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**GOOD PRACTICE, that successfully promotes sustainable development and regional attractiveness through peri-urban areas.**

**PART ONE - Characterize the selected Good Practice**

**What** - Short summary of the practice

**Zsuzsi narrow gauge railway system**

The Zsuzsi railway system was built more than 130 years ago. First it was used as a railway system for timber transporting, then for commuting from the peri-urban areas to Debrecen. Later (from 1980’s), the railway system became a tourist attraction – during the communist era it was called Pioneer’s Railway (according to the communist Pioneer movement). After the fall of communism the improving of the existing infrastructure became crucial. The railway nowadays is operated by a non-profit corporation and owned by the Municipality. **The railway now is used for awareness-raising purposes among the visitors (primarily for young pupils) in order to draw their attention to the natural values of Debrecen’s woodlands.** Around the terminus station new infrastructure elements were built in the last 10 years: the House Of Nature & Observatory, a look-out tower, an educational path in the forest, open-air stage etc. ­ **thus the surroundings of the terminus station has become an eco-touristic centre for visitors.**

Which PROSPERA leverages are core of this GOOD PRACTICE? : (1) **From smart to wise governance**

**Why** - Origin and aim of the practice

On the one hand the aim of the operator is to promote and develop the natural heritage of Debrecen. On the other hand, the terminus station is a center for tourism thus the regional attractiveness of the peri-urban is another objective.

The whole railway system is **a good practice for transforming an existing brown infrastructure to another type of using, in this case for (eco-)tourism.**

In addition, **the whole railway system is the oldest still-operating narrow gauge railway system in Hungary so it’s a cultural heritage** that is protected by national law. In this sense the railway system **combines cultural heritage preservation with promoting and developing the natural heritage of the city. Moreover, awareness-raising among visitors is a very important element.**

**Where** is the practices implemented

The railway line and the terminus station lie in the administrative border of the city of Debrecen. The train departs from the inner urban area and goes out to the peri-urban area. The terminus station is located in the woodlands of „Erdőspuszta” („Erdőspuszta” is the name of the woodlands that located in the Eastern part of the city’s territory). The length of the whole line is 17 kms.

**When** – duration of the practice

The railway line was built in 1882.

In terms of tourism, the railway line was transformed into a Pioneer’s railway by the communist party leaders in 1980’s. After 1990 the railway line was transferred to the Municipality of Debrecen. Modernization of the whole railway system started after 2010.

**Who** is involved in the coordination and the implementation

The railway line is **owned by** **the Municipality of Debrecen.**

The **Operator of the railway system is a nonprofit** corporate (ZSUZSI Erdei Vasút Nonprofit Corporate)

**How – What are the resources (staff – costs)**

**Staff:** 11 employees in 2018

**Costs:** More than EUR 3.5 million have been invested for developing the railway line since 2012 (reconstruction of 17 kms of the railway line, including platforms and modernization of locomotives and carriages, furthermore, building the House of Nature&Observatory)

Expenditure of the ZSUZSI Erdei Vasút Nonprofit Ltd. in 2018 was HUF 103 million (EUR 314,000)

**PART TWO - Evaluate the selected Good Practice**

**Evidence** of **success** (result achieved)

Number of visitors in 2018: 20,627

An existing brown infrastructure has changed its function over years (from timber-transporting to leisure function) and it is the oldest of its kind in Hungary.

Which are the **core** elements /**key** elements of succes?

1**. Cultural heritage:** the oldest narrow gauge railway system in Hungary

2. **Natural heritage:** the railway line crosses a woodland area called “Erdőspuszták”

3. **Tourist centre in the middle of the forest**: the terminus station is located in the middle of the forest. Visitors can find: look-out tower, the House of Nature&Observatory, a fish pond, playgrounds, Forest School in the surrounding area.

**4. Raising-awareness:** most of the visitors are young pupils from elementary schools of Debrecen.

Potential for **learning** or transfer (already some communication material available?)

1. How to transform brown infrastructure for tourism

2. How to involve local pupils in awareness-raising campaigns, drawing their attention to the natural values of the city

3. How to create a tourist centre that can satisfy the need of visitors, and can be an ideal place for awareness-raising campaigns in order to promote and develop the natural heritage.

**Challenges** encountered (optional)

The economic sustainability is a major challenge for the operator. In addition, the provider should ensure affordable prices to their users.

The COVID pandemic has hit hard the tourism sector, hence the railway line.

It should be guaranteed that further investments will not place a burden on nature.

*Further information on this Good Practice (URL) :*

<https://www.debrecen.hu/en/tourist/articles/zsuzsi-narrow-gauge-railway>

<http://zsuzsivasut.hu/nyelv/en> – unfortunately it is available in Hungarian only