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**TOGETHER WE BOOST  
RURAL GROWTH AND  
INNOVATIVENESS OF SME'S**

**An interregional cooperation project for  
improving SME competitiveness policies**

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# ACTION PLAN

## HARGHITA COUNTY COUNCIL

2018

## Part I – General information

Project: RuralGrowth  
Partner organization: Harghita County Council  
NUTS2 region: Centru  
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## Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact: (Please mark relevant program(s) with X)

- Investment for Growth and Jobs program  
 European Territorial Cooperation program  
 Other regional development policy instrument (LEADER Rural Development Program)

Name of the policy instrument addressed: Regional Operative Program 2014-2020  
Priority axis 2. Improving competitiveness of small and medium enterprises

Beneficiaries:  
Urban SMEs and rural non-agricultural medium size enterprises with a history of operation at least 1 year.

Responsible body: Centru Regional Development Agency for Centru (NUTS2 region consisting of Harghita County and 5 other counties). This organization is in charge of regional planning, is a leader or partner in large regional projects and manages funds from the European Union Structural Funds.

Aims of funding:

1. Construction / modernization and expansion of production space / SME services, including provision of tangible and intangible assets;
2. Activities necessary for completion and implementation of the certification of products, services or various specific processes;
3. Promoting products and services, development of websites for presentation of activities and promoted products or services, including online sales tools;
4. Specific activities of the internationalization process (participation in fairs and exhibitions, investment in adaptation of production processes in certification and standardization specific to export markets, etc.)

5. Activities of purchase of installations and specific equipment to achieve energy saving systems that use renewable or alternative energy sources;
6. Activities for implementation and certification of ISO quality management systems;
7. Activities for product or process innovation.

## Part III – General overview of the current situation and the desired state

### 1. Status quo situation

Harghita is situated in the middle of Romania towards the eastern border of Transylvania, in the central part of the Eastern Carpathians. It has a surface area of 6639 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 2,8% of the territory of Romania.

The county is predominately a mountainous area, with approximately 60% of the total surface covered by mountains. Harghita county is famous for its healthy spring water and the area has over 2000 springs. Vast woodlands cover more than 30% of the county's surface, the forest heritage is about 228.614 ha. The majority of these forests are coniferous (73%), hence why we call Harghita county the "evergreen land". There are 35 protected areas and national parks, the most significant being Cheile Bicazului - Hășmas National Park, where is the popular tourist destination Bicaz gorge is situated. Harghita county is the home for the only volcano lake in Central-Eastern Europe, the Saint Anne lake, and the biggest natural obstruction lake in the country, the Red Lake.

Harghita county is composed of three regions: Ciuc/Csík, Odorhei/Udvarhely and Gheorgheni/Gyergyó, which are very well defined both geographically and culturally. This creates a multicultural and diverse appearance for the county.

In the county there are 4 medium sized cities, 5 towns and 58 communes. The capital city is Miercurea Ciuc / Csíkszereda, the number of its inhabitants is: 38.966. As of January 2016, the total population of Harghita county is 333.674 inhabitants, of which 82,89% are Hungarians (Szeklers), 12,60% are Romanians and 4,49% are of other nationalities. Szeklers are a minority group in Romania who speak a Hungarian dialect and have a long and interesting history. Szekler land has distinctive architecture (e.g. fortified churches and ornate wooden gates) and other cultural aspects of interest to tourists.

Census data show that between 1992 and 2011 the overall population size of the county decreased by 10,76%. In recent years the proportion of young adults leaving the county has also increased due to out-migration towards urban areas.

Two main roads cross the county, one from East to West and one North to East, their length is 1231 km. The 213 km long railway follows the road in the valleys of Mureș and Olt rivers, and there is a direct rail line to Bucharest. The closest airports are: Târgu Mureș (134 km), Bucharest (270 km) and Cluj Napoca (270 km).

The main economic activities in Harghita County consist of wood processing, food processing, garment production, agriculture (especially animal breeding) and tourism.

***Strengths and opportunities to move forward:***

- Harghita County is an unspoilt area, very rich in natural and cultural assets and has considerable potential to develop green tourism further.
- The successful establishment of agro-tourism pensions (boarding houses) in rural areas can be considered a strength, an opportunity and also a best practice in our region. In previous years there have been several national level calls, addressed at those considering starting an enterprise in the field of rural tourism.
- Farming is relatively unmodernised and is often conducted on a small scale with low input use. This provides valuable ecosystems and a pleasant holiday environment.
- The establishment of the Szekler brand and the cooperation between the local farmers represents another strength, which could be further developed in the future.
- Some privately-run businesses provide excellent 'role models' by combining modern accommodation based on vernacular architecture and locally-rooted activities.
- Some gateway events already exist and attract visitors to the area, for example the annual Pentecostal pilgrimage to the Sumuleu Ciuc/Csíksomlyó basilica minor and monastery, which attracts approximately 250,000 visitors each year which is particularly popular amongst Hungarian Catholics. Other examples include the pilgrimage route Via Maria, which is frequented by around 25.000 pilgrims a year regardless of season, and the Early Music Festival and Summer University, which is held annually in the vibrant town of Miercurea Ciuc attracting several thousands of visitors and participants.

***Weaknesses and threats***

During the first and second local stakeholders' meetings the following root causes and problems were identified.

These can be grouped into four categories: Policy issues, a lack of skills, cultural restraints and issues with the legal framework:

Policy Issues:

- Lack of infrastructure: roads, public utilities, communication, etc.
- Many pensions are not working officially, thus the official data about the number of nights spent are not registered
- Lack of tourism related information: about available grants, business supporting organizations, relevant local and national statistics, studies related to visitor needs, etc.
- Lack of experience in project elaboration
- Lack of capital and financial sources
- Communication problems, low level of organization
- Inadequate marketing
- There are a lot of sights and attractions, but the major part of them is invisible to tourists

Lack of Skills and Soft Skills:

- Lack of human resources
- Insufficient number of experts, lack of vocational skills
- Lack of ideas
- Foreign languages are not spoken

Cultural Issues:

- Insufficient cooperation between the entrepreneurs
- Many entrepreneurs have difficulties in valorization of the products and offers
- Communication problems, low level of organization

Legal Framework Issues:

- Inadequate legal framework
- The legal framework with its heavy regulation discourages provision of tourist accommodation near small farms in areas where livestock in numbers exceeding 20 are kept, this being a restraint in construction of accommodation facilities.

## 2. Vision

During the brainstorming sessions organized within Local Stakeholder Group meetings the participants listed and discussed the main problems faced by the rural economy and the possible solutions to solve them. Taking this into consideration, we want to concentrate on the development of our rural areas,

which offer a strong supply for **green, slow and healthy tourism**. A healthy visitor-economy in our rural areas could contribute to the establishment of new job opportunities, introduction of tourism-related services and help to reduce the amount of out-migration of young people.

Specifically, the vision for Harghita County is one where:

- Tourists have enjoyable, unique, interesting and memorable holidays based on exploring the rich and colorful natural and cultural assets of the area. They tell their friends about the gained experiences and wish to return.
- There is increased income and employment in Harghita County from tourism involving a wide range of business sizes and activities, including accommodation, transport, restaurants, information, guiding, equipment hire.
- There are enough opportunities for young people, so that fewer will leave the area to obtain satisfactory employment.
- SMEs involved in the tourism sector are efficient, competitive, well-managed and oriented towards the needs of modern consumers including foreign tourists.
- SMEs involved in the tourism sector work co-operatively to increase their total impact, for example by collective marketing, interconnected services and program packages.

## Part IV – Lessons learnt from inter-regional exchange

During LSG meetings the local stakeholders and the representatives of the individual SMEs from the visitors' economy sector from Harghita learnt lessons from each other and became acquainted with the experiences and best practice examples presented during the Inter-Regional Exchange meetings in Drenthe (Holland, November 2016), Savonlinna (Finland, March 2017), Medina del Campo (Spain, July 2017), Nagykanizsa (Hungary, October 2017). Some of these are relevant to us and could be implemented in Harghita county in the rural visitor-economy.

We found that Harghita county has a lot of similarities with Finland taking into consideration the cold weather, snow conditions and landscape. In Finland everything is related to nature and people are proud of their resources and local values – this should be emphasized also here.

Brief description (What, where)	Features that are of interest and possibly relevant for your region.
<p>1. Establishment of farm for children for educational purposes – The Netherlands, Drenthe region. Based on a dairy farm, it offers enough recreational activities to make a day-long excursion for children.</p>	<p>This example is good because it helps children from an early age to get familiarized with the farm life and activities.</p> <p>It shows how a dairy farm was diversified to increase income; the recreational facilities have steadily grown and it now has 100,000 visitors per year; it attracts visitors to the area (gateway); increased demand for other businesses in surrounding area (accommodation, food etc.)</p>
<p>2. Web page addressed to visitors, administrated by the local authority – Finland, Savonlinna region (Visit Savonlinna open on-line platform) <a href="http://visitsavonlinna.fi/en/">http://visitsavonlinna.fi/en/</a></p>	<p>This web page offering much useful information is aimed at tourists. It is useful because it provides a single, unified, prominent, on-line presence for the region. Users don't just find one business but can quickly find others as well (by accident or deliberately). It is available in Finnish,</p>

	<p>German, Russian and English. Another function of the website is that is also used by businesses for networking.</p>
<p>3. Existing cooperation model between service providers – Finland, Savonlinna region. E.g. businesses are offering programmes for visitors in co-operation with each other and are promoting each other’s services. This helps to provide a good visitor experience and enhance the reputation of the area as a holiday destination.</p>	<p>The exemplary cooperation model existing between the different service providers could be followed also in Harghita county, because the LSG has identified lack of co-operation as a barrier. Lessons can be learnt about the features of the Finnish network that make it work successfully.</p>
<p>4. Punkaharju Camping - Finland, Savonlinna region</p>	<p>Using nature as a resource while also focusing attention to its protection is an important issue in rural tourism development. The Punkaharju Camping is a good example of how you can offer accommodation in a forest, without having environmentally-damaging infrastructure. One highly relevant example is the use of ecological composting toilets. In our county there are many nature reserves and remote areas of high touristic value but where there is a lack of sewage system. This is a serious problem and represents a challenge but the Finnish model could be a solution. In December 2017 a tourism company operating in Harghita County at the Saint Anne Lake – Mohos Natura 2000 Nature Reserve - imported 2 composting toilets from a Finnish manufacturer in order to test them. If they function as intended considering the local weather</p>



	<p>conditions, the company plans to import more and recommend them in the region as a solution to this specific infrastructure problem.</p>
<p>5. Use of frozen water surfaces to increase its attractiveness to tourists during the winter period – Finland, Savonlinna region</p>	<p>While Harghita county doesn't have as much water surface as Savonlinna region, the winters are as cold as in Finland.</p> <p>The surface of the frozen lakes in Finland is used as ice trails. Tourists can rent various sport equipment such as Nordic skates or kick sleds and go touring. As a result, lakeside tourism has been re-invigorated at Jarvisydan Hotel and Spa Resort. This example can be implemented in our region with adaptation.</p>
<p>6. Rejtek Bicycle Center and guesthouse in Lipcseszentadorján in Nagykanizsa area and the regional mountain cycling route network. 'Joined up' provision of services for cycling holidays.</p> <p>In Nagykanizsa area local NGOs in cooperation with forest owners, local administration and the national forestry administration created an extensive network of cycling paths and routes. The Rejtek Association offers mainly cycling related services like bike rental, bike service and cycling maps (both digital and paper-based) but also tourism services such as accommodation, visitor centre, exposition, cultural and historical programs. It has links to private accommodation businesses who have adapted to meet cyclists needs (e.g. facilities to wash and store bikes)</p>	<p>The topography of Harghita county is ideal for cycling and hiking, hence the example of the Rejtek Bicycle Center and Guesthouse is one which can be applied in our region.</p>

<p>Also, the maintenance of the biking route network is a good example: the national forestry administration recognized the importance of tourism in the region</p>	
<p>7. Rueda Wine Route - Municipality of Medina del Campo Rueda Wine Route is a wine tourism project which aims to improve the quality of tourist establishments and unite their efforts to create synergies and benefit the joint promotion. The Route was certified in December 2013, and officially became a Wine Route of Spain in February 2014. In the beginning it had 60 members, and at the present time their number has raised to 130 and include not only wineries, but other businesses such as restaurants, accommodation, guiding services and equipment rental 19 local public entities are part of the Route, twice the entities that started the project.</p>	<p>The experience of the creation and operation of the wine route network established in the region of Medina del Campo is valuable lesson which can be used in Harghita County for group marketing, valorization and creation of professional networks.</p>

## Part V – Details of the actions envisaged

Policy objective 1 (broad goal): Development of the transport infrastructure	
SMART objectives	
The specific outcome that you want?	Improving the road quality to localities and tourist attractions through the development of the existing transport infrastructure. Increasing the number of visitors.
How will you measure this?	Number of the road/transport infrastructure developments – number of new roads, new transport infrastructure developments, number kilometers of roads/streets improved. Reduction in journey time between localities/points of interests where transportation service has been improved or newly introduced. Traffic monitoring.
How much change do you expect?	Visible improvements are expected – Based on the needs identified in the inventory there will be an increased quality of the road network of the county with at least 13 rehabilitated country roads, 1 regional airport, 1 new Increase of tourism flow.
When will this change occur?	Until the end of the development period 2021-2027.
<p>Is this possible under existing policy instruments or projects? <b>YES/ NO/ PARTLY</b> Please explain your choice: The general development strategy of Harghita County for the period of 2015-2020. Priority objective 3.2 Development of infrastructure foresees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rehabilitation of at least 13 county roads</li> <li>• 57 projects for repairing rural streets, bridges, communal and inter-communal roads</li> </ul>	

- 1 new county road built
- 1 new regional airport built

The projects can be done with own funds of the County council and funds applied through The Regional Plan for the Development of Centre Region for the period of 2014-2020, Priority 1.2. Development of the transport infrastructure, communication and utilities in Centre region

**Interim steps (=actions)**

Making an extensive inventory of infrastructure problems to identify further problems, costs and prioritize investments.

Identifying the funding opportunities.

Obtaining EU and/or local funds for infrastructure development.

Improvement of the existing transport system to better reach localities and tourists sites.

**Policy objective 2 (broad goal): 'Improving employment opportunities for young people to reduce outmigration'**

**SMART objectives**

The specific outcome that you want?	Reducing the migration process among youth people. Assure employment for the young people in Harghita county. Supporting businesses by finding solutions to the lack of human resources.
How will you measure this?	Number of young people who establish their own businesses in the rural economy sector. Number of young people in employment
How much change do you expect?	Visible changes are expected.
When will this change occur?	2021-2027 development period

Is this possible under existing policy instruments or projects? YES/ NO/ **PARTLY**

The General Development Strategy of Harghita County for the period of 2015-2020.

<p>Priority objective 1.1 Development of tourism</p> <p>Priority objective 1.3 Consolidation and diversification of the existing business environment</p> <p>The Regional Plan for the Development of Centre Region for the period of 2014-2020</p> <p>Strategic domain 6 – Development of human resources and social inclusion</p> <p>Priority 6.1 Improving the access to vocational training and lifelong learning in different fields</p> <p>Priority 6.2. Supporting the development of human resources in order to assist employment at regional level</p> <p>It is necessary to include smaller SMEs (that is micro and small businesses) as eligible among beneficiaries of the funding by ROP 2.2 axis as now the funding is only for medium sized companies. Micro and small businesses form a substantial part of the rural business population.</p>
<p><b>Interim steps (=actions)</b></p>
<p>Improving employability of young people by raising skills for example by training and apprenticeships</p>
<p>Support entrepreneurship to create additional jobs</p>

<p><b>Policy objective 3 (broad goal): Establishment of a network to improve co-operation between SMEs</b></p>	
<p><b>SMART objectives</b></p>	
<p>The specific outcome that you want?</p>	<p>Stronger co-operation between service providers within the service providers in tourism sector and its related sectors.</p>
<p>How will you measure this?</p>	<p>Number of professional networks, associations clusters created Number of interconnected services and program packages.</p>
<p>How much change do you expect?</p>	<p>We expect the creation of at least one professional network having legal status (cluster, association, federation etc.), with min 25 members collaborating with a network of 150 tourism operators by 2021.</p>
<p>When will this change occur?</p>	<p>By the end of the current</p>

	development period.
Is this possible under existing policy instruments or projects? YES/ NO/ <b>PARTLY</b>	
The general development strategy of Harghita county for the period of 2015-2020.	
Priority objective 1.1 Development of tourism – the digital platform to support networking activities will be done by HCC by the end of 2019	
Priority objective 2.2 Development of the support capacity for the development of economic competitiveness	
Regional Operative Program 2014-2020, Priority axis 2. Improving competitiveness of small and medium enterprises needs to be changed in order to ROP to finance establishment and function of SME networks / associations/clusters and also to fund the interlinkage between digital platforms of other counties in order to build a national level networking/promotion platform	
<b>Interim steps (=actions)</b>	
Establishment of professional networks	
Joint promotion and valorization of the offers.	
Development of collective marketing strategy	

<b>Policy objective 4 (broad goal): Improve competitiveness of SMEs in tourism-related sectors</b>	
<b>SMART objectives</b>	
The specific outcome that you want?	Increased capacity of SMEs in tourism-related sectors
How will you measure this?	Number of trainings organized to improve competitiveness of SMEs and number of people who attend and changes in employment in tourism
How much change do you expect?	Provision of organized courses in IT, foreign languages, tourism management and marketing, at 3 local venues, attended by 10% of businesses.
When will this change occur?	Until the end of the development period (2020).

Is this possible under existing policy instruments or projects? YES/ NO/  
PARTLY

Please explain your choice!

The general development strategy of Harghita county for the period of 2015-2020.

Priority objective 1.1 Development of tourism

The Regional Plan for the Development of Centre Region for the period of 2014-2020

Strategic domain 5 – Increasing regional tourism attractiveness, supporting cultural and recreational activities

Priority 5.2 Development and modernization of the reception and leisure infrastructure in order to improve and diversify the offered tourism services

**Interim steps (=actions)**

Improve business management skills, improve use of IT and foreign language training

Updating and increasing accommodation standards

Training in visitor management to increase responsiveness to visitor needs

**Policy objective 5 (broad goal): Valorising the tourist potential**

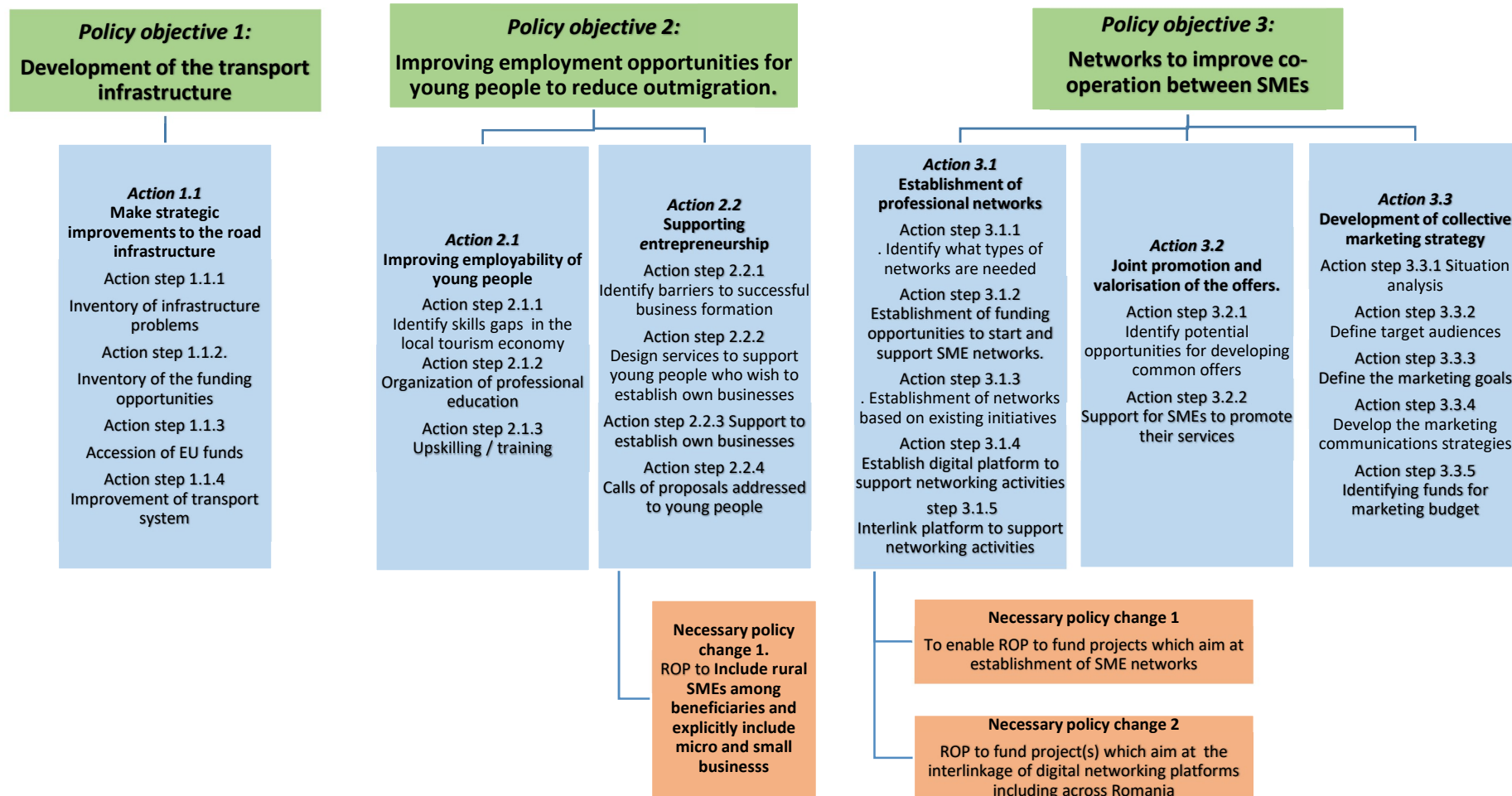
**SMART objectives**

The specific outcome that you want?	Increase the economic activity from tourism based on the area's natural and cultural assets. This can be achieved by growing the user numbers, the development and promotion of the Szekler brand, and by making it easier for tourists to identify, reach and appreciate the area's sites and events including those connected with Szekler culture.
How will you measure this?	Number of products and services obtaining the local brand Increase in the number of natural and cultural sites and attractions which are publicised.
How much change do you expect?	Considerable changes are expected.

When will this change occur?	Until the end of the development period.
<p>Is this possible under existing policy instruments or projects? <b>YES/ NO/ PARTLY</b> Please explain your choice!</p> <p>The General Development Strategy of Harghita County for the period of 2015-2020. Priority objective 1.1 Development of tourism Priority objective 2.2 Development of the support capacity for the development of economic competitiveness The Regional Plan for the Development of Centre Region for the period of 2014-2020 Strategic domain 5 – Increasing regional tourism attractiveness, supporting cultural and recreational activities Priority 5.3 Promotion of the tourism destinations from Centre region</p>	
<p><b>Interim steps (=actions)</b></p>	
<p>Geographically extending coverage of the Szekler brand for the whole Harghita county.</p>	
<p>Promotion of sites of interest for tourists to choose, reach and better understand them</p>	
<p>Developing the tourist infrastructure at existing sites in order to better connect with accommodations and enhance green-tourism and conservation of nature.</p>	
<p>Identifying and developing new sites of interest including the natural environment</p>	
<p>Co-programming including locally-sourced food</p>	



## Interlinkages between Actions and Policy influencing activities





**Policy objective 4:  
Improve competitiveness of SMEs in tourism-related sectors**

**Action 4.1**  
**Improve business management skills, improve use of IT and foreign language training**  
Training in visitor management to increase responsiveness to visitor needs  
Action step 4.1.1  
Status quo analysis - identifying the real needs  
Action step 4.1.2  
Identifying the training providers  
Action step 4.1.3  
Adapting the training materials for the real needs  
Action step 4.1.4  
Delivering the trainings including tourism companies in the learning process  
Action step 4.1.5  
Providing certification

**Action 4.2**  
**Updating and increasing accommodation standards**  
Action step 4.2.1  
Status quo analysis - identifying the real quality of accommodations  
Action step 4.2.2  
Establishment of new standards  
Action step 4.2.3  
Motivation of entrepreneurs to upgrade the quality of their services

**Policy objective 5:  
Valorising the tourist potential**

**Action 5.1**  
**Extending the Szekler brand for Harghita county**  
Action step 5.1.1  
Development of a communication strategy aimed to beneficiaries (SMEs)  
Action step 5.1.2  
Development of a communication strategy aimed to consumers/users  
Action step 5.1.3  
Extending the brand to include accommodations  
Action step 5.1.4  
Getting funding for promotion of the brand

**Action 5.2**  
**Promotion of sites of interest for tourists to choose, reach and better understand them**  
Action step 5.2.1  
Update and translate available information materials  
Action step 5.2.2  
Elaboration of new information materials about sites  
Action step 5.2.3  
Advertizing

**Action 5.3**  
**Developing the tourist infrastructure at existing sites**  
Action step 5.3.1  
Identifying the needs  
Action step 5.3.2  
Identifying funding opportunities  
Action step 5.3.3  
Offering funding

**Action 5.4**  
**Identifying and developing new sites of interest**  
Action step 5.4.1  
Identifying new sites of interest  
Action step 5.4.2  
Identifying the needs for development  
Action step 5.4.3  
Identifying the funding opportunities

**Necessary policy change 1**  
ROP to fund projects which aim the establishment or development of local/regional brands

## Part VI – Actions

<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Development of the existing transport infrastructure	<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 1
<b>Action Title:</b> Improving the transport system	<b>Action Number:</b> 1.1
<b>Background:</b> In Romania generally and in Harghita County specifically, the transportation infrastructure has deficiencies. The poor quality of road infrastructure and of transportation services is one of the important reasons our county is falling behind in tourism, especially in rural areas. Developed infrastructure networks of all sorts are in close relation and competitiveness of SMEs, hence in Harghita county's case the development of road and transportation infrastructure will have an important contribution to the competitiveness of local SMEs.	
a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?	During the LSG meetings poor road infrastructure (both length and condition) was identified as a serious barrier to tourism development. We have also learned that infrastructure to support quiet recreational transport is needed. In Hungary the use of forest roads, dirt roads and other roads as cycleways and link them together in a cycling road network is an example which should be used in our county. In the Po delta in Italy the plans to develop an integrated transport system that will use bikes and quiet boats is also a good example which we have learned.
b. What have you learnt?	We learnt that good quality road network system is essential to efficient development in every economical sector. Next to all the good practices in all partner countries, specifically in Hungary, during the meeting in Nagykanizsa area, we learnt about the bicycle road networks which are connected to the regional and national roads, so cyclists from all over the country and from abroad can easily access these roads.

c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?	We have learnt through the participation to the site visits and the workshops in all the partner countries, specifically in Hungary during the meeting in Nagykanizsa area.			
<b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b>	<b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b>	<b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b>	<b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b>	<b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2) Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b>
<b>1. Inventory of the actual situation regarding existing infrastructure and needs</b>	Local public authorities from Harghita county.	Local budget	Until the end of the 2014-2020 development period	
<b>2. Inventory of the</b>	Local public authorities from Harghita	Own human	2019-2020	

funding opportunities.	county	resources		
<b>3. Accession of EU funds for infrastructure development</b>	Local public authorities from Harghita county	Own human resources	Based on findings identified at Action step 2 Starting in 2020	
<b>4. Improvement of the existing transport system to better reach tourist sites</b>	Local public authorities from Harghita county, companies who fulfill public procurement criteria.	EU funds for infrastructure development	Starting 2019 ending in the next development period	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labor available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses	Increasing the number of visitors due to the development infrastructure. Growing demand for the local products and services offered in the region.			
<b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)	Action/ Policy objective number:  PO 5 - A 5.3	Description of implications: 5.3 Good quality roads will have the effect of stimulating transportation companies to broaden their services, meaning that they will open new transportation routes connecting sites with each other or with the localities with accommodation Developed road network enhances the transportation of		

		locally -sourced foods and goods from producers to? points of purchase: restaurants, hotels, markets, traditional stores.	
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<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Improving employment – Improve the opportunities for young people to reduce out-migration	<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 2
<b>Action Title:</b> Improving employability of young people	<b>Action Number:</b> 2.1
<b>Background:</b> Our county is facing a serious workforce out-migration problem, meaning that qualified workforce is leaving in massive numbers to work in other European countries combined with poor quality professional learning. Improving the professional skills and competencies of the youth is a high priority along with reducing the workforce out-migration and increasing the employability. Trained professionals are in strong relation with the development and competitiveness of SMEs	
a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?	We have learnt the good practices from the Dutch, Finnish and Spanish partners during the international partner meetings. LSG members all agree that there is a huge gap in the specialized workforce in the field of tourism.

b. What have you learnt?	<p>We learnt that the national Dutch government supports the farms who are offering opportunities for young people with disabilities. These kinds of activities are steps to integrate them socially among the active workforce.</p> <p>In Finland the local youth are supported to valorize the local products.</p> <p>In Spain there is an exemplary cooperation between the local public authorities and the universities. This also contributes to the employment of the young people and gaining experience while performing essential voluntary work.</p>			
c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?	<p>We have learnt through the participation to the site visit and the workshop in Drenthe, The Netherlands.</p>			
<b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced</b>	<p><b>REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020 – targeted PI in the Application Form</b> <b>PRIORITY AXIS 2.2 Improving competitiveness of small and medium enterprises</b></p>			
<b>2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b>	<p><b>Changes in calls: Inclusion of a new technical and financial evaluation criteria in advantage of companies (including SMEs) who propose employment of young people from rural areas or adjacent to rural areas.</b></p>			
<b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b>	<b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b>	<b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b>	<b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b>	<b>Name of the PI to be influenced; Change needed</b>
1. Identify skills gaps in	The local public authorities	The resources will	2019-2020	Due to the change in the

the local tourism economy (e.g. languages, catering, hospitality sector management)	in cooperation with the educational institutions and the local entrepreneurs.	be provided through the EU funding sources.		evaluation criteria in the calls of the REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020, a new project will be submitted .
2. Identify current training provision and organize professional training courses for school-leavers	Specialized educational units, Vocational training institutions.	Funds provided by the Ministry of Education and EU funds.	2019-2020	Due to the change in the evaluation criteria in the calls of the REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020, a new project will be submitted .
3. Upskilling/training for existing employees tailored to their needs and availability in the tourist season.	Specialized educational units, Vocational training institutions.	EU funding sources and own programs	Starting in 2020	Due to the change in the evaluation criteria in the calls of the REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020, new projects will be submitted .
<p><b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators</p> <p><b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses</p>	<p>Since the emigration of active workforce is one of the most severe problems of our county's demographic, reducing it especially the relocation of young people, by assuring employment for them here in Harghita county, will have a beneficial effect on every sector of the economy. It will help community development by maintaining a balanced age</p>			



	<p>structure.</p> <p>The key factors in keeping workforce in place are education and economical and political stability. The negative impact on other sectors by drawing away their workforce can be solved by offering a wider variety of professional education.</p>		
<p><b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)</p>	<p>Action/ Policy objective number: PO4 - A4.1, 4.3</p>	<p>Description of implications: Action step 2.1 may overlap with actions 4.1 and 4.3 hence there are chances for double funding. The effectiveness of the training courses in terms of attendance can be poor, if similar courses are organized. Good coordination can overcome this issue</p>	

<p><b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Improving employment – Improve the opportunities for young people to reduce out-migration</p>	<p><b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 2</p>
<p><b>Action Title:</b> Supporting entrepreneurship</p>	<p><b>Action Number</b> 2.2</p>

<p><b>Background:</b></p> <p>The action seeks to offer further support for young people. While action 2.1 targets the formation of workforce, action 2.2 aims to develop entrepreneurial skills and competences in several ways. In order to achieve better results the first step is to find out the needs and the difficulties the target group is facing and corroborate with the actual situation. Then in the next steps concrete actions and support mechanisms with their specific features can be developed. At this stage lacking key information we think it's a bit difficult to be specific on areas, priorities, topics, the main aim is to have young people to establish their own business and develop it and receive support for this process.</p>	
<p>a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?</p>	<p>The Finnish partner from Savonlinna and the Spanish partner from Medina del Campo during international partner meetings.</p>
<p>b. What have you learnt?</p>	<p>A good practice in Savonlinna region in Finnish is their approach to start-up coaching. In Savonlinna activities addressed to young people are designed in order to generate enthusiasm among the youth towards developing business ideas.</p> <p>In Spain there is an exemplary cooperation between the local public authorities and the universities, this also contributes to the employment of the young people, and beneficial involvement in voluntary activities.</p>
<p>c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?</p>	<p>We have learnt through the participation to the site visits and the workshops in Savonlinna, Finland and Medina, Spain.</p>

Action Steps (What will be done)	Responsibility (Who will do it)	Resources (Information, money, materials)	Timeline Start and end dates*	
<b>1. Identifying barriers to successful business formation</b>	Harghita County Council	Survey	2019-2020	New project
<b>2. Design services to support young people who wish to establish own businesses (e.g. advice, mentoring, capital grants)</b>	The national, regional and local level public authorities, stakeholders (mutual support)	EU funding sources, own programs, stakeholders' funding	Starting in 2020	
<b>3. Activate measures to support establishment of own businesses.</b>	Local authorities, stakeholders (mutual support)	EU funding sources, own programs, stakeholders' funding	Starting in 2020	
<b>4. Awareness raising campaigns addressed at young people to raise interest in business</b>	Regional and local level public authorities.	EU funding sources and own funding programs	Starting in 2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally	Since the emigration of active workforce is one of the most severe problems of our county's demographic, reducing it especially the relocation of young people, by assuring employment for them here			

<p>grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses</p>	<p>in Harghita county, will have a beneficial effect on every sector of the economy.</p>		
<p><b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)</p>	<p>Action/ Policy objective number: PO4 - A4.1, 4.3</p>	<p>Description of implications: Action 2.2 is may overlap with actions 4.1 and 4.3 hence there are chances for double funding. The effectiveness of the training courses in terms of attendance can be poor, if similar courses are organized. Good coordination can overcome this issue</p>	

<p><b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Establishment of a network to improve cooperation between SMEs and business performance</p>	<p><b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 3</p>
<p><b>Action Title:</b> Interlinked cooperation between different service providers, interconnected services and program packages</p>	<p><b>Action Number:</b> 3.1.</p>
<p><b>Background:</b> One of the main issues rural tourism SMEs in our county are facing is lack of collaboration, hence lack of information about the sector's offerings. This problem spirals back to the customers who benefit less services while the region has much more to offer.</p>	

The establishment of both intra- and intersectoral collaboration networks in the field of tourism and other connecting sectors (i.e. agriculture, manufacturing, environmental services etc.) is one of Harghita Council's main concern and already made steps in this direction.

Where there is lack of initiative for cooperation the Council through own institutions will identify the areas where networks are needed.

The next step is to identify the needs of the newly created or already existing networks and based on the findings to offer support for them through projects funded from both the County Council's own funds and EU funds.

A core element of modern networks are the digital platforms where information easily can be shared among service providers and services can be advertised to customers. In a later step these platforms can be connected to other similar platforms in the county, other counties or national database which will bring us a step closer to establishment of a more successful tourism destination management network.

<p>a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?</p>	<p>We have learnt the good practices from Municipality of Medina del Campo, Drenthe Province, and Savonlinna Development Services Ltd.</p>
<p>b. What have you learnt?</p>	<p>In Spain we learnt from the example of the Rueda Wine Route and we consider that the example can be adopted. The international cooperation existing between Spain and Portugal, set up under the Douro-Duero project which links heritage sites along the Douro river, which flows through Spain and Portugal is also a good example, made possible by the development of the networking system. Finland's on-line platform provides a way for businesses to network (as well as making people aware of their services). Establishing cooperation with similar entities in the neighboring</p>

	countries (Bulgaria, Hungary) can be beneficial to our county tourism development. We learnt in Drenthe that the existing networking system between the local entrepreneurs contributes to a more efficient development in each field. In Spain we learnt about clusters, the loose associations of small companies, which has a positive contribution to the development of the competitiveness of the SMEs.			
c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?	We have learnt through the participation to the workshops, through presentations and discussions in Drenthe, Medina del Campo and Savonlinna.			
1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced	<b>REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020 – targeted PI in the AF PRIORITY AXIS 2.2 Improving competitiveness of small and medium enterprises</b>			
2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).	<b>Modification in the PI: Inclusion of the possibility of financing the participation of SMEs to networks in different fields, i.e. accession fees, adjusting the activities of the SMEs to participate to networks.</b>			
<b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b>	<b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b>	<b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b>	<b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b>	<b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b>
<b>1. Identify what types of networks are needed</b>	Harghita County Council	Survey	2019	The survey will be carried out by the appropriate institutions of Harghita County

<b>e.g. if territorial network/or single sector/ or multi-sector</b>				Council
<b>2.Establishment of funding opportunities to support SME networks</b>	Regional public authority	EU funding sources: REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020	2019-2020	Modified REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020 PRIORITY AXIS 2.2 Improving competitiveness of small and medium enterprises and its call.
<b>3.Establishment of professional networks based on existing initiatives where possible</b>	The local public authorities in cooperation with the local entrepreneurs.	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources and own programs.	Starting 2020	National Rural Development Programme, Submeasure 16.4 projects which will finance horizontal and vertical cooperation among members of the supply chain
<b>4.Creation of digital platform to support networking activities</b>	The local public authorities in cooperation with the local entrepreneurs.	EU funding sources	2019-2020	Existing project funded by the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme. The project is called INSIGHTS - INtegrated Slow, Green and Healthy Tourism Strategies (Approval date: 13.12.2016, Submission date: 1 <sup>st</sup> step 03.11.2015 /

				2 <sup>nd</sup> step: 09.05.2016)
<b>5. Connect platforms to support wider networking activities (e.g. national)</b>	The local public authorities in cooperation with the local entrepreneurs.	EU funding sources	Starting in 2020	New projects about connecting platforms and networks.
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labor available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses	Cooperation among SMEs will have a considerable impact on agriculture. The small agricultural actors such as animal farms, vegetable and fruit producers will benefit from the newly created selling opportunities provided by companies activating in the tourism sector. The service sector will benefit also though increased opportunities in providing their services.			
<b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)	Action/ Policy objective number: A3.3 / PO3  A5.1, 5.2, 5.4 / PO5	Description of implications: Creation of professional networks is in synergy with Action 3.3 – Development of a collective marketing strategy. The members of functional networks are able to formulate all the components of a comprehensive regional marketing strategy. This action is complementary for most of Policy Objective 5. The extension of the Szekler brand (A5.1) will be much easier and more successful using the established networks. Advertising, reaching and understanding the value of sites of interest by tourists (A5.2) will be more effective if activities of coordinated networks are involved in the process.		



		Identifying and developing new sites of interest (A5.4), putting them in the regional tourism offer and connecting them with programs is more successful if done in cooperation. Using locally sourced food on larger scales is inconceivable without cooperation.
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<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Establishment of a network to improve cooperation between SMEs and business performance		<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 3	
<b>Action Title:</b> Joint promotion and valorization of the offers		<b>Action Number:</b> 3.2.	
<b>Background:</b> Collaboration among SMEs and elaboration of common offers are beneficial to both economical growth and also have a contribution to the attractiveness of the county. Harghita County Council can offer support in promotion of these offers.			
a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?	We have learnt the good practices from partners from Delta 2000, Italy, Medina del Campo, Spain and Savonlinna Development Services Ltd., Finland.		

b. What have you learnt?	In Spain we learnt from the example of the Wine Route and we consider that the example can be adopted. In Finland we learned that SMEs are collaborating in order to promote each other's services for the better experience of tourists. In Italy the co-operation between nature organizations (guides) and boat companies who provide transport to sites of interest in the delta are to be followed.			
c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?	We have learnt through the participation to the workshops, through presentations and site visits, in Savonlinna region, Po Delta and Medina del Campo.			
<b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b>	<b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b>	<b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b>	<b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b>	<b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b>
<b>1. Identify potential opportunities for developing common offers</b>	SMEs	Information	2019-2020	

<b>2. Support for SMEs to jointly promote their services</b>	HCC	Own programs EU funding sources	Starting 2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labor available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses	Cooperation among SMEs can have a benefic impact on local agriculture. Tourists might visit small farms and benefit from services like horse-drawn carriage/sledge tours, rides with tractor, tasting homegrown produce and food.			
<b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)	Action/ Policy objective number: A4.4/PO4 A5.1/PO5	Description of implications: Creation of common offers is in synergy with action 4.4 – Development of a collective marketing strategy. The members of functional networks are able to formulate all the components of a comprehensive regional marketing strategy. The Szekler brand is an active support for SMEs		

<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> More competitive SMEs in tourism related sectors		<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 4	
<b>Action Title:</b> Improve business management skills, including use of IT and foreign language training, Training in visitor management to increase responsiveness to visitor needs		<b>Action Number:</b> 4.1.	
<b>Background</b>			
a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?	We have learnt the good practices from all partners during the international partner meetings.		
b. What have you learnt?	<p>In Finland we learned that improving IT skills is essential and authorities are trying to engage businesses. It is also recognized that lack of entrepreneurial mentality in some older business owners prevents modernisation and growth.</p> <p>We learned that improving IT skills is essential and authorities are trying to engage businesses. It is also recognized that lack of entrepreneurial mentality in some older business owners prevents modernization and growth. The method used in Savonlinna while is simple, the motivation comes from a very good online promotion platform. Users (SME representatives or employees) are uploading, editing, updating their own pages on the platform.</p>		

	Province of Drenthe has recognized the need for some businesses to provide what modern tourists need. In Medina they organize training in oenology for visitor center staff at wineries, so they could run improved wine tastings.			
c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?	We have learnt through the participation in the workshops organized and through discussions with representatives of Savonlinna Development Services Ltd and small tourism company owners from Savonlinna region, representatives of Drenthe Region and Municipality of Medina del Campo.			
<b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b>	<b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b>	<b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b>	<b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b>	<b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b>
<b>1. Status quo analysis - identifying the real skills needs of businesses</b>	The local public authorities in cooperation with the local tourism entrepreneurs.	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources and own programs.	2019-2020	
<b>2. Identifying the</b>	The local public authorities in	Information	2020	

<b>training providers</b>	cooperation with the local tourism entrepreneurs.			
<b>3. Adapting the training materials to address the real needs</b>	Educational provider in collaboration with local and entrepreneurs	The resources could be provided through Regional Funds	2020	
<b>4. Delivering the trainings including tourism companies in the learning process</b>	Education providers, local entrepreneurs.	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources	Starting in 2020	
<b>5. Providing certification</b>	Education providers in collaboration with Ministry of Education	EU funding sources	Starting in 2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses	<p>Since the emigration of active workforce is one of the most severe problems of our county's demographic, reducing it especially the relocation of young people, by assuring employment for them here in Harghita county, will have a beneficial effect on every sector of the economy and socially.</p> <p>The key factors in keeping workforce in place are education and economical and political stability. The negative impact on other sectors by drawing away their workforce can be solved by offering a wider variety of professional education. Tourism companies will benefit by offering higher quality services. Improving management skills will have positive effects on most economic sectors of the county.</p>			
<b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts,	Action/ Policy objective	Description of implications: Action step 4 may overlap with action step 2.2(PO2) hence there are		

synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)	number: A2.2 / PO 2 A4.1/ PO4	chances for double funding. The effectiveness of the training courses in terms of attendance can be poor, if similar courses are organized. Good coordination can overcome this issue
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<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Improve competitiveness of SMEs in tourism-related sectors		<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 4	
<b>Action Title: Updating and increasing accommodation standards</b>		<b>Action Number:</b> 4.2	
<p><b>Background:</b> High accommodation standards attract more tourists and offer more benefits to SMEs. In order to increase the quality of the services rural SMEs offer, a local standard will be developed based on the findings of a Status Quo Analysis done by tourism specialists. Through a comprehensive awareness raising campaign the SMEs will be advised to adapt their services and increase the quality to meet the requirements of the new local standard. This also can be correlated with awarding the local brand, which further contributes to the success of the businesses. Offering higher quality services along with a well-coordinated regional promotion will offer the opportunity to the SMEs to have more clients and have a higher financial benefit.</p>			
a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s)	<p>During the site visits in Finland we learned about how in remote areas high standard accommodations with many connecting services are operated. The Dutch partner highlighted the gap that exists between the standard provided by many</p>		

have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?	accommodation businesses in Drenthe and the (higher) standards that contemporary tourists want and expect. The expectations of tourists were also different and this should be considered if Drenthe companies wish to be successful in that market.			
b. What have you learnt?	Higher accommodation standards attract more tourists and offer more benefits to SMEs			
c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?	Site visits during the project meetings.			
<b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b>	<b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b>	<b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b>	<b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b> •	<b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b>
<b>1. Status quo analysis - identifying the actual</b>	Harghita Community Development Association in collaboration with	Information, survey, study Harghita	2019-2020	



<b>quality of accommodations in Harghita County</b>	experts from universities.	Community Development Association's own funds		
<b>2. Defining the new standards</b>	Harghita Community Development Association in collaboration with experts in the field of tourism	Based on findings of the SQA funded by Harghita Community Development Association	2020	
<b>3. Motivation of entrepreneurs through awareness raising campaigns to upgrade the quality of their services e.g. by demonstrations and advertising</b>	Harghita Community Development Association and Harghita County Council	Publicity, From existing budget	Starting 2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training	Higher standards may have a positive effect on related services like carpentry, cleaning services, will require more skilled employees. Potentially a new market segment with greater spending power will be attracted to Harghita County increasing the demand for more good quality locally grown food, better restaurants and shops.			

courses		
<p><b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)</p>	<p>Action/ Policy objective number: A2.2 / PO2 A5.1 / PO5</p>	<p>Description of implications: Based on higher standard demands the quality of services established by the new, young entrepreneurs will increase. Implementing the upgrade of accommodation standards can be connected with extension of local brands like the 'Szekler brand', the new accommodation standards being included among the awarding criteria.</p>

<p><b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Valorising the tourist potential</p>	<p><b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 5</p>
<p><b>Action Title:</b> Development, extension and promotion of the Szekler brand</p>	<p><b>Action Number:</b> 5.1.</p>
<p><b>Background:</b> The long-term goal of our county is to have a rural tourism based on nature, sights and active relaxation. All the touristic infrastructure, reaching the sights, understanding and enjoying them are essential components of a successful tourism. Tourism SMEs are benefitting both directly and indirectly from the tourism potential of the countryside wherever might be located if they are properly prepared to be visited. Having numerous, high quality attractions will result in higher number of tourists offering a better chance for local tourism operators. Branding and promoting the tourist potential has the benefit of having a coherent image targeted to specific markets which again will have beneficial effect for SMEs.</p>	
<p>a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?</p>	<p>We have learnt the good practices from Province of Drenthe, Savonlinna Development Services Ltd., Local Government of Nagykanizsa, Delta 2000 Consortium, and Municipality of Medina del Campo during the international partner meetings.</p>

<p>b. What have you learnt?</p>	<p>In Spain we learned that EU funds are efficiently used in order to promote the local products. We learned from a cheese merchant who sells local cheeses and beers and undertakes associated activities – specifically guided tasting sessions.</p> <p>The Muraland project in Hungary has many elements which can be used for developing local and/or regional brands like the Szekler Brand. Its starting point is defining the ‘local values’ which underlie the area’s unique identity. In the Po Delta, Italy the partners are attempting to set up the institutional framework (e.g. setting standards, monitoring, legal issues) necessary to support a new Po Delta brand permanently.</p>			
<p>c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?</p>	<p>We have learnt through the participation in the workshops organized in Nagykaniza region and Medina del Campo.</p>			
<p><b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced</b></p>	<p><b>REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020</b> <b>PRIORITY AXIS 2.2 Improving competitiveness of small and medium enterprises</b></p>			
<p><b>2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b></p>	<p><b>Modification in the PI: Inclusion the creation of product brands as eligible costs.</b></p>			
<p><b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b></p>	<p><b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b></p>	<p><b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b></p>	<p><b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b></p>	<p><b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b></p>

<b>1. Development of a communication strategy aimed to beneficiaries (SMEs)</b>	Harghita County Council in cooperation with marketing and communication experts and local entrepreneurs.	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources and own programs.	2019	Development of a new project for the development of a communication strategy for the local brand aimed towards SMEs (beneficiaries)
<b>2. Development of a communication strategy aimed to consumers/ users</b>	Harghita County Council in cooperation with marketing and communication experts	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources and own programs.	2019	Development of a new project for the development of a communication strategy for the local brand aimed towards consumers
<b>3. Extending the brand to include accommodations</b>	Harghita County Council in cooperation with tourism experts	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources	2019	Submitting a new project to finance the extension of the brand
<b>4. Getting funding for promotion of the brand</b>	Harghita County Council	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources	2019-2020	Submitting a new project to financing the wide scale promotion of the brand.
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy? e.g. increases demand for</b>	Revitalize craft businesses e.g. wood workers			

<p>restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses</p>	<p>Awareness raising campaigns aimed to public regarding healthy food, quality products and services.</p>	
<p><b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)</p>	<p>Action/ Policy objective number: A4.2/ PO4  A3.3/ PO3</p>	<p>Description of implications: The Brands awarding criteria needs to be put in accordance with the accommodations standards developed at PO4 Action 4.2 The communication strategy overlaps with the marketing strategy developed at PO3 Action 3.3</p>

<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> <b>Valorising the tourist potential</b>	<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> <b>5</b>
<b>Action Title: Promotion of sites of interest for tourists to choose, reach and better understand them</b>	<b>Action Number:</b> <b>5.2</b>
<b>Background:</b> <p>Many times, when tourists arrive and stay in our region, due to the scarcity of information, after quite a short while the natural questions arise: “What can I do more? What else can I see? Where should I go next? What else should I try? etc.” There is a real need, expressed many times by local SMEs, to provide more information for tourists about sites of interest and how to reach them. This kind of promotion should be done coherently, incorporating as much information as possible to make the county more attractive.</p> <p>Another issue is that most of the times even if visitors get the opportunity to visit a place, information about the sight is often missing or is incomplete and is not available in foreign languages, hence they don’t understand the value of it. Having well promoted sites and equipped among all with all the necessary information to better understand them creates the opportunity to grow the number of nights spent in our region which translates in more revenue for tourism SMEs.</p>	
<p>a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?</p>	<p>We have learnt from partners from Municipality of Medina del Campo and Delta 2000 Consortium.</p>

<p>b. What have you learnt?</p>	<p>The Rueda Wine Route promotes the territory by means of the identity of high quality local wines. This supports wineries and related businesses such as restaurants, shops, accommodation and other leisure businesses. PO Delta have taken strategic actions to promote the Po Delta internationally on account of its high value as a birdwatching destination. (It is an internationally designated wetland.) e.g. Participating at international bird fairs.</p>			
<p>c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?</p>	<p>Through site visit and discussions in Medina del Campo and Po Delta.</p>			
<p><b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b></p>	<p><b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b></p>	<p><b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b></p>	<p><b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b></p>	<p><b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).</b></p>
<p><b>1. Update and translate available information materials</b></p>	<p>Harghita County Council</p>	<p>Own funds</p>	<p>During 2019</p>	



<b>2. Elaboration of new information materials about sites and for the sites.</b>	Harghita County Council with Local authorities and tourism information centres	Information, Harghita County Council own funds	2019	
<b>3. Making available for tourists the information materials by various means (online and phisically)</b>	Tourism information centres Harghita Community Development Association Tourism Associations	Own resources	2019-2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses	The increase of the number of visitors at sites of interest bring benefits for other businesses than tourism operators, such as transportation, programs, etc.			
<b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)	Action/ Policy objective number: A3.3 / PO3 A5.1 / PO5	Description of implications: Must be in accordance with the common marketing strategy developed at PO3 Action 3.3 and perhaps with the requirements of the branding done with the Szekler brand (PO5/ A5.1)		

<b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Valorising the tourist potential		<b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 5	
<b>Action Title: Developing the tourist infrastructure at existing sites</b>		<b>Action Number:5.3</b>	
<p><b>Background:</b> Although Harghita County has many sites of interest and these should be main attractions and could be incorporated in offers for active relaxation, sightseeing, etc., the lack of tourism and other infrastructure at these sites are among the main issues of the county's tourism sector. Well-developed sites, equipped with adequate information signs, restrooms, connected with hiking trails, bicycle roads, and other infrastructure, are offering possibilities for tourism SMEs to incorporate these sites in their offers, create the opportunity to develop new services like bike hire, guided tours etc. The presence of an attractive site is a direct benefit for SMEs since tourists will seek to accommodate closer to these sites and look for services they can benefit.</p>			
a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?		In Hungary from LSG member at Rejteck Bicycle Center and guesthouse in Lipcseszentadorján. Site visit in Punkaharju, Savonlinna, Finland and Po Delta, Italy.	

<p>b. What have you learnt?</p>	<p>In Hungary we learned that forest roads and agricultural roads can be used by bikers both as ‘transport’ and also to visit the local sights.          In Finland, at a campsite, we learned how without basic infrastructure services can be developed at relatively low cost using composting toilets. (there were no drinking water network and sewage)          In Italy, electric boats on waterways to facilitate birdwatching.          In our county there are also many forestry roads and other dirt roads which can be transformed in cycling roads and connect them into a network like in Nagykanizsa region. Having a good cycling road network is a powerful attraction to cyclists who will use accommodations, restaurants and other tourism services.          Observations points, bear watches and generally wildlife watches are also points of interests of our county, developing them and connecting them with services like in Po Delta but on land will be also beneficial for local SMEs.</p>			
<p>c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?</p>	<p>Site visits at Rejteck Bicycle Center, Nagykanizsa Hungary, Punkaharju Camping in Finland, Po Delta in Italy.</p>			
<p><b>Action Steps (What will be done)</b></p>	<p><b>Responsibility (Who will do it)</b></p>	<p><b>Resources (Information, money, materials)</b></p>	<p><b>Timeline Start and end dates*</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p><b>1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced</b></p>

				2)Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).
1. Identifying the needs and develop a strategy to maximize effectiveness of interventions	Local authorities, tourism information centers	Staff time	Ongoing, will be finished in 2018	
2. Identifying funding opportunities	Local authorities, Harghita County Council	information	2018-2019	
3. Funding of projects	Harghita County Council and other funding bodies	Resources could be provided through EU funding sources	Starting in 2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses	The increase of the number of visitors at sites of interest bring benefits for other businesses than tourism operators, such as transportation, programs, etc.			
<b>Implications for other actions or</b>	Action/ Policy	Description of implications:		



<p><b>policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)</p>	<p>objective number: A1.1/ PO1</p>	<p>Developing the road and transportation connections between sites of interest, which is a local development, can overlap with the general development of road infrastructure which is done by the County Council. Appropriate coordination of the projects will overcome this issue.</p>
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<p><b>Policy Objective Title:</b> Valorising the tourist potential</p>	<p><b>Policy Objective Number:</b> 5</p>
<p><b>Action Title: Identifying and developing new sites of interest</b></p>	<p><b>Action Number:</b> 5.4</p>
<p><b>Background:</b> Next to developing the existing sites (Action 5.2), it is also important to identify and develop new sites of interest. Harghita County is rich in many interesting places which only locals know about and many times they are not aware of the value of such places. Also looking for completely new development ideas and implementing them, like the example of La Casa delle Farfalle in the Po Delta, Italy will attract tourists and travelers, tourism SMEs benefiting directly by the presence of these new or renewed attraction points/sites of interests.</p>	

<p>a. From which partner/presenter/expert/LSG member(s) have you learnt the good practice which feeds this thematic action?</p>	<p>Delta 2000 and Drenthe Province</p>
<p>b. What have you learnt?</p>	<p>In the Po Delta, many places which in the past were used by fishermen or villagers for daily life activities are used now as tourist attractions La Casa delle Farfalle is a fairly new visiting center where a butterfly- and an insect house attracts thousands of tourists per year.</p> <p>In Drenthe we had the opportunity to visit a reservation, where a local product shop is in operation, and which valorizes local products. We visited a dairy farm where the locally produced milk is processed and the owners prepare ice creams. This offer was extended with a thematic park based round agriculture, which attracts families with children and enables them to become familiar with farming. This was an individual private initiative, developed in stages over several years.</p> <p>During the LSG, members identified key sites in Harghita County which could be sensitively developed for green tourism purposes.</p>
<p>c. How have you learnt (through a presentation, site visit, discussion, workshop etc.)?</p>	<p>Site visit and meetings in Po Delta Italy and Drenthe Province</p>

Action Steps (What will be done)	Responsibility (Who will do it)	Resources (Information, money, materials)	Timeline Start and end dates*	1) Name of the PI to be influenced/ already influenced 2) Change needed (e.g. new project, new call).
1. Identifying new sites of interest	Harghita County Council	information	2018-2019	
2. Identifying the needs for development	Harghita County Council, Local authorities, NGOs, SMEs	information	2019-2020	
3. Identifying the funding opportunities	Harghita County Council	information	2020	
4. Implementing the projects	Harghita County Council, Local authorities, NGOs, SMEs	The resources could be provided through the EU funding sources	Starting in 2020	
<b>Implications for other sectors of rural economy?</b> e.g. increases demand for restaurants /locally	All economical sector will benefit			



<p>grown food etc. Reduces skilled labour available for other operators  <b>Mitigation</b> e.g. implement training courses</p>			
<p><b>Implications for other actions or policy objectives</b> (e.g. conflicts, synergies, overlaps, possibility of double funding)</p>	<p>Action/ Policy objective number: -</p>	<p>Description of implications: -</p>	



## Part VII – Policy context

<b>PRE-DEFINED IN THE APPLICATION FORM:</b>	
<b>Policy addressed:</b> <b>REGIONAL OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 2014 – 2020 PRIORITY AXIS 2.</b> <b>IMPROVING COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES</b>	<b>Body responsible for the addressed policy:</b> <b>CENTRU REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY</b>
<b>Self-defined performance indicator:</b> <b>Number of SMEs benefiting from the projects generated by getting supported from ERDF</b>	<b>Target value of the indicator:</b> <b>20</b>

### **Evaluation of the current operation of the policy:**

1. The addressed policy currently functioning well in most of the cases only minor extra details are needed. However, in case of one change it will be a major one, since the axis doesn't fund rural small enterprises. Through the ROP no rural enterprises are funded, excepting medium sized non-agricultural enterprises. In our county aside from very few exceptions all the tourism service providers are micro- and small enterprises, hence the vast majority of the rural tourism enterprises are not eligible for funding through ROP. In order to provide opportunity for development of the county's tourism, rural micro- and small enterprises need to be included as eligible for funding.
2. The policy has a 'bottom-up' approach, public consultations are always held for the elaboration of the Applicants' Guides

3. Harghita County Council has no ownership of the policy.
4. In order to change the policy Harghita County Council will make suggestions to ADR Centru to influence the content of the policy
5. The policy currently has a touristic aspect it funds the following activity domains:
  - 5510 Hotels and similar accommodation facilities,
  - 5520 Accommodation facilities for vacation and short periods
  - 5530 Trailer parks, camping and camps
  - 5590 Other accommodation services
6. The policy currently doesn't have an aspect related to rural SMEs. It funds urban SME's and rural medium sized companies.
7. According to our findings, in the past the policy had run calls for touristic projects and it plans future calls as well.

**Kind of change and why it is needed:**

1. Harghita County Council will not propose new initiatives
2. Harghita County Council will propose modification to future calls. However, decisions to make changes to the call criteria can be made only by the Centru Regional Development Agency, Harghita County Council can only develop and submit propositions for change.
3. In order to implement the proposed Actions there is a need for 3 smaller changes and one major to future calls. The major change implies including rural SME's (especially micro and small businesses) among eligible applicants. The other changes are referring to add new funded activities.

Action Number	Action Title	What policy change is linked to the Action
2.2	Supporting entrepreneurship	Currently the Regional Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 funds only medium size companies from rural areas. In order to support rural tourism development, it is needed to include among future <b>beneficiaries</b> also the rural SMEs with focus on young entrepreneurs.
3.1	Establishment of professional networks	Regional Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 to include for funding projects which aim establishment of SME networks
3.1	Establishment of regional and national professional networks	Regional Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 to include for funding projects which aim the interlinkage and connection of existing digital networking platforms and databases in order to be able to create in the future regional or national professional networks.
5.1	Extending the Szekler brand for Harghita county	Regional Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 to include funding for the creation, development and extension of community brands in order to enhance the promotion of local cultural, historical, economical values to grow the promotional strength of the region.

Policy Influencing Activities (What will be done)	Responsibility (Who will do it)	Resources (Information, money, materials, workshops, meetings)	Timeline Start and end dates*

1. Proposition to include rural SMEs among beneficiaries of Regional Operative Programme, Axis 2.2	Harghita County Council	Information gathering Development of written proposition Meeting with representatives of ADR Centru	01.03.2019- 31.03.2019
2. Proposition to operate change of financed activities of the Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 and include for funding projects which aim establishment of SME networks	Harghita County Council	Information gathering Development of written proposition Meeting with representatives of ADR Centru	01.04.2019- 30.04.2019
3. Proposition to operate change of financed activities of the Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 and include funding for projects which aim the interlinkage and connection of existing digital networking platforms and databases	Harghita County Council	Information gathering Development of written proposition Meeting with representatives of ADR Centru	01.10.2019- 31.12.2019
4. Proposition to operate change of financed activities of the Operative Programme, Axis 2.2 and include for funding projects which aim the creation, development and extension of community brands	Harghita County Council	Information gathering Development of written proposition Meeting with representatives of ADR Centru	01.02.2019- 28.02.2019



### **RuralGrowth as an engine for change:**

How has the RuralGrowth project contributed to identifying and possibly achieving the proposed change(s) to the policy?

In the process of elaboration of the Status Quo Analysis and during the LSG meetings we managed to identify problems, difficulties, real needs and good practices and we also learned how these difficulties can be eventually overcome.

The site visits during the project meetings offered us the possibility to learn from our partners and also their LSG about how they deal with situations and also let us know about their experiences of influencing policies.

The elaboration of the Action Plan was a really useful process. The expertise of our advisory partners lead us to better identify and define the actions and then to propose policy changing actions.