

Building Partnership

Medical/Wellness Tourism Development in the World Heritage Caves of the Aggtelek And Slovak Karst (SKHU/1601/1.1/035)

Press Release

The cross-border project of the Aggtelek National Park Directorate and its partner, the State Nature Conservancy of Slovak Republic was awarded a non-refundable grant of € 1,616,098 from the Interreg V-A Slovakia - Hungary Cooperation Programme. The project was implemented between November 2017 and July 2021.

The 30+ km long Baradla-Domica cave system - split between Hungary (22 km) and Slovakia (approx. 8 km) - is the most significant representative of the underground world added to the list of World Heritage Sites as the caves of the Aggtelek karst and the Slovak karst. The aim of the project was to study the therapeutic effects of climate therapy in the Baradla-Domica cave system, to provide objective survey results, to renew the certification of Béke [Peace] Cave in Jósvalfő and to develop adequate visitor infrastructure needed for the corresponding services.

The connection between the cave climate and the improvement of the health of patients suffering from respiratory illnesses was first examined in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, this connection is undoubtedly proven and cave therapy, as a part of medical tourism, has now a growing potential in tourism and preservation of health.

Cave climate has certain constant features including the relatively constant temperature (annual temperature changes do not exceed 1°C), the purity of cave air (caves are free of dust, pollen and germs - at least the parts completely separated from the surface); the CO₂-content and the relative humidity values exceed those measured at the surface. However, every cave has also its own specifics - these include the unique chemical composition of the vapour, certain caves may contain fungi subspecies producing antibiotics contributing to the positive effect.

Researchers of Baradla Cave have recognised the special climate of the cave very early, which - due to the aspects of hygiene and microbiology - has a therapeutic effect; however, it's certification has not been performed yet. In the project, the partners performed the surveys required to achieve certification of Baradla Cave as a therapeutic cave in Hungary, the full certification documentation shall be submitted to the relevant authorities upon finalisation of the project. After achieving certification, climate therapy services may be provided to those visiting the cave to heal or to relax.

In Domica Cave, having significant geomorphological values, the construction of a climate therapy facility was started in the shaft of Demek-lápa in 2010, however, it's final shape was not achieved back then; our project partner implemented the necessary activities as part of the current project.

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As part of the activities, experts performed water staining, geophysical, hydrological, microbiological, radiophysical and cave climate surveys in the Baradla-Domica cave system, in Béke Cave and in the water catchment areas of these caves, both in Hungary and in Slovakia.

Moreover, in Baradla Cave, we have performed an approved cave therapy test, led by pulmonologists, to prove the effects of cave climate as a natural therapeutic factor on patients with respiratory illnesses.



*Test therapy venue, Baradla Cave,
Fox branch [Róka-ág]*



Test therapy venue, Domica Cave

In the project, we implemented the infrastructure necessary for providing therapeutic services in the future, i.e. the necessary infrastructure in Baradla Cave and Domica Cave, we also procured the therapeutic equipment necessary for cave therapy (beds, sleeping bags, garments, relaxation devices etc.).

We also focused on popularisation and raising awareness – this included the creation of a multilingual tourism website of the National Park Directorate (www.anp.hu) and a presentation aimed at education and promotion was made available on-line.

On 1 July 2021, the National Park Directorate shall present the results of the project at a conference open to the media in Jósvalfő, Hungary, with Dr. András Rácz, state secretary for the environment at the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary and Juraj Smatana, state secretary of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic as special guests.

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This project was implemented within the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cross-border Co-operation Programme. Details of the programme are available at www.skhu.eu. Information provided herein does not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union.