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PRESS RELEASE

INSiGHTS partners learning about destination management and product development

Thematic meeting and transnational walkshop in Harghita County, Romania

In the eastern part of Transylvania, Harghita County lies in a depression surrounded by the Eastern Carpathians. Due to its geographical position, Harghita County offers a variety of landscapes and natural wonders, thus making it great for the tourists who are looking for healthy and green destinations. Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely, a city in Odorheiu region rich with hills covered with leafy vegetation and warmer climate was the location of the INSiGHTS project partners meeting held from June 18–21, 2018 by Harghita County Council. The focus of the visit was on the transnational learning and exchange on green, healthy tourism, destination management and product development. Partners were introduced to the best practices of Harghita County, starting with a taiga reservation, a butterfly house and a salt mine, followed by the Legendárium studios, the Szekler gates and a cheese manufacture.

Partners met on Monday afternoon at the **Septimia Resort - SPA Hotel** in Odorheiu Secuiesc/ Székelyudvarhely and were welcomed by **Botond Barna Bíró**, the vice-president of Harghita County Council and by **Lóránt Verzár**, the director of Septimia Resort - SPA Hotel. The welcome speech was followed by **Dr. Zoltán István Miklós**, the director of the Haáz Rezső Museum of Odorheiu Secuiesc, who gave a short presentation of Harghita County, followed by a Master Class on tourism destination management schemes and product development presented by **Michael Meyer** from CEEweb. Parts of the Master Class were also three professional presentations on Szekler product development presented by **István Márton** from Rural Development Association of Harghita County Council; Via Mariae pilgrimage route presented by **Károly Szabó** from Harghita Community Development Association and Mountain tourism presented by **Örs Fekete** form Mountain Rescue Service of Harghita County Council.

Tuesday morning started with the **steering committee meeting** and the **thematic meeting** in the Septimia Resort. There were project management issues and communication activities presented along with the methodological guide for national tourism policy assessment.

The morning meetings were followed by a traditional Szekler lunch, held at the **Gizi restaurant**. Its interior is decorated with handcrafted products making the place very cosy. After lunch, partners travelled to Fântâna Brazilor/Fenyőkút where they took a **tour of the peat bog**. Partners discovered a unique habitat, some special phenomena and rare relict species through the taiga educational trail. The next stop of the study visit was Praid/Parajd, where partners visited the **butterfly house**, which offers moments of relaxation and excitement to both children and adults. It is the first permanent butterfly house in Romania. Built for this purpose and opened in 2012, it houses up to nine different common species and several hundred specimens of butterflies. Since the life span of a butterfly is only a few weeks, the species are always changing, thus offering visitors a chance to experience something different all the time. The study visit was concluded with a visit of the **Salt mine in Praid/Parajd**. Having estimated reserves of 50 billion tonnes of NaCl it represents the largest salt reserve in Romania. The underground visiting space is 120 m below the surface and offers visitors the saline air beneficial to the respiratory system. With many sports facilities, a playground for children and a chapel it offers many of the comforts of the life above ground.

On Wednesday, partners travelled to the **Legendárium** headquarters in Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely where the production of the animated series on the mysteries of Transylvanian legends takes place. Partners were familiarised with the animation process and watched one of the cartoons. This was followed by a visit of Băile Szejké/Szejkéfürdő where a huge **park dedicated to Szekler folklore** is under construction. Partners took a walk uphill along the permanent exhibition of the traditional Szekler gates to the Orbán Balázs memorial. After that, partners travelled to Merești/Homoródalmás and visited a **cheese manufacture**. The family who runs the manufacture is a third generation of cheese makers. They have transformed a traditional barn so they can produce cheese on the ground floor and live upstairs. The presentation of the manufacture was followed by cheese tasting.

After lunch partners met again for the **critical classroom** in which integrated management schemes were discussed, moderated by **Michael Meyer** from CEEweb. In the evening partners gathered one last time for dinner to officially conclude the meeting.

The next multilateral meeting will take place in **Komárno** in November 2018.

About the project

The 30-months long project (January 2017 – June 2019) was approved within the **Interreg Danube Transnational Programme** financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

The INSIGHTS project is about **finding solutions for making regions more attractive to tourists** by developing tourism strategies that keep in the focus the protection of natural and cultural resources. Regions in INSIGHTS all have outstanding natural and cultural resources, and at the same time they have a great potential related to the fast-growing recreational trend of slow, green and healthy tourism.

Partners are working in close cooperation with stakeholders in eight regions to gain relevant local feedback on the current situation of tourism and also ideas and proposals for new opportunities for slow, green and healthy tourism. There will be **eight integrated sustainable tourism strategies** developed by the partner regions and they will be adaptable all across the Danube Region.

For more information about the INSIGHTS project please visit: www.interreg-danube.eu/insights

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