



### **Good Practice Story Title:**

Harmonizing Heritage and Nature: Bodrogkeresztúr's White Stork Conservation and Village Renewal

**Destination:** Tokaj Wine Region

**Country:** Hungary

**Submitting Organization:** Tokaj Borvidék Fejlődéséért Nonprofit Kft.

### **Category:**

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

### **Destination description:**

Nestled in the heart of Hungary, the Tokaj Wine Region is a place where tradition meets innovation and the beauty of nature intertwines with centuries-old human craftsmanship. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is renowned for its unique and diverse natural assets. Picture the majestic Kopaszhegy Mountain and the serene confluence of the Tisza and Bodrog rivers, with the renowned National Blue Trail weaving through, generating significant tourist traffic.

The region is spread over a romantic landscape of cellar labyrinths, vines and slopes, nestled at the foothills of the Zemplén Mountains. Its winemaking history dates back over a thousand years, that has graced the tables of emperors and connoisseurs for centuries. The most famous variety, Aszú – was described by Louis XV of France as 'Vinum Regum, Rex Vinorum' - the Wine of Kings, King of Wines.

From spring to autumn, the region comes alive with tourists eager to explore its wide variety of activities. Boating on the Bodrog and Tisza rivers, vineyard tours, hiking the Blue Trail, and cycling through picturesque landscapes draw visitors far beyond the water routes. The interest in cycling





tourism has surged in recent years, thanks to regional cycling path developments that encourage eco-friendly exploration.

In Tokaj, the serene waters and meticulously maintained vineyards invite you to experience the fruits of centuries-old winemaking expertise. The region's dedication to preserving its cultural heritage and promoting sustainable tourism is evident in every aspect, from the innovative use of renewable energy at the visitor center to the extensive network of cycling paths.

The Tokaj Wine Region is more than just a destination; it's a journey through time and tradition, where every sip of wine and every step taken on its trails brings you closer to the essence of Hungarian culture and the timeless beauty of its landscapes. Whether you're cruising down the rivers, cycling through vineyards, or immersing yourself in a cultural festival, Tokaj promises an unforgettable experience that will linger long after you've left.

### **Summary of Good Practice Story:**

The story began with the passing of Bodrogkeresztúr's beloved resident stork, Fülöp, who tragically lost his life to the village's overhead electric cables. Fülöp, banded in Spain, had spent 11 loyal years in Bodrogkeresztúr without migrating south for the winter. His untimely death galvanized the local community to take action, sparking an initiative that would intertwine stork protection, local identity, community spirit, and tourism.

From 2020 to 2022, Tokaj Borvidék Fejlődéséért Np. Kft., the organization responsible for managing the Tokaj Wine Region as a UNESCO World Heritage site, collaborated with the Municipality of Bodrogkeresztúr to carry out a village development project on the historic main street with EU support (GINOP-719). One of the project's key outcomes was the replacement of overhead power lines with underground cables and the installation of 25 stork nesting poles in place of the old electric poles. These nesting poles provide safe nesting sites for returning stork pairs, protecting them from the risk of electrocution. This solution positively impacts the stability and long-term survival of the local bird population.

The construction and placement of the poles were carried out in a way that preserved the village's historic and traditional appearance. Alongside the infrastructural and bird protection developments, an exhibition in the village center educates visitors about the lifestyle, behavior, and significance of storks. The exhibition features interactive elements, interesting descriptions, and stunning photographs, showcasing the migration routes and feeding habits of white and black storks, providing schoolchildren with fascinating insights.

Every year, the Municipality of Bodrogkeresztúr, together with civil organizations, hosts a running event named after Fülöp the stork. This event has grown over the years to include various programs, such as literary contests for children and wine competitions among Bodrogkeresztúr, Bodrogkisfalud, and Szegi Hegyközség. Fülöp's legacy has thus become a symbol of community building, emphasizing the



importance of youth staying in their hometown and drawing inspiration from the famous stork who never left the village.

This project not only preserves the stork population but also strengthens the town's identity and connects stork protection with local community initiatives and tourism. The story of Fülöp and the collective effort of the local community have turned a tragic event into a positive and enduring legacy, showcasing the power of community-driven conservation and sustainable tourism development.

### **Issues faced:**

Bodrogkeresztúr, a key village in the World Heritage Tokaj Wine Region, is rich in historical, religious, and natural assets, yet it faced significant challenges before the development project. The village, known for its premium vineyards and renowned wines, had not seen comprehensive infrastructural improvements for decades. There was a notable lack of accessible public spaces, walking paths to connect wineries and historic cellars, and areas for receiving visitors, which hindered the potential for wine tourism.

A pressing issue was the danger posed to the local stork population by overhead power lines. Bodrogkeresztúr, often referred to as the stork village, is home to nearly forty stork pairs from April to October. These large birds, protected under national law and deeply ingrained in Hungarian cultural identity, often nested on electric poles, leading to frequent fatalities due to electrocution, especially among young storks. The tragic death of Fülöp, the town's favorite stork, underscored the urgency of addressing this issue.

The community also faced the challenge of maintaining Bodrogkeresztúr's traditional and historic village character while making necessary infrastructural updates. Balancing the preservation of its picturesque appearance with modern needs required careful planning and execution. Additionally, there was a need to integrate the bird protection measures with the village's development to ensure both environmental sustainability and enhanced tourism appeal.

This project aimed to address these multifaceted issues, enhancing the village's attractiveness for tourists, protecting its stork population, and fostering a strong sense of community and local identity.

### **Solution:**

The primary goal of the project was to enhance Bodrogkeresztúr's historic center and main street, increasing its tourism appeal while ensuring environmental, social and economical sustainability. The initiative was driven by the community's commitment to protecting their beloved storks and preserving the village's traditional charm.





#### Infrastructural Improvements:

- **Underground Cables:** The project replaced overhead power lines with underground cables, eliminating the risk of electrocution for the storks. This was a crucial step in safeguarding the local bird population and ensuring their long-term survival.
- **Stork Nesting Poles:** In place of the old electric poles, 25 stork nesting poles were installed. These poles provide safe nesting sites for the storks, allowing them to thrive without the danger posed by overhead wires.

#### Community and Tourism Enhancements:

- **Public Spaces and Walkways:** The project created accessible, pedestrian-friendly walkways, wider sidewalks, and green spaces. These improvements included bus stops, rest points, event spaces (such as a music pavilion, wine walkway, and lookout point), and integrated parking areas, making the village more welcoming and convenient for visitors.
- **Interactive Exhibition:** Alongside the infrastructural developments, an interactive exhibition was established in the village center. This exhibition educates visitors about the lifestyle, behavior, and significance of storks, featuring engaging elements, informative descriptions, and stunning photographs. Schoolchildren and tourists can learn about the migration routes and habits of white and black storks.
- **Local experts and colleagues:** the exhibition, tour guiding and bird protection initiatives are run by the local experts, who's identity and passion are inseparable from the storks.
- **Annual Fülöp Stork Run:** The municipality and local civil organizations host an annual running event named after Fülöp the stork. This event celebrates Fülöp's legacy and fosters community spirit. Over the years, it has expanded to include various programs, such as literary contests for children and wine competitions among local wineries.

#### Sustainable Development:

- **Energy-Efficient Lighting:** The project included the installation of energy-efficient lighting fixtures, contributing to the village's environmental goals.
- **Electric Bus Stop and Charging Point:** A new electric bus stop and charging point were established to promote eco-friendly transportation options.

The project's holistic approach successfully integrated stork protection with village renewal, enhancing Bodrogkeresztúr's identity as a stork-friendly village while boosting tourism and community engagement. This initiative, driven by the local community, turned a tragic event into a symbol of positive change, showcasing the power of community-driven conservation and sustainable development.





## Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

To ensure the success of the project, a comprehensive and community-focused approach was implemented, integrating environmental conservation with village development. Here are the key methods, steps, and tools applied:

### 1. Stakeholder Engagement and Planning:

- **Initial Consultations:** The project began with extensive consultations involving local stakeholders, including community members, entrepreneurs, and planning experts. This collaborative approach ensured that the diverse needs and perspectives of the community were considered.
- **Expert Involvement:** Environmental and urban planning experts, including specialists from the Aggtelek National Park and regional chief architects, were engaged to set project goals, define tasks, and identify potential challenges. Their expertise helped shape a detailed and realistic project plan.

### 2. Project Preparation and Design:

- **Environmental and Heritage Considerations:** From the outset, the project prioritized environmental conservation and the preservation of Bodrogkeresztúr's historical character. This included assessing potential solutions and their impacts on the village's landscape and heritage.
- **Detailed Planning:** A comprehensive project timeline and implementation plan were developed, outlining specific activities, responsible parties, and budget allocations. This plan included measures to minimize disruptions and ensure the safety and well-being of the stork population.

### 3. Infrastructure Development:

- **Underground Cable Installation:** The replacement of overhead power lines with underground cables was carried out with precision to avoid any damage to the village's historical appearance.
- **Stork Nesting Poles:** The installation of 25 stork nesting poles was carefully executed to provide safe and accessible nesting sites for the storks, ensuring their protection and supporting their natural behavior.

### 4. Community and Educational Initiatives:

- **Interactive Exhibition:** An engaging exhibition was created in the village center to educate visitors about storks. Featuring interactive elements, informative descriptions, and captivating photographs, the exhibition highlighted the migration routes, feeding habits, and significance of white and black storks.



- **Annual Fülöp Stork Run:** The annual running event named after Fülöp the stork was expanded to include various community activities, fostering local engagement and emphasizing the importance of environmental conservation.

#### 5. Sustainable Infrastructure Enhancements:

- **Energy-Efficient Lighting:** The project included the installation of energy-efficient street lighting, contributing to the village's sustainability efforts.
- **Electric Bus Stop and Charging Point:** A new electric bus stop and charging point were established to promote eco-friendly transportation options, further supporting the village's environmental goals.

#### 6. Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:

- **Regular Assessments:** The project included provisions for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the implemented measures were effective and that any emerging issues were promptly addressed.
- **Community Feedback:** Continuous feedback from the local community was sought to refine and improve the project, ensuring it met the evolving needs of Bodrogkeresztúr's residents and visitors.

This integrated approach not only addressed the immediate challenges but also laid the foundation for sustainable development, enhancing the village's appeal as a tourist destination while protecting its treasured stork population.

### Achievements and Results:

The project brought about transformative changes in Bodrogkeresztúr, successfully enhancing its infrastructure, bolstering environmental conservation, and strengthening community ties. Here are the key outcomes:

#### 1. Infrastructure Improvements:

- **Safer Electrical Systems:** Replacing overhead power lines with underground cables eliminated the threat of electrocution for the local stork population, significantly improving safety.



- **Modernized Public Spaces:** The development project created wider sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly walkways, green spaces, and designated areas for buses and rest points. These upgrades made the village more accessible and enjoyable for both residents and tourists.

## 2. Environmental Conservation:

- **Stork-Friendly Habitats:** The installation of 25 dedicated stork nesting poles provided secure nesting sites, which has been instrumental in maintaining and potentially increasing the local stork population.
- **Sustainable Lighting Solutions:** Energy-efficient lighting was installed throughout the village, reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainability.

## 3. Educational and Cultural Enhancements:

- **Interactive Exhibition:** A new exhibition in the village center now educates visitors about the storks' lifestyles, migration patterns, and ecological importance. This exhibition includes interactive displays, detailed descriptions, and captivating photos, engaging visitors of all ages, especially schoolchildren.
- **Community Events:** The annual Fülöp Stork Run has become a signature event in Bodrogkeresztúr, promoting community involvement and environmental awareness. This event has expanded to include various cultural and educational activities, further enriching the village's social fabric.

## 4. Strengthened Community Identity:

- **Cultural Preservation:** By carefully managing the infrastructural improvements, the project preserved the historical and traditional charm of Bodrogkeresztúr. This has strengthened local identity and pride.
- **Enhanced Local Engagement:** The project fostered greater community engagement through collaborative planning and execution, leading to a stronger, more cohesive community.

## 5. Boost to Tourism:

- **Increased Tourist Attraction:** The integrated approach to stork protection and village renewal has significantly boosted Bodrogkeresztúr's appeal as a tourist destination. The village's unique identity as a stork-friendly area, combined with improved amenities, has drawn more visitors, contributing to the local economy.



Overall, the project not only addressed critical safety and environmental issues but also revitalized Bodrogkeresztúr, making it a model for sustainable rural development that harmoniously blends conservation, community, and tourism.

### Lessons Learned and Advice:

- **Nesting Sites:** White storks only accept nests that are undisturbed and relocated intact.
- **Health Monitoring:** If a stork is seen sitting on the ground in an unusual area for several days, it should be checked for injuries.
- **Wintering Storks:** Due to milder winters and available food, more storks are choosing to stay in Hungary during the winter months.

This project exemplifies sustainable development by integrating heritage preservation, community engagement, and environmental protection, setting a precedent for other regions to follow.

### Recognitions and Additional References

<https://www.tbft.hu/bodrogkeresztur-turisztikai-attractivitasanak-fejlesztese/>

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