

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Regional action plan of Pilsen Region

Activity 1.3.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Information about the Partner

The Regional Development Agency of the Plzeň Region (RRA PK) is a non-profit organization established in 2000. Its mission is to provide expert consulting services to local governments in the Plzeň Region and to support the economic and social development of the region. Besides the Plzeň Region and its towns and municipalities, important clients of RRA PK also include ministries, universities, and private entities. The agency's tasks mainly involve the creation of analyses, concepts, and programs, as well as the preparation and management of development projects. These projects are primarily implemented within the territory of the Plzeň Region and within international cooperation programs. RRA PK is a member of the Czech Association of Development Agencies.

Its analytical and conceptual activities cover a broad range of regional development topics, relying particularly on comprehensive data about the Plzeň Region. The Plzeň Region uses these services, for example, in preparing complex regional development programs and territorial and sectoral concepts. Towns and municipalities utilize the agency's analytical services in spatial and territorial planning processes, decision-making about investment priorities in areas such as education or social services. The services related to preparation and management of development projects, often co-funded by European funds, focus on the Plzeň Region's priority development areas, which include the development of regional education systems, transport infrastructure, environmental protection, and civic amenities in towns and municipalities, including investments supporting employment. RRA PK also acts as the main office of the Association of Towns and Municipalities of the Plzeň Region, organizes training for representatives of local governments, and provides expert assistance across a wide range of needs related to the management of towns and municipalities in the region.

By participating in the Danube Wood(s) Route project, RRA PK builds on previously implemented projects and concepts related to the development of visitor potential based on cultural and natural prerequisites. Based on experience, the agency aims to focus on utilizing the potential of the forested areas of the Šumava and Český les (Bohemian Forest) in the context of the Green Belt initiative, and to support the development of destination management in the Český les and possibly other newly emerging destination management organizations in the region.

1.2 Main and Specific Objectives of the Action Plan

This Regional Action Plan (RAP) for the Plzeň Region has been developed within the international project Danube Wood(s) Route (The Wealth of Danube Forests and the Cultural Heritage of Wood /tangible and intangible/ - A Path to Sustainable Green Tourism anchored in the European Cultural Route of Danube Wood) under the Interreg Danube programme. The main goal of the project is to contribute to the long-term sustainable use and valorization of the forest wealth of the Danube region by supporting innovative forms of green tourism. The project aims to establish a strategic framework, provide capacities, and enhance visibility to facilitate the creation and promotion of the Danube Cultural Wood Route. The RAP serves as a strategic tool that helps translate the transnational project objectives, set by the common Strategy, into specific, locally anchored measures reflecting the regional conditions, priorities, and potential of the Plzeň Region.

The Plzeň Region is characterized by a diverse landscape with a high proportion of forested areas, which are not only a significant ecological element but also carriers of cultural, historical, and economic values. The forests provide space for recreation, education, craft production, and cultural activities connected with traditional uses of wood. At the same time, the region faces challenges

related to climate change, changing land management, and biodiversity preservation. The key motivation of this action plan is precisely the interconnection of these aspects - nature, culture, and sustainable development.

The main objective of the RAP for the Plzeň Region is to actively contribute to the creation and development of the Danube Cultural Wood Route as a tool for sustainable rural development, preservation of cultural heritage, strengthening regional identity, and local economic development, especially through innovative and environmentally friendly tourism.

Based on this vision, the following specific objectives were established:

- To identify and activate natural and cultural heritage related to forests and wood in the Plzeň Region, including both tangible and intangible heritage (e.g., natural areas and monuments, traditions, crafts skills, and historical as well as modern wooden buildings).
- To support the development of sustainable tourism products and services that utilize local natural and cultural resources and contribute to diversifying the regional economy, with a focus on smaller rural municipalities and forested areas.
- To ensure the transfer of knowledge and support education, especially in the fields of sustainable tourism, traditional crafts, environmental education, climate resilience, and sustainable land management.
- To support the involvement of key regional actors, including public administration, municipalities, tourism institutions, schools, the non-profit sector, local entrepreneurs, cultural institutions, and experts, in building and promoting the Danube Cultural Wood Route.
- To prepare the region for the certification of the European Cultural Route as a new cultural product, thereby increasing international visibility of local attractions and strengthening the region's marketing capacities.

The Action Plan also emphasizes cross-sectoral cooperation, integration of environmental and cultural values, and the establishment of a system for monitoring the impacts of the proposed measures. In this way, the Plzeň Region aims to contribute to fulfilling the vision of the Danube Wood(s) Route project while strengthening its own development potential in accordance with principles of sustainability and local identity.

2 REGIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 Natural and Cultural Values

The Plzeň Region is located in the western part of the Czech Republic and is one of the 14 self-governing regions. It borders the Karlovy Vary Region to the northwest, the Central Bohemian Region to the east, and the South Bohemian Region to the south. The western and southern borders of the region form the state border with the Federal Republic of Germany - specifically with the federal state of Bavaria.

The Plzeň Region is rich in historic towns, castles, and architectural monuments, including the town of Klatovy, which is listed on the indicative UNESCO list. The history of the region is also reflected in the local architecture, which includes Gothic and Baroque-style buildings. The regional capital,

Plzeň, is known not only for its historic city center but also for the Pilsner Urquell Brewery and numerous churches and museums, which testify to the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Plzeň Region - Basic Information and General Characteristics

With an area of 7,649 km² and a population of 589,899, the Plzeň Region is the third largest region in the Czech Republic (by area). It is also the third most forested region in the country, with a forest cover of 44% compared to the national average of 37.1%. Forests in the Czech Republic are fragmented into many smaller units, and truly large forests are mainly found in peripheral mountain ranges. In the Plzeň Region, these include the Šumava Mountains (70.3% forest cover) and the Český les (Bohemian Forest) (64.2% forest cover). Other important natural forest areas in the region include the Brdy Highlands, Křivoklátsko, and the Šumava Foothills. (Source: National Forest Inventory of the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (NIL3) 2016-2020 - forest inventory based on actual field conditions). The Plzeň Region lies in the southwest of the Czech Republic. On the west, it borders Bavaria. The Karlovy Vary Region (with the highest forest cover in the Czech Republic at 50.2%) forms the northwest border. To the northeast, it borders the Central Bohemian Region and to the southeast, the South Bohemian Region.

Natural Attractions of the Plzeň Region and Their Potential for Tourism

The largest national park in the Czech Republic, Šumava National Park, covering an area of 680.64 km², is located in the Plzeň and neighboring South Bohemian regions. (The Czech Republic has four national parks in total - Krkonoše, Podyjí, Bohemian Switzerland, and Šumava). Šumava National Park, together with the adjacent Šumava Protected Landscape Area and the neighboring German Bavarian Forest National Park, forms the largest continuous forest complex in Central Europe. Notably, the entire Šumava National Park area is also part of the Šumava Special Area of Conservation and the Šumava Bird Area within the Natura 2000 network. In 2023, Šumava NP attracted 2.4 million visitors. (Source: National Park Šumava website). The national park was officially established in 1991; before that, part of the area was protected as a Landscape Protected Area (CHKO) since 1963. The park protects not only rare animal species but also glacial lakes, peat bogs, and other unique ecosystems. Visitors can learn about these through visitor centers and educational trails. The extensive Šumava Foothills area adjoins the national park.

Another valuable forested area in the region is the Český les Protected Landscape Area, covering part of the eponymous mountain range. It was declared a protected landscape area in 2005. Most of the area is forested, with a forest cover of 64.2%. Český les is characterized by its distinctive landscape rather than by specific tourist attractions, with forests, meadows, and villages. For example, there is the Nature House of Český les.

Other protected landscape areas extending into the Plzeň Region include Brdy, Křivoklátsko, and the Slavkovský les. The Český les area continues into the Karlovy Vary Region, where it connects with Slavkovský les. The Postřelí tourism micro-region extends into Karlovy Vary Region. The Brdy and Křivoklátsko areas extend slightly into the Plzeň Region from the Central Bohemian Region, and Šumava National Park (and its protected landscape area) continues into the South Bohemian Region (together with the Šumavsko Destination Management Organization). Examples of tourism routes include the Šumava Craft Trail featuring wooden clogs production in Volary and the Šumava Dove craft trail. The South Bohemian Tourism Center is also a partner in regional tourism.

Tourism is a significant economic sector in the region, offering visitors a wide range of experiences - from exploring natural beauty and leisure activities to discovering cultural monuments. Forests, especially in the Šumava area with the Šumava National Park, which is also a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, constitute a major part of the landscape. This region includes dense forests, clean rivers, and wetlands that provide a unique ecosystem and pristine environment. Together with the Šumava

Protected Landscape Area and the adjoining Bavarian Forest National Park, it forms the largest continuous forest complex in Central Europe. The entire national park area is also part of the European ecological network Natura 2000, both as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA).

At the western border of the region lies another significant forested area - Český les, a vast wooded area stretching to the Karlovy Vary Region, where it connects with Slavkovský les. This region is characterized by dense forests, rolling landscapes, and traditional villages. Tourists can enjoy hiking, cycling, and wildlife observation here. Both border mountain ranges were strongly affected in the past by the presence of the so-called Iron Curtain, as this was the East-West border with West Germany. Although this situation negatively impacted local inhabitants, from an ecological perspective, it led to the creation of the Green Belt of Europe, which has gradually become a refuge for diverse species and a symbol of reconciliation and peace after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Thus, the Plzeň Region combines rich natural environments, historical monuments, and a developing tourism sector, making it an attractive destination for nature and culture lovers alike. The natural and cultural conditions mentioned above make the Plzeň Region an ideal destination for educational (both cultural and natural) tourism, pilgrimage routes, and day trips.

The opportunity to participate in the Danube Wood Cultural Route is seen as very beneficial since the region possesses abundant forests and woodworking traditions. This thematic cultural route can integrate both the natural wealth of the forest and the cultural heritage of the region - tangible (historic buildings, museums) and intangible (crafts, traditions, events). One of the priorities for tourism development in the region is coordinating the offer into thematic products (e.g., the already existing Baroque route or newly emerging products focused on industrial heritage). The region can also build on its natural values and preserved local traditions within the framework of the region's woodworking heritage.

Visitor distribution across the region is uneven. Although the city of Plzeň itself offers many attractions, it would be beneficial to encourage visitors to explore the wider region. This can be supported by promoting lesser-known locations and making border areas accessible for hiking (e.g., Český les). For this purpose, it is essential to ensure the necessary infrastructure: language accessibility of information centers and museums, multilingual informational materials and guides, as well as the use of modern navigation tools (e.g., mobile applications). Equally important is supporting this offer with quality interpretation and presentation of the region's values.

2.2 Social and Economic Conditions in the Region

2.2.1. Demographic Characteristics

By area, the Plzeň Region is the third largest region in the Czech Republic, but with approximately 580,000 inhabitants, it ranks ninth in population size. It accounts for 5.4% of the total population of the Czech Republic. After the South Bohemian Region, it is the second least densely populated region in the country. The majority of the population lives in cities, especially in the regional capital Plzeň, which forms the administrative, economic, and cultural center of the region. The settlement structure of the region is unbalanced - the metropolitan area of Plzeň with 189,000 inhabitants is surrounded by a sparse rural structure. There is a lack of medium-sized towns. A typical feature of the area is the high number of small settlements. The cadastral areas of municipalities with up to 2,000 inhabitants cover more than 4/5 of the region's area and are home to over 30% of the population. These trends create pressure on the sustainability of services, education, and cultural infrastructure outside the main centers.

2.2.2. Economic Structure

The Plzeň Region is among the moderately economically developed regions in the Czech Republic, contributing about 5.5% to the country's GDP. In terms of GDP per capita, it ranks fifth compared to other regions, primarily due to the high economic performance of the city of Plzeň, which is estimated to generate nearly two-thirds of the total GDP of the region. The economy of the Plzeň Region is strongly industry-oriented - engineering, food processing, building materials and ceramics industry, energy production and distribution, metallurgy - with a concentration of enterprises in Plzeň and other larger towns. Small and medium-sized enterprises, often family-run, also play an important role. Agriculture and forestry are traditional parts of the regional economy, especially in the border areas. Forests cover approximately 39% of the region's area, which creates conditions for the development of forestry and related sectors, including wood processing and crafts.

2.2.3. Tourism as an Economic Sector

The location of the Plzeň Region is also significant for tourism development. The main target groups of tourists are citizens of Germany and domestic tourists who regularly return from larger Czech cities. Tourism in the region is on the rise, with growing interest in natural and cultural attractions. Plzeň attracts visitors with its history, brewing tradition, and cultural heritage, while the Šumava and Český les (Bohemian Forest) attract nature lovers, hikers, and cyclists. An important factor is the Šumava National Park and the UNESCO biosphere reserve. Nevertheless, the tourism potential of some areas remains underutilized. Tourism products are often fragmented and thematically uncoordinated.

Cooperation with Key Regional Stakeholders An important partner for implementing the regional action plan is the long-planned and newly established Plzeň Region Tourism Center (CCRPK), which begins operations in July 2025. CCRPK was established as a registered institute by decision of the Plzeň Regional Assembly and took over most of the agenda of the former regional tourism department, including marketing and destination management.

The main tasks of the center are coordination, strategic development, consulting, education, and cooperation at all levels - from local to international. The key goal is to increase the attractiveness of the region, especially less visited areas, and to develop sustainable and balanced tourism through cooperation with five regional destination companies (Český les, Postřelí, Rokycansko, Šumava, and Plzeň and surroundings), as well as the public, private, and non-profit sectors.

The administrative agenda of subsidy programs and part of project management remain with the Regional Authority.

From the perspective of the regional action plan, the Center is a key strategic partner with whom the development of the tourism offer and promotion of the region will be coordinated.

From the start of the project, the Czech partner RRA PK assumed broader involvement of stakeholders not only from administration, municipalities, nature protection, culture, and tourism but also from forestry - Lesy ČR and wood processing companies. The last two have not been included so far; therefore, work continues with tourism and nature protection areas and their mutual interaction and respect. Involving RRA Plzeň Region continues previously implemented projects and concepts related to the development of visitor potential based on cultural and natural conditions.

Based on experience, focus will be on utilizing the potential of our forested areas of Šumava and Český les in the context of the Green Belt initiative and supporting the development of destination management for Český les and potentially other newly emerging destination management organizations in the region.

The Danube Wood(s) Route is envisioned in the Plzeň Region as a tourism product fully respecting nature protection, biodiversity conservation, and the values and development potential of the area from both perspectives. Inspiration in this spirit is provided by the Cross-border Territorial Concept for Nature Protection, Recreation, and Tourism in the Bohemian and Upper Palatinate Forests, which defines priority areas for tourism and recreation development (outputs of the Joint Strategy - Protection and Understanding of the Bohemian Forest, 2020), and the subsequent Territorial Study aimed at creating conditions for tourism and recreation development in the Bohemian Forest Protected Landscape Area, respecting nature and landscape protection. The territorial study serves as a basis for decision-making and zoning plan amendments.

Trends in Tourism as a Challenge Tourism in Europe and the Czech Republic is undergoing significant transformation. Changes in consumer behavior, the influence of technology, emphasis on quality of life and sustainability lead to new trends that directly affect the direction of regional strategies. These trends impact the Plzeň Region and its potential as a destination within the Danube Wood(s) Route. Combining cultural heritage, nature, authentic experiences, and digital tools enables the creation of an attractive and sustainable regional offer even on an international scale.

Among current tourism trends, there is significant growth in short-distance tourism, i.e., travel within the domestic environment or to nearby border regions. Visitors prefer accessible and authentic destinations that can be visited within a day or a short weekend stay. The Plzeň Region has exceptional potential in this regard due to its geographic location in the western part of the Czech Republic and direct border with Bavaria.

Another trend is growing interest in cultural and experiential tourism, which relies on authenticity, local character, and personal experience, emphasizing gentle movement in the landscape and protection of natural heritage. Visitors increasingly seek places that offer not only cultural heritage but also stories, traditions, and opportunities to connect directly with local communities. The Plzeň Region has potential in this regard, offering themes worth developing and promoting, such as the living tradition of cooperage in Plzeň connected with Pilsner Urquell, puppetry listed by UNESCO, and wood-processing and forestry heritage in the Šumava and Bohemian Forest areas. Sustainability would benefit from supporting local communities and businesses, especially in less visited areas (e.g., Český les, Pošumaví). This can be supplemented by promoting regional brands (e.g., Šumava Original Product). This concept matches the current demand for meaningful leisure time spent in a natural and non-commercial environment.

Sustainable and responsible travel supports the development of soft infrastructure (cycle paths, long-distance hiking trails with facilities, educational trails, local products) and the use of technological innovations and digital tools for trip planning support - online information, mobile apps, QR codes, personalized routes.

2.2.4. Education, Culture, and Human Capital

The region has numerous primary and secondary schools, including vocational schools focused on crafts and technical fields. The Plzeň Region hosts three universities: the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň, the Medical Faculty of Charles University in Prague, and the Metropolitan University. These institutions attract students not only from the Plzeň area but also from other Czech regions and abroad due to the high quality of education and the specialization of study programs. The University of West Bohemia offers a wide range of higher education, including

design, technology, and ecology. However, cultural heritage related to woodwork (carving, musical instrument making, nativity scene craft) needs more systematic support and transfer to younger generations. Local museums, cultural centers, and community associations play an important role.

2.2.5. Social Aspects and Local Communities

The Plzeň Region is characterized by strong potential of local communities, especially in smaller municipalities and microregions. Associations focused on sustainable development, environmental education, and local traditions are active. At the same time, there is a significant need to support cooperation between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. In some parts of the region, lower civic engagement may complicate participatory planning. Involvement of local actors is key to the sustainability of projects such as the Danube Wood(s) Route.

2.2.6. Summary and Relevance for the RAP

The Plzeň Region offers a stable social and economic background for the development of a cultural route linked to wood and forests. Challenges remain in uneven distribution of visitors, weaker tourism organization, and limited connections between cultural actors, municipalities, schools, and tourist services. The RAP can contribute to strengthening the thematic linkage of the region's natural and cultural values, supporting local products and traditional crafts, and involving local communities in sustainable tourism development.

2.3 Summary of Regional Analysis

2.3.1. Natural and Cultural Values

The Plzeň Region is located in the southwest of the Czech Republic, bordering Germany (Bavaria) and several other Czech regions. It is the third largest region in the Czech Republic and the third most forested region (44% forest cover).

The main natural areas of the region are:

- Šumava - National Park (NP), Protected Landscape Area (CHKO), UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, part of Natura 2000; together with the Bavarian Forest NP, it forms the largest forest complex in Central Europe.
- Český les - Protected Landscape Area since 2005, with over 64% forest cover, ecologically valuable area with lower tourist pressure.
- Other Protected Landscape Areas: Brdy, Křivoklátsko, Slavkovský les - partially within the region.

The cultural richness of the region mainly includes:

- Historic towns (Plzeň).
- Architectural monuments, religious buildings, museums.
- Traditions and crafts related to wood - woodcarving, clog making, nativity scenes, musical instruments, timber rafting.

Tourism:

- Significant potential, especially thanks to nature and cultural monuments.
- The tourist offer is fragmented and focused mainly on Plzeň and Šumava.
- Existing thematic products (e.g., Baroque route, industrial heritage).
- Suitable conditions for the creation of a new thematic trail Danube Wood(s) Route and a more detailed Wooden Map of the Plzeň Region.
- A functioning central DMO (Destination Management Organization) is in the process of being established, stabilizing the fragmented coordination.

In the regional context, the Plzeň Region, located in the southwest of the Czech Republic on the border with Germany, offers a combination of natural wealth and cultural heritage. The region is also among the most forested areas in the Czech Republic—especially due to the extensive forest complexes of Šumava and Český les. The region includes the Šumava National Park and several protected landscape areas (e.g., Český les, Brdy, Křivoklátsko). The region provides ideal conditions for nature and educational tourism as well as the development of thematic trails connected to nature, culture, and traditions.

The region has a rich history and significant cultural centers, the largest being Plzeň with 189,000 inhabitants. Plzeň, as the regional capital, is an economic and cultural center, while rural areas face population decline and lower service accessibility. The regional economy is industrially and agriculturally oriented, with forestry having a long-term importance.

Tourism has great potential but lacks coordination and unified destination management - the establishment of the regional DMO is still in preparation. The region offers opportunities for thematic routes and cooperation between municipalities, schools, and local stakeholders, especially within projects like the Danube Wood(s) Route, which connect natural, cultural, and educational values.

For the Danube Wood Route itself, in the first phase, we select locations that meet internationally defined criteria for inclusion in the Danube Wood Route.

To be included in the Danube Wood Route, selected locations must meet a set of strategic and operational criteria ensuring their suitability for the development of cultural tourism and international cooperation. Main requirements include unique features (“unique selling points”) related to forest and woodworking heritage, good accessibility for visitors, and sufficient existing or planned tourism infrastructure. Furthermore, clear ownership and management of the location must be defined, qualified staff should be available, financing secured or at least the potential for long-term financial sustainability. A key criterion is also the readiness and willingness of local stakeholders to cooperate in project implementation. Meeting these conditions significantly increases the potential of the location to contribute to the goals of the Danube Wood Route as a sustainable, culturally rich, and well-managed tourism initiative.

Justification for the selection of key heritage sites in the Šumava and Český les regions for the Danube Wood Route Selected natural, cultural, and heritage sites in the Šumava and Český les mountain regions show strong potential for integration into the Danube Wood Route due to their alignment with key selection criteria.

Unique features of these sites include exceptionally preserved traditional forest landscapes, historical infrastructure related to wood processing (e.g., glassworks, sawmills, floating canals), and authentic stories connected to forestry, woodworking crafts, and cultural memory – including narratives about vanished villages and the troubled border history. These features provide a strong foundation for interpretation and experiential tourism.

Accessibility is generally good, especially in Šumava, where developed tourist trails, road networks, and visitor centers already exist. In the central parts of Český les around tourist centers, tourism infrastructure and related services are less developed but continuously improving, and even less-visited areas of Český les are seeing gradual accessibility improvements through soft infrastructure and information support.

Tourist infrastructure in Šumava is very well developed – an extensive network of hiking and cycling trails, accommodation capacity, visitor centers, and guided tour offers are available. In Český les, although infrastructure is more modest, selected sites already benefit from thematic trails, educational elements, and pilot interpretative activities that can be further developed through the project.

Management and ownership of the selected sites are clearly defined – often national parks, CHKO administrations, the state, municipalities, or established NGOs. These entities have proven experience in site management, development, and stakeholder engagement.

Human resources are sufficient in most selected locations – local guides, educators, and craftsmen practicing traditional skills are involved. Further education and capacity building could enhance this potential, especially in less developed areas.

Financing is partially secured through national and European funds, regional grants, and cross-border cooperation tools. Inclusion of the sites in an international thematic route will increase their visibility and eligibility for additional funding.

The readiness of local stakeholders is high, thanks especially to existing cooperation structures (e.g., functioning and emerging destination management organizations, local action groups, cultural associations, NP and CHKO administrations), local pride, and motivation to revive forest-related traditions. Previous pilot initiatives (e.g., thematic events, interpretative panels, craft workshops) clearly demonstrated interest and engagement.

For these reasons, the selected locations in the Šumava and Český les areas represent not only cultural and natural value but also strategic readiness for inclusion in an international thematic route focused on sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, and wood-related traditions.

2.4 Challenges and Opportunities

Summary of relevance for the RAP (Regional Action Plan)

- Strengths: rich natural and cultural offer, woodworking traditions, strong potential for a thematic cultural trail (e.g., Danube Wood(s) Route).
- Weaknesses: fragmented tourism, uneven visitor distribution, weak infrastructure in less known areas, insufficient linkage between tourism actors.
- Recommendations:
 - Coordination of tourism products.
 - Support and promotion of rural and border areas.
 - Investment in infrastructure (including language accessibility and digital tools).
 - Interpretation and presentation of regional values with an emphasis on sustainability.

3 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

4 POSSIBLE MEASURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The measures serve to further elaborate within the stakeholder group, considering the development of the Route and its content, as well as the implementation of additional measures. The measures are selected with the aim of developing a thematic tourism product within the Plzeň Region, also reflecting the growing visitor demand for soft infrastructure.

4.1 Measure No. 1: Creation of a thematic "Wooden Map of the Plzeň Region"

Importance of the measure

The aim of this measure is to support a more balanced distribution of visitors across the Plzeň Region and promote sustainable tourism development through the thematization of cultural and natural heritage connected with forests and wood. The map will enable identification and promotion of locations linked to forests, wood, traditional crafts, wooden architecture, and natural as well as cultural points of interest beyond the most visited tourist centers (Plzeň, Šumava). It will help create a network of points of interest and stimulate the emergence of new thematic tourism products (e.g., wooden trails, experiential programs).

Nature of the measure

This is a mapping and planning tool that collects, categorizes, and visualizes existing and potential "wood-related" attractions in the region, for example:

- Objects of traditional wooden and wood-related architecture (technical structures, traditional rural buildings, sacred buildings, natural architecture)
- Craft workshops and studios (carvers, joiners, coopers, puppeteers, etc.)
- Cultural and educational institutions (museums, nature houses, exhibitions, educational trails, long-distance routes, schools focusing on forestry and woodworking)
- Natural sites associated with forests (significant forests, trails, memorial trees, forest nurseries)
- Cultural events and traditions related to wood (markets, workshops, wood festivals)

Possible activities under the measure

- Data collection and field mapping: identifying and categorizing wood- and forest-related locations (including lesser-known or forgotten ones). This data collection has already been conducted in previous project phases.
- Creation of a digital interactive map: a clear online application with filtering options (crafts, architecture, nature, events). This map app could build upon the printed map; its

creation and development should be implemented as a tourism product in cooperation with the regional DMO and local DMOs, financially supported by the Plzeň Region.

- Publication of a printed map and thematic guidebook: suitable for promotion in TICs (Tourist Information Centers) and events. This map could be created within the project with support from the Plzeň Region.
- Development of thematic routes (e.g., "Following the Footsteps of Wooden Architecture in the Český les," "Craft Workshops of the Pošumaví Region").
- Involvement of local schools and communities in content creation (e.g., photo and video documentation, collecting and sharing stories).
- Marketing and promotion: graphic identity, on-site signage, PR campaigns, linkage to Danube Wood(s) Route.
- Connection with other projects: e.g., cooperation with other cultural trails and long-distance routes, local educational trails, geoparks, cultural landscapes.

Involvement of stakeholders

- Regional Destination Management Organization - coordination, communication, use of the tourism platform.
- Local DMOs and micro-regions - identification of locations, support for signage and marketing.
- Towns and municipalities - suggestions for sites, maintenance of attractions, event hosting.
- Schools, museums, and educational institutions - content, public and school programs.
- Craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and associations - presentation of traditions and participation in offers (e.g., workshops, open days).
- Nature protection agencies, Protected Landscape Areas (CHKO), National Parks - natural attractions and education.
- Regional and national tourism centers and Danube Wood(s) Route partners - international promotion.

Proposed timeline

- Phase 1 - Preparation and mapping (6 months) - based on the Inventory report and map and Templates for the Joint Strategy already prepared
 - development of methodology,
 - establishment of cooperation with partners,
 - data collection and processing.
- Phase 2 - Map and content creation (6-9 months)
 - development of the digital map, graphic materials, and printed guidebook,
 - compilation of thematic routes and itineraries,
 - pilot events and signage.

- Phase 3 - Promotion and development (following 1-2 years)
 - marketing campaign and presentation at trade fairs,
 - integration into the European promotion of the Danube Wood(s) Route,
 - impact evaluation and map updates according to interest and visitor numbers.

Brief description of the output:

The intended output is the "Wooden Map of the Plzeň Region" - a thematic digital and printed map clearly displaying attractions related to forest, wood, crafts, wooden architecture, and natural heritage. The output will also include proposals for thematic routes, a visitor guide, and an accompanying promotional campaign. The map will serve as a basis for developing new tourism products and better visitor distribution in the region, aligned with sustainability principles. Financing issues need to be addressed further.

4.2 Measure No. 2: Kick-starting regional development through the creation of experiential tourism and a community of its providers - "experience makers"

Importance of the measure

This measure can bring a new impulse for supporting tourism in the region, as well as for local communities, and, not least, it may have social and economic impacts. It involves presenting the idea of providing experiential tourism—from activating people, understanding the system, defining roles, through education and skill enhancement, to achieving first successes and ensuring the sustainability of the initiated activities.

Nature of the measure

The activity would smoothly build on actions already implemented in the Danube Wood(s) Route project, specifically mapping and exploring the region through the theme of wood and forests, traditions, and crafts in the fields of culture and tourism. In the project, we focused on regional plans, strategies, studies, and other documents related to tourism, rural development, regional culture, economy, and similar areas.

Furthermore, we mapped stakeholders for cooperation in the project, including municipalities, the region, destination management organizations, cultural and community centers, museums, civil society, and individuals. From these stakeholders, a network of organizations and people connected through the project and its theme was created, with interest in supporting tourism and culture in the region, as well as its economic and social development. Through these actors, we could now begin activating individuals and inviting them to collaborate in a network of experience providers for visitors.

As a pilot region, we would select an area with potential for offering experiences and, at the same time, a region that would benefit economically and socially from such a product. Pilot areas may include so-called economically and socially disadvantaged areas. Economically and socially endangered areas (HSOÚ) are regions that face a long-term combination of adverse economic and social conditions. They are typically characterized by higher unemployment, lower workforce qualifications, weaker economic structures, and outmigration, especially of young people. These regions often have limited access to services, poorer transport connections, and low levels of

investment. These factors lead to a lower quality of life and fewer development opportunities, requiring targeted support from the state and regional policies.

In the Plzeň Region, these include municipalities with extended powers (ORP) Sušice, Horažďovice, and Nepomuk, as well as the former military areas Dobrá Voda (part of Sušice) and Brdy. Sušice, as one of the gateways to the Šumava Mountains in its foothills, has, based on knowledge gained in the DWR project, great potential for the development of experiential tourism.

As an example of good practice, guidance, and inspiration, we would use the Slovak project *Objavte Poloniny* and the outputs of the organization *Také naše, o.z.*, which we had the opportunity to get acquainted with during a Peer Review visit in the Prešov region and the Poloniny in August 2025. *Objavte* focuses on mediating local experiences for visitors, benefiting the local communities.

We would target individuals with potential to become “experience makers,” i.e., to create tourism services in the form of various activities, artistic or craft workshops, handmade or gastronomic experiences, guided walks, and similar. In the project, we will further identify them through the **Innovation Tool Box** activity, which involves a competition for an original wooden souvenir of the region. Craftspeople, students, and creatives working with wood and natural materials were invited; the competition runs until February 2026. Additionally, through the preparation of the **Wooden Weekend in Plzeň**, primarily aimed at promoting the emerging DWR, we plan to involve creators, craftspeople, etc., in wooden workshop activities.

In the selected Sušice region, in cooperation with local actors (municipalities, towns, tourist and visitor centers, cultural institutions, and civil society), we would approach targeted local individuals. This would expand the existing DWR project activities to include additional stakeholders - potential future experience makers.

Possible activities under the measure - process of creating the experience network

1. Establishing a shared vision and goal, and defining the roles of stakeholders
2. Education and skills development, inspiration from good practices
3. First successes - building trust, cohesion, meaning, and communication of activities and achievements - personal stories, motivation
4. Maintaining an active spirit - persistence, openness, and creation of an ecosystem - connected network, roles, collaboration

Involvement of stakeholders

- Plzeň Region Tourism Headquarters (CCRPK) and Plzeň Region (support)
- Regional destination organizations (Destinace Sušicko)
- Municipalities and towns
- Cultural institutions, museums
- Local communities, associations, schools
- Artists, craftspeople, other active individuals

Outputs

- Created experiential programs

- Created technical conditions and facilities for the experiential program
- Community of involved experience makers
- Website with booking system for experiences, and possibly an app

Indicators and impact measurement

- Number of involved experience makers
- Increase in regional and site visitation where experiences can be undertaken
- Number of website or app visits
- Involvement of local partners and institutions (number of cooperating entities)
- Visitor satisfaction (questionnaires, online reviews)

4.3 Measure No. 3: Interpretation of Memory Sites and Historical Traces in the Landscape (not only with wooden elements)

Significance of the Measure

This measure responds to the need to preserve, highlight, and interpret the cultural and historical layers of the Plzeň Region landscape, especially in the Šumava and Český les areas. These places - often forgotten and today physically indistinct - hold strong symbolic and historical significance and can become valuable destinations for thematic educational tourism.

Nature of the Measure

It involves building soft interpretive infrastructure at sites of vanished villages, historical routes, and other memory locations. Emphasis is placed on a sensitive approach to nature, non-invasive elements, and linking digital tools with physical experiences in the landscape.

Proposed Activities

- Installation of interpretive elements in the landscape (memory panels, wooden silhouettes of houses, symbolic objects)
- Use of digital tools (e.g., ArcGIS Story Maps, Mapy.cz applications, QR codes linking to old maps, memories, photographs, 3D reconstructions)
- Creation of thematic educational trails "In the Footsteps of Vanished Villages" with several stops and connection to local stories
- Collection and processing of eyewitness memories, historical sources, and visual materials in cooperation with municipalities, schools, and museums
- Collaboration with craftsmen and artists on creating wooden objects as symbolic traces of vanished places

Involved Entities

- Plzeň Region Tourism Headquarters (CCRPK)

- Regional Destination Organizations (e.g., DMO Šumava, DMO Postřelí, DMO Český les)
- Municipalities and towns
- Memory institutions, museums, archives
- Local communities, associations, schools
- Artists, craftsmen, landscape architects

Outputs

- Newly marked memory sites in the field
- Educational trails with physical and digital elements, or improvement and supplementation of existing ones
- Linking trails with digital versions, databases of historical sources, stories, and photographs

Indicators and Impact Measurement

- Number of newly interpreted locations
- Trail visitation (using counters or mobile device data)
- Number of visits to websites or applications
- Engagement of local partners and institutions (number of cooperating entities)
- Visitor satisfaction (surveys, online ratings)

5 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND MONITORING SYSTEM

5.1 Monitoring Framework

The monitoring framework is a tool for tracking the progress and effectiveness of the measures proposed within the development of the Danube Wood(s) Route. It monitors the achievement of goals in the areas of tourism, cultural heritage, sustainable forest use, and local community development.

Main elements of the monitoring framework:

- Identification of key project measures and activities - The project will conclude in the first half of 2026, with a possible extension until the end of 2026. The project has defined outputs for individual periods and main project outputs. From a regional perspective, key is the involvement in the European Cultural Route of Wood and Forest, which will bring new opportunities for regional development in tourism, culture, and the related economy. In the RAP, activities of the Wooden Map of the Region are planned, mapping the region from the perspective of wood and forest themes and delivering this theme to visitors (especially Measure 1). Further, networking the stakeholders involved in the project and their future cooperation, both organizationally and individually (especially Measure 2, but also the other measures). If a route is created, it is necessary to support and develop its infrastructure, visual aspects, and storytelling with physical elements; thus, Measure 3 is proposed.

- Designation of responsible entities - RRA PK through participation in other projects and programs, Plzeň Region providing conceptual and financial support, municipalities as networking elements and implementers of culture and tourism in their areas, tourist and cultural organizations, and NGOs.
- Setting a timeline for implementation - Implementation of Measure 1 - Wooden Maps of the Region from January to December 2026 within the project. Implementation of Measure 2 - Experience Networks - initiating activities within the project by activating stakeholders, networking, education, sourcing resources, and finding implementers and funding for follow-up activities. Implementation of Measure 3 - Infrastructure - partially could be piloted within the project, e.g., one starter element, a wooden bench at an attractive spot on the route, with additional elements added in other locations. This should be a long-term goal following the route's development and ensuring its sustainability.
- Monitoring the achievement of planned goals and benefits for the region (economic, cultural, environmental) through evaluation of the plan.
- Regular documentation and reporting of results.

5.2 Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan defines how the impact of the measures will be measured and assessed. The goal is to determine whether the activities are effective and deliver the expected results for regional development, tourism, and cultural heritage.

Evaluation procedure:

1. Data collection - Regular collection of data on route visitation, the number of participating municipalities, participation in cultural and educational events, and involvement of local stakeholders.
2. Performance analysis - Comparing the achievement of objectives with planned indicators.
3. Feedback and recommendations - Identifying areas for improvement and optimizing activities based on data and analyses, as well as cooperation within the stakeholder group established in the project, which should continue to contribute to the topic's development.
4. Reporting - Regular reports for involved entities, including recommendations for future financing and development.

5.3 Measure Indicators

Indicators are used to measure the success of individual measures. Recommended types of indicators:

A. Quantitative indicators:

- Number of participating municipalities and project partners in the measure and related activities.
- Number of visitors annually relating to the theme of the Route, wood, and forest (questionnaires).

- Number of cultural and educational events connected with forest and woodworking heritage and contemporary topics.
- Investments in route infrastructure (km of marked trails, number of elements, interpretation points).

B. Qualitative indicators:

- Satisfaction of visitors and event participants (questionnaires, online reviews).
- Level of cooperation between municipalities, cultural institutions, and other involved entities.
- Impact on awareness of the region's cultural and natural heritage.

C. Environmental and economic indicators:

- Implementation of sustainable practices in the management of tourism infrastructure.
- Number of new jobs and local businesses involved in the project.
- Increase in revenue from tourism and cultural activities.

6 FUNDING OPTIONS - beyond the Danube Wood(s) project

For a project like the Danube Wood(s) Route, in its phase of sustainability and development, as well as for the implementation of the measures proposed in this plan, there are multiple funding opportunities. These can be combined to cover both infrastructure investments and cultural, educational, and environmental activities. They can be divided by levels - European, national (Czech Republic), regional (Plzeň Region), and local/community sources.

European funding sources:

- INTERREG / Danube Transnational Programme - programs focused on cross-border cooperation in tourism, nature protection, and cultural heritage (ideal for linking with other Danube regions).
- Interreg Bavaria - Czech Republic - opportunities for cross-border cooperation involving municipalities, NGOs, and businesses.
- COSME and Creative Europe - support for the development of cultural tourism, marketing, and educational activities.
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) - investments in sustainable forest management, educational infrastructure, and environmental activities.
- HORIZON EUROPE - grants for innovations in sustainable forestry, eco-tourism, and digital tools for trails.

National sources - Czech Republic

- Ministry of Regional Development (MMR) - programs supporting tourism and rural development (e.g., Rural Development Programme, Regional Development Support Programme).
- Ministry of the Environment (MŽP) - programs for nature protection, sustainable forestry, and environmental education (e.g., Green Savings Programme, national LIFE projects).
- Ministry of Culture (MK) - financing for cultural heritage, educational and promotional activities, and protection of monuments and historical objects related to forest and woodworking heritage.

Regional sources - Pilsen Region:

- Regional grant programs of the Region - support for tourism, cultural and educational activities, trail marking, and tourist infrastructure.
- Support for municipal and micro-regional development - small projects to improve local infrastructure (cycle paths, rest areas, educational trails).
- Regional development funds and contributions - financing investment projects and marketing activities for the development of tourist destinations.

Contributions from municipalities and local residents:

- Financial participation of municipalities - co-financing infrastructure investments, trail maintenance, information boards, and rest areas.
- Voluntary contributions and community fundraising - local associations, forest owners' groups, or citizens can contribute to trail maintenance, educational activities, and cultural programs.
- In-kind contributions - involvement of local residents in planting, trail maintenance, guiding services, event organization, and route promotion.
- Partnerships with entrepreneurs and local businesses - sponsorships, services for tourists, and the provision of local products and souvenirs.

Recommendations for combined financing

- Mix of European and national funds - infrastructure and major investments can be financed from EU funds, while cultural and educational activities are better supported through national and regional programs.
- Involvement of communities and municipalities - ensures project sustainability and local support.

7 CONCLUSION

8 LIST OF SOURCES

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