Title of the Story: Summer express Záhoráčik

Destination Name: Bratislava Region

Country: Slovakia

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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☒ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Islands & Seaside
☐ Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19
☒ Post COVID-19 recovery
☐ One of the 17 SDGs* (if yes, which one) Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? [https://www.unsd.org/content/unsd/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html](https://www.unsd.org/content/unsd/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html)

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: [http://tourism4sdgs.org/](http://tourism4sdgs.org/)

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Issues faced

In Bratislava Region there is a picturesque subregion, Záhorie, with pine forests, green meadows, romantic castles as well as bottomland forests along the Moravia River which was created for an active relax in untouched nature. The problem of the subregion was low tourist attendance in due to limited accessibility of the subregion from the capital Bratislava. There also was an insufficient base for supplementary tourism facilities, no Tourist Info Point. So there was a need to create more suitable conditions for sustainable development and economic growth of the Záhorie. And the key success factor was a transportation solution – creation of sustainable connection of Záhorie with Bratislava. Support of development of the subregion Záhorie, improvement of sustainable connection of Záhorie with the City of Bratislava.

One possible solution was to renew the rail transport on disused railway line.

Methods, steps and tools applied

Our institution, Bratislava Self-Governing Region, Tourism Department, initiated series of negotiations with Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic to achieve the change in Transport law in purpose to permit a running of disused railway lines not only for public purpose but also for the purpose of tourist transportation.

Bratislava Self-Governing succeeded and was created new model of cooperation with divided financial participation - cooperation between state administration, self-government and Railways of the Slovak Republic. In the second step Bratislava Self-Governing Region initiated series of negotiations with municipalities located along the railway line in due to support a creation of more suitable conditions and supplementary tourism facilities. We succeeded again thanks to positive attitude of local mayors who took care of promotion in their municipalities, boosted railway stations in their villages, involved local people into different initiatives.

Záhorie was made more visible thanks to new cycle maps, brochures and promotion through websites, social media and other channels.

Key success factors
Institutional support, good accessibility as key factor of successful regional development, element of sustainable and soft mobility because of bike carriage which enables people to take their bikes with them on-board, support of small stakeholders, local support and local initiatives, local communities, active approach of mayors and municipalities, supplementary events and activities for people (Three keys for Catharine – History which connects us – competition which connected several castles across Slovakia including castle Plavecký hrad in Záhorie), willing people at all levels.

Lessons learned
In the first step we had to gain approval of state administration and subsequently their financial subsidy, then get financial provision in our budget besides other priorities which we as regional government need to cover. The chairman of Bratislava Self-Governing Region needed to understand that the impact of tourism on economic growth is more secondary than direct and therefore tourist projects need financial subsidy in the initiative phase. Fortunately, the project of Summer express Záhoráčik was naturally convincing thanks to enormous response of people – both locals and visitors. The initial year (2017) was boom. But every next year it was a struggle with our management to gain an approval for financial subsidy of this project. Finally we gained an approval but on condition that number of transported people will increase from year to year. However, in 2018 communication through media and social networks was weak and insufficient (financial issue again) and we were struggling to keep statistics at least at the same level as in 2017. In 2019 situation and conditions were better and the project was enormously successful. In 2020 was the start of the Záhoráčik season planned on April. Since in March the COVID-19 crisis came, Bratislava Self-Governing Region had to make reallocation of finances and one of the first cut off projects were these in tourism. But at the end of June Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic came with post COVID-19 recovery initiative which includes starting up all summer expresses across Slovakia including our Summer express Záhoráčik.

Results, achievements and recognitions
The impact of tourism on both economic growth and employment in the Záhorie subregion is clearly positive. In due to this project new job opportunities were created. In Plavecké Podhradie, the final village on the line, was established Tourist Information Center with employee who provides information about major tourist attractions in the subregion of Záhorie. Locals joined together and organized cleaning of public spaces. Mayor of municipality Plavecké Podhradie sees potential of this project in fact, that he has village full of tourists who use local services and pay for it while number of cars decreased because majority of visitors travels by train. Záhorie became an accessible and attractive region for families with children, groups of young people, bikers, hikers, visitors of Bratislava City. Visitors as well as inhabitants love to discover secluded places of Záhorie. Summer express Záhoráčik supports sustainable and soft mobility thanks to bike carriage. Záhoráčik was the first express of its kind in Slovakia and served as a good practice example for other regions of Slovakia. Today, in Slovakia we have 10 summer trains which are connecting interesting tourist spots with difficult accessibility. Summer trains make regions visible, support regional
development, discover new tourist destinations with great conditions for hiking, cycling, experiencing historical, natural, cultural and technical sites of slovak regions.

Additional references

Summer express Záhoráčik website 2020
https://bratislavskykraj.sk/zahoracik/
Summer express Záhoráčik – pictures 2020
https://bratislavskykraj.sk/foto-letny-vlak-zahoracik/
Summer express Záhoráčik proved 2017
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfBcV_xUjWc
By Summer express Záhoráčik to Plavecké Podhradie 2019
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yy1UfL2Qi38