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# **INNOVATIVE CULTURAL TOURISM IN EUROPEAN PERIPHERIES**

Edited by

Karol Jan Borowiecki, Antonella Fresa and  
José María Martín Civantos



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# Innovative Cultural Tourism in European Peripheries

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Karol Jan Borowiecki,  
Antonella Fresa and  
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# 8 Participatory platform for sustainable cultural tourism

## The case of Central Slovakia

*Darina Rojíková, Kamila Borseková  
and Alexandra Bitušíková*

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present and evaluate the participatory methodology employed in the development of “Mining Treasures,” an interactive online platform designed to enhance regional development and tourism in the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region of Slovakia. This platform, particularly focused on the region’s less developed and marginalised areas, was created through extensive collaboration with diverse stakeholders and individuals. The underlying concept of this initiative is sustainable cultural tourism, which, according to the European Commission (2019), involves the integrated management of cultural heritage and tourism activities in harmony with local communities. This approach not only aims to yield social, environmental, and economic benefits for all involved parties but also emphasises the conservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage alongside sustainable tourism development. Sustainable cultural tourism places the cultural heritage and its communities at the heart of decision-making, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared with the cultural heritage and its local people. This concept supports the preservation of cultural heritage and its authentic interpretation, as well as local sustainable economies. Furthermore, sustainable cultural tourism seeks to balance the benefits of attracting visitors to local communities with the mitigation of potential negative impacts, such as the degradation of cultural sites and practices due to overuse and commodification. The chapter will also explore strategic planning and networking in sustainable cultural tourism, highlighting concepts like “slow tourism,” “authenticity,” “storytelling,” “well-being,” and “contact with locals” (Callot, 2013). The European Commission (2019, 2022) underscores the integral role of society, heritage communities, groups, and individuals in cultural heritage, not merely as passive audiences but as active participants in governance and management (for more information see, e.g. Borseková et al., 2022, 2023).

Therefore, the primary motivation behind this chapter is to share our experiences with a broader professional audience regarding the participatory creation of a responsive web platform and digital map, “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia.” This platform vividly showcases the paramount mining



locations in the region's two cities, Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica (and their environs). It not only presents these sites in an engaging manner but also fosters participation and heritage community building. The participatory approach adopted during its development aims to rejuvenate the current tourism offerings in the market. It seeks to distribute tourists more evenly, especially diverting them from crowded cities to broader areas, attract those keen on mining cultural heritage (be it tangible, intangible, or industrial), and provide unparalleled educational resources tied to the region's mining history and culture. This is particularly crucial given the region's underutilisation of its cultural heritage for sustainable tourism and territorial development. While cities grapple with the challenges of mass tourism, often drawing criticism from locals, the surrounding rural municipalities face a dearth of tourist interest and inadequate development. Hence, a key goal of the platform is to distribute tourists more evenly across a larger area that has much to offer.

The potential of the Banská Bystrica region is deeply intertwined with its mining legacy. Since the 13th century, deposits of gold, silver, and copper, especially in Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, and Kremnica, have been exploited. Reflecting the metals mined, the mining towns were aptly named "Copper Banská Bystrica," "Silver Banská Štiavnica," and "Golden Kremnica."

The city of Banská Bystrica, known for copper mining, attained its current picturesque appearance in the late Middle Ages. This transformation was largely due to the affluent Fugger and Thurzo families, who established the prosperous Thurzo-Fugger Copper Company in 1494, a pioneering capitalist enterprise of its time. The Thurzo-Fugger company is also credited with several global "firsts," including the introduction of an 8-hour workday, retirement benefits for miners and widows, medical care, and the innovative double-entry bookkeeping system. The region is replete with over 250 tangible cultural heritage sites, including palaces, mansions, and more, particularly in and around Banská Bystrica.

Another significant area with a rich mining history is Banská Štiavnica, known as "Silver Banská Štiavnica." This historic city, along with its surrounding technical monuments, has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1993. Banská Štiavnica has a storied past, from its early mentions in 1156 as "terra banensium" to its rise as the largest mining centre in the Habsburg monarchy in the 18th century. The city is home to 360 monuments, with over 200 linked to its mining history.

Despite the immense potential of this heritage for tourism, its value remains underappreciated in the region. There's a noticeable absence of marketing and digital tools that could spotlight this unique historical facet, fostering territorial development and sustainable tourism.

## **8.2 The current state of tourism**

The Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, spanning an area of 9,454 km<sup>2</sup> and constituting 19.3% of Slovakia's total land area, is the country's largest

region. Located in the southern part of central Slovakia, it shares its southern border with the Republic of Hungary. The region's topography is diverse, ranging from high mountainous terrains in the north, rugged landscapes in the centre, to gently rolling and flat areas in the south.

With a population of approximately 660,000, the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region has a population density of fewer than 70 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Once considered the most prosperous and affluent region in Slovakia, it now ranks among the least developed. This decline is evident from its relatively high unemployment rate and low Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Despite the region's rich cultural and natural assets, a significant portion of its population is employed in the industrial, trade, and construction sectors. Mining, once a pivotal industry for the region, has seen a decline, with the focus now primarily on surface mining of non-metallic minerals. The industrial sector contributes to over a quarter of the region's gross added value. In contrast, trade, transport, accommodation, and catering—sectors intertwined with tourism—contribute only 17% to the added value.

Relative to other Slovak regions, the tourism sector in the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region is underdeveloped. This observation is supported by tourism metrics. Tourism revenues in the region account for a mere 0.57% of Slovakia's total, the lowest among all Slovak regions. This trend is consistent across various tourism indicators, including revenues from active tourism (2.26%), passive tourism (0.44%), domestic tourism (2.85%), and foreign tourism (1.36%).

One significant factor impacting the attractiveness of this region is the accessibility of transportation infrastructure modes such as trains, buses, and roads. Despite the fact that the region has a network of public bus and train transport, this is not sufficiently integrated. There is also a lack of road connection between the east-west and north-south of Slovakia, which would quickly and qualitatively connect the Banská Bystrica region with other touristic significant locations in Slovakia with a high concentration of tourists, e.g. the High Tatras, the capital Bratislava, Košice. In some cities of the region, e.g. Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica, there is also a huge problem with parking. There is a lack of parking lots with the possibility of public transportation to city centres. The lack of tourist information centres with multilingual staff and insufficient promotion of available services in the region contribute to a perception of poor infrastructure and detract from the overall tourist experience.

Some of the mentioned problems that create barriers for the development of tourism in the Banská Bystrica region are the subject of discussions by politicians, experts, and the general public. Currently, there are slowly emerging solutions that could remove these barriers (e. g. integrated public transport system, completion of important roads connecting the southern and northern parts of the region). However, their implementation and the resulting effect will not be seen until several years from now.

### *8.2.1 Indicators of tourist potential*

From a tourism perspective, there are notable disparities between the districts of Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica, largely attributed to their differing sizes. The Banská Bystrica district houses up to a quarter of the region's accommodation facilities. However, when considering the distinct sizes of the districts and the cities themselves, the difference in the number of accommodations—70 in both Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica—is relatively minor.

The most significant variances between the two districts emerge when examining indicators like the total number of rooms and beds. The Banská Bystrica district offers over a third of the region's total accommodation capacity, but only a quarter of this capacity is utilised in both districts. In contrast, the Banská Štiavnica district primarily features smaller accommodation facilities, as evidenced by the room and bed counts per facility.

Although the Banská Bystrica district encompasses a third of the region's accommodation capacities, it accounts for 73% of the total accommodation revenue. This trend is consistent with other indicators, such as total revenue from both foreign and domestic visitors.

The reason is that Banská Bystrica district also attracts a significant number of business travellers due to its central location, developed infrastructure, presence of industries, businesses, and government institutions. The district's conference facilities, hotels, and amenities cater to the needs of corporate travellers, who often spend more on accommodation and related services compared to leisure tourists. Banská Bystrica district also serves as a hub for economic activities and employment opportunities in the region. Overall, the combination of appealing tourist attractions, business opportunities, infrastructure, and economic activities contributes to Banská Bystrica district's dominance in accommodation revenues within the region. This phenomenon underscores the district's importance as a tourism and economic hotspot and highlights the potential for further growth and development.

Despite the average accommodation prices in both districts being below the regional mean, domestic visitors often express concerns about the costs. The high demand for tourism services, especially in Banská Štiavnica, has led to an increase in prices for related services, like dining, over recent years. This has made them less affordable, particularly for residents.

Moreover, essential service providers like hair salons, grocery stores, clothing retailers, and drugstores have gradually vanished from Banská Štiavnica's centre. In their place, tourism-related establishments like cafes, bakeries, restaurants, and souvenir shops have emerged. This shift has posed accessibility challenges, especially for locals residing in the city centre. Such developments, among others, have fostered tension between the local community and tourists.

The trends in the indicators “Overnight Stays in Accommodation Facilities” (Figure 8.1) and “Turnover in Accommodation Facilities” (Figure 8.2)

*Table 8.1* Indicators of tourist potential in the Banská Bystrica region, Banská Bystrica, and Banská Štiavnica districts

<i>Indicator of tourism</i>	<i>Banská Bystrica region</i>	<i>Banská Bystrica district</i>		<i>Banská Štiavnica district</i>	
Total number of accommodation facilities available	61,400	15,600	25%	8,600	14%
Total number of rooms available	7 97,300	2 91,100	37%	57,600	7%
The number of rooms converted to 1 accommodation facility	13	19		7	
Total number of beds (including camping places) available	2,1 47,000	7 48,200	35%	1 76,600	8%
The number of beds converted to 1 accommodation facility	35	47		20	
Total revenue for accommodation (euro)	1,2 37,2 13,000	9 04,0 70,300	73%	2 29,6 25,100	19%
Sales of foreign visitors (EUR)	2 24,2 99,900	1 56,7 28,900	70%	327 633,00	15%
Sales of domestic visitors (euro)	1,0 80,4 84,100	6 79,7 70,400	63%	1 96,8 61,800	18%
Average price for accommodation in accommodation facilities (euro)	3,670	3,130		3,020	
Average price for accommodation in accommodation facilities per foreign visitor (euro)	5,050	3,440		3,730	
Average price for accommodation in accommodation facilities per domestic visitor (euro)	3,530	3,040		2,930	
Net use of permanent beds in accommodation facilities (%)	2,490	2,360		2,220	
Net room utilisation (%)	3,330	2,920		2,680	

*Source:* Own elaboration based on data from Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

highlight the seasonality of tourism in the districts of Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica. Notable differences between the districts are evident.

In the Banská Bystrica district, there are two primary tourist seasons: summer and winter. However, each lasts only for a brief duration of two months. The summer season, occurring in July and August, aligns with Slovakia's summer holidays. The winter season spans from January to February.

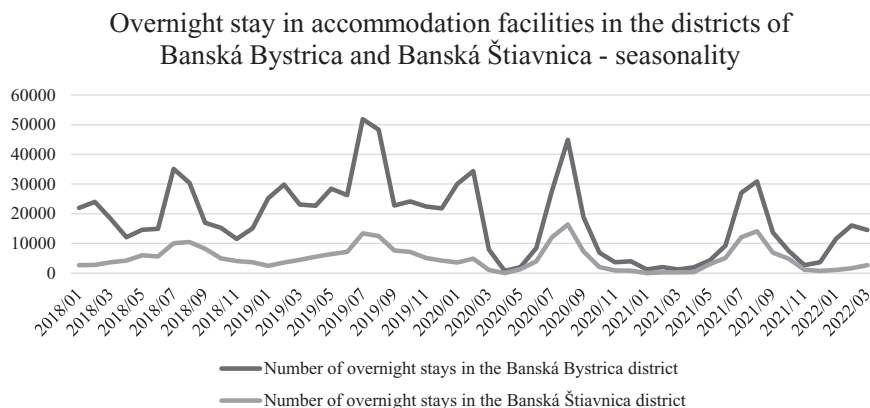


Figure 8.1 Overnight stay in accommodation facilities in the districts of Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

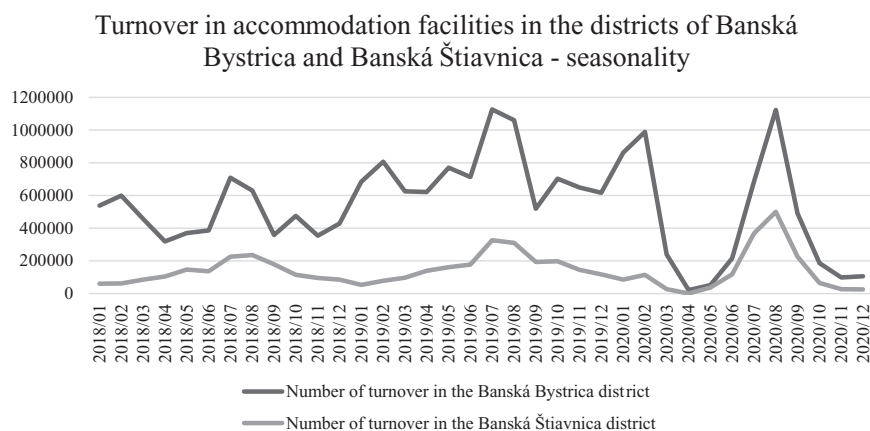


Figure 8.2 Turnover in accommodation facilities in the districts of Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Conversely, the Banská Štiavnica district has a single, more extended season that gradually builds up and lasts for four months, with peak tourist activity observed from June to September.

The distinct seasonality between the two districts can be attributed to their unique offerings. Banská Bystrica, with several winter resorts in its vicinity, is better equipped for winter tourism. On the other hand, Banská Štiavnica boasts a rich cultural heritage linked to mining and is home to 24 artificial lakes (from an original count of 60). These lakes, initially designed

innovatively to generate energy for mines, now serve as recreational spots during the summer.

The stretch from April to May 2020 and December to April 2021 was particularly unique for tourism in both districts due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated preventive measures.

### 8.2.2 *Identification of competitive advantage*

Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica boast a remarkable mining history dating back centuries. Banská Štiavnica and Banská Bystrica were once among the most important mining towns in the Kingdom of Hungary. Their territories showcase well-preserved mining structures, including mines, churches, and manor houses. Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica, along with their surrounding municipalities, are distinguished by over 600 tangible and industrial heritage sites that stand testament to their rich mining history. The cultural vibrancy of Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica is evident through numerous festivals and events celebrating their heritage. Additionally, region hosts annual cultural events, such as historical reenactments, folklore festivals, and arts exhibitions, which attract visitors from across Slovakia and beyond. This cultural heritage, intertwined with the region's stunning natural landscapes and punctuated by cultural routes like the Barbora and Fugger routes, establishes Central Slovakia's unique competitive advantage.

While other regions of Slovakia may possess historical sites and cultural attractions, few rival the depth, diversity, and authenticity found in Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica. By harnessing and effectively leveraging this shared competitive advantage, mining towns and tourist routes can significantly bolster the region's sustainable development. This aligns with the findings of Borseková et al. (2015, 2017), which highlight that the most commonly identified competitive advantage across all Slovak regions is their cultural and historical heritage, serving as the primary tourist attraction in Slovakia. Such a heritage not only offers a type of competitive advantage but also holds the potential to evolve into a genuine competitive advantage, given its unique and inimitable nature.

### 8.2.3 *Routes connecting the mining cultural heritage in Central Slovakia*

The **Barbora Route** stands as the longest educational and sightseeing route in Slovakia, weaving together mining monuments and attractions throughout central Slovakia. Strategically segmented between villages, the route can be traversed on foot or by bicycle. After completing each segment, visitors have the option to rest at local accommodation facilities, which also offer luggage transfer services. Along the way, catering services present an opportunity for travellers to taste traditional local dishes.

Spanning 186.2 km, this pilgrimage route begins and concludes in Banská Bystrica, designed to be completed over nine days. It's structured into nine

stages, with each stage culminating in an overnight stay. The stages vary in length, alternating between longer and shorter distances. As the name suggests, the route pays homage to St. Barbora, the patron saint of miners. It celebrates locations tied to the mining history of both Slovak and broader European significance. The Barbora route features 29 symbolic stops, commemorating the age at which Saint Barbora passed away. These stops highlight locations of mining, historical, natural, religious, cultural, and technical significance. Throughout the journey, visitors can collect stamps in a guidebook, and upon completion with all stamps, they receive a certificate of passage.

The **Fugger Route** serves as an educational exploration trail leading to mines and mountain centres that enriched the Fuggers with silver, copper, and iron. The Fuggers amassed their wealth in early modern Augsburg through the cotton trade, loans to prominent figures, and predominantly the mining industry. Circa 1490, the Fuggers established a pan-European mining enterprise with ore mines and smelters in Tyrol, Carinthia, and Banská Bystrica in Upper Hungary (present-day Slovakia). Their ventures with various metals, especially copper and mercury, penned a riveting chapter in European economic and social history. Today, Fugger houses, castles, churches, monuments, accessible mining tunnels, and museums in cities like Banská Bystrica, Kremnica, and Banská Štiavnica offer insights into the history of this mining conglomerate, which, by around 1660, prefigured the European Union.

Today's Fugger Route in Slovakia is a segment of the broader European Fugger Route, linking cities such as Augsburg, Bad Hindelang, Schwaz, Hall, Sterzing, and Banská Bystrica. Banská Bystrica (Neusohl) stands as the heart of the Fugger Route in present-day Slovakia, given the Fuggers' significant copper ore acquisitions from the city. An old adage goes, "Golden Augsburg stands on Copper Banská Bystrica."

In contrast to the Barbora Route, which is actively marketed as a tourism product, the Fugger Route lacks management and promotion. The Barbora Route's stewardship lies with the civic association Terra Montanae. Its members maintain the hiking trails, mark the route, and guide pilgrims along the way. In the realm of sustainable tourism, a participatory approach stands as a cornerstone for genuine and lasting development. By actively involving local communities, stakeholders, and visitors in decision-making processes, we can ensure that tourism initiatives are both environmentally sustainable and culturally respectful. The Barbora and Fugger Routes, with their rich historical and cultural significance, present a prime opportunity for such development. By harnessing wider participation from local communities and beyond, these routes can be transformed into vibrant hubs of sustainable tourism, ensuring their preservation and relevance for generations to come.

### 8.3 Participatory platform—Mining treasures of Central Slovakia

The responsive web platform and digital map, "Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia," vividly showcase the most significant mining sites in two key cities



of the region: Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica, as well as their surrounding areas. The participatory approach adopted in its development not only refreshes the current tourism offerings but also helps disperse tourists, especially those from urban areas, across a broader region.

Informing visitors about the offerings of the region beyond the city centre is important, but it is not sufficient on its own to redirect tourist flows. The Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia platform adopts a multifaceted approach that combines the promotion of both well-known and lesser-known mining sites, education, and cooperation with local stakeholders.

The Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia platform employs a comprehensive and strategic approach to marketing activities aimed at promoting mining cultural heritage, thus mitigating the effects of tourism on city centres, especially in Banská Štiavnica. The platform not only highlights renowned sites but also showcases lesser-known mining locations. This encompasses the promotion of industrial and material heritage, as well as cultural events and tourism in the surrounding villages. Lesser-known mining sites often remain undiscovered by tourists due to the lack of presentation and promotion by tourist information centres, tourism organisations, and travel agencies. Additionally, the platform offers off-season activities through tourism and cultural events. By diversifying tourism offerings, the platform can distribute visitor flows and alleviate pressure on city centres.

However, for the implementation of sustainable tourism practices, cooperation with local stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, civic associations, cultural institutions, and residents, who acknowledge the adverse impacts of tourism on overcrowded city centres, is crucial. These stakeholders actively contribute to the platform's content creation, thereby taking ownership and spreading its message further. By highlighting the unique offerings of the entire region, not just the city centre, stakeholders advocate for responsible tourism. The platform's educational function, featuring distinctive educational resources that delve into the region's mining history and culture, also plays a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism in the area. It is essential for children and young people to learn about the region's rich and rare mining history, fostering their readiness to protect cultural heritage and engage in sustainable and responsible tourism in the future.

The platform also provides a forum for stakeholders to engage in discussions with representatives of local and regional governments regarding potential solutions for promoting sustainable tourism in the region. Government investment in infrastructure beyond the city centre is crucial, including improvements to transport links, signage, and visitor facilities. These enhancements can facilitate tourists' access to and enjoyment of attractions outside the city centre.

Through these measures, the platform can assist in alleviating the adverse impacts of tourism on city centres, fostering a more sustainable and equitable tourism experience for visitors, and generating or sustaining tourism income for residents.

This approach attracts a diverse set of tourists, especially those keen on exploring mining cultural heritage—be it tangible, intangible, or industrial.

The participatory creation of the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” platform commenced in June 2021 and was officially launched in December 2022 on the website [www.banickepoklady.eu](http://www.banickepoklady.eu). As of now, it features a total of 250 activities spread across nine categories: galleries and museums; tangible heritage—monuments; intangible heritage; industrial heritage; events; education; for children; hiking; and on the map. “Mining Treasures” is a dynamic platform, regularly updated with new activities, intriguing features, and news articles. Since April 2023, an English version has been available, broadening its appeal to international visitors. Since its inception, the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” platform has garnered 338 users from 18 different countries, with an average visit duration of 2 minutes and 7 seconds. The majority of users are from Slovakia, followed by the USA, Sweden, and Ireland. On the platform, the cities of Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica, articles, and routes—specifically the Barbora and Fugger routes—as well as activities related to galleries and museums have been of particular interest to visitors. The platform’s promotion is facilitated through its integration with social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. While “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” is fundamentally a digital platform, its creation extends beyond just the technical aspects. The participatory development process encompassed data collection, community engagement, design, marketing, and content creation.

### **8.3.1** *Data collection*

As part of the creation of the platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia,” primary and secondary data related to the creation, testing, use and promotion of the interactive platform were collected and evaluated. Data related to the creation of the interactive platform consists of primary and secondary data related to the content of the interactive platform; this includes texts, photographs, videos, and audio materials. Data related to the testing, use, and promotion of the interactive platform consists of collecting data related to the testing and usage of the platform, such as the number of visits/clicks, the number of interactions, and data related to feedback while using the interactive platform (from local communities and beyond) and collecting data related to using/promoting the platform and its content through social media (e.g., using the hashtag #banickepoklady/#miningtreasures, liking, commenting, sharing the content of the platform through different types of social media).

In connection with data collection for interactive platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia,” more than 30 museums and galleries, 60 tangible heritage objects, 40 industrial heritages objects and 25 events were physically

visited. More than 250 texts were prepared and reviewed for the content of the interactive platform, more than 2,300 photos were taken, and more than 350 websites were visited to get inspired. A total of more than 100 people participated in data collection within the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” platform.

### 8.3.2 *Meetings with communities*

At the very beginning of the creation of the interactive platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia,” several important meetings were held with key stakeholders. This includes the Regional Destination Management Organisation BBSK and the Local Destination Management Organisation Central Slovakian Local Destination Management Organisation. The participation of students who became active contributors to the platform by creating original content for the platform was increased. In addition, more than 20 meetings were organised with the ICT company related to the preparation phase of the interactive digital platform. Training on the functionality of the content of the interactive platform and adding items was also carried out by the company that designs the interactive platform.

Through destination management organisations and numerous meetings with local organisations, new groups of local communities and individuals are involved in the creation of the platform. Successfully involved in the creation of the platform are local photographers who provide photos and visual materials for the content of the platform.

University students are involved in the creation of content as well as testing and promotion of the platform through specific assignments in five different courses (Creativity and culture in regional development; New trends in local and regional politics; Participatory creation of public policy; Basics of marketing; and Marketing public and non-profit sector). Students’ participation led to the creation of 19 proposals for the logo and design manual of the interactive mining treasure platform. The winning proposal is used in the final version of the platform. Students also become active contributors and users of the platform. At the beginning of 2023, we met the author of the children’s book “*Copper Land*,” which tells the story of the Špania Dolina treasure and how a forest elf became a permonian. We were also invited to the launch of the book and established cooperation with this author. In 2023, it was also possible to meet and develop cooperation with stakeholders who are significantly involved in the protection and development of the mining heritage for the development of sustainable tourism and the creation of new products, including CA Terra Montanae, CA Štiavnický tajch, Primary school with kindergarten Maxilian Hella Štiavnické Bane, CA Špaňodolinská historical school, and Slovak Mining Museum in Banská Štiavnica. Very close cooperation was established with CA Terra Montanae, which covers the Barbora route project. Subsequently, in August 2023, a Memorandum of

Cooperation was signed with the representatives of CA Terra Montanae, not only in the creation of an interactive platform.

There was excellent collaboration in the development of the interactive platform with CA Štiavnický Tajch. This organisation, along with its dedicated volunteers, is actively involved in the revitalisation of the Banská Štiavnica water management system, which stands as the most significant water management structure ever constructed in Slovakia.

In total, the creation of the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” interactive platform involved more than 40 organisations spanning the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Additionally, 90 students from five academic courses, 27 photographers (including four professionals), and 22 active content authors contributed to the platform. Throughout the development process, over 45 meetings were held with these contributors.

### *8.3.3 Creation and design of responsive platform—technical part*

The development of the platform is carried out in three main phases: information architecture/web design/development; integration/framework/SEO/training; back-end configuration/implementation.

Based on the specified requirements, during phase 1 (information architecture/web design/development), the information architecture of the interactive platform was developed, followed by the design of the necessary subpages, modules, and elements, and the front-end and back-end was deployed.

Phase 2 included integration of a new visual identity and design modifications; deploying demo content—activities; articles, static pages SEO; preparation of the content framework for preparation; document with manual; cloud content architecture, two-phase training in working with the content framework and deploying content via TYPO 3.

During phase 3 (back-end configuration/implementation) was realised configuration of content management system for language mutations; configuration of recording elements for translation (activities, articles, tags, etc.); route interconnection configuration; Google analytics configuration testing; creating language files with a list of static texts/expressions for translation; implementation of texts from language files; additional filters (route complexity, or other parameter).

After the TYPO3 system was configured, it was possible to start creating the first activities—inserting texts, photos, information and running the platform in a test demo version, which was still being modified. Subsequently, the final user version of the platform was launched in December 2022. The Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia platform can be accessed at [www.banickepoklady.eu](http://www.banickepoklady.eu). Detailed instructions for using the Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia platform are available in Borseková et al. (2024) or directly on the platform in the part “Articles”—“Manual for working with the platform Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia.”



Figure 8.3 Final form of the logo of the platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia.”

#### 8.3.4 *Creation and design of responsive platform—Design and marketing part—logo competition, participatory approach to logo design and creation*

Students from the courses “Basics of Marketing” and “Marketing of Public and Non-profit Sector” actively contributed to the design of the interactive platform. They were given a specific assignment related to the platform’s visual identity. The creation of the visual identity for the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” platform was participatory in nature, facilitated through a logo competition. In total, 31 students participated, resulting in 19 proposed designs for the platform’s visual identity, logo, and design manual. The competition yielded numerous compelling logo proposals, making the selection of the final logo to represent the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” a challenging task.

The winning logo design consists of the abstract symbolism of mining, a hammer, which is interspersed with a cross as a sign used in the context of marking a place, a goal, etc. (treasure). The logotype refers to the discovery and wandering of “mining treasures.” Logo designs, including the winning logo, can be found in Borseková et al. (2024).

The winning logo design was modified by the designers in the final form (Figure 8.3), which is used on the platform, social media, in presentations, materials, and documents. The winning logo was embedded with a pin symbol, which we use to indicate activity on the platform map. The pin sign also appeared in other student logo designs.

#### 8.3.5 *Creation of content for the responsive platform—Participatory approach to platform content*

Creating the content of an interactive platform is a rather demanding process, which includes preparation of text obtained from several sources (books, articles, websites, meetings with the community), photography and editing of photos, obtaining information about entrance, opening hours, time required, track length, restrictions. Furthermore, it is necessary to obtain the exact location using Google Maps and the coordinates, which must be verified directly in the field. The content of the interactive platform is created in a participatory manner with the participation of students, representatives of partner organisations, and scientists involved in the project. Thus, a total of 18 students of the Creativity and Culture in Regional Development course were involved in the creation of the content of the interactive platform, who

had the task of visiting selected activities of the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” (museums and galleries, material monuments, industrial monuments) and processing the content of the interactive platform.

Twenty-seven authors and 31 photographers took part in the participatory creation of the content of the interactive platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia.”

More than 40 other students of the Creativity and Culture in Regional Development course participate in the promoting of the platform by publishing posts on the social networks Facebook and Instagram using the hashtag #banickepoklady. These are mainly photos from visiting platform activities (usually galleries and museums, monuments, events, etc.)

### **8.3.6 *Outputs of participatory creation of the interactive platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia”***

A total of more than 100 participants were involved in the participatory creation of the platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia,” who took part in the creation and design of the responsive platform within the technical part, design and marketing part, and content development.

During one year of participatory creation of the platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia,” more than 45 meetings were organised with more than 40 organisations and communities involved in the creation of the platform. A total of 250 activities were created by 27 authors on the platform. Twenty-seven photographers created more than 2,300 photos for the platform. A total of 90 students in five study subjects were involved in the creation of the content of the platform. Eighteen students prepared content and photos for 54 activities on the platform. Thirty-one students worked on creating the logo, creating a total of 19 logo designs. Forty-one students are still working on promoting the platform through social networks. Currently, the interactive platform has more than 1300 users from 96 countries of the world and their number is constantly growing. Table 8.2 shows the results of the participatory creation of the interactive platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia.”

The “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” platform successfully ensures the accuracy and authenticity of its content through a series of meticulously designed mechanisms. Collaborative creation is at the forefront, with over 40 organisations and communities actively participating in 45 meetings, contributing diverse perspectives and expertise to the content. The central role of a dedicated coordinator is crucial in this process, overseeing the verification of all submitted content, maintaining communication with stakeholders, and ensuring adherence to cultural and factual standards. Additionally, the platform provides comprehensive training and clear guidelines to all contributors, which helps in maintaining a consistent quality of content. Furthermore, the integration of advanced technology, such as digital archives and GIS mapping, plays a significant role in verifying geographical and historical

*Table 8.2* Results of participatory creation of the interactive platform “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia”

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Value</i>
Number of organisations and communities involved in the platform creation	40+
Number of meetings with partners	45
Total number of students involved in the platform creation	90
Number of students involved in creating the content of the Mining Treasures website	18
Number of activities processed by students on the Mining Treasures platform	54
Number of students involved in the creation of the Mining Treasures logo	31
Number of Mining treasures logo designs	19
Number of study subjects in which students participated in the platform creation	5
Number of activities on the platform Mining Treasures	250
Number of photos created for the platform	2300
Number of photographers involved in the creation of web content	31
Number of authors involved in the creation of web content	27
Number of social media platforms involved (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube)	3
Number of users of the platform	1300+

*Source:* Own elaboration.

data, thereby enhancing the platform’s reliability and educational value. These combined efforts result in a platform that is not only rich in diverse inputs but also anchored in accuracy and authenticity, reflecting the true essence of Central Slovakia’s cultural heritage.

In addition to its focus on accuracy and authenticity, the “Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia” platform also implements strategies to minimise environmental impacts, promote responsible tourism practices, and enhance community well-being. A key initiative in this regard is the incorporation of educational content about environmentally significant landmarks, such as the Banská Štiavnica Water Management System. This content not only educates tourists about the region’s unique environmental features but also highlights ongoing participatory renewal efforts. By informing visitors about the importance of these ecosystems and the role they play in local heritage, the platform encourages more responsible and environmentally conscious tourism behaviours. This approach not only aids in the preservation of these natural systems but also fosters a deeper connection between tourists and the local community, contributing to the overall well-being and sustainability of the region.

#### 8.4 Conclusion

Central Slovakia’s historic mining locations, connected by the Barbora and Fugger routes, hold immense potential for fostering a heritage community



united by a shared cultural legacy. This community should be anchored in the mining history of the region, with a focus on preserving its rich cultural heritage and supporting enduring cultural traditions. The act of preserving and promoting this cultural heritage not only maintains the region's cultural diversity but also reinforces a sense of belonging and identity among its inhabitants. It evokes pride and offers a platform to showcase these values to the broader world.

By following the path of sustainable cultural tourism in Central Slovakia, particularly its historic mining locations linked by the Barbora and Fugger routes, offer a unique opportunity to cultivate a heritage community rooted in the region's rich mining history. This approach emphasises the preservation and promotion of the region's cultural heritage and enduring traditions, thereby maintaining its cultural diversity. By doing so, it not only reinforces a sense of belonging and identity among the local inhabitants but also instils a sense of pride in their cultural legacy. Such sustainable tourism initiatives provide a platform to share and showcase the region's unique cultural values and traditions with a wider audience, balancing the enhancement of regional development and tourism with the conservation of cultural heritage and local community engagement. This aligns with the broader concept of sustainable cultural tourism, which aims to integrate the management of cultural heritage and tourism in a way that benefits all stakeholders and supports both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

However, despite the region's vast potential and the presence of numerous cultural institutions, such as galleries and museums, as well as civic associations and mining groups, there remains a gap. These entities, all bound by the rich tapestry of mining history, have yet to fully unite and form a cohesive, resilient heritage community. Such a community would not only be a guardian of our ancestors' cultural heritage but would also harness it for territorial development, creating innovative products for sustainable tourism. Central to building this heritage community is the adoption of a participatory approach, one that is rooted in a "bottom-up" perspective.

The "Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia" platform stands as a testament to the power of collaborative effort and the potential of participatory approaches in fostering sustainable cultural tourism. Here's a breakdown of the platform's creation and its impact:

- **Collaborative Creation:** Over 40 organisations and communities came together, holding 45 meetings to shape the platform. This extensive collaboration underscores the importance of collective effort in building something of value.
- **Student Participation:** A significant 90 students from five different academic courses contributed to the platform's creation. Notably, 18 students were directly involved in curating the content for the website, processing 54 activities. Additionally, 31 students participated in a competition to design the platform's logo, resulting in 19 unique designs. This

active involvement of the younger generation highlights the platform's commitment to inclusivity and the blending of academic learning with practical application.

- **Rich Content:** The platform boasts 250 activities, enriched by a staggering 2,300 photos. This vast repository of content was made possible by the contributions of 31 photographers and 27 authors, emphasising the platform's comprehensive approach to showcasing Central Slovakia's mining heritage.
- **Digital Outreach:** The platform's digital presence spans three major social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. This wide digital footprint ensures that the rich history and cultural significance of Central Slovakia's mining heritage reach a broad audience.
- **User Engagement:** Since its inception, the platform has attracted more than 1300 users, indicating its growing popularity and the potential to become a significant tool for promoting sustainable cultural tourism.

In conclusion, the "Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia" platform exemplifies how a participatory approach can harness diverse talents and resources to create a comprehensive digital tool. Promoting the rich mining heritage of Central Slovakia not only educates and informs but also paves the way for sustainable cultural tourism in the region.

Moving forward, the journey of the "Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia" platform is far from over. The "Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia" is embarking on an exciting phase of development, bolstered by the pursuit of a matching grant from the Slovak Renewal Plan. This project's core objective is to leverage cultural heritage as a key driver for social and economic development in the region, using innovative and original methods that emphasise participation, education, and sustainable tourism. One of the key initiatives in this new phase is the development of an original prototype of a physical map of Central Slovakia and the Barbora Route. This map is unique in that it features a layer designed to connect with an app that integrates the content from the [banickepoklady.eu](http://banickepoklady.eu) platform. This integration represents a novel approach to tourism, blending traditional and digital methods of exploration. The physical map, paired with the digital app, will allow users to discover traditional sites while simultaneously engaging with digital content, enhancing the overall experience of exploring Central Slovakia's cultural heritage. For this, project is crucial to ensure that the benefits of the platform are distributed fairly among all stakeholders. Furthermore, the expansion of the participatory platform to include Kremnica and its surroundings marks a significant step in the project's development. By employing a participatory approach, similar to what was used for Banská Bystrica and Banská Štiavnica, the platform ensures that the development of new content is inclusive and reflective of the community's needs and insights. This expansion is not only about adding new locations but also about strengthening cooperation with local stakeholders, particularly in Kremnica, and utilising the

content for educational purposes. Utilising the content of the platform for educational purposes necessitates the involvement and cooperation of other stakeholders, including educational institutions and their teachers, pupils, students, civic associations, and cultural institutions. They will participate in both the preparation of the educational content for the platform and serve as recipients of its content.

The participatory approach, with its inherent dynamism, serves as an inexhaustible wellspring of inspiration. It continually brings forth fresh ideas and novel avenues for showcasing and leveraging the rich cultural heritage of Central Slovakia. As we continue to embrace this approach, we are not just limited to Central Slovakia but have the potential to set a precedent for regions beyond, illustrating the transformative power of collective effort in celebrating and preserving cultural legacies.

In essence, participatory approaches in tourism serve as a vital instrument for realising sustainable tourism in Central Slovakia. They harmonise economic, cultural, and environmental objectives with the desires and needs of local communities, ensuring the enduring success of tourism destinations. This approach is in line with the principles of sustainable cultural tourism, as it seeks to balance the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage with the economic and social development of the region. The emphasis on participatory methods ensures that the local community is not only a beneficiary but also an active participant in the development process, thus ensuring the sustainability and authenticity of the initiatives. This fact is also a basic prerequisite for the longevity and sustainability of the Mining Treasures of Central Slovakia platform. Long-lasting accessibility of the platform will be ensured by the Local Destination Management Organisation Central Slovakia, with which very close cooperation is developed, and which also actively participates in the creation of the platform's content. Additionally, considering that the Local Destination Management Organisation Central Slovakia is within the organisational scope of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region, sufficient financial and organisational support will be ensured for the long life of the platform.

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