



STAR Cities - Sustainable Tourism for the Attractivity of Riverside Cities

Good Practices Guide

STAR Cities
Interreg Europe



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The STAR Cities project

Exchange of good practices for developing river tourism within five European riverside cities

Many European territories have developed **strong relations with rivers**, which assume an economic and social role in their history. In the heart of European cities or in suburban areas, **riversides offer exceptional natural, cultural and industrial heritage**, both tangible and intangible. They provide these cities with the opportunity to combine traditional tourism (such as visiting monuments and museums), with visits to more **natural and original places**. That is why **riverside development is a real opportunity for European cities** to create innovative solutions for sustainable tourism development.

The STAR Cities project brings together **7 partners** in order to **improve regional policies in 5 European cities**:

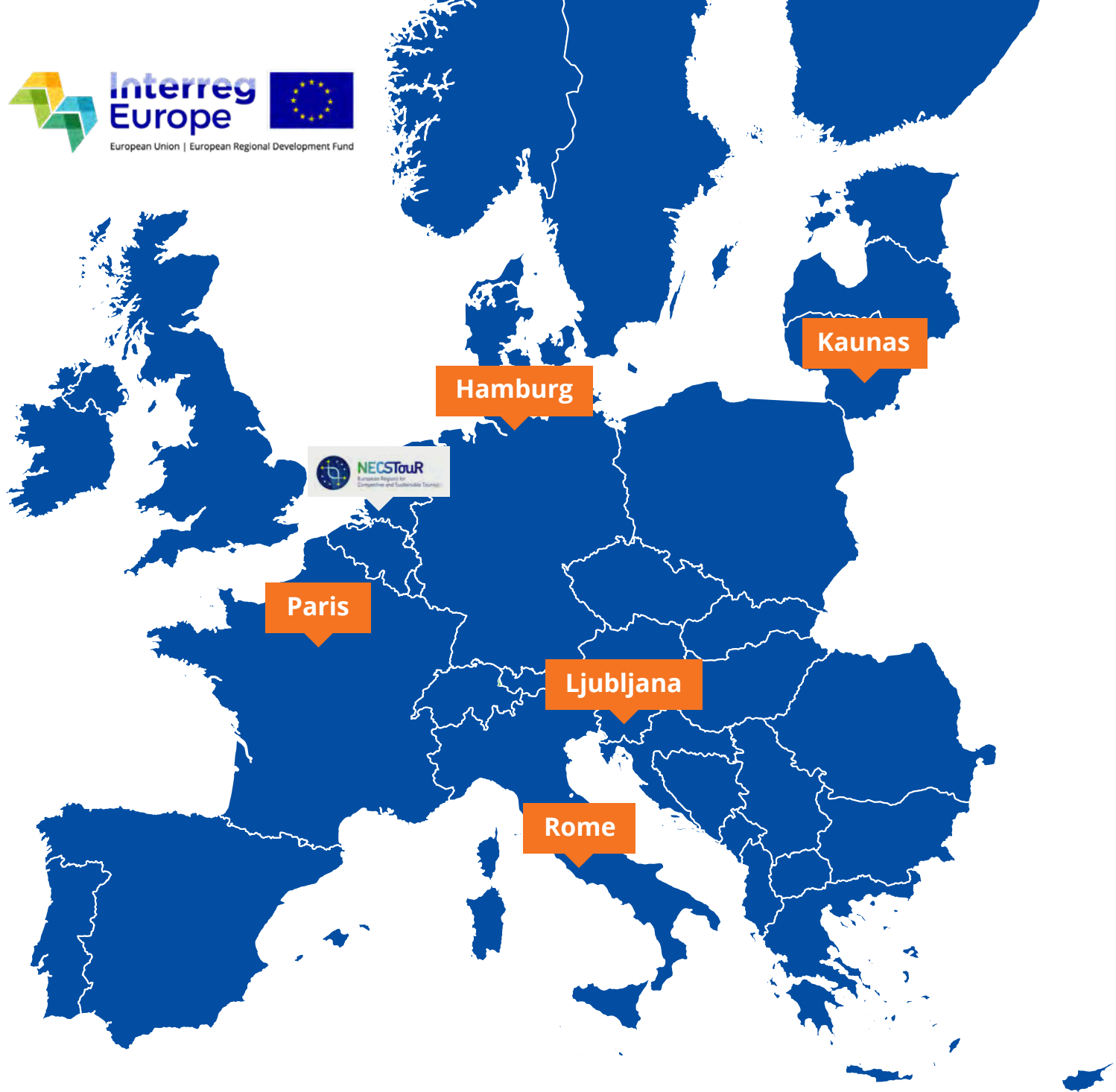
- Val-de-Marne Tourism Board (France)
- Lazio Region (Italy)
- Municipality IX EUR of Rome (Italy)
- Hamburg Metropolitan Region (Germany)
- Kaunas 2022, European Capital of Culture (Lithuania)
- Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region (Slovenia)
- NECSTouR, the Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism (Belgium)

Interreg Europe helps regional and local governments across Europe to **develop and deliver better policy**. To achieve this goal, the programme offers opportunities for regional and local public authorities across Europe to **share ideas and experiences** on public policy in practice, thereby improving strategies for their citizens and communities.

Within this framework, the STAR Cities project aims at **improving regional policies on natural cultural heritage, and tourism development**. By focusing on sustainable development as a major issue, it also seeks to encourage policy makers to **view the development of riverside environments in European cities as a new tourism proposition**.

Key facts

- **7 partners**
- **1,178,000 € of which 995,000 € ERDF**
- **5 years, from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2023**
- **2018-2021: Interregional learning programme**
- **2021-2023: Implementation of Action Plans**



Val-de-Marne Tourism Board – Lead partner



Structuring and developing the tourism offer along 50 kilometres of Marne river near Paris

The [Val-de-Marne Tourism Board](#) is a non-profit association, created by the Val-de-Marne Departmental Council in the Greater Paris - France. Similarly to other **Destination Management Organisations** (DMO), the Val-de-Marne Tourism Board is responsible for tourism policy, development, and promotion, and the commercialization of tourism products. **Since 2002, we have implemented projects targeting the Marne river.**

In particular, we are leading a **local network of tourist boards and almost 200 stakeholders** involved in **developing** the tourist, cultural, leisure and sporting activities **along 50 km of Marne river close to Paris.** Because of its abundant **cultural and natural heritage**, which saw the development of **leisure, cultural and sporting activities** alongside industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Marne river has been identified as a priority touristic hub by the Ile-de-France Region. In order to uncover its full potential, we are implementing a **long-term strategy to develop the tourism provision based on the enhancement of riverside activities and history.**

Our involvement in STAR Cities will benefit from the exchange of experiences with the partners in specific actions, such as **cultural development**, the **involvement of the locals** in tourism promotion, or **soft mobility** development. Moreover, STAR Cities will help to further strengthen the commitment of local public and private stakeholders involved in the development of tourism along the Marne river.

Key facts

- **Project area:** 50km of Marne river near Paris
- **Policy instrument addressed:**
Regional Tourism and Leisure Development Plan 2017 – 2021



Tiber river through Rome and the Lazio Region

Lazio Region

With 5 720 796 inhabitants, the [Lazio region](#) it is the **second most populous region in Italy** after Lombardy. **Tourism plays a significant role in the regional economy as a major asset**, especially tourism related to art and monuments and places of interest in the region (Rome in the first instance), religious tourism (Rome and the sanctuaries of Lazio), summer seaside tourism, and summer/winter tourism in the ski resorts of the Lazio Apennines.

The Lazio Region, in its dual concern for the **environmental protection of riverside areas**, on the one hand, and **tourism promotion**, on the other, aims at improving its knowledge and capacity to intervene with significant projects and new models of governance **to improve sustainable tourism in riverside cities**. The Interreg EUROPE **STAR Cities** project represents an important opportunity to pursue this goal.

In particular, the Lazio Region's ambition is **to increase the competitiveness of its territory** through improving the attractiveness of its landscape, and enhancing its capacity to boost the tourist offer. The region should become **a region for innovation, talent and sustainability**.





City of Rome – Municipality IX EUR

The [Municipality IX EUR](#) is **one of the fifteen administrative bodies** into which the City of Rome is structured. It is the **second largest in terms of territory** (183km²), having the same dimensions as the city of Milan, and its population is approximately 183,000. Geographically, the Municipality is in the sub-urban area of South Rome and it is **crossed by the Tiber river for about 14 km**.



REGIONE
LAZIO

ROMA
Municipio Roma IX Eur



Key facts

- **Project area:** Tiber river, from southwestern section of Rome up to the Tyrrhenian sea.
- **Policy instrument addressed:** Regional three-year Plan for Tourism for Lazio Region and River Contracts

It is a large area in which there are relatively new neighbourhoods, which sprung up mainly in the post-World War II period up to the 2000s and are characterized by the presence of **important natural and cultural heritage**, with two regional natural reserves and some archeological sites. **Tourism is not particularly developed** in this area, since the main focus for tourism in Rome is the City Centre. But the potential for exploiting tourism remains high, especially along **the Tiber river which, for a long stretch, connects the first outskirts of the city to the sea**, with wonderful natural heritage present on the riverside, populated by significant biodiversity.

The Municipality IX EUR has been working in recent years to **propose new sites for riverside tourism** along the Tiber on its course through the City of Rome, and has turned out to be very active in European projects. It has recently applied for a **regional call to create the first DMO based on the Tiber river** jointly with another Municipality in the South area of Rome.



Hamburg Metropolitan Region



metropolregion hamburg

Cultural and natural heritage along the river Elbe, through Hamburg City to the North Sea.

[Hamburg Metropolitan Region](#) is the **second largest metropolitan region in Germany**. It covers the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg – the second largest city in Germany – and parts of three surrounding federal states: Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein. Hamburg Metropolitan Region consists of eight districts in the federal state of Lower Saxony, six in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein and two districts in the federal state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and of the city-state of Hamburg itself. The size of the area is 26,000 square kilometers and is home to more than 5.4 million inhabitants.

The River Elbe flows for **170 km through the region** until it reaches the North Sea. From Hamburg to the estuary, it is an important waterway which feeds **Hamburg's international port**. The port towns of Hamburg, Brunsbüttel, Stade, Cuxhaven and Glückstadt can look back on a long tradition in maritime economy. Upriver from Hamburg, the River Elbe shaped a **mostly untouched river landscape of high natural value**.

The River Elbe in HMR is touristically relatively well developed. A **good infrastructure of ports, sport boat marinas, ferries, piers and boat trips** provides

many ways to move along, on and across the Elbe and its tributaries. Along the riverbanks, there is the **Elbe Cycle Route** and further local cycle routes connecting the hinterland to the river. Smaller and greater towns and cities with their touristic infrastructure, accommodation, restaurants and cafés can be found in great variety.

Despite the diversified offer, **the touristic landscape along the Elbe is highly fragmented**. There are 11 destination management organisations (DMO), each of which assigns a different importance to its riverside areas. There is no joint strategy to which the neighbouring federal states or destinations commit themselves for the whole Elbe section within Hamburg Metropolitan Region. Nor is there a sustainable approach to river tourism.

Three cross-boarder projects are exceptions: « **Kurs Elbe** », « **Maritime Landscape Lower Elbe** » and the "Elbe Cycle Route", where DMO have pooled some of their resources for **joint marketing and development activities**.



Key facts

- **Project area:** Elbe river through Hamburg Metropolitan Region
- **Policy instrument addressed:** "Strategic Framework for Action" with its Tourism Development Concept of Hamburg Metropolitan Region



Kaunas 2022, European Capital of Culture

Using the power of rivers to gather communities and revitalise riversides with new activities and events

Until the middle of the 20th century, rivers were an important part of the economic and social life of **Lithuania's second largest city - Kaunas**: almost all of the city's earliest industrial sites were located beside the river. However, after the hydroelectric power plant was built in 1956, people's connection to the river gradually decreased, both physically and mentally.

Thus, **the principle objective in Kaunas today is to revitalize this important element of our city**. Rather than considering its industrial purposes, Kaunas looks to the river's new potential as a focalpoint for natural and cultural tourism. However, the waterway routes and water tourism is developing very slowly, mainly due to a lack of business interest and tourism infrastructure. Since [Kaunas 2022](#) is not a policy maker but rather acts as a cultural operator and mediator between local stakeholders, the improvement of these issues, within the frame of the STAR Cities project, depends on the implementation of new projects.

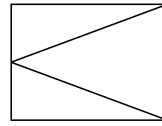
The primary actions were taken by a **Community Program, which is a platform that promotes the sense of community through culture**. Creating community labs in Kaunas helps to unite local

residents, artists, educators and everyone else wishing to contribute to the creative development and empowerment of their residential area through artistic and creative activities. **Since 2017, communities are brightening the riversides**, developing initiatives that reflect local identities, seeking to create a safe and creative environment for their neighbours and much more.

The project in 2022 will **unite hundreds of thousands of people from Kaunas and Kaunas District to act together** in order to create new public spaces where formerly there were none, to feel responsible for our own neighbourhoods, and also to host events, especially along riversides.

Key facts

- **Project area:** Kaunas city and district along Nemunas and Neris rivers, with a special focus on Kačerginė, Kulautuva and Zapyškis
- **Policy instrument addressed:** Kaunas City Cultural Strategy 2017–2027



Kaunas 2022
Contemporary
Capital
European Capital of Culture



Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region



From Ljubljana city centre to Ljubljansko barje Nature Park: better promotion of river tourism, natural and cultural heritage

The **Ljubljana Urban Region** unites Ljubljana, the capital, and 24 municipalities in central Slovenia. One can **enjoy the European Green Capital 2016 or easily accessible natural environment, diverse wildlife, and varied landscape** not far from the city centre. The vicinity of quality natural areas and the interweaving of the built and natural environments **makes Ljubljana with its river Ljubljanica truly unique** among European metropolitan regions.

Ljubljanica is well integrated into the tourist products in Ljubljana city centre, and less when entering the Ljubljansko barje Nature Park, where a special park regime is in force. At the same time **the river is yet not navigable** in that area. All Slovenian waters are managed and monitored by the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, while municipalities are responsible for management of riverbanks.

[The Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region](#) (RRA LUR) supports sustainably oriented infrastructural, social, cultural, creative,

and business activities. At the same time, it encourages connecting and developing partnership networks among various stakeholders whose activities bolster the region's sustainable development. In the field of tourism, our main partner is Ljubljana Tourism, the Regional Destination Organisation (DMO).

Through STAR Cities, RRA LUR wanted to **raise awareness about river tourism and natural and cultural heritage**, and advocated the adoption of relevant good practices, adhered to by project partners, in our region.

Key facts

- **Project area:** 7 municipalities from Ljubljana city to Ljubljansko barje Nature Park along Ljubljanica river.
- **Policy instrument addressed:** Regional Development Programme of the Ljubljana Urban Region 2014-2020



NECSTouR - Advisory partner

Capitalising on regional best practices to improve European tourism policies

[NECSTouR](#) stands for the **Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism**. NECSTouR is a network of **40 Regional Authorities and even more associated members** (universities, research institutes, tourism businesses, and sustainable tourism associations). The association was created in 2007 with the willingness to **share experiences and foster alliances to build a sustainable and competitive tourism in Europe**.

The network is **one of the few links between touristic destinations and the European institutions** (Parliament, Commission, and the Committee of the Regions).

STAR Cities' goal of tackling the **decongestion of touristic cities** fits within NECSTouR's priorities, the **Five "S" for the Tourism of Tomorrow: Smart, Skills, Statistics, Socio-Cultural, and Safety**. Because STAR Cities is focusing on natural and cultural heritage valorisation and sustainable development, the project is also aligned with the **Barcelona Declaration "Better places to live, better places to visit"**, one of NECSTouR's key strategic objectives.



NECSTouR
European Regions for
Competitive and Sustainable Tourism

Within the Star Cities project, NECSTouR is acting as an advisory partner to **give a wider scope to the project by including other regions and strategic alliances**. The NECSTouR secretariat is actively promoting Star Cities through multiple communication channels, lobbying actions and the organisation of a high-level European Conference.





STAR Cities Learning Program

The main goal of the STAR Cities project is to implement activities which give partners the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange good practices on river tourism.

The project started in June 2018 and the first 3 years, up to May 2021, were focused on the **interregional learning programme**. The second phase, from June 2021 to May 2023, is dedicated to the **implementation of regional Action Plans** and the capitalisation of the project results.

The learning programme has been implemented in several steps:

1. State of play

During the first year, **project partners reviewed and evaluated the existing regional policies and actions** concerning river tourism. Partners presented their regional context, in particular the **governance and management** of their destination, their **natural and cultural heritage** and existing **tourism products and facilities** along rivers. Partners also identified the **strengths and weaknesses** of river tourism in their region, **good practices** they would like to share and **learning needs** they would like to see addressed by the project.

2. Thematic Learning Programme

Based on both the learning needs and good practices, project partners adopted a thematic programme to be developed through Interregional learning sessions. Four main challenges have been tackled:

- Engaging **Locals & Communities** in river tourism
- Developing new **tourism products & Marketing** strategies
- Improving **Governance systems & Cooperation** of stakeholders
- Raising awareness on **Environment & Sustainability** topics

These themes have been addressed through the organisation of **study visits** (before the Covid-19 pandemic) and **good practices webinars**. Such events were prepared with the participation of local stakeholders involved by project partners. They allowed all partners and stakeholders to learn from good practices presented and get inspiration for regional development.

The thematic programme also included brainstorming discussions during **thematic workshops**. Participants were invited to broaden the discussion and debate of the more interesting, challenging, inspirational ideas presented during webinars and formulate general conclusions. **These conclusions are presented in the sections below as policy recommendations.**

3. Good Practices Selection:

The core of the STAR Cities learning programme is the **identification, presentation and transfer of good practices**. All partners prepared lists of good practices addressing the four themes presented above, and a selection of these good practices has been presented during study visits and webinars.

After each thematic session, partners voted for the more **inspirational, interesting, innovative and transferable good practices**, which are presented in the publication as well as on the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform.

Most good practices are related to river tourism. However, some of them are related to the prioritised themes by way of inspiration for river tourism.

This selection is an important tool for **raising awareness, among policy makers and stakeholders, of important issues concerning riverside management and development**. It will be a means of mobilizing and motivating, and above all will serve as a dissemination tool for common shared outcomes that will outlive the project.



STAR Cities GOOD PRACTICES

In the next sections of this guide, you will discover some of the best practices chosen by STAR Cities partners. Here is the complete list of ideas, projects, initiatives of inspiration from and for partners. We hope that they will be of inspiration at a larger scale !

Learn more on Good Practices in STAR Cities website: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/starcities/good-practices/>

Engaging **Locals & Communities** in river tourism

PARTNER(S)	TITLE	SHORT DESCRIPTION
Hamburg	Industrial Heritage Festival	Biannual event held over two days across the entire region to celebrate industrial monuments along the region's waterways.
Kaunas	Fluxus Labs	Community laboratories which aim to empower the circulation of local people's ideas, approaches and experiences.
Hamburg	Port Museum Hamburg	The Museum is using an authentic location for port-related exhibits, bringing them to life with the help of a large network of volunteers.
Kaunas	Zapyškis church project	Reconstruction and adaptation of Zapyškis church for cultural purposes.
Kaunas	Modernism for the Future programme	Collaborative program for conservation, interpretation, promotion and activation of modernism heritage in Kaunas.
Lazio Region / Rome	#RomaDecide Participatory Budget 2019	Citizens and the Administration decide together, for the first time, how to invest 20 million euros throughout the territory.
Val-de-Marne	Vitry street art tour	Great example of how to promote cultural content, starting from the passion of one inhabitant and reaching thousands of people.
Val-de-Marne	Industrial tourism: guided tours with workers	Guided visits that aim to valorise the women and men who live and work in industrial territory in Val-de-Marne.
Val-de-Marne	Migrant Tour programme	The solidarity travel agency Bastina supports and trains migrants people to become tour guides in their cities.

Developing new **Tourism products & Marketing strategies**

PARTNER(S)	TITLE	SHORT DESCRIPTION
NECSTouR	Water Museum of Venice	Digital and open-air museum promoting the heritage of Venice's inland minor waterways.
Val-de-Marne	Explore Paris Booking platform	A booking platform promoting unusual guided tours and touristic activities to explore the secret spots of Paris capital city and its suburbs.
Hamburg	Elbe Cycle Bus	The bus takes cyclists and their bikes as well as hikers to destinations, cycling and hiking trails in the "Altes Land" near Hamburg.
Hamburg	Herzapfelhof Apple Farm	Organic fruit farm with an attractive touristic offer. Visitors experience how fruit is cultivated and harvested.
Hamburg	Sup Club Stade	Public-private partnership in the unused city harbour, by creating a stand-up paddle club which became an attractive meeting-point.
Lazio Region / Rome	Tibertour, from Umbria to Rome	7 days river tour for paddlers, cyclists, walkers along the Tiber to promote sport, nature, tourism through healthy and respectful understand.
NECSTouR	Blue Ways in Barcelona Province	Ambitious project to convert almost 300km of trails for bikers and hikers along the main rivers of the province of Barcelona.
Val-de-Marne	Summer in the canal Festival near Paris	Festival built on public-private partnership and aiming at enhancing the tourism attractiveness of the canals.

STAR Cities GOOD PRACTICES

Improving **Governance systems & Cooperation** of stakeholders

PARTNER(S)	TITLE	SHORT DESCRIPTION
Hamburg	Kurs Elbe joint strategy	Six tourism regions have joined forces to jointly develop tourism along the Elbe, from Hamburg to Wittenberge.
Lazio Region / Rome	Agenda Tevere	An association of NGOs and citizens that aims to collaboratively retrain the urban trait of Tiber River in Rome.
Hamburg	Elbe Cycle Path	The cycling route stretches along the river Elbe, one of the most untouched rivers in Europe, and through Hamburg region.
Hamburg	Day-trip Tourism Campaign	22 regional DMOs have joint forces to promote lesser-known destinations for day trips in and around Hamburg.
Ljubljana	Barjanka cycling race	Event in the Ljubljansko barje Nature Park connecting sport, tourism, culture, nature, and education.
Ljubljana	Regional Destination Organization of Ljubljana Region	Units 26 municipalities in developing joint tourism products, strengthening of collaboration in planning, design and marketing.
NECSTouR	The Vltava, a river full of experiences	Joint strategy introducing the Vltava river and its surroundings as one attractive tourism destination in Czech Republic.
Val-de-Marne	Cap sur la Marne joint strategy	Implementation of joint actions by 4 DMOs along 50km of Marne river : tourist activities, events, communication and promotion.
Val-de-Marne	SAGE Marne Confluence	A local planning tool for a balanced and sustainable management of water resources in a specific river basin.
Val-de-Marne	Nautical Trails label	Development of secure river routes for canoes, in collaboration with water sports clubs, tourist offices, and local authorities.

Raising awareness on **Environment & Sustainability** topics

PARTNER(S)	TITLE	SHORT DESCRIPTION
Ljubljana	Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism	Tool for the development of sustainable tourism in destinations and businesses, under the brand Slovenia Green.
Val-de-Marne	Au fil de l'eau boat trips and shuttle services	A social programme contributing to both soft mobility and valorisation of natural heritage of rivers.
Kaunas	UPYNES - TĖKA platform	A virtual tool of the TĖKA initiative collects an archive of the memory of rivers, streams, and banks of the Kaunas region.
Kaunas	Let's celebrate the river	Community festival, aiming to develop the dialogue between sustainable river tourism forms and activities.
Ljubljana	Ljubljana European Green Capital 2016	Focus on pedestrian & cycling networks, new green spaces & public transport, attracting more and more tourists.
Val-de-Marne	Big Cultural Walks	Walking events punctuated by cultural visits and animations to make hundreds of participants discover the territory.
Val-de-Marne	Haute Ile Nature Park	A Natura 2000 site inspired by the natural landscapes close to the Marne river and implementing an innovative management.

Locals & Communities

Rivers are a valuable resource from which to create a common European narrative, and locals should be involved as key actors in this process

More and more tourists are looking for **authentic and “real” experiences with locals**: they want to feel “like a local” and discover a region **off the beaten track**, avoiding mass tourism. Although there are limits (reliability, professionalism, organisational weaknesses), it is worthwhile to **engage locals and communities in the development of touristic products** because it turns them into active stakeholders who **benefit from river tourism and help to increase its acceptance**. STAR Cities partners adopted this approach, responding to a common challenge and need, and made progress through the good practices, which have the potential to become successful case studies.

Learning from good practices

HISTORICAL HERITAGE MOTIVATING AND INSPIRING THE CREATION OF NEW PRODUCTS

Sustainable “use” of cultural heritage for touristic proposes is of great importance, especially in raising the awareness of locals and communities. Evidence emerging from project partners’ case studies shows

that new projects in heritage sites, where community groups were involved, became a source of memory, identity, dialogue and creativity.

All of the abovementioned facets are visible in the **Industrial Heritage Festival (Hamburg)**, where a platform for local museums, local voluntary associations and municipalities to take part is being created. The **Modernism for the Future program (Kaunas)** has the same aim – to invite locals and communities to participate in discussions, ideas workshops, arts and culture practices, which are all related to this river city’s modernist heritage.

Sometimes similar dialogues can even lead to the promising results with policy makers, where one of the outcomes is long-term infrastructure transformation, as showcased in **Reconstruction and adaptation of Zapyškis church for cultural purposes (Kaunas)**, where the community is also engaged in creating riverside activities and using existing infrastructure.

INVOLVING AND HIGHLIGHTING LOCALS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY INITIATIVES

Opening up industrial heritage to visitors can, in some cases, imply more than just simple tourism. The **Guided tours with workers programme** (Val-de-Marne) aims to valorise the women and men who live and work in industrial territory. The same is true of the **Port Museum of Hamburg**, which gives a precedent to create a dialogue between visitors and (former) workers, to promote infrastructures linked to the water as well as highlighting the know-how of participating volunteers.

With **Migrant Tour** (Val-de-Marne), the solidarity travel agency Bastina supports and trains migrants to become tour guides in their cities. The theme of the tour is the city's history and stories of immigration, both past and recent, encompassing the living testimonies of its residents. By telling his or her own story of migration during the walking tour, the guide becomes one of the witnesses to this emerging history.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MANTRA "ACT LOCALLY THINK GLOBALLY" FOR STRENGTHENING THE AUTHENTIC RIVER TOURISM EXPERIENCE

There is a need for new projects that are being run by, or that are being undertaken by, local people and communities. Therefore, the question arises of how projects like these (or others developed through local and community engagement) can be integrated into the touristic offer and the touristic marketing of a river region.

The **Vitry Street Art Tour** (Val-de-Marne) is a great example of how to promote cultural content through various interdisciplinary activities, starting from the passion of one inhabitant and reaching thousands of people. A similar community-based model is used for **Fluxus Labs Community program** (Kaunas). Moreover, all projects created by locals will become a part of the European Capital of Culture opening program and will attract a wider audience. This also showcases the successes of different organisations in taking the initiative to support active community involvement in city life, and how they are creating specific, socially sensitive programmes to this end.

ENHANCEMENT OF RIVER TERRITORIES THROUGH NEW FUNDS

The provision of new funds for the development of river areas is a prerequisite for the involvement and enhancement of the territory and local communities, as it provides local actors with concrete tools for planning and undertaking actions that can develop the territory from a social and economic point of view.

Rome Participatory Budget 2019 is a showcase of the importance of decision making done by policy makers in collaboration with local people. Citizens together with the Roman municipality made joint decisions on how to invest 20 million euros. Among the projects presented by citizens: reclaiming river banks, building a pedestrian cycle path from the city centre to the river mouth and a cycling path from Municipality IX area to Ostia.

Industrial Heritage Festival

The ["Days of industrial heritage by the water"](#) is a biannual cultural event held over two days across the entire Hamburg Metropolitan Region.

The objective is to celebrate **industrial monuments along the region's waterways**. The event focusses on **rural areas and small towns** along the river Elbe and its tributaries. It draws attention to small and little-known attractions. In each edition, more than 120 objects take part. They comprise a large collection of **historical ships, harbours, shipyards, locks, lighthouses and water technology**.

The event is an example of **how local people, communities and voluntary engagement is integrated into an event connecting a whole region**. It is a good practice for their engagement in the creation of a touristic and cultural product. It is considered a success because of its high number of participants and visitors, as well as the significant media interest it attracted. While the preservation of the objects relies heavily on the work of volunteers, **the festival provides an opportunity for their historical objects to be made accessible to a wider public** and thereby to receive recognition for their work.

The festival is organised centrally with a manageable budget and staff deployment. **It is a not too costly way of establishing a new attraction on the riverside**. Barriers to participation are kept minimal: each partner decides how much they can contribute. The programme editing, marketing and public relations work is done centrally by the organising office. The website listing the objects is a constantly growing guide to the region's industrial heritage.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Hamburg Metropolitan Region Office
- **Location:** Hamburg, Germany





Fluxus Labs - Community programme of Kaunas 2022

"Fluxus Labas" is a programme involving community laboratories which aim to empower the circulation of local people's ideas, approaches and experiences.

The programme embraces the **creative dialogue between various members of communities** in order to create common connections and socio-cultural changes in different neighbourhoods. Community laboratories gather people to **co-create community actions where common ideas invite to connect people with each other.**

3 community laboratories are focusing especially on the topic of how the **river plays a crucial part in community life**: this includes an active sports cycle (more than 20 activities led by local people), co-created local festivals, "Nemunas story-telling festival", interdisciplinary artistic projects, workshops and meetings, etc.

Therefore, there is evidence of success, including: a high level of the community involvement (more than 1000 active community members), leading to **community empowerment**; a very close relationship with nature, raising the **awareness of inhabitants regarding sustainable actions**; Fluxus agents' attachment to their neighbourhood and communities – this provides the basis for the Fluxus Lab programme's creativity model.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Kaunas 2022 public institution
- **Location:** Kaunas, Lithuania

Building the programme over 5 years has fostered the potential for learning to be transferred: the community involvement in some neighbourhoods is the outgoing; the method used in Kaunas is very effective – **storytelling**, workshops with the community on various topics related with their personal experience and place; the **use of the riverbanks as an exhibition area** is transferable.





Policy recommendations

to develop and improve the engagement of locals and communities in river tourism projects

1. ENGAGEMENT OF LOCALS STARTS WITH THE REAPPROPRIATION OF RIVERBANKS

Project partners realized that any project promoted by a public administration aiming at developing the attractiveness of the riverside needs the strong involvement of local communities and integrated interventions to facilitate the accessibility of venues. Local facilities contribute to the usability of these places, while a good connection between the municipal administration and any local associations that are assigned to providing services may improve the quality of their provision. Moreover, riverbanks can be perfect exhibition venues and meeting places for locals and communities.

2. KEEPING THE MEMORY OF THE RIVER'S HISTORY ALIVE HELPS TO STRENGTHEN THE STORYTELLING POTENTIAL OF RIVERSIDE DESTINATIONS

If cultural heritage is a strong asset for riverside cities, then the stories and memories of people living and working alongside the river is another one. This intangible heritage, based on the feelings of local people and communities, should be better highlighted and promoted in order to bring authenticity to the riverside tourism offer. Storytelling is important for the identity of territories and who better than the

local inhabitants themselves to build a living and “real” storytelling experience at our chosen destinations?

3. AS INSTITUTIONS OR PUBLIC BODIES, ADOPT BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES BY INVOLVING CITIZENS

Responding to the fragmented governance structure and shared responsibilities of riverbanks, institutions and public authorities should adopt a bottom-up approach starting from the basis of local people's needs. When we refer to a different organization, we mean the modification of the “top-down” technical relationship currently existing between institutions and local communities, in favor of a symmetrical relationship where local communities are informed and involved in the creation and development of projects. Partners agree on the need to engage local actors and associations to develop riverside attractiveness, possibly through the help of local bodies who may play the role of social facilitators for the involvement of residents.

4. TURN LOCALS INTO ACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS TO INCREASE THE POSITIVE RECEPTION OF TOURISM

Engaging locals is a very powerful tool! Firstly, because the early involvement of locals in projects can raise their sustainability and positive reception, and secondly

because the knowledge and experiences of locals can increase competencies and empowerment, and new offers for small groups can increase the probability of securing an external investor and benefitting from tourism revenues. All of these projects could tell an authentic story about the region, although being relatively small in scale, non-commercial, and not competitive.

5. THINK SMALL AND START WITH SMALL-SCALE EVENTS CARRIED OUT ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

One of the main lessons learnt through STAR Cities might be described as something like “think small”. Tourism offers do not have to be planned on a “big” scale or be developed to 100% perfection. Small-scale and individually-tailored offers have a potential, too, that is easily overlooked. The development of tourist products often orients itself excessively towards the anticipated wishes and tastes of the masses. New trends, however, show that increasingly greater numbers of visitors are looking for an individually-tailored experience and want to feel “like a local”. Such initiatives can be a way to “downsize” tourism and therefore make tourism more sustainable.

6. TOURISM IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY LOCAL!

There is an increased awareness, especially among local residents, about the value of green spaces along the riverside – for recreation, excursions, exploration of nature and culture, or simply for a get-away from the city. Demand for this has increased with changes in travelling patterns and values due to the pandemic.

Focussing on local populations rather than international tourists is also important as this helps with maintaining the integrity and sustainability of river tourism.



Products & Marketing

Covid-19 will further accelerate the need for product innovation, strong branding, digital transformation, and marketing, which engages people and is more socially responsible

In the world of rapid technological evolution and the digital economy, consumers are continuously changing – tourists are among the first to do so. In the new normal (in post-pandemic times), the visitor is becoming more demanding, makes decisions more prudently and expects a more trustworthy, inclusive, authentic, safe and personalized experience. At such a time, vision, trust, and branding become all the more important, including more socially responsible engagement through marketing and building stronger relationships. River tourism can capitalize on the trend towards open spaces, nature and outdoor activities – visiting a city is more and more connected with exploring a wider region. River tourism and local tourism could be “winners” of the pandemic.

LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICES

ACCESSIBILITY & MOBILITY

Poor accessibility to more peripheral areas of the river landscape makes development of new tourist provision unsustainable and challenging. Good practices show that this hindrance can be overcome by creating new (innovative and sustainable) mobility solutions that become intrinsically attractive and sustainable

products themselves.

Elbe Cycle Bus (Hamburg) has managed to improve the regional mobility of non-motorized visitors and residents. It is also an attraction in itself, and works to promote public transport use. Furthermore, it addresses not only a question of accessibility, but also of integrated mobility – for example, adjusting timetables to join up various means of transport (ferries and trains). Another good example is the **Blue Ways project** (NECSTouR-Barcelona Province), an integrated system incorporating a network of sustainable local mobility and a product in itself – cycling and hiking tourism along the Blue Ways, as a means of promoting diversification, deconcentration and deseasonalisation. **Tibertour** (Lazio Region/Rome) approached the topic in a different manner, by launching an event to create a river route, as the first step in convincing municipalities and other stakeholders of the feasibility of such an initiative. This serves as a great example of how an event can work to create attention and open doors for further development. The **Water Museum of Venice** (NECSTouR-Veneto Region) used digital routes to enhance cultural and natural river heritage, involving local people in the collection of oral stories and the subsequent creation of related digital routes based on them.

INNOVATIVE TOURISM PRODUCTS

Many new tourism products as well as inclusive and authentic experiences have been developed along STAR Cities partners' rivers and in hinterland (thematic routes; boat cruises; water activities; guided biking, hiking and nature tours; events; culinary experiences, etc.), but there are still too few. There is a challenge to build up innovation in the process and to strengthen tourism infrastructure outside city centres.

Herzapfelhof Apple Farm (Hamburg) has proven how a non-typical tourist product can become an attraction for visitors and how good storytelling and high-quality branding can help build an authentic experience for domestic and international visitors. Constant innovation is a must. This kind of experience is sorely needed.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

There is an increased pressure from public authorities to turn to the private sector as a partner in creating and maintaining new products, services and infrastructures. Sustainability features highly on the public authorities' agenda in this process, whereas for the private sector profitability and financial feasibility are the main priorities. Private investments are attracted by open market conditions, and swift, transparent and predictable policies and procedures. Funding cultural heritage adds to the challenge.

The private initiative **Sub Club Stade** (Hamburg) became a popular meeting place for recreation, with a smart "step by step" approach, with the city as well as a public

tourism organisation supporting the project from the beginning in terms of marketing as well as infrastructure. A total win-win! A public-private partnership approach is also being used in the **Summer in the Canal Festival** (Paris Region/Seine-Saint-Denis), with the right mix of public funds and private sponsors, focusing on slow, sustainable, and culture and nature-based tourism.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

There are no 'one-stop shop' information platforms for rivers as tourist destinations – each DMO develops its own communication tools to promote the river tourism offer, which decreases efficiency and is less user-friendly. There is a need for new marketing approaches promoting not only the must-sees, but capitalizing on the trend to travel to lesser-known spots in search of more authentic experiences.

The **Explore Paris Booking Platform** (Val-de-Marne) manifests how these challenges can be addressed in one solution. It is a joint booking platform for lesser-known offers, supporting smaller initiatives. In addition, it works as an effective booking tool and a platform which helps tourism boards to develop even closer relations with local stakeholders.

Water Museum of Venice

The [Water Museum of Venice](#) is a digital and open-air museum promoting the heritage of Venice's inland minor waterways.

The museum assembles **significant examples of the rich legacy of the water civilizations of the Tre Venezie** ('Three Venices'), **through an online platform**. Also including several **digital** itineraries related to more than **70 water sites and small museums**. Altogether, they welcome **more than 400.000 visitors per year**.

Water heritage (both natural and cultural, tangible and intangible) is conceived as a **key vector for local development, sustainable mobility, and responsible tourism** along waterways.

The replicability of this practice is demonstrated by the existence of the **Global Network of Water Museums**, founded by the Water Museum of Venice with a similar approach. This **'flagship initiative' of UNESCO-IHP**

focuses on sustainable water uses and improvement of water management at all levels. Today, it includes more than **80 water museums located in 28 different countries** (welcoming 30.000.000 visitors per year).

Through this UNESCO Resolution, the international community recognized the importance of valuing and promoting water heritage from the experience of the Water Museum of Venice. With this, **citizens can imagine their future relationship with water through a sustainable tourism approach** linked to local water heritage.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** the Water Museum of Venice
- **Location:** Veneto Region, Italy





Explore Paris Booking platform

#ExploreParis

A [booking platform](#) promoting unusual guided tours and touristic activities to explore the alternative attractions and secret spots of Paris capital city and its suburbs.

Eight Tourism Boards and other partners brought their expertise and resources to renew and boost Paris' image as a tourism destination, and to develop and promote a **new urban tourism offer in off-the-beaten-track** venues, on the wider scale of Greater Paris.

Paris, the ultimate city break destination, is not simply a city centre. An abundance of **cultural, artistic and festive offers** on both sides of the ring road attract tourists searching for something different. This creative offer is based on themes such as **street art, architecture, modern art, cosmopolitan Paris, nature** and in particular **river tourism in the Greater Paris area**. The finalised offer has been launched at the **www.exploreparis.com e-store**, both in French and in English. Tourists can choose from a wide selection of Greater Paris experiences, discovering the area and meeting residents on **tours and walks, at workshops, on cruises, and engaging in water sports activities**, etc.

The aim is not only to develop this tourist destination's image but also to **increase tourism flows from the centre of Paris to the capital's suburban districts and towns** – which are all easily accessible by public transport - and to promote these areas and their tourist attractions.

The platform also offers professionals an **effective booking tool** that has substantially simplified their everyday work. This system has helped tourism boards to develop even **closer relations with local stakeholders**.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Val-de-Marne Tourism Board with 7 other partners
- **Location:** Greater Paris - France



Policy recommendations

to enhance tourism product development and more socially responsible marketing

1. AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR INNOVATION AND NEW BUSINESS MODELS

Innovation in tourism is an underdeveloped topic in terms of infrastructure, competencies, resources, sustainability and sustainable product solutions. Covid-19 will further accelerate the need for innovation and digital transformation. Governments and destinations will have to call upon innovators and entrepreneurs to put forward new solutions to foster innovation, help the tourism sector recover from Covid-19, and to capitalize on the new opportunities it presents for river tourism.

2. THE TIME HAS COME FOR MORE UNIQUE RIVER EXPERIENCES

Next to the already-established boat tours, riverbank festivals, hiking and biking routes, museums, etc., there exists a significant potential for developing more local, authentic, inclusive and more boutique (smaller, premium) river experiences along the river and in the hinterland. Offers developed close to the river, such as coffee shops, bakeries, street food corners, arts shops, etc. are also very important, when it comes to increasing the attractiveness of the river's ambience. There is also a strong need for more sustainable models and circular economy solutions.

3. PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS START WITH AN ALIGNMENT OF VISION AND VALUES

While public-private partnership is not the right tool for every scenario, the strategic use of these partnerships can contribute significantly to the development of sustainable river tourism programmes, and can be a part of a broader strategy to accelerate and facilitate tourist access, infrastructure, marketing, and to improve the attractiveness of the river destination experience. Any investment in river tourism requires a strong commitment from the public authorities in terms of smooth administrative procedures. It also falls to DMOs to support private tourism providers in the promotion of their products, using the destinations' own marketing and communication tools. However, it all starts with the cohesion of vision and values.

4. THERE IS NO RIVER TOURISM WITHOUT RIVER LANDSCAPE ACCESSIBILITY

When establishing new tourist attractions and products along the river or promoting events on riverbanks, we need to make sure that these places are connected to public transport links, or provide green transport options. A mobility option can work as a product in itself. Accessibility can also be understood in terms of how products are made more attractive and accessible digitally, and whether they reach younger target groups.

5. TARGETED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT TO ENABLE BETTER MANAGEMENT OF VISITOR FLOWS AND GUARANTEE NATURE PROTECTION

With many destinations struggling with high visitations numbers (despite the pandemic), alternative destinations should be developed to decrease the environmental and social impact on certain key destinations or on the river itself. More active work managing tourism flows should be done by DMOs – through sustainable product development, accessibility via public transport, the promotion of soft mobility options (hiking and biking, slow tourism activities such as bird watching, etc.), and also developing products in off-season.

6. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION TO BECOME MORE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE AND ENGAGING

Better management of river tourism needs to go hand-in-hand with better marketing. It is not only a matter of joining up fragmented approaches and resources, and developing stronger river brands; more socially responsible marketing is of equal concern. Marketing needs to be communicating the green river pledges and targeting more responsible visitors, who want to make a positive difference to the local community they visit. All stakeholders must align their stories, values and vision towards appreciating rivers as green lifelines of the region.



Governance & Cooperation

Rivers are a common good and should be managed through strong partnerships, with a strong commitment not only to management, but stewardship of these delicate ecosystems.

River tourism involves a **complex network of stakeholders**, as well as different local authorities and management systems. All STAR Cities partners' regions share a common challenge: **how to bring together key stakeholders and engage them through a joint strategy**, working towards a common goal and vision – managing river tourism in the best and most sustainable possible way. Cooperation with various stakeholders coming from public, private, and non-governmental sectors, as well as cross-sectorial collaboration, are crucial in this process.

LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICES

STAR Cities partners' current state of play show there are strong and established partners in river governance and river tourism management, but the systems are often fragmented. The river is in majority not positioned strategically in partners' governance models. The substantial complexity of river legislation and governance (monitoring, preservation, enhancement of the river and floodplains, navigation regimes, tourism) further adds to this challenge. River tourism is integrated into local tourism strategies, but rarely prioritised. There are no joint development or marketing strategies for rivers as a whole (the river, the riverbank and the hinterland).

Furthermore, rivers are not developed and positioned as brands. Tourist offers often end at the district border.

Good practices in joint strategies and actions show the efficiency of bottom-up approaches, which over time grow into long-term partnerships and strategies. However, dependency on a project-led approach represents a challenge (providing quick wins but with a lack of stability versus long-term structures). Self-sustainable models are scarce.

The SAGE Marne Confluence (Val-de-Marne) is a good example how different stakeholders, including citizens, can work together to ensure the balanced and sustainable management of water resources. The **Agenda Tevere** (in the Lazio Region) is also a showcase of how to work together as a hub of associations and individual citizens, as a catalyst for change vis-à-vis policy makers, collaboration and shared responsibility.

Another display of the importance of good organisational structure is the **Regional Destination Organization of Central Slovenia Region** (Ljubljana), where 26 municipalities have been working together as one tourist destination through a strong platform of regional tourist destination organisation, all sharing one

vision and contributing to the budget.

But joint strategies can also start with joint projects. The partnership agreement in the **Joint action plan implemented by Marne river DMOs** (Val-de-Marne) was a great kick-starter for developing common activities along the river Marne. **Kurs Elbe** (Hamburg) is one of the projects that has successfully transformed cooperation into sustainable working structures. It shows how cross-border cooperation between tourist destination marketing organisations can work, with a permanent office, joint marketing for boat trips, cross-border package deals, etc.

Elbe-Cycle-Route (Hamburg) is a testament to how having a single clear objective (1,300 km of a cycling route) proves helpful in bringing together two countries, four coordination bodies, seven states, dozens of administrative districts, and hundreds of tourism providers, all under one brand name. The **Nautical Trails label** (Paris Region-Val-de-Marne), in which all the stakeholders took part by collectively paddling along the river route, shows the importance of collaboration. **The Vltava, a river full of experiences** (NECSTouR - South and Central Bohemian Tourist Boards) introduces the river to visitors in all its beauty as a single, attractive tourist destination.

The **Day-trip Tourism Campaign** (Hamburg) shows that when it comes to day trips, competition within a region can be overcome and that cooperation between the city center and peripheral areas is a win-win. The **Barjanka Cycling Race** (Ljubljana) unites sport, tourism, culture, nature, and education in a cross-sector cooperation which includes the local community.



Kurs Elbe - Hamburg to Wittenberge

Six tourism regions along the Elbe have joined forces to collaboratively develop tourism along the Elbe.

The objective of Kurs Elbe is to **develop the Elbe's hidden potential**. The participants jointly drive the development forward. Kurs Elbe started in 2011 as a project of the Hamburg Metropolitan Region and was mainly funded by its regional funds. **Since 2017 it has been financed by the regional partners.**

The targets of the project are: **strengthening tourism in the rural areas** along the Elbe, **increasing tourism revenue**, creating a **network of tourism stakeholders**, **improving the tourist offer** on and along the river, and **increasing the visibility** of the products through joint marketing activities.

One result of the project is **"The Elbe Festival"**, a diverse programme taking place on both sides of the Elbe with live music and colourful markets, offering abundant fun and entertainment for both young and old.

Kurs Elbe also took part in the **"Cultural Landscape Routes"** project of Hamburg Metropolitan Region **presenting landscapes through audio stories**. For Kurs Elbe, the little drop of water **ENNI** goes on a discovery tour along the Elbe. A total of 20 facilities, sights and adventure locations are visited. The aim is to disseminate information about water, the river Elbe, and experiences and offers in a simple and effective way.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Flusslandschaft Elbe GmbH
- **Location:** Elbe area from Hamburg to Wittenberge, Germany

This cooperative project shows how a joint commitment can shape the presentation of a rural area and help to develop tourism potentials. This project can **encourage other regions to think beyond their own borders and join forces** to promote their tourism offers.



Agenda Tevere

[Agenda Tevere Onlus](#) is an association of NGOs and citizens that aims to collaboratively retrain the urban trait of Tiber River.

Agenda Tevere was created in March 2017 based on the experience of the **Central Park Conservancy Organization** which designed the well-known park that became a symbol of New York and also a model for a new approach to institutions.

The main goals of Agenda Tevere is to **reclaim the Tiber river by revitalizing it through the setting-up of new initiatives** supporting the main authorities concerned (the Lazio Region and the City of Rome) and **establish a new bottom-up working approach involving civil society** in projects of river regeneration.

Its promoters define Agenda Tevere as an **“Accelerator of change, collaboration and shared assumption of responsibility”** that immediately started to **implement the first “prototype” interventions** with the contribution of private sponsors, such as the “Tiberis Beach”.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Agenda Tevere Onlus
- **Location:** Rome and Lazio Region, Italy

Agenda Tevere has also worked with the “dedicated offices” of the Municipality and the Region in order to design and implement increasingly demanding interventions in the middle term, to finally **create a model for a change** of gear, approach and dynamics – one that would be able to initiate processes of territory regeneration, as well as espousing the long-term goal of building spaces for innovators.

In this way, Agenda Tevere has been promoting the **“River Contracts”** throughout the entire Lazio Region, as a **tool for revitalizing the rivers by involving territorial associations, local institutions, and citizens**. They promoted the **convergence on a Declaration of Intent for the Tiber River Contract from Castel Giubileo to Foce** by all public administrations competent in the governance of the Tiber.





Policy recommendations

to increase efficiency of river tourism management and enhance cooperation

1. RIVERS SHOULD BE BETTER POSITIONED STRATEGICALLY IN GOVERNANCE MODELS

There is a strong need for better strategic positioning of rivers in governance models and better coordination between different DMOs about river tourism policies, river tourism product development, brand identity and marketing activities. Post-pandemic time is the right time to re-think strategies, join forces and to better position rivers within strategic frameworks.

2. RIVERS NEED FOCUSED & COOPERATIVE RIVER TOURISM STRATEGIES

STAR Cities partners, in the majority, believe that joint and well-prepared river tourism strategies (stretching across several municipalities and administrative entities) would contribute to better river tourism development, management and marketing. In cases where such strategies are deemed not to be necessary, partners still believe that they should at least consider finding a way of unifying approaches between different DMOs. The challenging question still remains: do we really need a river tourism strategy, or just a better promotion of river tourism in our general strategy? Focusing on one clear objective/product/theme in joint strategies and actions is helpful in enhancing the commitment and cooperation of stakeholders.

3. BUILD TRUST: FIRST THROUGH PILOT ACTIONS, THEN MOVE TO STRATEGIES

Cooperation between DMOs works! But DMOs need to be reassured and have a trusting relationship in order to implement a joint strategy. STAR Cities partners agree that a good way to move forward, in the beginning, is to work on joint pilot actions – to test collaboration and build trust – and then, subsequently, to move on with joint strategies. Pilot actions can prove successful in convincing stakeholders to move to bigger and more formal structures.

4. RIVERS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME TOURIST DESTINATIONS

At present, rivers are not developed and promoted as a brand – different DMOs include rivers into their activities in different ways – but STAR Cities partners think they should consider to brand them or at least to unify DMOs' branding and marketing approaches in the process. The river (and the hinterland offers) should be considered as a tourist destination in its own right, and not only part of individual territories. This raises the question of whether it is possible to promote a river as a brand without making the identity of each DMO disappear.

5. PROJECTS THAT COME FROM RESIDENTS OR WORK FOR THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE ARE THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Involvement of local residents is a key success factor and good practices show that initiatives coming from communities can be more effective in the long run than those coming from local authorities. The need for more resilient and sustainable models and solutions, which work locally, has been increased with the pandemic.

6. THE EVOLVING ROLES OF DMOs - FROM MARKETING TO MANAGEMENT

The roles of DMOs have been shifting in recent years, mainly due to overtourism, but this has been intensified even further with the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. Destination marketing is becoming destination management. DMOs must now dedicate more time to developing sustainable products, directing visitor flows, managing caring capacities, using new technologies to help accelerate green transformation, cooperating with a wide network of stakeholders, and - last but not least - to winning the political support of local authorities in the first place.



Environment & Sustainability

Rivers are the lifelines of river cities and should be the showcases of environment protection and sustainable development for tourism use

River tourism has the potential to **turn rivers and their hinterland into a sustainable economic and social asset**. Through tourism, rivers can be utilized as an engine for regional development, **improving the city's connectivity with rural areas**, acting as a mode of transport, and as a means of **protecting unique ecosystems and biodiversity**. Finally, they can **improve people's quality of life** – but only when managed in a sustainable way. Furthermore, sustainable river tourism can work as tool for promoting more responsible behaviour from residents and visitors.

Tourism (Slovenia) is a showcase for how a nationwide approach with a widely recognized vision of green boutique Slovenia and an internationally recognised set of sustainable criteria can bring together destinations and service providers in a process which makes tourism operations more sustainable. Meanwhile, *Ljubljana as the European Green Capital 2016* endorses the importance of internationally acclaimed awards that also serve as a tool for ambitious goals for further environmental improvement and sustainable development.

Learning from good practices

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE MODELS

STAR Cities partners noted that there is a lack of sustainable approaches in governance models as well as in river tourism management. Sustainability is not central to local tourism strategies, and overarching sustainable river tourism strategies do not exist. There is a strong need for actionable models that would accelerate and promote sustainable practices.

To this purpose, the **Green Scheme of Slovenian**

SUSTAINABLE RIVER MOBILITY

Many peripheral areas along the rivers are not connected by public transport. Rivers need to be viewed as a means of sustainable mobility, and of daily commuting. It is equally necessary to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to greener solutions in river transport (for both urban mobility and the transport of merchandise).

Au fil de l'eau boat trips and shuttle services (Val-de-Marne) are not only a greener river shuttle option, but they also engage and help unemployed people to integrate into the social and economic life, by

doing riverbanks maintenance works, organising boat cruises and other activities to promote environmental awareness along the river Marne.

TOURISM IN RELATION TO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

There is a need for the active management and measurement of the environmental as well as the social impacts of tourism, through caring capacity models, smart management of tourist flows, and new information technologies. Without this tourism cannot be a positive force. The future will be green and digital, so we also need to promote new innovative digital solutions across the sector.

Haute Ile Nature Park – Natura 2000 site (Val-de-Marne) is a great example of how to observe unique wetlands of fauna and flora in a responsible way, adhering to the highest environmental standards, whereas – at a cultural level – the river research platform **UPYNÈS – TĖKA platform** (Kaunas) offers an innovative virtual tool for the collection and archiving of memory concerning the rivers, streams, and riverbanks of the Kaunas region.

EVENTS TO CELEBRATE THE RIVER AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Events have proven to be a great tool to attract people to a certain river area. However, despite strong and well-established traditional events along the partners' rivers, events often bring pressure to bear upon a certain spot (also transport-wise), but do not promote wider river territories. High numbers of visitors in bigger-scale

events are not sustainable, and any positive outcomes are not long-lasting.

The **organisation of big cultural walks as events to discover the territory** (Val-de-Marne) successfully addresses two of the challenges: firstly, it promotes walking as the perfect way to visit and discover delicate river ecosystems, and secondly, it promotes a wider territory. Another good practice, **Let's Celebrate the River** (Kaunas 2022), is an inspiration, since it's not just an event, but a community festival, aiming to develop the dialogue between sustainable river tourism forms and activities.



Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism

A [national tool](#) for the development of sustainable tourism in destinations and tourism businesses operating under the brand Slovenia Green.

The GSST works as a quality certificate used to indicate the **fulfilment of a wide range of requirements related to sustainable tourism**. It is based on globally established criteria: Destinations are assessed according to the **Green Destinations Standard**, recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council; while businesses must obtain one of the international certificates recognized by the Scheme.

The GSST is owned and managed by the **Slovenian Tourist Board**, while the Factory of Sustainable Tourism Goodplace is an accredited partner with a licence to make assessments using the Green Destinations Standard and provides support. Since 2015, the scheme has **more than 150 holders of the Slovenia Green certificate**.

Slovenia's top Green Destination is **Ljubljana**. **With its river the Ljubljanica, this city as a case study addresses the field of river tourism development**. Due to the scheme's success, Slovenia was ranked as the **Best in Europe** among **The World's Top 10 Sustainable Destinations 2018**, and awarded the National Geographic Destinations Leadership Award.

The Scheme presents a tried and tested process, specifically designed to meet all the needs of destinations and businesses, desiring more sustainable development. It is developed as a **holistic and developmental programme** so it can act as a good learning case for national tourism organisations.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Slovenian Tourist Board
- **Location:** Slovenia

SLOVENIA GREEN



Au fil de l'eau boat trips and shuttle services

A social programme working on environmental fields and contributing to both soft mobility and valorisation of natural heritage of rivers

[Au Fil de l'Eau](#) is an NGO working in both social and environmental fields. Au fil de l'eau employs poor and long-term unemployed people from Val-de-Marne to help them in their social and economic integration. The employees maintain riverbanks, and organise boat cruises and other activities to promote environmental awareness along the Marne and Seine rivers.

Each weekend from May until the end of September, Au Fil de l'Eau provides a **shuttle service to cross the river** in several places, using small ecological boats (12 passengers maximum and some bikes). This service is used both by **commuters and visitors**. It is integrated in the **soft mobility** facilities of the territory and is a good asset for **multimodality** and enhanced connectivity with public transport.

Au Fil de l'Eau also offer **boat trips to discover the natural heritage of the Marne river**. These small river cruises (1:30 maximum) are commented to enhance the biodiversity and raise awareness of the public for environment protection. Comments are sometimes done by the reintegrated employees as a training for animation skills in the tourism fields.

The boats used are small catamarans called "catalantes". Although they are not electric, they are nevertheless **environmentally friendly** because they do not disturb the riverbanks (generating no waves, being quiet, etc.)

Au fil de l'eau activities are **strongly supported by local authorities** at regional, county, and city levels. This financial support is essential to implement the social programme and ensure accessibility with very low prices for users and visitors.

Key facts

- **Implemented by** Au fil de l'eau NGO
- **Location:** Marne and Seine rivers in Eastern Paris, France



Policy recommendations

to support and accelerate development of sustainable river tourism

1. SUSTAINABILITY IS TO BECOME THE NEW NORM

We consider that the development of sustainable forms of river tourism is not only essential for the long-term viability of this economic sector, but is also the only way to achieve a more environmentally and socially sustainable, climate smart, and resilient industry, across its supply chain. Tourism is taking more and more action to become more sustainable, but there is still a long way to go. A strategy/road map for sustainable transition of river tourism is needed, supported by investments in green infrastructure, more sustainable business models and products, and clearly defined sustainability standards.

2. HOLISTIC SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT NOT ENOUGH

We believe that sustainable actions start with a clear vision and a holistic sustainable strategic framework. But it is vital that these are supported with good operating models and actionable policies that direct and accelerate sustainable actions across the sector. In order to be able to develop rivers in a sustainable way, cross-border cooperation across different municipalities and governing bodies along the river is essential. Furthermore, there is a strong need for a dialogue between governing bodies responsible for

nature/water protection and tourism organisations. Good practices show the importance of starting with small, “pragmatic” projects and building up – but following a clear vision from the start.

3. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM NEEDS TO BENEFIT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

In the years of rapid growth, we have somehow missed measuring success according to the attitudes and sentiments of the local population concerning tourism. We have mostly focused on visitor numbers, revenues and tourist satisfaction. The local resident has to be at the core of sustainable (river) tourism and sustainable tourist products must primarily benefit local people.

4. SUSTAINABLE RIVER MOBILITY MUST BE AT THE HEART OF SUSTAINABLE RIVER TOURISM

Sustainable mobility is a key factor in developing a river in a sustainable way. Furthermore, it significantly helps in promoting more responsible practices. There is an urgent need to make sustainable mobility an integral part of all sustainable river strategies (and beyond) and to develop public-private sustainable mobility models, which will accelerate a transformation from fossil-fuel boats to greener options. Furthermore, we need to integrate different modes of transport into user-

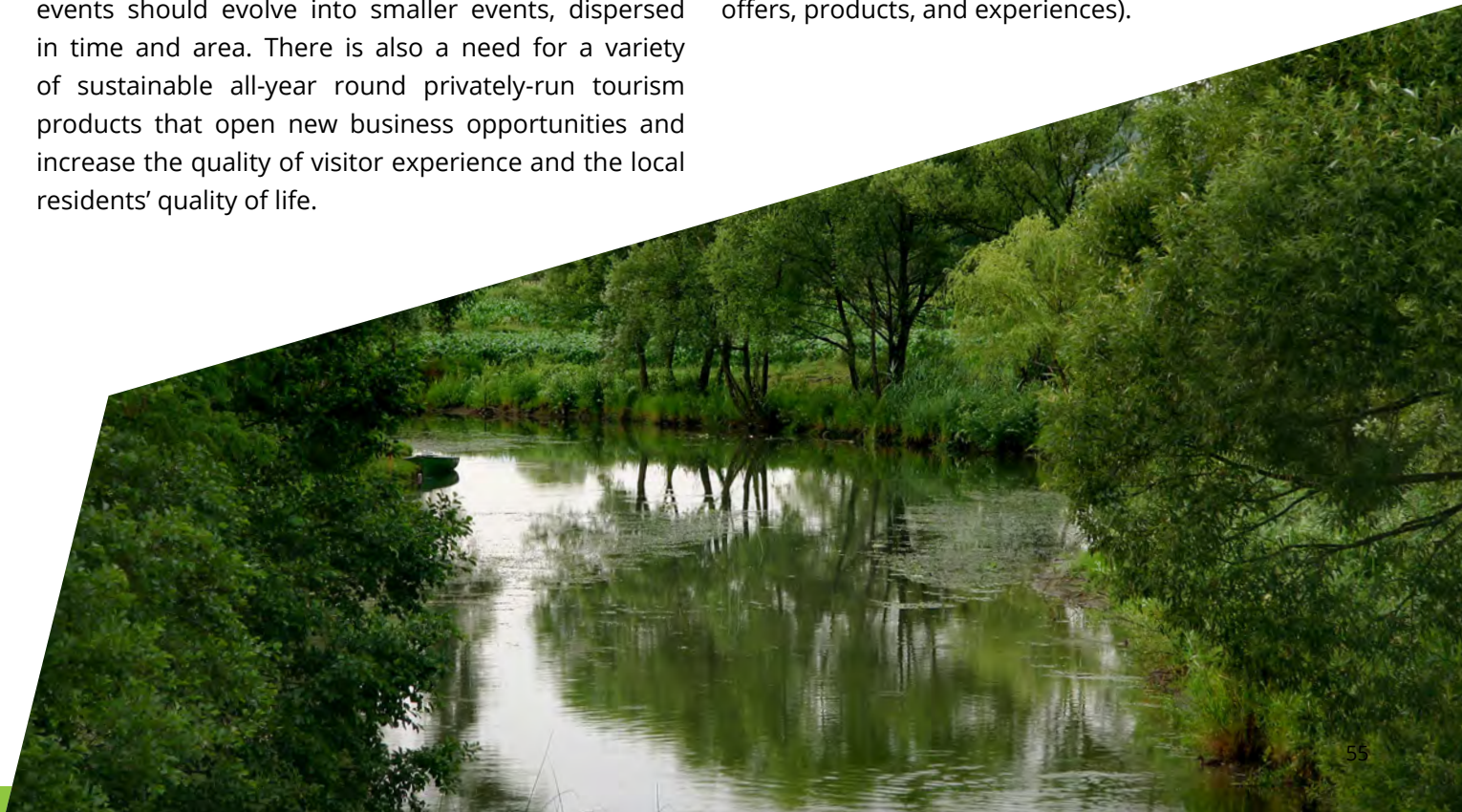
friendly one-ticket (digitalised) models. It is vital to have in mind that transport options also serve the needs of locals and not only tourists. In many destinations, this has proven to be a decisive factor of success and sustainability of the mobility projects in the long run.

5. A BALANCED MIX OF EVENTS AND ALL-YEAR ROUND TOURISM PRODUCTS IS ESSENTIAL

Events have proven to have a very important role in raising awareness about the importance of environment and heritage protection. They are especially important for testing ideas that can gradually develop into more long-term and sustainable products, with more added value for local communities. Zero waste events standards should be applied and preferably bigger events should evolve into smaller events, dispersed in time and area. There is also a need for a variety of sustainable all-year round privately-run tourism products that open new business opportunities and increase the quality of visitor experience and the local residents' quality of life.

6. IT'S AN IMPERATIVE TO PROVIDE MORE SUSTAINABLE OPTIONS

Covid-19 has brought a significant change in the lifestyle of hundreds of millions of people across Europe and the globe and travel priorities have changed radically. Recovery will be uneven. Travel will become more inclusive and smaller communities will play a bigger role. The pandemic has shown how important it is for people to have access to open spaces and to nature. River cities with abundant green spaces along the rivers and easy accessibility from the cities to the countryside can benefit from these shifts, but this also means we will have to be better in managing these flows (generated by residents and visitors) and providing more sustainable options (including new offers, products, and experiences).



Conclusion

More than ever, STAR Cities partners believe that river tourism development is a real opportunity for European cities to create innovative solutions for sustainable tourism development.

The Covid-19 epidemic deeply impacted tourism activities in a negative way all over Europe and particularly in urban destinations as STAR Cities regions. Many people are looking for ways to spend their leisure time and/or holidays outside crowded cities in a natural environment. The trend to balance city tourism more evenly between touristic hotspots (mostly in the centers) and less frequented area points seems to be the right direction and might also be a chance for further river tourism development.

STAR Cities learning programme have been particularly helpful for project partners to enrich their recovery strategy, support local stakeholders and guide policymakers in the way of a more sustainable tourism using rivers as an opportunity for territorial development.

After 3 years of cooperation, exchange of experiences and exciting discussions, STAR Cities partners are now implementing actions inspired by other regions and look forward to continuing this partnership in the future.



Riverside Cities European Network

Some of the STAR Cities partners are also members of the Riverside Cities European network, bringing together local regions that wish to develop or revitalise recreational activities along rivers or waterways in urban environments.

Learn more: www.riversidecities.eu

The STAR Cities learning phase summarised in 24 challenges for river tourism development

1	Engagement of locals starts with the reappropriation of riverbanks
2	Keeping the memory of the rivers' history alive helps to strengthen the storytelling potential of riverside destinations
3	As institutions or public bodies, adopt bottom-up approaches by involving citizens
4	Turn locals into active stakeholders to increase the positive reception of tourism
5	Think small and start with small-scale events carried out on a voluntary basis for more sustainable tourism
6	Tourism is becoming increasingly local!
7	An absolute necessity for innovation and new business models
8	The time has come for more unique river experiences
9	Public-private partnerships start with an alignment of vision and values
10	There is no river tourism without river landscape accessibility
11	Targeted product development to enable better management of visitor flows and guarantee nature protection
12	Marketing and communication to become more socially responsible and engaging
13	Rivers should be better positioned strategically in governance models
14	Rivers need focused & cooperative river tourism strategies
15	Build trust: first through pilot actions, then move to strategies
16	Rivers have the potential to become tourist destinations
17	Projects that come from residents or work for them in the first place are the key to success
18	The evolving roles of DMOs – from marketing to management
19	Sustainability is to become the new norm
20	Holistic sustainable strategic frameworks are important, but not enough
21	Sustainable tourism needs to benefit local communities
22	Sustainable river mobility must be at the heart of sustainable river tourism
23	A balanced mix of events and all-year round tourism products is essential
24	It's an imperative to provide more sustainable options

Concluding remarks from the project officers

European cooperation projects involve, above all, the personal engagement of partners and human encounters. To conclude this guide, we wanted to give a voice to those who have worked on this project every day since its launch in 2018.



Camille Chowah, Val-de-Marne Tourism Board: We started this project with a great desire to get to know other European territories and learn from their own experiences in river tourism development. Despite the Covid-19 crisis that prevented us from “real” meetings for 2 years, we succeeded in establishing a dialogue and exchange that will enrich our own local policies and, hopefully, lead us to new cooperative projects in the future.

Viltė Migonytė – Petrulienė, Kaunas 2022: All these years have been full of active learning and the sharing of good practices and tools as well as challenges, among all STAR Cities partners. In this rich journey, beyond the invaluable experiences inherent in it, our most important achievement has been establishing a brave and wise dialogue, strengthening the feeling that Kaunas, like other European cities, has the opportunity to participate in transformative processes.



Elisabetta Romano, Municipality IX of Rome: The STAR Cities project was developed at a time when the City of Rome was resuming work on the redevelopment of the Tiber to make it liveable after many years of neglect. The experiences learned from the project have given us ideas to improve our interventions and to propose new ones. The creation of an urban beach called “Tiberis”, and the proposal for the first DMO on the Tiber, are examples of these.



Alessandro Drago, Lazio Region: The STAR Cities project took place during a very important phase for the Lazio Region, characterized by an experimental launch of policies for the enhancement of its rivers, increasing their attractiveness and thus their potential as tourist attractions. The Regional Law on River Contracts made it possible to finance target projects, enabling the exchange of good practices for setting up river tourism.

Nataša Mršol, Ljubljana Urban Region: The exchange of knowledge and experiences among project partners and our stakeholders, the sharing of good practices on different themes within tourism development, and sharing evidence of successes, what went well and what did not work out and the reasons behind this – all of these aspects of the STAR Cities project were of great value to me, to the RRA LUR team and our region.



Tanja Blätter, Hamburg Metropolitan Region: STAR Cities inspired us to broaden our view beyond our own horizons and learn from the experience of other regions in Europe. We already have quite a diversified touristic offer along the Elbe, but there is still a lot to learn and a great potential – especially if we want to develop a more sustainable and coordinated tourism along the river. Thanks to STAR Cities, we had the chance to get first-hand insights into other regions' projects and to meet the great people behind them.

Thomas Guillot, Network of European Regions for Competitive and Sustainable Tourism: After this difficult period for the tourism sector, STAR Cities is more than ever proving sustainably is the way forward for the tourism of tomorrow. The efficient switch towards an all-online framework permitted STAR Cities to easily enlarge the scope of the project through the participation of NECSTouR member regions in the attendance, of course, but also in the exchange of knowledge.





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The STAR Cities Good Practices Guide is the result of three years of cooperation and exchange of experiences about river tourism development. This document presents the main outcomes of the project learning programme and a selection of good practices from all project partners.

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