

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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MYSTICAL DANUBE

Action plan

**Ipoly Valley & Börzsöny
Region**

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Introduction

Goal and situation overview

The action plan aims to provide a common strategic framework for the sustainable development of the Börzsöny–Ipoly region, with particular emphasis **on the protection of natural values, the preservation of cultural heritage**, and the development of **slow, responsible, and conscious community-based tourism**. The document was prepared to provide clear guidance to the settlements, organizations, and professional actors in the region on how to respond to the challenges that have already been identified and what development opportunities are worth pursuing jointly.

The background analyses – in particular the SWOT and territorial situation analyses – identified several problem areas that require coordinated strategic action:

- **fragmented, less known tourism offerings**, with varying capacities and visitor numbers in each settlement capacities and visitor traffic,
- **lack of a unified regional brand and digital presence**,
- **accessibility and transport difficulties** in several settlements (e.g. Upper Ipoly region, poor rail access),
- **underutilized or outdated tourism infrastructure**,
- **the existence of sensitive natural areas** that are highly exposed to the effects of climate change (water shortages, forest fires, habitat degradation)
- **lack of an organization coordinating the region's tourism offerings**, which would represent service providers as a "host" and have the power to assert their interests

In response to all of the above, the purpose of this document is to:

Setting a strategic direction

A development path based on a long-term vision that takes into account the preservation of natural and cultural values, cooperation between settlements, and the strengthening of community participation.

Laying the foundations for the development of sustainable tourism

International trends and research clearly support the view that sustainable tourism trends, such as closeness to nature, slowing down, health awareness, connecting with locals, local experiences, and local products, will play a fundamental role in the behavior of future travelers. Based on an analysis of local supply and demand and the results of the workshops, it is clear that the goal in the Ipoly Valley region is not to

to increase the volume of tourism in the Ipoly Valley region, but **to ensure a high-quality, slow, value-based experience that fits in with the natural character of the region.**

Activating cultural heritage

Local myths – the Börzsöny bandit, Sisa Pista, the Danube monster – as well as Drégely Castle and the Palóc cultural heritage are unique elements that lend themselves to exciting, modern interpretations.

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Strengthening nature conservation priorities

Based on the professional guidelines of the Danube-Ipoly National Park and Ipoly Erdő Zrt., the action plan supports the preservation of ecological integrity, habitat management, water retention, and the strengthening of landscape resilience.

Promoting cooperation between settlements and sectors

The basis for regional development is that municipalities, civil and economic actors, tourism service providers, religious and nature conservation institutions jointly shape future directions.

Formulation of concrete, feasible development proposals

The action plan works with practical, SMART objectives that can be directly incorporated into development programs, tenders, and partnership initiatives.

Involvement of stakeholders

The action plan was developed on the basis of broad partnership cooperation. The actors in the region came from different sectors, institutions, and communities and jointly contributed to the assessment of the situation, the definition of strategic objectives, and the development of a vision for the future.

Involvement took place on several occasions and in several forms, including the **June meeting in Ipolytölgyes** and the

July workshops in Diósjenő, which were decisive in clarifying the content of the action plan.

The following groups constitute the most important stakeholders in the Börzsöny–Ipoly region:

Local governments

The local actors' knowledge of the area, development experience, and infrastructure responsibilities were fundamental to the process.

Participating municipalities:

Szob

Ipolydamásd

Letkés

Ipolytölgyes

Vámosmikola

Perócsény
Kemence
Tésa
Bernecebaráti
Hont Ipolyvece
Dejtár
Ipolyszög
Nagyoroszi
Diósjenő
Borsosberény
Drégelypalánk
Patak

Local governments primarily identified service gaps, infrastructure problems (accessibility, deficiencies in tourism infrastructure, and online and offline visibility), community needs, and long-term development directions.

Examples of community needs in the region:

- Ipolytölgyes: There is a strong demand for barrier-free tourist routes and services that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Perócsény: Locals consider improving the accessibility of the region and better signage for hiking trails to be urgent development priorities.
- Nagyörzsöny: There is a need to better showcase cultural heritage sites (e.g., local mills, monuments) and to develop municipal information platforms.
- Diósjenő: The local community wants to develop the cultural content of the local museum and create safe, well-marked and visitor-friendly nature trails connected to the settlement.

Civil organizations and community groups

The civil network in the region plays a key role in the preservation of cultural heritage, nature conservation, and community tourism. Based on the workshops, the following active players can be identified in the sample area:

- **Palóc Út Association** (cultural route development),
- **Börzsöny Nature Park Association** (protection of landscape and natural values),
- local heritage protection groups (e.g. Drégely Castle Friends),

- eco-NGOs (e.g. Börzsöny Nature Lovers and Mountaineering Association, Börzsöny Foundation, Sugárkankalin Tourism Association,
- traditional communities, storytellers, local historians.

Civil society actors played an important role in strengthening local identity, passing on cultural values, and increasing community activity.

Nature conservation and environmental actors

The area is particularly sensitive from a nature conservation perspective, as it is partly a national park, so the involvement of nature conservation actors and ongoing consultation with them was particularly important.

Key stakeholders:

- **Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate,**
- **Ipoly Forest Ltd.**

They ensured the accurate exploration of landscape and ecological values, the identification of vulnerable areas, and the determination of development directions from a nature conservation perspective.

Small and medium-sized enterprises, local economic

The local economy is driven by micro and family businesses that are directly linked to tourism, local production, and craft activities.

Examples:

- beekeepers, cheese makers, woodworking craftsmen,
- rural guesthouse and bed and breakfast operators,
- gastronomic entrepreneurs (e.g., chili sauce makers, fermented beverage masters),
- local markets and manufacturers, local producers (e.g., Omama ice wine, Natura Hill fermented products)

This group of actors is strongly interested in sustainable tourism economic models.

Church institutions

The region has a significant religious heritage:

- **Pálos Monastery in Márianosztra,**
- **Nagybörzsöny, Szob and the parishes of the surrounding villages.**

The importance of church actors is evident in the preservation of cultural and historical values and their interpretation for tourism.

Tourism service providers

They shape the region's experience structure:

- **narrow-gauge railways:** Kemence Forest Railway, Királyrét Forest Railway, Nagybörzsöny Valley lines,
- rural information offices,
- tour guides, event organizers,
- riding stables and equestrian tourism providers,
- water tour organizers on the Ipoly
- other tourism service providers (tour organizers and gastronomic experiences, e.g., Ezer Fű-Fa-Virág)

Educational and youth institutions

The region's educational institutions and youth centers play a key role in environmental education and natural identity:

- local primary and secondary schools,
- forest schools (e.g., Kemence, Királyrét),
- youth camps.

Transport and forestry operators

In terms of landscape accessibility, forest management, and infrastructure operation:

- **Ipoly Erdő Zrt.,**
- **MÁV** regional lines,

Border (Slovak) partners

Due to joint developments in the Ipoly Valley, the involvement of the Slovak side is essential:

- settlements on the other side of the Ipoly (e.g. **Malý Kamenec, Čebovce**),
- Slovak civil organizations, churches, cultural groups,
- regional development and tourism partners.

The role of workshops

Key steps in stakeholder involvement:

- **June 2025 workshop – Ipolytölgyes**
- **July 2025 workshop – Diósjenő**

These workshops laid the foundations for the strategic directions and the content of specific actions.

Vision and strategic goals

The vision for the future of the Börzsöny–Ipoly region is determined by the common values formulated at the workshops, the results of territorial analyses, and the specific characteristics of the cultural and natural heritage. The participants formulated a vision for a region that preserves the tranquility and natural character of the countryside while being open to the development of responsible and community-based tourism.

Vision

"A quiet, livable, close-to-nature, and culturally diverse region where responsible, slow, and inclusive tourism serves to strengthen the landscape values and local communities."

The vision is based on the following main pillars:

1. Preservation and restoration of natural values

Protecting the Börzsöny volcanic mountain range and the floodplain ecosystems of the Ipoly Valley is fundamental. The goal is tourism and development that does not overburden fragile habitats, but supports their ecological stability in the long term.

2. Activating cultural and symbolic heritage

The identity of the region is defined by local legends and stories (the Börzsöny bandit, Sisa Pista, the Danube monster), Drégely Castle, and the Palóc cultural heritage. These narratives give the region a strong, unique tourist character.

3. Community-based and responsible tourism

The region aims to develop a tourism model that benefits locals and offers visitors a value- and experience-based approach — not mass tourism, but conscious presence.

4. Reception and accessibility

The creation of services and routes accessible to blind, disabled, mentally disabled, and elderly visitors is a priority, with particular regard to the integration of the institution in Ipolytölgyes.

5. Regional and cross-border cooperation

Strengthening cooperation between municipalities and partners on the Slovak side is essential for the region to become a genuine, coherent tourist destination.

Strategic objectives

In order to realize this vision, the action plan sets out the following strategic objectives, which also form the basis for the subsequent chapters of the document and the specific measures of the action plan:

1. Development of sustainable and responsible tourism infrastructure

Modernization and networking of routes (walking, cycling, horse riding, rowing), rest areas, signage, and information points.

2. Development of storytelling and heritage-based experiences

Presenting the region's unique myths, stories, and cultural heritage in an experiential way.

3. Implementation of inclusive and barrier-free tourism

Physical and informational accessibility, creation of inclusive services.

4. Strengthening and integrating the local product economy into tourism

Organizing local food and handicraft products (apples, ice wine, chili, fermented beverages, herbal products) under a regional brand.

5. Strengthening inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation

Joint tourism platform for 20 municipalities, development of cultural and ecotourism routes with Slovak partners.

6. Protection of natural values and climate adaptation

Habitat management, water retention, maintenance of forest infrastructure in accordance with the guidelines of the Danube-Ipoly National Park and Ipoly Erdő Zrt.

Delimitation and description of the area

The Börzsöny–Ipoly region is one of Hungary's most diverse and valuable natural and cultural border areas. The area consists of **two distinctly different yet complementary landscape units**: the volcanic, forest-covered Börzsöny and the mosaic floodplain-meadow ecosystems along the Ipoly River. The region comprises 20 settlements, which together form the Hungarian pilot area.

The most important settlements in the pilot area are:

- **Kemence, Nagybörzsöny, Szob, Márianosztra, Perócsény, Letkés, Tésa, Ipolytölgyes, Vámosmikola, Drégelypalánk**, as well as other smaller villages in Börzsöny and along the Ipoly River.

The physical geography of the region can be described in terms of the following three main elements:

The Börzsöny Mountains

- is of volcanic origin, densely covered with forests,
- high biodiversity and Natura 2000 areas,
- steep valleys, streams, springs,
- and a system of lookout towers and peaks that are important for tourism (e.g. Csóványos).

The Ipoly River and its valley

- floodplains, backwaters, water-related habitats,
- rich bird life, wetlands,
- river sections suitable for rowing and water tours.

Border settlement belt

- direct connection to the Slovak side (Malý Kamenec, Čebovce, and other villages),
- Ipoly bridges, crossings, small border traffic,
- historical and cultural ties.

The natural environment of the region

The Börzsöny and Ipoly valleys are **highly sensitive ecological areas**, which are described in the background materials as having the following characteristics:

High diversity of animal and plant species

The dense forests of Börzsöny and the wetlands of the Ipoly Valley contain more than twenty different habitat types (forests, swamps, marshes, meadows, riparian forests).

Ecological challenges

The area is vulnerable in several respects:

- water shortages and declining water yields,
- drying stream beds,
- increased fire risk due to climate change,
- decline of floodplain ecosystems.

The ecological protection of the region is coordinated by the **Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate** and **Ipoly Erdő Zrt.**

in cooperation with the local population and nature conservation volunteers.

Historical and cultural environment

The cultural heritage of the region is outstanding, often appearing as living traditions based on local knowledge rather than official sources:

Drégely Castle

One of the iconic sites of Hungarian historical memory, a symbol of steadfastness.

Local myths and legends

- The story of **the Börzsöny bandit** (a narrative of forgiveness),
- **Sisa Pista** as a local folklore figure,
- The legend of **the Danube monster**, which is linked to the mythology of several settlements.

These stories form the basis of the region's unique, exciting tourist character.

Palóc cultural heritage

Folk architecture, traditional clothing, gastronomic traditions, and tales are important elements of the region's identity.

Industrial and agricultural heritage

- Historical mining areas and "landscapes",
- **Nagybörzsöny watermill**,
- narrow-gauge railways: Kemence, Királyrét, Nagybörzsöny.

Transport and accessibility

Problems that regularly arise in the region:

- several settlements **are difficult to reach by public transport**, especially in the mountainous and upper Ipoly regions;
- the railway infrastructure **needs to be made accessible** in several places;
- tourist routes are poorly connected;
- many services are seasonal or not organized systematically.

Based on the workshops, locals and service providers unanimously agreed that
→ without regional cooperation and better mobility infrastructure, tourism will not be sustainable.

General characteristics of the location

The pilot area is characterized by:

- **a quiet, livable rural environment**,
- **untouched nature**,
- **low visitor numbers** (but growing interest),
- **fragmented service system**,
- **extensive local knowledge and cultural richness**,
- **close ties between settlements**,
- **strong identity and living traditions**.

The character of the area as described by participants:

"A peaceful, value-based, sustainable rural area – close to the capital, yet worlds away."

Brief description of target groups and beneficiaries

Visitors to the Börzsöny–Ipoly region and local actors benefiting from the developments are diverse. The region's attributes—its natural environment, cultural heritage, and tranquility—attract both domestic and international visitors, while also creating important economic and social opportunities for local communities.

Visitors

The region attracts visitors who prefer nature experiences, cultural heritage, and slow, responsible tourism:

- **hikers and nature lovers,**
- **cyclists and horse riders,**
- **water tourists on the Ipoly River,**
- **families and visitors with children,**
- **those interested in heritage and culture,**
- **retired people and adults** looking for a peaceful environment.

Particularly important visitor groups:

- **Visitors from Budapest,** for whom the region is quickly and easily accessible, making it an ideal destination for day trips and weekend getaways.
- **Visitors from Slovakia** (across the Ipoly River), for whom the cultural and natural treasures of the border towns are easily accessible.

Stakeholders

The action plan was developed with the involvement of the following groups:

- **local governments** (20 municipalities),
- **civil society organizations, traditional and heritage preservation groups,**
- **nature conservation actors** (Danube-Ipoly National Park, Ipoly Erdő Zrt., local volunteers),
- **tourism service providers** (small railways, horse riding and water tourism service providers, tour guides),
- **cultural and religious institutions** (e.g. Márianosztra Pauline Monastery),
- **educational and youth institutions** (schools, forest schools, camps),
- **local entrepreneurs and producers** (craftsmen and food producers).

Beneficiaries

The development of the region will bring direct or indirect benefits to several social groups.

Direct beneficiaries

- **local residents** and communities, **tourism service providers and hospitality operators**,
- **local producers** (gastronomy, crafts),
- **cultural and heritage institutions**,
- **schools and young people** (through environmental education programs).

Vulnerable social groups whose involvement is particularly important

- **people with disabilities**,
- **Roma population**,
- **women** (especially young women and single mothers),
- **the elderly**,
- **low-income households**.

The aim of the developments is to create **accessible and inclusive services for all social groups** and to ensure that tourism genuinely improves the quality of life in the local area.

SWOT analysis

Summary of current challenges

The development of the Börzsöny–Ipoly region is hampered by several mutually reinforcing factors. The geographical

Its location is favorable, easily accessible from both Budapest and Slovakian settlements, but tourism and local economic performance do not reflect this potential. Based on background documents and workshops, the following main challenges emerge:

- **The tourism offer is fragmented**, there is no unified regional brand or coherently connected service chain.
- **Access is difficult in many places** (especially in the Upper Ipoly region and by rail), which hinders the flow of visitors and the development of tourism.

- **The narrative and heritage elements are not linked**, even though the cultural heritage of the region (legends, Drégely, Palóc traditions) has strong tourism potential.
- The area is characterized by **natural vulnerability**: water shortages, drying streams, climate change stress, and habitat fragmentation.
- **Services are not fully inclusive**, particularly with regard to people with disabilities and disadvantaged social groups.
- **Cooperation between settlements needs to be improved**, as the current relationships and information flow do not ensure a unified tourism approach for the region.
- **The potential of the border region is underutilized**, even though the proximity of Slovakian settlements is a unique advantage.

These challenges together justify the creation of a coordinated, multi-sector action plan.

SWOT - Börzsöny & Ipoly Valley

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Rich natural environment, Natura 2000 habitats.	- Fragmented tourism offering, lack of regional branding.
- Strong cultural and narrative heritage (Drégely Castle, legends, Palóc culture).	- Difficult transport access in certain settlements (e.g. Felső-Ipoly).
- Small railways, mill heritage, historical landscape features.	- Lack of accessibility (rail access, infrastructure).
- Wide range of local products (apple products, ice wine, chili, fermented drinks).	- Underutilized infrastructure (e.g., Drégelypalánki Visitor Center).
- Peaceful, quiet environment, authentic village structure.	- Weak digital presence, limited marketing.

Opportunities	Threats
- Storytelling-based tourism (bandits, Sisa Pista, Danube monster).	- Effects of climate change: water shortage, drought, forest fire risk.
- Development of tourism networks, linking thematic routes.	- Vulnerability of habitats, nature conservation conflicts.
- Strengthening cross-border cooperation with Slovakian settlements.	- Demographic decline, emigration.
- Expansion of ecotourism infrastructure (hiking, cycling, horse riding, rowing).	- Tourist pressure in sensitive areas.
- Development of inclusive, barrier-free tourism.	- Economic uncertainty for small businesses.

Strategic priorities and SMART goals

The development directions for the Börzsöny–Ipoly region are determined by the natural, cultural, social, and tourism challenges identified in the previous chapters. The strategic priorities aim to **bring together and guide** the areas that are most important for sustainable development, strengthening local community strengthening and regional cooperation.

SMART goals related to priorities define specific, measurable, and time-bound results that will guide developments in the coming years.

Strategic Priorities

Priority 1 – Developing responsible and sustainable tourism infrastructure

The goal is to improve, connect, and sustainably develop the infrastructure for hiking, cycling, horseback riding, and water tourism.

Key elements: connecting routes, renovating signage, rest areas, information points, improving access to the banks of the Ipoly River.

Priority 2 – Cultural heritage and storytelling experience development

Tourism activation of the region's unique cultural narrative elements – legends, myths, historical sites.

Key elements: interpretation of Drégely Castle, the story of the Börzsöny bandits, the Danube monster, Palóc heritage, thematic storytelling points.

Priority 3 – Implementing inclusive and accessible tourism

Improving physical, informational, and service accessibility in tourism, with a particular focus on persons with disabilities, Roma communities, women, older persons, and other vulnerable social groups.

Key elements: Accessible routes, services, and communication elements.

Priority 4 – Developing the local product economy and gastronomic culture

Integrating local products – fruit, ice wine, chili, fermented beverages, herbal preparations – into tourism and organizing them into a regional brand.

Key elements: local product routes, markets, workshops, networking of producers.

Priority 5 – Strengthening cooperation between settlements and across borders

Establishing joint tourism initiatives for the 20 municipalities and developing relations with partner municipalities in Slovakia.

Key elements: joint platform, unified communication, joint products, cross-border ecotourism routes.

SMART goals

The SMART objectives support the implementation of the priorities set out above.

SMART goal 1 – Sustainable tourism infrastructure

- **S:** Connecting and developing at least 5 key tourism routes (hiking, cycling, horse riding, water).
- **M:** Signage renewal and infrastructure development at a minimum of 10 locations.
- **A:** In cooperation with municipalities, DINPI and Ipoly Erdő Zrt.
- **R:** Improves visitor experience and local economic activity.
- **T:** Between 2026 and 2028.

SMART goal 2 – Development of heritage and storytelling attractions

- **S:** Creation of 3–5 new thematic storytelling points (e.g., Drégely, bandits, Danube monster).
- **M:** Interactive content, information boards, digital experiences.
- **A:** In cooperation with municipalities + cultural organizations.
- **R:** Strengthens the region's unique tourist identity.
- **T:** 2025–2027.

SMART goal 3 – Inclusive tourism

- **S:** Creation of 2–3 new barrier-free tourist sites.
- **M:** Infrastructure developments, information materials, training.
- **A:** Local governments + Ipolytölgyes institution + civil organizations.
- **A:** Increasing social inclusion in the region.
- **T:** By 2026.

SMART goal 4 – Developing the local product economy

- **S:** Developing a regional "Börzsöny–Ipoly" product profile.

- **M:** Involvement of at least 15–20 producers.
- **A:** In cooperation with producers, entrepreneurs, and civil society actors.
- **R:** Strengthening the local economy and identity.
- **T:** 2025–2027.

SMART goal 5 – Inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation

- **S:** Creation of a joint tourism platform with the participation of 20 municipalities.
- **M:** Preparation of at least 3 cross-border projects.
- **A:** Local governments + SK partners + tourism service providers.
- **A:** The region appears as a unified tourism system.
- **T:** By 2026.

Action plan objectives, measures, and activities

The tables below present the most important pillars of sustainable tourism development in the region.

PRIORITY 1 – Sustainable, responsible tourism infrastructure

Objective

Development and interconnection of hiking trails, ecotourism infrastructure and thematic sites.

Measure 1 – Development and interconnection of ecotourism routes

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Measure m
Connecting pedestrian and bicycle routes in the upper Ipoly region	Municipal , DINPI	2026–2028	Interreg SK–HU, TOP Plus tourism development,	3 new interconnected routes

			local government contribution contribution	
Development of safe, marked access to the Honti Gorge	DINPI, Ipoly Erdő Ltd.	2026	LIFE Nature & Biodiversity, Interreg SK–HU, DINPI own resources, forest infrastructure development development domestic resources	New marked route ready
Marking of horse riding trails and creation of rest areas	Tourism service providers	2026–2027	Interreg SK–HU, private sector cooperation, voluntary contributions from municipalities	2 new equestrian sections

Measure 2 – Rest areas and information points

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Indicator
Creation of storytelling lookout points at 2 locations	Settlements + cultural experts	2026	Creative Europe, Interreg SK–HU, municipal cultural framework	2 new storytelling points
Installation of information boards and QR-coded content code content at pilot points: Diósjenő Country House, Honti Gorge	Municipalities, cultural organizations	2026	Interreg SK–HU, Creative Europe, domestic cultural and tourism resources, private sponsorship Possibility	6 new information elements
Development of water boarding facilities on the banks of the Ipoly	Municipality ok	2026–2028	Interreg SK–HU, ERDF cross-border programs, local business partnerships contribution	2 new boarding points

Exploration of integrated tourist routes

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Measurement
Organization of guided tours with DINPI (e.g., Honti Gorge or Diósjenő Country House surroundings)	DINPI + Settlements	2026 Spring	Project own resources (Mystical Danube),	1 megtartott tour

			DINPI professional contribution, voluntary collaboration and	
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PRIORITY 2 – Cultural heritage and storytelling

Objective:

To present the local myths, narratives, and cultural heritage of the region in an experiential way.

Measure 1 – Development of storytelling routes

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Measure m
Creation of a Börzsöny bandit-themed walking trail	Cultural professionals	2026 2027	Creative Europe (cultural content development), Interreg SK–HU (cultural thematic routes), domestic municipal and civil society grant funds	Route completed
Drégely Castle interpretation development	Local government + DINPI	2026 2028	Interreg SK–HU (heritage & tourism), LIFE (landscape interpretation and habitat protection),	1 new interpretation

			from DINPI funding, domestic tourism and heritage protection subsidies	
Joint cultural pilot program with the Palóc Museum (Balassagyarmat)	Museum + Settlements	2026	Creative Europe (pilot cultural program), Interreg SK–HU, museum grant funds, domestic cultural fund	1 pilot program

Measure 2 – Digital and on-site interpretation

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Indicator
Creation of a digital story map	Civil society organizations	2026–2027	Creative Europe – digital heritage, Interreg SK–HU (digital tourism content), domestic cultural and civil resources	Digital platform
Collection and publication of Palóc myths collection and publication	Cultural actors	2026	Creative Europe (heritage digitization), domestic cultural institutions	10 published stories

			grants and funding	
Danube monster creating an installation	Settlements	2026–2027	Interreg SK–HU (thematic locations), Creative Europe (cultural installations), sponsorship, community funding opportunities	Installation created

PRIORITY 3 – Inclusive and accessible tourism

Objective:

To ensure accessible, inclusive tourism experiences for people with disabilities, the Roma population, women, and the elderly.

Measure 1 – Physical accessibility

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Indicator
Accessible routes for people with disabilities in the pilot area	Local government + DINPI	2026	ESZA+ – applications, Interreg SK–HU, DINPI applications, domestic	1 new route

			barrier-free resources	
Accessibility of rest areas	Settlements	2026–2027	EMVA – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development applications, Interreg SK–HU, domestic investment resources	3 locations
Study and proposals for improving rail access	MÁV + Settlements	2026	CEF – Connecting Europe Facility Fund applications, MÁV development framework, Interreg SK–HU research component	Study completed

Measure 2 – Service provider and community acceptance

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Indicator
Creation of an inclusive tourism map	Civil society organizations	2026	CERV – Rights and Values Program, ESZA+, Interreg SK–HU, civil grant funds	Published map
Integration of Roma cultural program into tourism offerings	Settlements + Roma communities	2026–2027	CERV, Interreg SK–HU, ESZA+,	1 program/year

			domestic funding	
Involvement of elderly people and women in local interpretation projects	Settlements	2026 2027	ESZA+, Erasmus+ adult learning, Interreg SK–HU, domestic civil applications	10 participants/year

PRIORITY 4 – Development of local products and gastronomy

Objective:

Coordinated development of local product economy and gastronomic culture, integration into tourism.

Measure 1 – Creation of a regional local product brand

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Measure m
Börzsöny–Ipoly local product profile	Producers + Civil	2026	EMVA – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, Interreg SK–HU, domestic rural development subsidies	Brand design completed
Organization of producers into a network	Settlements + producers	2026–2027	EMVA, ESZA+ Business development and domestic agricultural marketing resources	10 accession ó

Gastronomic themed days	Municipal	2026–2028	Interreg SK–HU, Hungarian Tourism Agency, private sponsorship	1 events/year
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Measure 2 – Development of product routes

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Measurement
Creation of an apple-chili-ice wine route	Producers	2026–2027	EMVA, Interreg SK–HU, domestic product marketing tenders	Route completed
Local market development and fairs	Settlements	2026–2028	EMVA, Interreg SK–HU, domestic development funds	3 new events
Herbal and fermented products exhibition point Creation	Producers	2026	EMVA, domestic agricultural innovation resources, private sector partnership	1 presentation location

PRIORITY 5 – Inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation

Objective

To establish coordinated tourism activities between 20 municipalities and their Slovak partners.

Measure 1 – Regional tourism platform

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Indicator
Creation of a joint tourism platform	Settlements	2026	Interreg SK–HU, ERDF – European Regional Development Fund	Platform active
Coordination of municipal offerings	Coordination group	2026–2028	Interreg SK–HU, ESZA+	20 municipalities included
Common image and communication	Tourism partnership	2026–2027	Creative Europe, Interreg SK–HU marketing component	Image manual

Measure 2 – Cross-border cooperation

Activity	Responsible	Timing	Resources	Indicator
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Development of SK–HU ecotourism route	Settlements + SK Partners	2026–2028	Interreg SK–HU, ERDF Border tourism	Route creation
Organization of cross-border cultural events	Settlements	2026–2028	Interreg SK–HU, Creative Europe, municipal cultural framework	1 event/year
Joint communication campaign	Coordination unit	2026–2027	Interreg SK–HU, Creative Europe, ERDF Cross-border marketing support applications	Campaign ongoing

Monitoring and evaluation framework

Monitoring of the Börzsöny–Ipoly region is simple and easy to maintain for both the community and local actors. The system rests on two main pillars: **annual regional meetings** and **monitoring workshop prior to project closure**. This is complemented by a **digital, QR code-based feedback option**, which provides real-time information on the use of the area.

The task of monitoring is to

- to track the progress of developments,
- record the results achieved during the year,
- evaluate the achievement of SMART goals,
- involve local stakeholders in maintenance decisions,

- collecting actual visitor and user data using digital tools.

Monitoring occasions

Annual regional meeting

Once a year, municipalities, civil society organizations, and professional actors review:

- the activities that have been implemented,
- visitor feedback,
- the functioning of products and services,
- the results of online data collection.

Monitoring Workshop (Spring 2026)

Before project closure:

- monitoring responsibilities will be assigned for after 2026,
- determine which actors will monitor what in the long term (route, installation, information point, etc.),
- the "Monitoring Responsibility Sharing Plan" is adopted.

Monitoring methodology – offline and online integrated system

Monitoring is simple, combining two basic data levels:

On-site observation (offline)

- once a year, each municipality inspects its own routes,
- checking: signs, information points, boards, infrastructure condition,
- photographic documentation is prepared.

Digital data collection (online)

A QR code is placed on each newly created tourist feature, which:

- collects brief visitor feedback
(*Experience? Accessibility? Is it in good condition?*)
- indicates the number of visits (number of QR scans),

- provides an opportunity to report problems,
- and, in the case of local product points, allows for simple inquiries or registration.

Typical locations for online collection:

- Storytelling points
- Diósjenő Country House – pilot interpretation elements
- Honti Gorge – marked trail
- Balassagyarmat Palóc Museum – cultural pilot program
- Ipoly riverside boarding points
- Product routes (apple–chili–ice wine)
- Local markets and product events
- Barrier-free routes
- Rest stops for horse riders and cyclists

QR codes provide the best quality data with the least amount of effort.

Monitoring officers

- **Settlements** – monitoring the condition of their own tourist attractions
- **Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate** – nature conservation monitoring
- **Ipoly Erdő Zrt.** – monitoring of forest infrastructure
- **Tourism service providers** – feedback on programs
- **Civil society organizations** – monitoring inclusive services and social involvement
- **Coordination group** – organizing annual meetings and monitoring workshops

Indicators

- Number of QR code feedback responses and scans
Number of tours and programs implemented (e.g., joint sample tour with DINPI)
- Number of new interpretation points
- Number of barrier-free elements
- Number of producers participating in product routes
- Number of cross-border collaborations
- Number of participants at annual regional meetings
- Percentage of municipalities involved

Communication and Participation

The development of the Börzsöny–Ipoly region can only be successful if municipalities, organizations, service providers and residents are kept informed about the progress of joint work and become active participants in the process. The aim of communication is to ensure that all stakeholders in the region have access to the most important information and can easily join in the joint thinking process.

Key stakeholders and communication channels

The most important actors in communication are local governments, civil society organizations, tourism and cultural service providers, the Danube-Ipoly National Park, Ipoly Erdő Zrt., local producers, and Slovak partner municipalities.

Information flows within the region through several channels:

- **an annual regional meeting**, where all stakeholders evaluate the developments that have been implemented;
- **joint consultation before project closure**, which ensures that monitoring and cooperation are sustainable in the long term;
- **on-site communication tools** (QR codes, information boards, short digital content);
- **municipal websites and social media pages** where the public can follow the changes;
- **direct exchange of information between service providers and cultural institutions.**

The purpose of communication is to ensure that everyone clearly understands what is being prepared, where the process stands, and how they can get involved.

Scheduling involvement and evaluation

The communication and reporting system has two main pillars:

Annual regional meeting

Once a year, regional stakeholders meet in person to review completed developments, share their experiences, and jointly determine the priorities for the following year.

Project closure monitoring meeting (spring 2026)

Before the project is closed, a dedicated workshop will be held where municipalities and organizations will decide who will take on which monitoring tasks in the future and how they will maintain the functioning of the completed developments.

Principles of involvement

The aim of involvement is to ensure that the entire community in the region plays a role in the developments.

Special attention will be given to:

- local residents,
- vulnerable social groups (people with disabilities, Roma communities, women, the elderly),
- local producers and service providers,
- cultural, heritage, and nature conservation partners.

The forms of involvement are simple and direct: on-site consultations, small group discussions, evaluation of pilot programs, and receiving feedback via QR codes.

Appendix

Trends in visitor numbers in Hungary and Pest County

Tourism – basics and 2024 results

Tourism accounts for more than 13% of Hungary's GDP and indirectly provides a livelihood for 400,000 families. In addition, more than 10% of central budget revenues come from tourism-related consumption and employment.

Tourism is a strategically important area and one of the main drivers of the economy. The number of people working in the sector is constantly increasing, which clearly demonstrates the strength of tourism and the effectiveness of the government's measures to increase employment.

The year 2024 was a record year for Hungarian tourism. Never before have so many of our compatriots vacationed within the country's borders, and never before have so many tourists visited our country.

Last year, 18.2 million guests stayed at accommodations in Hungary, which is 12% more than in 2023.

In 2024, there were 44.9 million guest nights, which was 7.3% higher than the previous year's result. Accommodation establishments generated HUF 1,065 billion (+17.5%) in revenue, while catering establishments generated HUF 2,007 billion (+11.3%).

According to Eurostat data, the number of guests in commercial accommodation increased by 2.4% in the EU and by 7.2% in Hungary. This means that Hungary's guest traffic grew at nearly three times the EU average, ranking 7th in terms of guest growth and 9th in terms of the highest growth in guest nights.

Budapest's world championship in guest growth contributed greatly to the record year's results. Based on international data, the Hungarian capital surpassed Miami, Los Angeles, Athens, Madrid, and Barcelona in this indicator.

2024 was the most successful year in the history of Budapest Airport. The number of passengers passing through Liszt Ferenc International Airport was 17.6 million, which is 20% higher than in 2023.

The SZÉP card, which is considered the driving force behind domestic tourism, also contributed significantly to the excellent performance of tourism.

The popularity of the SZÉP card continued to grow in 2024. The total value of top-ups exceeded HUF 454 billion (+2%). Cardholders spent HUF 432 billion by the end of December 2024. Taking into account tourism-related spending, they spent more than 9% more than a year earlier. In addition to the total amount of top-ups, the number of cardholders and acceptance points also showed dynamic growth.

Visitor traffic in Pest County continued to grow in 2024 compared to 2023, both in terms of visitor numbers and visitor nights. However, the rate of growth was not uniform: while guest arrivals showed a sharp increase, guest nights grew only moderately, and the length of stay decreased slightly. This is in line with the trend of more short stays, which partly reflects the growing proportion of day trippers and active leisure seekers from Budapest and its surroundings.