

# CYCLING TOURISM AND CULTURAL ROUTES

## Online workshop

The meeting was opened by TSG4 coordinator Ms Blanka Belošević and followed by welcoming speeches. They included representatives of Croatian ministries Ms Mirela Grgurić, Head of Sector for International Cooperation in the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Mislav Kovač from The Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds, and Mr Nedjeljko Špilek from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They send the good wishes to all participants and after them the same did TSG2 coordinator Pierluigi Coppola from Italy, TS and EUSDR PA3 coordinators Ms. Irina Cozma from Romania and Mr. Nikola Manevski from Bulgaria.

The official part of the Workshop was opened by Ms Lidija Mišćin, Expert Associate of MedCycleTour, who briefly introduced the speakers and their presentations. The first speaker was Mr. Ed Lancaster, ECF/EuroVelo, Senior Policy Officer, who presented the Keynote speech “Introduction to Cycling Tourism”. His presentation included short introduction to European Cycling Federation and description of existing cycling networks in Europe, with special accent on Covid-19 measures and its influence on cycling tourism. He pointed out the importance of cycling tourism and development of EuroVelo routes for sustainable development, especially in environmentally sensitive areas, documented with actual numbers and good examples such as Great Western Greenway in Ireland.

The next presentation was held by Mr. Miklós Berencsi from the National EuroVelo Coordination Centre in Hungary, who also spoke about the sustainability of cycling tourism and growing numbers, but was focused on many different examples in the World, such as national routes in Switzerland, Crankworks competition in Whistler, Canada, Bike festival on Lago di Garda in Italy or bike friendly accommodation in Croatia. The last presentation before the break was held by Mr. Frank Hoffman, Board Member of ADFC Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad Club from Germany, who presented experiences of ADFC from developing cycltourism services and infrastructure since nineties in Germany. It included interesting data about the importance of cycling tourism in Germany and the information about the quality standards, cycling tourist expectations, importance of high quality signposting and marketing issues.

After the break the workshop continued with the national interventions sessions showing good examples from various countries regarding the cyclist’s infrastructure, development of routes, involvement of local communities etc. The first presentation was held by Mr. Massimiliano Angelotti from Italy, who spoke about the infrastructure status of Adrion Cycle Tour on the Adriatic Coast of Italy. It was followed by the presentation of the cycling route on the Croatian side of the Adriatic Sea “EuroVelo 8 – Mediterranean Cycle Route in Croatia”, presented by Workshop moderator Ms. Lidija Mišćin. She pointed out the importance of this section of the Mediterranean route as a tool to influence regional and national policies in Croatia in favour of sustainable and responsible tourism and increase the efficiency of investments in cycling infrastructure.

The next presenter was Ms. Cristina Lixandriou from Romania, who presented “Danube Cycling Plan project as a new opportunity for Romanian cycling”. She pointed out the cycling potential of Romania

as a country and importance of EuroVelo 6 Atlantic – Black Sea, in this area known as Danube route, as a trigger for the development of cycling tourism in Romania. As a link to the Danube route Mr. Zoran Klarić from Institute for Tourism and Rapporteur of the Workshop presented experiences from Croatia in the presentation “Drava Bike Route in Croatia“, covering parts of EuroVelo 6 and EuroVelo 13. He pointed out the importance of those two EuroVelo routes for development of tourism in the continental part of Croatia, which is still undeveloped in tourism terms, although it has a lot of cultural attractions and preserved countryside, represented in Mura – Drava – Danube World Biosphere Reserve, also called the Amazon of Europe.

Ms. Alessandra Fogar from Promoturismo Italy in her presentation “Cycling and Discovering” presented actual efforts to promote her region Friuli Venezia Giulia as an excellent area for cycling due to nice routes and attractive countryside and nature in this area, located between the Mediterranean and the Alps close to Austria and Slovenia. The following presentation by Mr. Anej Struci, focused on a small attractive case of Jamnica Trail Park in Slovenia, also promotes cross-border co-operation. This mountain area close to Austrian border thanks to strong local initiatives became one of the top world destinations for MTB bikes, but remain sustainable and local population benefits from such development.

The following presentations came from two countries at starting phase of cycling tourism, but with huge potential due to very attractive countryside, preserved natural and cultural heritage and image of undiscovered destinations for cyclists. The first one was a presentation “Cycle tourism in Montenegro: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” by Mr. Nebojša Crnogorac, who pointed out that cyclotourism is still not seen as an important tourism product in Montenegro in spite of good possibilities due to many local roads with low motor traffic in preserved and beautiful countryside, and excellent possibilities for mountain biking. Ms. Eltjana Shkreli from the town of Shkodra also presented the example from a country with undeveloped cycling tourism, but was more focused on a case of the town of Shkodra and the effort of local community to make it a cycling city. This effort was very successful, because in 2011 get fifth place as cyclist friendly city in Europe and the only certified city coming from Southern or Eastern Europe. It helped also to promote usage of EuroVelo 8 in Albania and cross-border co-operation with the neighbouring Montenegro.

The last of national intervention was done by Ms Maša Klavara from small town of Tolmin in Slovenia near the Italian border, who presented a project “Walk of Peace biking, hiking and cultural cross border trail along the World War First heritage and as good example of involvement of local communities”. This project is interesting because it includes not only cycling tourism, but also hiking and cultural tourism with a focus on a memorial tourism in attractive countryside. A link to the last national presentation was an Intervention from other EU macro-strategies, where Mr Łukasz Magrian from Poland spoke about experiences in connecting the cycling paths in different European countries in his presentation: “EuroVelo10 - opportunities and challenges in creating a cross-border tourism product”. He presented the main activities in the project and the most important challenges which are the consequence of cross-border issues, but he sees them as an opportunity for the development of an attractive tourism product.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Cycling tourism is developing strongly across Europe, especially when it comes to building attractive biking paths and using new technologies such as GPS applications and E-bikes.
- The coronavirus pandemic has further encouraged the development of cycling tourism, as the benefits of using bicycles over the use of motor vehicles have come to the fore, both in terms of mobility and in terms of environmental protection.
- Cycling tourism is also spreading to countries in the South and East of Europe, but the differences compared to the North and West of Europe are still large, especially regarding cycling infrastructure and biking culture in general.
- Despite significant positive trends, in many less developed countries there is still a lack of understanding for cyclists, which requires stronger support for the development of cycling in such countries on European level.
- Having in mind that border areas are very popular for cycling tourism, such development has a positive effect on cooperation between countries, and thus on the unity of Europe and understanding between the various European nations.
- Local initiatives play an important role in the development of cycling tourism, which is why cycling tourism appears as an engine for the development of many remote and undeveloped rural areas.
- Cycling tourism has a positive impact on the sustainability of tourism and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, especially the development of cultural routes, and is thus highly compatible with the development of other environmentally friendly forms of tourism such as hiking, wine and cultural tourism.