

# ESP Newsletter – Spring 2021



Dear EUSAIR colleagues,

We invite you to take a look at the main events that have taken place in Adriatic Ionian region since Spring 2020 and get inspired with the ideas all countries have contributed to.

Yours,

ESP Facility Point partnership

## ADRIONCYCLEROUTE

### THE ADRIONCYCLETOUR PROJECT

The idea of developing an integrated cycling route running along the Adriatic and Ionian coast is now an [EUSAIR](#) flagship project ready to start. The ADRIONCYCLETOUR is not just a cycling route that connects all the coast – it creates connections with the hinterland areas and capital cities, involving also the countries that do not face the sea basin. It is a project which promotes a joint development of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region, from Sicily, Italy, to Greece.



Reference to Kosovo in this document/map is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

### **ADRIONCYCLETour: a common and joint cycleways system in the Adriatic-Ionian Region**

With the ADRIONCYCLETour project EUSAIR aims to establish and develop an Adriatic-Ionian cycle route, consisting of a coastal and an inland network. The route should serve as an integrated infrastructure for cycle tourism, urban and inter-urban mobility, sports, and leisure activities.

Therefore, it can be regarded as a multifunctional cycle route, which will allow tourists and citizens to move from one place to another in a sustainable way.

The project meets four objectives of the EUSAIR strategy: it connects the macro-region; it promotes coordination among the participating countries; it promotes their historical, artistic, cultural, and naturalistic heritage; and it develops eco-tourism.

The extraordinary challenge that EUSAIR is launching is that of coordinating the various cycle route initiatives running at national level as well as the different legal, political, and financial frameworks to make such transnational endeavours concrete.

# THE RELEVANCE OF A COMMON, INTEGRATED CYCLING ROUTE

The construction of a common, integrated cycleways system in the Adriatic-Ionian region has a strong value for the sustainable development of the EUSAIR macro-region. Connecting with each other all the national segments, the project gains a great macro-regional value, contributing to the harmonious development of the territory and to the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Thanks to the ADRIONCYCLETOUR, tourists will have the chance to discover the beauty of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region. Crossing ten Italian regions and eight other European countries, the route will take tourists through a unique cultural, natural, and historical space, discovering commonalities and differences.

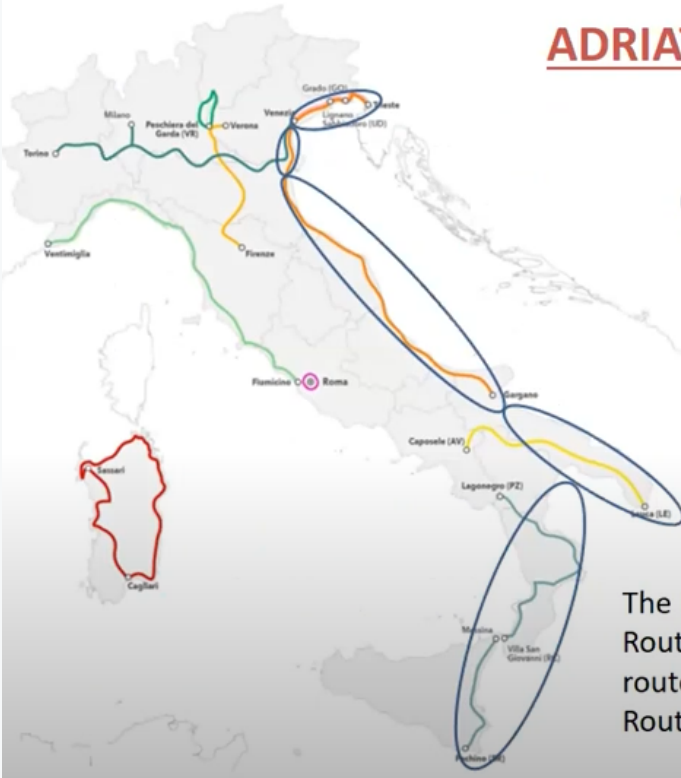
Besides its symbolic value, expressed through the creation of direct connections between the EUSAIR territories, the project may also improve connectivity within the macro-region (that is the goal of the 2nd Pillar of the strategy), as it promotes intermodal transport and sustainable vehicles contributing to the reduction of the environmental impact (that is the aim of the 3rd Pillar of the macro-regional strategy) and helps diversifying the tourism offer (that reflects the purpose of the 4th Pillar of the EUSAIR).

The ambition of the ADRIONCYCLETOUR is to create a transnational cycle route that is connected with other means of transport. Thus it may contribute to integrating the macro-region through transport networks or to enhancing its intermodality. Moreover, a cycle route efficiently connected with railways, ports, and airports may better attract tourists.

The development of an Adriatic-Ionian cycling route should be a driver not only for the development of the coastal areas, but also for the development of the **hinterland** and the landlocked countries of the macro-region. Therefore, the design of the integrated cycling route along the coast is conceived as a main artery stemming smaller cycle routes.

In this sense, the project promotes virtuous processes in a macro-regional perspective. In the long run, the route will be connected both to the local cycle paths in each country of the macro-region and to other macro-regional routes (e.g. the one that is under construction in the Danube region, promoting a cross-strategy approach) as well as to the EuroVelo network.

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Welcomed as an initiative of high relevance, the idea has then been developed to include the whole macro-region and it recently became a flagship project

for the EU 2021–2027 programming period. To sum up, a project with strong potential which was born in one country has been put at the service of the macro-region.

The challenge is now to channel funds for the realisation of this extensive project.

## EMBEDDING THE ADRIONCYCLETOUR IN THE NEW EU PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2021–2027

[EUSAIR](#) relies on different EU funds for its implementation. The primary source of funding has been the Interreg programme [ADRION](#), a transnational programme which overlaps with its geographical area. As it relies on limited resources, EUSAIR coordinates all participating authorities in channelling the other existing regional and national funds in order to finance the identified priorities or flagship projects. This work is named “embedding process” and is a demanding effort of great importance as it can turn a great idea such as the ADRIONCYCLETOUR into a practice.

The first challenge EUSAIR has to face is the fact that member states and candidate countries draw the resources from different funds, the European Structural Instruments (ESI) funds for the former and the Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) funds for the Western Balkans. They share only the Interreg-European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes: the already mentioned ADRION and the cross-border programmes such as Italy-Albania-Montenegro.

Moreover, there is the issue of using the proper fund for the right purpose. As Pierluigi Coppola [stressed](#), it is necessary to rely on diversified financing opportunities. For example, mainstream funds (ESI funds and IPA) should be used to finance the cycle-route infrastructure, while smaller ETC funds can be used to plan services and finance integrated development projects (e.g. involving both tourism and transport) and pilot actions or for testing ICT solutions for cycle-mobility.

The challenge is also to include projects related to cycle routes in structural funds, equating them to railways. The ADRIONCYCLETOUR project is related to the main policy objectives of the new programming period of the EU structural funds for 2021–2027. Explicitly stimulating cycling as a means of transportation has a fundamental sustainability dimension while creating a more connected Europe crossing state borders.

EUSAIR could be the place for coordinating all the aforementioned financial efforts, trying to harmonise the investments. In particular, transboundary sections of the cycle route will require special actions.

Gilles Kittel, DG Regio Team Manager, during the workshop “The embedding of the EUSAIR Adriatic-Ionian cycle route in the EU 2021–2027 programming period”



on April 7th, underlined that “The embedding process allows a better use of the budget available for the implementation of macro-regional projects exploiting the economies of scale”.

IF the ESIF and IPA are aligned as much as possible to the projects arising from the macro-region thanks to the EUSAIR embedding process, the result benefits the mainstream programmes and the macro-region: it simplifies the development of the latter, it has positive impacts on the visibility of the former, and it allows capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and the establishment of contacts among policymakers at transnational level.

## **What is the state of development of the cycle routes in the countries and regions involved?**



### **Italy**

The coastal network of the ADRIONCYCLETOUT is encompassed in the National system of tourist cycle routes, born with Law 208/2015. The national system has the goal of creating 10 safe and quality national cycle routes for sustainable tourism to enhance historical, cultural, and environmental itineraries along the country.

The ADRIONCYCLETOUT overlaps with five out of the ten projects of national cycle routes, namely: the **Magna Grecia** cycle route, the **Apulian Aqueduct** cycle route, the **Adriatic** cycle route, the **VenTo** cycle route, and the **Trilive** cycle route. The recognition of its value has also promoted its interconnection with other transport systems, particularly the railways network.

The latest recognition of the importance of cycle routes came with Law 2/2018, which promotes the use of bicycles as means of transport and encourages the identification of cycle paths of national interest that will make up the national cycle network. The national network will in turn be integrated into the trans-European cycle network called EuroVelo.<sup>[1]</sup>

Overall, when completed, the ADRIONCYCLETOUT will encompass 10 Italian regions, for a total amount of 2,977 km. The route will be developed on its own track or on shared tracks (in case of low traffic).

As stressed by Sandra Sodini, EUSAIR regional contact point for Friuli Venezia Giulia, during a seminar organised by the [University of Udine](#), the macro-region has complex governance but is full of potential. Of course, bringing many countries together on a common work program is an ambitious goal that takes time. It is not surprising that it took 18 months to agree on the ADRIONCYCLETOUT project. You need to reach a consensus among many actors in order to ensure follow up.

The challenge now is to materialise the brilliant idea that has been agreed upon. The first thing to do is a unitary feasibility study and then there is its complex implementation phase over the next few years. What EUSAIR will need to do is to encourage the use of the appropriate funds to ensure its realisation and in particular the coordination among territorial institutions at national and transnational level to make sure that the work done does not stop at regional or state borders.

Let us see in more detail the state of development of the national cycle routes that will be part of the ADRIONCYCLETOUT.

### **Magna Grecia cycle route**

The 1,130 km [route](#) involves three Italian regions: Calabria, Sicilia, and Basilicata, that signed a protocol of understanding in 2019. The Magna Grecia cycle route will be part of both the EUSAIR cycle route and EuroVelo 7 (the Sun Route that goes from North Cape to Malta).

### **Apulian Aqueduct cycle route**

The [Apulian Aqueduct cycle route](#) is a 400 km cycling route from Santa Maria di Leuca to Grottaglie, that follows the route of historical aqueduct pipelines. A previous INTERREG project (CY.RO.N.MED.) allowed the identification of this cycling path in Southern Italy. With that project, the Region was the first in Italy to allow the free transport of bikes on trains. Half of this route passes through already existing roads and tracks. Puglia Region has built a first 15 km section.

### **Adriatic cycle route**

The route crosses six Regions (Puglia, Molise, Abruzzo, Marche, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto) for 1,109 km, of which 311 km have already been built. It can be considered the country's main urban cycle route, as it crosses an interrupted coastal conurbation of large, medium, and small towns. It is useful not only for tourism, but also for commuters and daily movements, as it is flanked by the Adriatic railway, which allows intermodal integration.

## VenTo cycle route

The [VenTo cycle route](#) aims to connect the city of Venice to the city of Turin with a system of connected cycle paths that follow the course of the Po River. When finished it should be 732 km long. The part involved in the ADRIONCYCLETOUR is 101 km long. Till now only 52 km are accomplished and safe for cyclists.

## Trilive cycle route

The Trilive (Trieste-Lignano-Venezia) cycle tour will be 331 km long and will cross two Italian regions: Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia. Arriving at the border with Slovenia, it is a hinge between the two countries.



## Slovenia

By the end of 2018, over 77 cities in the country adopted a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, and numerous actions have been planned to develop cycling infrastructures.

Parenzana is among the most popular routes in Slovenia. It is a regulated cycling path that connects Slovenia to Italy and Croatia. The Adriabike route connects Kranjska Gora with Ravenna, in Italy. As can be seen in the [website](#) dedicated to the project, the route combines the beauty of historical centres with parks and archeological sites. Multimodal services for the transport of bikes by train and boat are offered in the areas of Slovenian Istria and in Italy.

Moreover there is [Bike Alpe-Adria](#), a new platform that offers cycling trips through the Slovenian lakes, the Alps, and the beaches of the Adriatic Sea.



## Croatia

The Croatian section of the ADRIONCYCLETOUR matches with Croatian EuroVelo 8 Route. It is 1,116 km long from Istria to Dubrovnik. On its [website](#) you can find all the information needed for planning a trip, with the GPS traces of all the route sections. The route goes through eight UNESCO sites, three national parks, and four natural parks.

Ivana Karuza, Head of EU and related projects department of the Croatian national tourist board, spoke about the Action Plan for the development of the Croatian route EuroVelo 8 during the [workshop](#) "ADRIONCYCLETOUR: an integrated project for the Adriatic-Ionian Region cycle routes". The Action Plan lists 248 specific activities to be implemented in the period 2018-2030, including the removal of barriers, the improvement of safety, and the strengthening of the network of bike rentals and of detailed information availability.





## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina does not yet have routes that belong to the EuroVelo. However, the Savska route project can be a backbone for developing routes in the future and for connecting state routes with EV 8. There is a negotiation process about the Savska route with Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia to establish where it could enter BiH. The estimated length of the Savska route is over 1,000 km from Kranjska Gora to Belgrade, and its section in BiH will be 270 km long. It will pass through all the entities: 70% in Republika Srpska, 18,9% in the Federation of BiH, and 11,1% in the Brčko District. It has been included in the Strategy for tourism development of the Brčko District.

According to Tihomir Dakić (Center for environment, contact point of the EuroVelo route in BiH), who intervened in the above mentioned [workshop](#), the Savska route project is important because it promotes connectivity between cities across the river. Although cycle tourism is becoming more and more common in Bosnia and Herzegovina, public institutions have just started to pay attention to the development of cycle routes and their possible benefits.



## Serbia

Three EuroVelo routes pass through Serbia: the Atlantic-Black Sea (EuroVelo 6), the Iron Curtain Trail (EV 13), and the East Europe Route (EV 11). Moreover, the already cited Savska route project meets all the requisites to become part of the EV network.

As mentioned above, the ADRIONCYCLETOUR does not only have a coastal dimension, but includes the construction of an inland network. Part of this inland network should be the Adriatic circle route: the core idea of this route is to connect Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Dubrovnik, planning to involve Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro for a length of 1,400 km.

According to Jovan Eraković, president of the NGO Ciklonaut Belgrade who took part in the [workshop](#), the project is a new opportunity for cooperation among ex Yugoslav countries and would promote cycle tourism as a new and sustainable form of tourism and source of income for local populations.



## Montenegro

The first sustainable mobility plan for carbon neutral tourism in Montenegro was developed in 2016. EuroVelo 8 (Mediterranean route) could pass through the country for an overall length of 175–195 km. Cycle tourism is not yet widespread in Montenegro, thus the incorporation in the EuroVelo network will bring in the country safer corridors for cycle tourism, the reduction of road accidents, and an improvement of accessibility.



## Albania

The EuroVelo 8 route in Albania is 350 km long, starting in Shkodra and ending in Saranda. Eltjana Shkreli, Executive director of the NGO Go2 Albania, said during the [workshop](#) that cycling is a tradition in Shkodra, where it has been recognised as a sport in 1920. The NGO has developed a plan for the development of the route in the country, including four tour packages.



## Greece

Three EuroVelo routes pass through Greece: EuroVelo 8, EuroVelo 11, and EuroVelo 13. The country has an extended network of secondary roads, but there is a need to develop a national strategy for cycling tourism. Among the things to do, there is also the arrangement of organised packages for cyclists.

The ADRIANCYCLETOUR in the country also programmes to allow cyclists to reach the islands. For example, thanks to intermodality transport, it will be possible to reach Zante by boat where many options for cycling are provided.



## North Macedonia

Currently, the country has very short cycle routes, but more and more cities are investing in cycling infrastructures. North Macedonia is involved in EuroVelo 11 and EuroVelo 13, but routes have not been defined yet in the country. Challenges are related to the morphology of the territory, the high mountains, and the need for new infrastructures.

Bojan Rantasa (representative of the Center for sustainable initiatives of

The first is along Lake Shkodra, a cross-border territory between Montenegro and Albania: a protected area rich in cultural monuments. The second tour is focused on the Buna River, with many rural settlements. The third is focused on central Albania, Tirana, and the metropolitan region. The last package is programmed to be in the south, starting from Fier and ending in Saranda. These are the proposals coming from civil society but a real project concerning cycle routes has not yet been undertaken at governmental level.

North Macedonia) who intervened during the [workshop](#) proposed the development of a cycle route along the Via Egnatia path, in connection with the ADRIONCYCLETOUR and the EuroVelo network.

***We talked a lot about EuroVelo[1], what is it?***

[EuroVelo](#) is a project developed by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF). It is a network of 17 long-distance cycling routes that cross Europe, for a total length that will almost reach 90,000 km.

As we have seen, the ADRIONCYCLETOUR will predominantly be in line with the Mediterranean route (EV 8), but it will be related also to the East Europe Route (EV 11), the Iron Curtain Trail (EV 13), the Sun Route (EV 7), and the Atlantic-Black Sea (EV 6).

## INTERVIEWS AND CONCLUSIONS

We talked about ADRIONCYCLETOUR and its potential for the protection of the environment and for the promotion of slow tourism with Tadej Žilič and Larisa Kunst (Slovenia), members of the Regional Development Centre Koper; Jovan Eraković (Serbia), president of the NGO Ciklonaut Belgrade; and Lucia Bruni (Italy), who collaborated with numerous associations that promote sustainable mobility.

***What could be the value of a cycle route that crosses the whole macro-region?***

**[Tadej Žilič and Larisa Kunst]:** A route that crosses the whole Adriatic and Ionian region may be of great importance. A continuous route connecting all countries along the coast may be an important tourist product that could attract considerable tourist flows from cycling routes of northern and central Europe towards the south. The project is a big opportunity for the stakeholders

of the area to work together – regional and local authorities, development agencies, tourist stakeholders, and cycling associations. The development of a new tourist product can certainly add value to the region. First of all, it can improve the quality of services for cyclists, both local and visitors.

**[Jovan Eraković]:** It can be more efficient, logical, and practical to construct a strong narrative about a route that is not limited (almost always artificially) to the borders of one country. The route "breathes" more easily when it is not constrained by borders. It is then much more certain that the practical experience of a cycle tourist will correspond in this way to the promises of the narrative, which further creates trust in the creators of the route and justifies the effort invested in the trip. Moreover, the ADRION CYCLE TOUR can be an efficient tool to heal some wounds from the recent turbulent past.

My experience is that the development of a really important cycling route(s) in countries with weak, or recently built tradition in cycling/cycle touring is not a one-way process, where participants in the project are a passive object that waits to be established, defined, promoted... There is actually strong feedback from that "object", reflected in the fact that participants, stakeholders, government institutions, and government officials build a new view of tourism, but also (and even more importantly) a new view of the ways they can cooperate.

**[Lucia Bruni]:** The project of a cycle route in the macro-region aims to attract tourism from abroad, to develop local and slow tourism, and to allow workers to move from one place to another by bike and not by car. All this will be possible only if we have the development of intermodality, the certainty that the route is 100% safe, the availability of services for cyclists along the route, clear signposting etc... If you do not have all these things, you will not meet the objectives.

***Do you believe that a well-defined cycling route in the region, and in your country, could be an incentive for tourism?***

**[Tadej Žilič and Larisa Kunst]:** Tourist agencies are already reporting an increasing demand for cycling tourism. Building missing sections of the main cycling route and its connections towards the hinterland, as well as a unified offer of tourist services for cyclists, would increase the importance of the area as a cycling destination. An important issue would also be to improve public transport (cross-border railway and bus connections) in order to enable tourists (cyclists) to reach the destination by using sustainable transport.

**[Jovan Eraković]:** Of course. I have had more than 30 cycling-related projects in the last 18 years, so something definitely had to keep me enthusiastic during all that time.

But well-defined is not enough, it is just a very good start. I would even say that being well-defined could make, let's say, 25% of a tourist value of a route. Another 25% would be infrastructure (bike oriented and/or bike-friendly accommodation and services, and in perfect circumstances – cycling paths).

The remaining 50% of the value, in my opinion, is promotion, promotion, promotion, constant and persistent promotion... We could have a fantastic route but, without strong promotion, it could take decades before the number of visitors reaches an economically viable level. And in that time – again, in countries with weak and fragile cycle tourism tradition – the route could even "die": signposts could disappear, local people could forget about cycle tourists



and turn to something else to earn money, local governments and organisations and/or state authorities could lose trust and patience to keep it sustainable.

**[Lucia Bruni]:** Cycle tourism has a tremendous potential. Cyclists are by definition slow tourists, they stop in each shop, they eat every half an hour, they need a good hotel. But it is necessary to develop all the related services nearby, you cannot only trace the cycle path on the ground. Otherwise, it will continue to attract only the usual cyclists, it will not be an incentive for families or for persons who do not usually cycle.

***Based on the experience of the existing routes and of past projects, do citizens make use of bikes not only for tourism but also in their daily life? Could they be a driver for a better engagement of the institutions in the realisation of projects like this?***

**[Tadej Žilič and Larisa Kunst]:** In bigger cities, as for example the capital Ljubljana, people use bikes also for going to work, to school, or for daily errands. In other smaller towns, especially those situated in more hilly areas, cycling is popular only as a means of recreation in free time. Slovene local authorities are already engaged in the promotion of cycling as a sustainable mode of transport, defined as such also in the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans. They are searching funds for investments in cycling infrastructure that is lacking. An important issue would be also to change people's way of thinking – to use the car less.

**[Jovan Eraković]:** It depends on the region. Vojvodina has a quite long and strong tradition of using bicycles in daily life. In the rest of Serbia – everything that starts at the right bank of the Danube – there are some towns or zones with similar qualities, but in most places the understanding and acceptance of bicycles as a means of regular transport started to develop only in the last decade or two. That process is quite intensive and exciting. It is worth mentioning that Vojvodina also has the advantage of being flat, while the rest of the country is mostly hilly or mountainous, except for bigger river valleys. On this issue citizens could definitely be a driver for a better engagement of institutions. At this time the main obstacle is only the insufficient connection, engagement, and coordination of the numerous local cyclists' associations existing. They mostly concentrate on small tasks (organising rides and local events) and forget about the bigger picture, at the state and regional levels.

***Did something change on these issues with the Covid-19 pandemic? A cycling trip allows you to discover hidden spots, it is associated with an idea of slow tourism, and has less of an impact on the environment. Could it be seen as a way to combine the need to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and environmental issues?***

**[Tadej Žilič and Larisa Kunst]:** This project could certainly contribute to improving the protection of the environment. An increase in the number of cycle tourists in our region has already been noticed in the past years. Now, during the pandemic the sale of bicycles in Slovenia has risen significantly. This is an indicator that interest in cycling is growing.

**[Jovan Eraković]:** The pandemic has changed people's behaviour, and it came down to a growing desire to avoid mass tourism. But it is not all about the pandemic: environmental awareness and global warming awareness also contribute to this trend. And all basic characteristics of cycling tourism certainly meet these "new" desires and criteria.

### ***In conclusion?***

**[Tadej Žilič and Larisa Kunst]:** For a successful promotion of the Slovene part of the Adrion cycle route, it would be important to obtain funds for building the missing cycling paths in city centres and connections with the hinterland. We should also improve public transport services, introduce cross-border transport lines (by rail, road and sea), strengthen the cooperation among tourist service providers (also cross-border), and enhance the quality of these services.

**[Lucia Bruni]:** The idea of a cycling route connecting all the countries in the macro-region is notable, but it will take years and resources to become true. It will be difficult to put all the political and administrative levels involved together. It is necessary to work with the municipalities, the regions, the national governments, and the EU. It will not be an easy task to coordinate all these efforts and maintain the momentum.

**[Jovan Eraković]:** As someone said, "in a car, you are in contact with the road, but on a bicycle, you are in contact with people". This opens another interesting aspect that is specific to some parts of the region. Namely, for some countries that (especially after the wars in the Balkans) still suffer from the burden of a bad image in Europe and the world, cycling tourism is one of the most efficient ways to change that image for the better. The thing is that in those "problematic" countries, hospitality and friendly attitude towards foreigners is at a very high level – and that is actually the best tourist "infrastructure" that they have. But for those who come in the frame of a typical "industry package", for those who experience the things mostly through bus or car windows while travelling fast and staying shortly, just one poor service in a restaurant or hotel might be enough to seriously spoil their impression of the country. On the other hand, those who travel by bicycle stay much longer and get more in contact with local people. Sometimes just asking for a direction, sometimes needing help with a bike breakdown, etc – but all that usually ends with a nice experience or even an invitation to lunch or an overnight stay. That is something that "fast" tourists never get and never discover. And at the same time, that is something that a host country can provide without heavy investment – a win-win situation for everyone.

### **ESP Marche Region**

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[esp@regione.marche.it](mailto:esp@regione.marche.it)

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*EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform*

*Regione Marche via Gentile da Fabriano, 9*

60125 Ancona, Italia

[Eusair Stakeholders Platform website](#)