



## Infopack

# Road to border region cultural tourism development

## Lessons learnt from the Umgebindeland region

### This road is for:

**ENTREPRENEURS, SMES, GOVERNMENT BODIES, AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS IN BORDER REGIONS** WHO ARE INTERESTED IN EXPANDING TOURISM AND STRENGTHENING COHESION WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

## Abstract

TE<sup>x</sup>TOUR is a project **co-creating sustainable cultural tourism development strategies**. Umgebindeland, one of the project's pilots, is a border region with special characteristics and challenges.

Three countries meet in Umgebindeland: Poland, Czech Republic and Germany.

As an organisation working in this territory, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Fachwerkstädte was primarily interested in carrying out a project that was close to the people and **strengthen the cohesion of the tri-national region**. The actions aimed to help citizens better identify with the region. The fil rouge that connects different populations, languages and lifestyles is represented by the **Umgebindehouses**. They are the architectural heritage of a shared history and are at the heart of innovative cultural tourism initiatives developed within the TE<sup>x</sup>TOUR project.

Border regions are usually characterised by the fact that people travel daily from one country to the other for work and leisure. Road signs, currency information and sales offered in border towns are often **multilingual**. This also makes it easier to deal with tourists.

The actions carried out have demonstrated the possibility of **overcoming linguistic barriers and political differences** even beyond national borders. The project represents a starting point for the future development of the region.



# What to pack:

### KNOWLEDGE, TOOLS, AND SKILLS REQUIRED BEFORE IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION

- Identification of existing civic institutions, especially with cross-border activities
- Cross-border connecting elements with which citizens can identify, e.g. architecture and landscape
- Good translators or the courage to communicate with hand and foot if necessary
- The desire to pioneer things and to step out of the comfort zone and attract attention
- Integration of the stakeholder at an early stage and ongoing information without overloading
- New ideas based on existing cross-border projects and collaborations
- Professional moderation to identify projects and set priorities

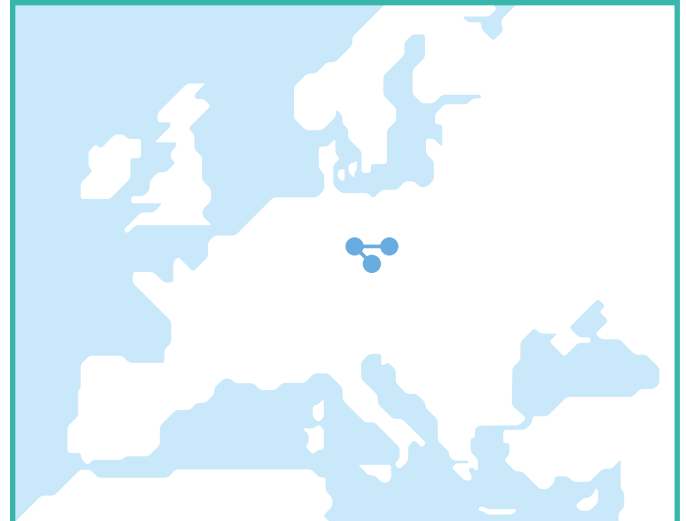


## Exploring Umgebindeland and its innovative actions

### UMGEBINDELAND: TRI-NATIONAL REGION AND ITS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The Umgebindeland is a **cross-border region** between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Its name comes from the Umgebindehouses, historic and unique half-timbered houses, typical of this area. The region has been repeatedly reshaped over the centuries, with national borders shifting from time to time. The Umgebindehouses, industrial development, and the lifestyles of the citizens nevertheless show that this tri-national region has a shared identity. Its cultural landscape developed in the Middle Ages and characterised by modern industrialisation, offers a strong yet underused potential for cultural tourism. Indeed, there is no shared concept of tourism in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Therefore, even though Umgebindeland offers a variety of options and tourist offers, there is still no uniform and coordinated tourism concept for all three countries together.

To address this, we decided to look at these three **characteristics** of the area – three languages, political borders and different tourism development priorities and interests – as **opportunities** and starting points for our cultural tourism project.



### APPROACH AND STRATEGY

First, **we identified the potential partners** who possessed extensive regional knowledge as well as the time and experience to carry out a cross-border project lasting several years.

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Pic.1: "UMGEBINDEHOUSE", by Laura Plugge

Then **we restarted existing collaborations** to attract partners of interest. Those who have already worked together successfully are easier to inspire for new joint projects. At the same time, such **established structures** offer the potential to attract new partners. They see a greater chance of success here than in collaborations with newly "thrown together" collaborations where people do not know each other.

The result was a German team composed of different organisations. One member is a national half-timbered house association, which is already active with other projects in the region. **Municipal contacts** were also involved: a regional urban development and tourism organisation, an expert on the Umgebendehouse and finally an expert in urban and regional development. Having an all-German team made cooperation easier due to the shared language. However, we also aimed to **ensure representation** from all groups within our territory.

For that reason, we selected the regional urban development and tourism organisation, a partner that is also active in Poland and the Czech Republic. This provided **initial points of contact** with the other nationalities.

The newly constituted team **mapped and contacted existing tourism associations** and organizations of interest in the region. We decided to act through these local entities since it is much more effective than trying to contact local people one by one.

We also tried to **select highly motivated stakeholders**, as this would allow us to build on the work already

done and the experience gained. One challenge here was to **win over stakeholders**, particularly on the German side, because many projects had already been carried out in the region, which had led to project tiredness. "Yet another project?" or "What should the project try this time?" were frequent questions.

The key to convincing potential stakeholders and new partners was the **innovative nature of the action**. It was the first time that a joint tourism project would be developed in the three countries. However, despite our preference for engaging organisations, we found only a few local entities active in the tourism sector in Poland and the Czech Republic. Therefore, **we had to reach out to individuals** to involve them. By approaching existing institutions, a network of regional stakeholders quickly came together, some of whom already knew each other from previous projects while others had never met before. The **networking was an added value** for our partners, paving the way for future collaborations.

The individual work steps in the TEXTOUR project were taken within this new network. The Covid pandemic made cooperation more challenging, leading to the impossibility of holding face-to-face events in some cases. However, **digitally-held discussions** created new participation and co-creation opportunities since cross-border cooperation often involves large distances between partners. However, the different languages pose a challenge here.

### TRANSLATION COSTS AND COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Interpretation costs make up a large proportion of the project budget. It is best to **agree on a common language** (e.g. English). However, as it cannot be assumed that everyone can speak English and therefore individual partners are automatically excluded, **interpreters must be used**. At the start of the project, it makes sense to hold events with partners from only one country at a time, so that a maximum of one interpreter is required. This can be done very easily via a digital event. As soon as **multilingual events** are planned, they should take place in person. Several interpreters are required for this, but the costs for digital implementation and technology can be saved. In addition, it is much easier to hold discussions **in person** alongside the actual event, as the interpreters can be deployed flexibly at all times. When planning the project, **it is important to allow sufficient budget for interpreters**: their work is essential to a cross-border project.



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## IN-PERSON EVENTS AND JOINT ACTIVITIES



Pic.2: "coming together, face-to-face, promotes trinational cooperation", by Laura Plugge

In addition to that, in-person events better followed for **constructive exchanges**. Being face-to-face was crucial to building honesty and openness, two necessary characteristics to foster stakeholder collaboration and knowledge exchange. The innovative tourist actions we carried out in TExTOUR are a mix of tested methods and creative new ideas, pushing innovation into the cultural tourism sector. The key to success was to **keep our actions simple**.

As previously stated, we wanted to help citizens to better identify with the region. To this end, the Umgebindehouse was placed in the foreground as a cultural building that defines the region and staged with a photo exhibition on life in the Umgebindehouse.



Pic.3: "UMGEBINDEHOUSE photo exhibition", by Laura Plugge

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Other activities undertaken, such as guided tours and trips through the region with different thematic focuses, showed that some people, especially those beyond the national borders of the three states, knew little about their region, "their neighbourhood". The same applied to the stakeholders as well: although some were active in the same sectors, they were unaware of one another.

To implement a tourism project with the local stakeholders, activities had to be planned. New and innovative are usually the keywords for modern tourism. Nevertheless, it is also important to utilize **existing offers** and established activities of local stakeholders. This shows appreciation for the stakeholders and their skills. An additional advantage of incorporating existing activities in the action plan is that they have already proven their worth, representing a solid base to build on.

For example, within the TExTOUR project, we started promoting events and activities that had already been

planned, with the Umgebindeland summer event. By supporting the existing events, we aimed to increase their outreach and attract more attendees. This proved to be the right approach. Building on this, new activities were developed, in our case adventure tours through the Umgebindeland. Here, too, existing offers were taken up, but implemented in a new way and offered on a joint tour. As a result, even more people became aware of what the Umgebindeland has to offer. This paves the way for new ideas in the future.

In summary, cross-border cooperation is characterised by **working with the people in the region**. Support from the municipalities is essential. However, the focus is then on getting local citizens enthusiastic about the activities. First and foremost, they convey a sense of togetherness in the region. This is the basis for development processes there. Only if citizens feel comfortable in the region and identify with it will it be possible to attract tourists to the region and to develop tourism there.

## Roadmap:

### THE MAIN STEPS TO EMBARK ON

- 1** **MONTH 1-2**  
Identification and selection of the **potential partners** of the Umgebindeland region
- 2** **MONTH 3**  
Assessment of **cross-border challenges** (linguistic, political, and tourism development barriers)
- 3** **MONTH 4**  
Evaluation of the cultural and local **resources** of the region
- 4** **MONTH 5-6-7**  
Efficient planning and allocation of available financial and human resources
- 4.1** Development of innovative **strategies** and **activities** to promote cultural tourism in the region
- 5** **MONTH 8-9**  
**Facilitating collaboration** and **knowledge exchange** among local communities and regional authorities of the three neighbouring countries to fully exploit the tourist potential of the Umgebindeland region.
- 6** **DURING THE PROCESS**  
Actively **involve** local communities, businesses, and non-governmental organisations in the **decision-making process** and implementation of tourism initiatives

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### Testimonials

**“Increasing cultural awareness is a way to empower local communities”**

**LAURA PLUGGE, ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT DEUTSCHE FACHWERKSTÄDTE**



### New fellow travellers

#### WHO JOINED AND FORMED YOUR NEW NETWORK

- Private building renovators and owners of Umgebendehouses
- Municipal contacts from Poland and the Czech Republic
- Private companies, including those based in Umgebendehouses
- Private individuals who are increasingly interested in the Umgebendehouse

## Souvenirs

#### BEST ACHIEVEMENTS RELATIVE TO THE PROJECT'S IMPACTS



##### **SOCIAL IMPACTS**

- Empowered communities with active participation in the tourism industry
- Increased cultural awareness for the cultural heritage and local traditions of Umgebendeland



##### **POLICY IMPACTS**

- Getting municipalities in the three countries to work together to promote and enhance their shared heritage.



##### **RESEARCH IMPACTS**

- Tourism-related activities stimulated economic growth in the region, creating job opportunities and supporting local businesses

# Contact us to replicate joint cultural activities between border countries

## AUTHOR AND LOCAL CONTACT

**Laura Plugge**

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Fachwerkstädte

[laura.plugge@fachwerk-arge.de](mailto:laura.plugge@fachwerk-arge.de)

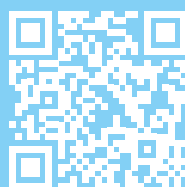
## PROJECT COORDINATOR

**Daniel Basulto**

Fundación Santa María la Real

[coordinator@textour-project.eu](mailto:coordinator@textour-project.eu)

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