

## Newsletter 2 - 01/2014

### Iron Curtain Trail “Sustainable mobility along the newest EuroVelo route, the Iron Curtain Trail”, South East Europe Programme



#### “Iron Curtain Trail” project events - The “Iron Curtain Trail” Half Time Conference, Thessaloniki, 03.10.2013

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013, “Iron Curtain Trail” project partners, non-governmental organisations, local development organisations, regional and local representatives as well as other relevant stakeholders (cycling associations, transport services representatives etc.) participated in the “Iron Curtain Trail” Half Time Conference organised by the Greek project partner “ANTIGONE-Information and Documentation Center on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence” and held in the New City Hall of Thessaloniki. The Conference was opened by Mr. Giorgos Dimarelos, representative of the Municipality of Thessaloniki. Mr. Andreas Kourakis, Vice Mayor for Urban Development who also participated in the Conference, welcomed the participants and introduced them to the perspectives of Thessaloniki being a cycling friendly city.

The Conference audience had the opportunity to be informed on “Iron Curtain Trail” project objectives and progress concerning the connection of South East Europe region with a long distance cycling route aimed to be achieved through a wide European cooperation for the development of EuroVelo 13 cycling route. Furthermore, cycling related common methodologies as well as existent and potential sustainable tourism and transport offers in partner countries were presented in the Conference. Best practices in South East Europe regions concerning sustainable transport and sustainable tourism were introduced to the audience.

During the Conference, participants were also informed about running and future project potentials as well as about the planning processes for the period 2014-2020.

In the Press Conference that took place the same day under the framework of “Iron Curtain Trail” Half Time Conference, speakers stressed “Iron Curtain Trail” objectives and progress, presented the creation of the first EuroVelo route in Greece and its importance for sustainable tourism and introduced “Cyclists Welcome Hellas” European cycle friendly service network in Greece.

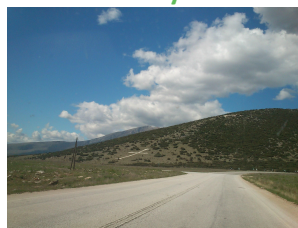
During the closing session of the Conference, in the Round Table Conversation that followed, participant project partners, local and regional representatives and stakeholders raised their questions and discussed the potentials of a collaboration under the framework of “Iron Curtain Trail” project.

More information on “Iron Curtain Trail” Half Time Conference, minutes and footage is available in English in the following links:

<http://www.ict13.eu/news/half-time-project-conference-iron-curtain-trail-sustainable-mobility-along-the-newest-eurovelo-route--south-east-europe-programme-thursday-october-3rd-2013>

<http://www.antigone.gr/en/projects/project/1/>

#### Final Itinerary



The Southern section of the Iron Curtain Trail starts at Slovakian - Austrian border and finishes at the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria after more than 300 kms. The route is

expected to provide unique tourism and transport, regional and rural development opportunities in the

border regions.

In order to reach its fullest potential as EuroVelo 13 route, the potential itineraries, services, promotion-marketing conditions as well as the organisational and financial background of the Iron Curtain Trail have all been collected and evaluated. According to the needs of the local and international cyclists, the objective is to improve the route, service conditions and to provide information and organise effective promotion.

85% of the 3000 km long final itinerary leads on low traffic or traffic free roads, which are mostly asphalted and can be used immediately, although 10% of the route is located on public roads with high motorized traffic where separation or traffic calming / reduction is needed urgently and on 5% the surface is challenging. Especially in the southern, more mountainous sections the services are not fulfilling even the basic needs of the cyclists.

Based on survey it can be clearly indicated that the promotion – marking – information situation is far behind the expectations on all sections also due to the lack of proper (EuroVelo) coordination (centers) all along the route.

opportunity to fill in the “missing pieces” and have a complete transnational action plan for the entire route. The current work will build upon the previous methodology for surveying, evaluation, action planning etc. that has been successfully used in earlier projects.

The project partners recognise that there are many challenges that need to be overcome in order to realise the route. Perhaps most significantly, the itinerary for the route has not been decided yet in the four new countries mentioned above. This will need to be decided during the course of the project with agreement not just from Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia and FYROM but also their neighbour countries (i.e. Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria). Another challenge relates to the fact that the existing cycling infrastructure in the countries covered by the project varies considerably. Austria boasts some of the best cycle routes in the world but to the South there is very little in the way of existing infrastructure. Consequently the transnational action plan will need to set goals that are realistic for the country concerned.

One practical issue is the lack of border crossing points in some areas of the route. This is because Serbia and FYROM are not part of the EU, whilst Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria are not part of the Schengen agreement yet. A short term solution is to make it clear where users of the route can cross safely but in the longer terms efforts must be made to encourage the authorities to open more convenient crossing points. Finally, there are some particular geographical challenges that the action plan must try and address, such as rivers with few bridges; high mountains with few



**Common methodology to bring  
“Iron Curtain Trail” -EuroVelo 13-  
cycling route closer to reality**

For the first time ever, the current “Iron Curtain Trail” project brings together partners from all of the countries along the southern section of the route (south from Austria). In previous EU-funded projects, partners from Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia and FYROM were not eligible, so the project represents a fantastic

passes; and roads with high levels of motorised traffic.

The partners are following a common methodology along the whole of the “Iron Curtain Trail”. This involves surveys of the potential route and an evaluation of the alternatives to help decide upon the final itinerary. The initial surveys include field work, internet searches and analysis of existing documents. All the information is collected in a standardised format, including alternative itineraries (if not decided yet). Using the information stored in the database, the partners are able to evaluate the alternatives taking into account the route conditions, services, existing promotion and marketing measures and organisation. This evaluation helps to find the best itinerary within one country or to decide between countries.

Once the itinerary has been agreed, action plans are prepared on regional, national and trans-national levels identifying the key actions that need to be undertaken to realise the route. The actions are standardised as well -the methodology offers a menu of possible solution for all challenges explored during the survey - but the partners should choose carefully to keep their proposals ambitious but still realistic. When complete, the action plans can be used to secure political support for undertaking the necessary measures and to allocate the necessary financing.

The rewards are there for those that are willing to do this work. A study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2012 indicated that once complete the “Iron Curtain Trail” would generate 3.3 million day trips in addition to 849,000 holiday trips per year, equating to an annual economic impact of €355 million.

## Pilot Activities - Cyclists Friendly Service Network



Under the framework of “Iron Curtain Trail” project, the greek project partner “ANTIGONE-Information and Documentation Center on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence” developed the Cyclists Friendly Service Network “Cyclists Welcome Hellas”.

“Cyclists Welcome Hellas” is a business network that takes into consideration the specific needs of cyclists and cycling tourists. It is based on a system of evaluation and certification of tourism enterprises and sites that promote sustainable mobility. It is applied throughout Greece. In the initial phase, businesses offering accommodation services will receive the signal with the smiling sun-bike after the review of their services. The criteria were created based on the research of the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) according to certification and award schemes operating in European countries by ECF members.

### Minimum criteria

- Accommodation can be booked for one night only
- Breakfast (eg yoghurt, muesli, fruit, herbal tea)
- Bicycle parking near the entrance
- Lockable storage space for bicycles overnight
- Basic bike repair kit (free).
- Possibility for washing machine and equipment
- Informative Tablet “Cyclists Welcome Hellas”

## Cycling related best practices in “Iron Curtain Trail” project partner countries

### Hungary, Lake Balaton



“Balaton Bike Route Service Chain” involves the development of the Balaton Bike Route as a potential of tourism at the region aiming to

contribute to the success of Lake Balaton as a destination that combines a number of services.

Cycling is therefore linked to different services such as hiking, walking and water tourism, winter sports that as complementary elements add to the development of this 200 km long cycling route. The project is originated in the area by “Balaton Cyclist Tourist Society”.

More information available in the following link:

[www.balatonbringa.hu](http://www.balatonbringa.hu)

### Hungary, Sudburgenland



“EBike Sudburgenland” is not only an E-bike rental system, but also offers guided or not guided thematic tours or the taxi ride back for

one way trips. The system uses existing bicycle infrastructure in the region (more than 800 km of signposted bicycle routes).

Cooperation with local restaurants and producers of local products allows authentic stops and catering along the routes. The new and well-maintained E-bikes can be rented at 18 rental stations throughout the region of Sudburgenland. Bikes are also available at touristic hot-spots like the region’s thermal resorts.

The comprehensive service-package further includes a helpline and roadside assistance, transportation of luggage, bicycle maps, navigation systems, seats and trailers for children and route suggestions.

More information available in the following link:

<http://www.ebikesuedburgenland.at/home.php>

### Hungary, Szigetkoz area



In 2006, the EuroVelo 6 section between Halaszi and Darnozseli has been

constructed in the Szigetkoz area (financed by the Structural Funds, through the Regional Operational Programme of Hungary).

Number of cycling tourists has been increasing since then continuously. This tendency has also influenced investments and projects of the local municipality and tourism SMEs in the area.

The local municipality has established a cycling accommodation next to the sport facility of the settlements, reconstructing a former locker room building.

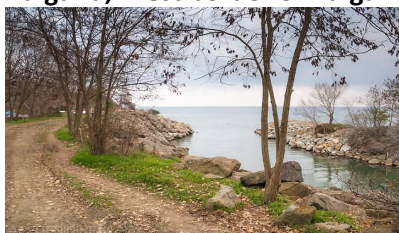
Local SMEs recognised potentials in cycling tourism and tourists starting to develop their offers in the fields of equestrian water and fishing tourism, bicycle and vessel rental services.

The local government and the local SMEs operate a joint event calendar and promote the settlement and its events in a quadrilingual /HU-DE-ENG-SK/ brochure.

More information available in the following link:

[www.szigetkozkerekpar.hu](http://www.szigetkozkerekpar.hu)

## Bulgaria, West border of Bulgaria



Through this initiative of the association “Baikaria” cyclists are given the opportunity to cover

a total distance of 2.200 km along the Bulgarian borders. Some sections of the cycling route cover the “Iron Curtain Trail” and EuroVelo 6 routes.

The cycling plan for 2013 under the framework of “Cycling along the Bulgarian borders”, covered the area of the west border of Bulgaria, from Belasica, through Osogovo and West Balkan Mountains to the cross point Timok/Dunav.

More information available in the following link:

[www.bikearea.org](http://www.bikearea.org)

## Greece, Municipality of Drama



The bike sharing system in the town of Drama, located 50 km away from Exohi border, gives the opportunity to its users

to cross the new “Iron Curtain Trail” cycling route close to the borders of Greece and Bulgaria.

With “Bike and Mobility” pioneer program, the Municipality of Drama collects to its depot abandoned or damaged bikes and bikes not needed from citizens. A group of volunteers from technical schools take on to service any existing problems and so the repaired bicycles are then placed in selected parts of Drama city available for use by all citizens. Bicycles that cannot be repaired are sent for recycling. Residents willing to offer

their bicycles can contact the Department of Cleaning or deliver the bicycles to the depot themselves.

More information available in the following link:

<http://www.dimos-dramas.gr>

## Romania, Alba Iulia, Arad, Baia Mare, Brasov, Bucuresti, Cluj, Constanta, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Iasi, Sibiu, Timisoara



“SkirtBike-Bicycle as women’s fashion statement” is a project aimed to promote urban

cycling to women. The project has been inspired by the huge cycle chic wave that spread from Copenhagen to New York and Tokyo, reaching Bucharest in 2010. Since then, twice a year, stylish bicycle parades where the skirt and the bicycle are the dress code take place .

The main goal is to increase the number of bicycles on the streets by promoting their use in everyday life, going to work, school, shopping or any other daily activities. The more bicycles on the streets, the more people are encouraged to consider cycling as their transportation of choice.

More information available in the following link:

[www.skirtbike.ro](http://www.skirtbike.ro)

## “Iron Curtain Trail” leaflet

The leaflet describes the context, the goals and the activities of the project in partners’ national languages and are downloadable in PDF at the address:

<http://www.ict13.eu/publication/other-publications>

### **In Slovak language**

The project leaflet in Slovak language was published in Slovakia by the Ekopolis Foundation.

### **In Romanian language**

The project leaflet in Romanian was published by the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism.

### **In Hungarian language**

The project leaflet in Hungarian language was published in Hungary by the South Transdanubia Development Agency.

