

Introduction

This publication is published within the framework of the Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Co-operation Program 2007-2013 as part of the project called “Inviting Forest – Discovery of Protected Areas on Nature Trails between Two Castles”. As the region near the border is very rich in natural attractions, the main focus of the project is on the joint efforts of the two settlements at the border, Slanec (SK) and Füzér (HU) aiming at protecting the nature as well as developing an environmentally conscious attitude of the public towards environmental protection. Considering the geographical closeness of the protected areas, their protection requires close cooperation and coordination within the field. The system of cross border nature trails has five thematic parts: the Nature Trail along the Border, the Izra Lake Nature Trail, the Great Milic Nature Trail, the Marovka - Bodó Meadow Nature Trail and the Őr Hill (Guard Hill) Nature Trail. The biggest height difference – up to 566 meters – is on the Great Milic Nature Trail and the longest nature trail segment is on the Izra Lake Natural Trail with its 21,066 meters. All nature trails use the same symbol: a rectangular sign with white background and two horizontal lilac-yellow strips. Most of the nature trails are located between the two castles, which function in addition to being majestic monuments as information centres and museums within the framework of the cross border cooperation. Visitors have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the history of the castles and their surroundings as well as the traditions and life of the communities of Slanec and Füzér. While exploring the region they can rest at the rest areas located alongside the nature trails. With the aid of the information signs, they can at each station get to know the flora and fauna of the region and maps help them to find their own location and directions. They can rest on the benches and at the rest places equipped with tables and stoves located in the beautiful nature and in case of bad weather; they can stay in the beautifully crafted, wooden rain shelters. All objects at the rest places are made of high quality oak.

The numerous natural attractions of our region are integral parts of the system of the protected areas of Natura 2000. The main aim of Natura 2000 is to protect the biodiversity of the given state and consequently the EU as part of the system of protected areas of the member states. This system of protected areas aims at protecting the most valuable and endangered plant and animal species that can still be found in their natural habitat as well as their habitats in the member states of the European Union and at ensuring an absolute biodiversity within the EU through the protection of these species and their habitats. The nature trails specified in this project have been established on this basis at the most notable locations of Milic, Milic Rock, Marovka,



Malá Izra, Reed Lake and the two castle hills. The trails go alongside areas of national importance, like the Izra Lake, the Bodnár Well and the forester houses.

The neighborhood of Košice has a proven touristic potential: The Slanské Hills in the eastern part of Slovakia have volcanic origin. The range extends in north-south direction from Prešov to the Slovakian-Hungarian border and closes the Košice Basin from the east. From a geological point of view, the Slanské Hills belong to the so called Eastern Slovakian Neovolcanic Hills (23.8-5.3 mill. years). The region has countless and vary diverse natural, cultural and historic attractions, which build the basis for tourism. From a touristic point of view, the existing gastronomical and accommodation possibilities of the region cannot accommodate a more intensive active tourism due to their capacity, the services offered and their locations. The deserted family houses of the regions, which are mostly owned by private individuals, are the biggest potential in terms of a more intensive diversification towards rural tourism. These houses could be preliminarily used as tourist accommodations and smaller rest houses. The development of the enterprises working in tourism could be an ideal opportunity for our region to start to flourish; we could avoid the establishment of large industry, which would in the long run harm the environment. By increasing the popularity of the region, the settlements would develop, new enterprises could be established and by continuously expanding our product lines we could become an interesting tourist destination, which is visited by tourists over and over again.

The work of local governments does not end with establishing rest places along the natural trails. These places have to be managed and maintained and continuous and high quality services have to be offered to visitors. The integration of nature trails into the Slovak national natural trail network, their introduction to tourists and their promotion in the local information centres can only be realized at a higher, over-regional level. We would like to contribute to the promotion of the local attractions among tourists, cyclists and other visitors of every age group by preparing tourism itineraries about the natural trails, the cycle lanes and the regional sights enabling them to prepare for their hike according to their own wishes. The nature trails contribute to a healthy lifestyle and give us the opportunity to get to know the beautiful natural sights and the flora and fauna, to visit the people living in our partner settlements and to maintain our mutual relationships. It strengthens the relation between the two neighboring countries and our common interests when tourists meet at the border regardless of nationality, citizenship or political views. Such activities unite well-intentioned people in a peaceful atmosphere in the nature and last but not least have a beneficial effect on their spirit as well.

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