



Good Practice Story Title: Sustainable shopping in a historic city of Hungary

Destination: Komárom-Esztergom county, city of Esztergom

Country: Hungary

Submitting Organization: Esztergomi Turisztikai Nonprofit Kft.

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition

X Thriving Communities

- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Esztergom is the first official city of Hungary. On the one hand this noble title provides a special value to the trustful attractiveness of the city of 28.165 people (2020 data), but on the other hand it is also a huge responsibility. The mission of the city is to authentically represent the thousand-year-old Hungarian country to domestic and foreign guests. Esztergom is among the most significant historical and religious centers of Hungary: King Saint Stephen was not only born here, but also crowned here, thus declared the city as the archbishop's seat. The city was also served as a royal residence up until 1242. By the 15th century it had become a religious and cultural center. With its numerous miracles, legends and stories the treasures of the Castle Hill attract many guests: it is an outstanding historical treasure and one of the most important memorial sites of Hungarian Christianity. Both the Castle of Esztergom and the Basilica are located on the Castle Hill, however the hill also offers an unparalleled panorama of the Danube, the Mária Valéria Bridge, the Szenttamás hill and the Víziváros. The city can offer much more interests and experiences for its visitors. The new trustful strategy of Esztergom was based on the city's historical values and aims to offer solutions for the challenges of the current century and the renewal of tourism in the city. Esztergom is the prime mover of tourism in the region. The city also has an ideal geographical location: it is located near Budapest, and can easily be accessed by car, train, on water and by bicycle.





Summary of Good Practice Story:

Introduction

In 2023, was realised a long awaited development for the people of Esztergom, as the **Esztergom Market** with its long tradition moved to a completely renewed, modern infrastructure.

For the last two centuries, unregulated street trading has been a temporary but prolonged activity, leaving local producers and traders in the background in the competition for customers and strengthening multinational chains in the city.

An important role in designing and operating the new infrastructure was to create a likeable and functional commercial centre as well as a community space, which would continue the classic market function, bring back the growth potential of local producers or entrepreneurs and serve the demand of tourists coming to the city.

The complex, which covers an area of more than 3,000 m² with daily opening hours, has 23 shops and 53 covered market tables, where the top priority is to promote and showcase **local products, growers and farmers**. We have also involved it in the main attraction of local tourism, building an economically complex and sustainable model.

Its leading tourism campaign element is the "**Tastes and Tales**" communication, which is based on the idea of focusing on the person of the local entrepreneur, the farmer, and presenting the personal story, building trust in the products sold. Each vendor is personally introduced on each of the market's digital platforms, explaining their products, and their production as well as their farming processes, partly with an educational purpose for the public. In addition, the market staff will also visit the producers, processing their partners' individual stories and production conditions in video form. As a tourism product, the market also organises guided walks where a personal contact between producer and customer can be established through direct conversation. It can be said that in Hungary, Esztergom has a **completely unique experience market**.

Communication and commercial development is based **on the triangle of local resident - urban service provider - tourist**. The good practice we have selected has confirmed this connection.

The problem is that the urban structure and geography of the city, in addition to poor local transport services, meant that the range of products and services offered by the new Market was not accessible to an aged and mobility restricted generation and audience. We wanted to ensure that all residents of the city could truly enjoy the community experience of the market.





Good practice

Taking advantage of the mobility facilities of the **Visit E-bus electric minibus**, which is available in the city for profit and is specially built for adventure travel, we developed a market trip for the Esztergom pensioner target group on the Wednesday market days. The preparation of the programme started already in 2023 and was launched with a test run from March 2024. After that, it was ready for live use by local elderly residents.

The project is to run 1-1 electric minibus service every week to different districts of the city, picking up passengers at pre-communicated stops at agreed times and bringing them to the market. A highlight of the programme is that students are available to assist the seniors on each shuttle, helping them to get on and off, pack their bags, go shopping and ensure a smooth service.

For older people, travelling, spending time together, meeting younger generations and sharing experiences is a very special experience. Young people can learn about the thinking and behaviour of the older/disabled target audience as well as learn to deal with the everyday difficulties of the ageing population. We can also show the opportunities offered by the Market to young people, offering local produce and fresh goods, as opposed to multinationals. They can experience a different shopping alternative from the perspective of the older generation, not least by seeing reusable packing options such as canvas bags, wicker baskets and similar reusable packing solutions, as opposed to plastic sacks. The internships are voluntary, with students receiving minimal compensation for their work, thus strengthening local employment in the programme.

An incredible experience week after week, the special market walk has since built up into one of the leading community events in Esztergom.

We can state that **3 main pillars** of the programme are being implemented: **environmental protection, social sensitisation - education and the functioning** of the economic model.

Issues faced:

In Hungary especially in Esztergom, the multi-national retail food chains have a significant market dominance, almost destroying the operational and competitive capacity of local businesses. In Esztergom, a small town, there are currently 15 medium and large supermarkets.

The market is a new opportunity in this competitive environment, offering local micro-enterprises an experience, a range of quality products and a sustainable development by working together. The limited geographical accessibility of the market makes it difficult for older people living in the locality to buy from the market, however, one of the most secure purchasing power is with this target audience.

As a business, tourism is used by for-profit operators in the municipality, but rarely provides non-profit activities for local residents. We would like to change this, because for us it is a priority to have the acceptance of the local population for all the programmes we introduce, so that they can feel a little bit like their own.





In Esztergom, the VisitE bus service was introduced to renew tourist mobility, and we promoted its operation, subject to the condition that it should be a non-profit activity in addition to a commercial one.

Among several choices, this programme was supported and backed by the contractor. Our aim was to make the partner feel ownership of our initiative!

The basic vision of the project was well perceived by the target audience, but an operating model had to be implemented that could provide an economically sustainable framework to ensure the long-term operation.

Solution:

The business viability of the market traders is placed on a solid footing, as the new scheme, in addition to the revenue from local shoppers and tourists, provides a target audience of customers resulting from the new service, which will result in a fixed customer base appearing at the market each week.

The Visit E- Bus environment-friendly experience buses have 22 seats, are comfortable and perfectly suited to their intended purpose. Local public transport is irregular and access to the building may not be viable. It was important for the service to be able to be delivered in a networked way, involving both the market operator and the traders selling in the market, so that it would be economically sustainable. The organisation operating the vehicles, with a focus on social responsibility, has developed a long-term, lower operating plan specifically for this scheme for local residents, with a fare of €4 per person. This is co-funded by the market vendors at €1/person and an additional €1/person contribution from the Market's operators, so that passengers only pay €2/person (the general daily fare is €10/person). It was considered important not to provide a free service, but to be appreciated and valued by the participants. And this is how the concept is put together, to ensure favourable and liveable conditions for all participants.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The effectiveness of the programme depends on a combination of several aspects. By involving local non-governmental organisations, the community has a real sense of ownership of the concept and the program has been able to reach the actual target audience. Reaching the older generation and connecting them with the younger generation has also triggered an educational process and contributed to social sensitisation and satisfaction. However, it also has an identity-forming and community-strengthening effect overall.

From an economic point it supports the economy and the local producers by bringing the customer to the place where they actually spend money and buy locally produced goods. In this way, the economic virtuous circle is created within a given destination.

The market service is also implemented during a lower traffic period for the Visit E-bus, so we can also increase occupancy.



Achievements and Results:

We faced **3 main challenges** at the start of the programme:

- 1.** attracting producers and market actors to the programme and to the participation in the funding: traders were reluctant at first, as they thought that the programme would not be successful, because the visitors to the market would not buy, but would only perceive the cheap travel as an excursion.
- 2.** Involvement of a bus entrepreneur into the project: the business owner of the electric buses was driven solely by for-profit activity and found it challenging to get acceptance that his business and service would be greatly helped by the involvement of a local non-profit
- 3.** Attracting stakeholders to the campaign: the key target demographic of older people found it hard to believe that the programme was guaranteed to work and that buses would actually arrive at the advertised stops. After several weeks of operation, the programme was accepted by the local public as viable.

The result: more than 400 pensioners from 6 districts of Esztergom, 1 time per month, with the help of 6 local civil society organisations and 2 VisitE buses, could reach the Esztergom Market in 3 months. With the involvement of 50 students and a municipal backing guarantee, the service was provided to local residents until mid-October. We plan to reach a minimum of 1500 target visitors to Esztergom Market in 2024.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

An important lesson learned was that the communication channels of today's day and age have brought almost no conversion of the advertised service to the target audience. It was therefore necessary to change the targeting and to recognise that online advertising would not be effective with the older target group. Therefore, after an initial less successful experience, a market visit programme was advertised to the local non-governmental organisation, through which the individual population was approached, personal contact was established, and the service was presented to the public explaining the service available as well as inviting passengers. We addressed the participants almost individually, inviting them to continue the programme on an ongoing individual basis after the first experience. From this point on, word of mouth became the strongest marketing tool for the programme. A specific staff member of the Market is constantly working to contact local senior clubs and organisations and present the opportunity to them in person.

Recognitions and Additional References

The marketing concept of Esztergom Market won the national City Marketing Diamond Award in the category of Marketing Programmes and Campaigns of Urban Development Projects in the year 2023.

In the spring of this year, the Prime Minister of Hungary visited the new Esztergom Market on one of its thematic day.



