz. (Members of the Association include the Municipalities of Dunaszeg, Dunaszentpál, Györladamér, Győrújfalú, Győrzámoly, Kisbajcs, Kunsziget, Mecsér, Nagybajcs, Vámoszabadi és Vének)

Partners' evaluation of the 4th Regional workshop

Partners' remarked that the presentations were very interesting. The organisation of Forest Schools, which are certified by the Society of Forest Schools with a woodpecker label, was very positively received. About 10,000 children attend these schools year round. It is considered a valuable ecotourism activity because the forest schools are organised in local inns or other accommodation and support the local economy in many ways. The forest schools last for 5 days and are part of the school curriculum.

Also, it was remarked that the fact that most presentations were made by representatives from various associations, shows a strong culture of cooperation and networking in Hungary. The partners were also impressed by the involvement of local government in tourism promotion.

Partners stressed that a very relevant presentation was the one from the Hungarian PAN Parks Office, whose representative foresaw the potential of the ECO-ROUTE project in raising awareness about ecotourism development in Hungary and could perhaps be invited to get involved in the training. Partners also pointed out their support for a bottom-up approach rather than centrally planned actions. This issue was also extensively discussed in the workshop, where most participants noted that there is lack of central funding, which to their view hindered the promotion of ecotourism. It seemed however, they are realising the importance of committing own resources. A few entrepreneurs organise several activities by themselves rather than cooperating with others.

All partners noted that overall, they have gained nice ideas from the workshop that could be incorporated in the action plans for the implementation of the project in their pilot areas. It was also noted that there seems to exist great potential for the introduction of an eco-label in the Hungarian pilot region, and the local project team was advised to carefully consider certification options together with the fact that a "leader" often makes the difference for the successful adoption of a label and hence the continuity of the ECO-ROUTE project activities.