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Charles A. Flink FASLA

Greenways, Incorporated, chuck.flink@greenways.com

Daniel Mourek

Greenway International Affairs Coordinator, Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation

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Sustainable Greenways Tourism: A Comparison of the East Coast Greenway (United States) and the Prague to Vienna Greenway (Czech Republic)

Mr. Charles A. Flink¹, Mr. Daniel Mourek², ¹FASLA, President, Greenways Incorporated, ²Greenway International Affairs Coordinator, Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation

Introduction

The first Greenways in Central Europe began in the early 1990s inspired by the experiences of the Hudson River Valley Greenway as well as other American Greenway initiatives. The past 15 years of cooperation between the Prague-Vienna Greenways, the Hudson River Valley Greenway and the East Coast Greenway Alliance have shown how the different natural, socioeconomic, and political conditions on both sides of the Atlantic provide a rich store of experience that can be mutually beneficial. Thanks to this cooperation not only have European Greenways been successfully developed, but there are now Greenways linking people, places and ideas across borders and between great cities like Vienna and Prague, Budapest and Krakow. American Greenway projects are using the European inspired model of ecotourism and heritage tourism to expand visitation and use. Americans and Europeans are participating in cultural exchange programs, learning from each other to enrich Greenway planning, design, development and management.

Goal

In 2002, the East Coast Greenway Alliance and the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation signed a memorandum of agreement to exchange information, foster better communications and cooperation, and conduct tours of completed greenway sections in America and the Czech Republic. One of the purposes of this agreement was to shed light upon and substantiate the ability of greenways to serve as a model for sustainable tourism. This partnership serves as a model for other non-governmental organizations around the world. Due to their linear nature and their ability to connect people to a variety of landscapes, greenways are ideally suited for promoting ecotourism and heritage tourism.



Methodology and Results

This paper examines some of the accomplishments of the Czech Environmental Partnership and the East Coast Greenway Alliance with respect to sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is an emerging practice that is committed to a low impact on local environments and culture, while at the same time helping to generate income and employment for local people. Sustainable tourism ensures a positive experience for local people, tourism companies and tourists. This paper profiles how sustainable tourism is being put into practice in both the Czech Republic and America.

Learning from and expanding on the American model

American Greenways and the ability of Americans to join forces and work together for a good cause has served as key inspiration for the work of the Greenways Program of the Czech Environmental Partnership. Transferring this inspiration into practice represents the greatest challenge. Today, not only has the Greenways Program involved hundreds of people in Greenways development, but we have also overcome unique barriers such as the many state and ethnic borders that our Greenways cross. Experience has proven that we have good neighbors (better than historians and politicians tell us - if only they built Greenway, too!) Together with our neighbors we have succeeded to make our Greenways models of sustainable and responsible tourism. Three of our main Greenways projects in Central Europe include the flag-ship *Greenway, Prague - Vienna*, which crosses the former Iron Curtain from Austria into the Czech Republic and continues for 260 miles (416 kilometers) of cycling and walking trails to the Czech capital. The *Krakow - Moravia - Vienna Greenway* stretches for 460 miles (736 kilometers) and crosses three international borders and the *Amber Trail Greenway* follows the historic amber trading route for nearly 300 miles (480 kilometers) through three countries from Budapest, Hungary through Slovakia to Krakow, Poland. Most of the newly developing Greenways in Central Europe include multiple use trails along main rivers like *Elbe Greenway* in the Czech Republic and in Germany (800 miles/1,280 kilometers), the *Oder river Greenway* in Poland and many others following smaller streams. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Poland the Greenway Program involves also greenways built on abandoned railways, so called rail-trails. Now the Greenways Program is supporting the expansion of Greenways into other regions such as the Balkans and former Soviet Union. The Czech Environmental Partnership is sharing know-how and experiences with communities in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia and the Polish Partnership is starting to work with partners in the Ukraine and Byelorussia where these activities not only contribute to protecting the environment but also support the development of civic initiatives and a civil society indispensable for strengthening democracy and respect for human rights.

www.greenways.pl.

CEE Greenway Milestones

1990s	1996	1997	2001	2002	2005
US Greenway inspiration brought to CEE	Prague Vienna Greenway signposted	Czech Environmental Partnership /NP/starts Greenway Program	Greenways for Europe initiative, later CEG	NP joins the European Greenway Association	EPSD takes coordination of CEG program

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Successful projects of CEG

“**Cyclists Welcome!**” (Czech Republic, Slovakia) is a nation-wide certification scheme aiming at improving the quality of travel-related services in the Czech Republic for a specific target group of cyclists and cycle tourists. The certification scheme defines quality standards comparable to existing certification schemes in other EU countries (Germany, Austria or Denmark). In addition, the Czech scheme also deals with tourism destinations catering to the needs of cyclists and cycle tourists and it introduces an original system of points of first aid and technical assistance along the cycle routes. Currently in CZ/SK there are over 1.150 businesses certified as cycle friendly. www.cyclistswelcome.eu



Rails to Trails DRAŽNÍ STEZKY (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania)

are programs currently operational in the Czech Republic and Poland and with high potential to be successfully developed in Slovakia, Bulgaria and other CEG countries. Main aim of the program is to map and analyze the situation of

abandoned, unused railways as potential corridors for greenways in their country. Next stage is coordinated approach of decision makers and EU bodies to turn this infrastructure into greenways based on examples from the USA, CEG but also other EU countries with well-established rail-trails such as Spain, France, Italy or Belgium. www.greenways.cz

Monitoring of cyclists and pedestrians on Greenways 

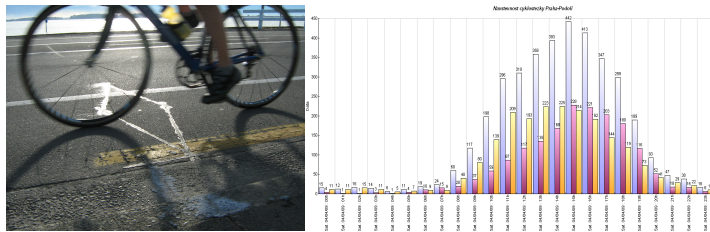


Figure 1: Eco-counters on Vltava Greenway, Prague with monitoring report

The Czech Greenways Program started to monitor users of greenways in 2009 by automated 24/7 counters, called an Eco-counter. The hard data is crucial for future planning of greenways as well as proving economic benefits of building this infrastructure. The stationary counters were installed in Prague for monitoring daily commuting on main greenway and mobile counters were monitoring cycle tourists along the Elbe Greenway in several points. Other use of automated counters is at the national parks /mainly for hikers/ and on regional level /for both users. Our common goal is to provide reliable barometer of greenway use combined with studies on economic benefit of our trails. www.partnerstvi-ops.cz

Most popular Greenways in CEG family 

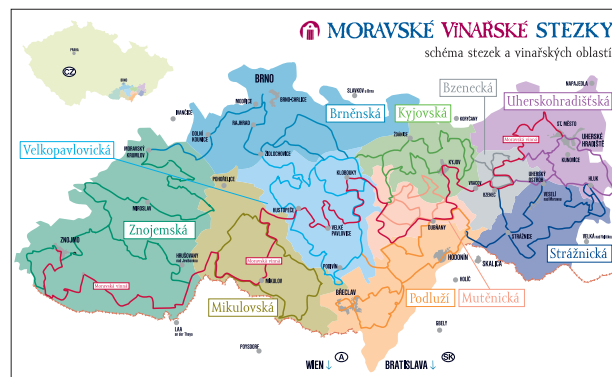
Prague-Vienna Greenways “Cultural trail connecting Central Europe”



Figure 2: Week of Cycling along Prague-Vienna Greenways, Galgenberg /AT/

Prague-Vienna Greenways (PVGW), a cultural trail, was established in 1994 and is the first greenway in Central Europe. It is a network of well-marked hiking trails and biking routes connecting two former imperial cities of Prague and Vienna. The main route stretches 292 miles/470 kilometers along the Vltava River valley in Southern Bohemia and the Dyje River Valley in Southern Moravia. It passes through historic towns and picturesque villages -the settings of numerous folk and music festivals-, UNESCO Heritage and Biosphere sites, pastoral countryside of rolling hills and blooming fields, pleasant forests, the wilderness of National Park Podyji, and vineyards in Southern Moravia and Austria's Weinviertel. The Greenway can be traveled by bike, on foot, and sections offer canoeing and horseback riding. More than 20 large information panels with rest stops are placed in bigger towns along the Greenway. The tourist Information centers provide basic information about the Greenway. More than thirty local civic organizations along the route, with support of Nadace Partnerstvi, work towards community revitalization, natural and cultural preservation and sustainable tourism. There are several thematic loop-greenways: *Through the countryside of naïve painter Josef Lada (near Prague around Říčany)*, *Devil's Load GW (Sedlec-Prčice)*; *Rural Baroque GW (Veselí nad Lužnicí)*, *Rozmberk Heritage GW (Třeboň)*, *Heritage Trails of Nove Hradky mountains*; *Rebel Grassel Trails (near Slavonice)* and *Liechtenstein Heritage GW (Lednice-Valtice-Austria)*. www.pragueviennagreenways.org

MORAVIAN WINE TRAILS “By bicycle through country side of monuments and wine”



Moravian Wine Trails (Czech Republic): 1200 kms of cycling and hiking trails through orchards, vineyards and wine cellar alleys of South Moravia. The main route connects Uherské Hradiště in Eastern part of the region with Znojmo, medieval town at the Austrian border. Ten loops feature typical wine types and wine cellar lane architecture creates a network of unique cultural heritage and viniculture. Both South Moravia (CZ) and Lower Austria /A/ are famous for its wines but also for unique, wine cellar lanes. UNESCO has included three areas in Southern Moravia in the World Heritage List, which is the highest number in the Czech Republic: the Lednice-Valtice area (Lednicko-valtický areál) and the biosphere reserves of Pálava and the White Carpathians (Bílé Karpaty). Cross-border National park Podyjí/Thayatal is the youngest national park in the country. The region is very

rich in living folklore traditions. Gems of folk art and handicrafts from the entire world are collected in the Institute of Folk Culture and in the open-air Museum of a Southern Moravian Village in Strážnice. The visitors can choose a one-day or two-week tour to explore Moravian folklore, wine and UNESCO Heritage sights. This trail system is continued in Austria with 13 main trail loops of 1.600kms of signposted wine trails in Austrian Weinviertel highlighting the main wine sorts such as Traminer, Grüner Veltliner, Sauvignon, Blauburgunder and others. The regions of South Moravia and Weinviertel create a unique wine growing area catering to the needs of cycle as well as wine and culture tourists. Main vision of this project of Nadace Partnerství is to make South Moravia a prosperous region known as “**Region of Monuments and Wine**”. www.vinarske.stezky.cz

Learning from the European model

Americans are learning from European counterparts how to develop and operate ecotourism and heritage based Greenways. The East Coast Greenway is a prime example of where this is occurring. During a visit in the fall of 2007, members of the East Coast Greenway Alliance were provided with a professional guided tour (see photo below) and an explanation of the ecotourism and heritage tourism operations of the Prague–Vienna Greenway. This inspired the Alliance to shift the focus of its operations and sponsor more ecotourism and heritage tourism events. This has improved the profile and visibility of the Greenway and strengthened the mission of the organization. The East Coast Greenway extends 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometers) from the Maine and Canadian border to Key West, Florida. It is the longest and most significant urban Greenway in America, extending through the heart of Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, DC, Richmond, VA, Raleigh-Durham, NC, Charleston, SC, Savannah, GA and Miami, FL.



Figure 3 (left): Map of East Coast Greenway, Figure 4 (right): Lada Ptacek of the GTC conducts tour of Prague-Vienna Greenway for ECGA.

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As a result of the working relationship with the Czech Environmental Partnership, the Alliance has focused its efforts on opening four 100-mile (160 kilometer) ecotourism and heritage tourism segments of the Greenway. These 100-mile (160 kilometer) segments are allowing the Alliance to offer unique ecotourism and heritage tourism opportunities for Americans and international visitors alike.

The Alliance has sponsored three ecotourism and heritage tourism events along the Greenway: from Baltimore to Washington, DC; Wilmington, DE to New York City; and in northeast Florida. The following offers a description of three heritage corridors that can be traversed by using the East Coast Greenway.

Baltimore-Washington Corridor

Beginning at the Inner Harbor in downtown Baltimore, the East Coast Greenway extends 100 miles (160 kilometers) into downtown Washington, DC, and onto the National Mall; which extends between The White House and the United States Capital. From north to south, tourists explore a variety of urban and suburban landscapes, ecosystems and heritage sites that capture the essence of these strategically important American cities. The route of travel takes tourists through Baltimore-Washington International Airport and directly into historic Annapolis, Maryland, site of the United States Naval Academy. Domestic and international tourists can easily plan and execute their visits along the route, choosing from numerous hotels and restaurants to make the trip convenient and enjoyable. For its part, the Alliance provides cue sheets to guide riders and hikers. The entire route is signed as well, confirming the route of travel.



Figure 5 (left): Chuck Flink rides south along the B&A Trail to Annapolis, MD.
Figure 6 (right): Map of Maryland section of East Coast Greenway.

Wilmington to New York City Corridor

The East Coast Greenway corridor from Wilmington, Delaware to New York City traces some of the most historic and important landscapes in American history. It also links tourists to some of the most populated landscapes of America. The 225-mile (360 kilometer) corridor begins at the historic DuPont factory on the banks of Brandywine Creek, and winds its way north to Philadelphia, site of the America’s Colonial capital. The route crosses the Delaware River and traverses the heart of historic Trenton, New Jersey. The trail then follows the historic towpath of the Delaware and Raritan Canal, retracing America’s industrial heritage.

As the trail winds north and into Newark, dense urban development interrupts the travel route, forcing Greenway users to employ local transit to complete their journey to New York City. Upon arrival in the “Big Apple,” Greenway tourists are greeted by a network of trails and paths that hug the island of Manhattan coastline, traversing a landscape that was once industrial, but which is now teeming with people, shops, restaurants and high-rise housing. New York City is determined to implement a “Greenprint” across America’s most densely populated community. To accomplish this, the city has aggressively reclaimed the waterfront and transformed the abandoned industrial landscape into a linear park, or greenway, that envelops the island. The East Coast Greenway utilizes this transformed landscape to circumnavigate the island, and also to provide efficient access to the City’s best known destinations, including Central Park, Times Square and Wall Street.



Figure 7 (left): ECGA riders at Liberty State Park with New York City skyline.
Figure 8 (right): Map of ECGA in State of New Jersey.

Northeast Florida Corridor

A journey along the East Coast Greenway through the southern United States is a dramatic departure from the touring experience of the northeastern Atlantic Seaboard. Given its 3,000-mile (4,800 kilometers) length, the Greenway affords

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tourists a wide variety of heritage and natural environments to explore and experience. Northeast Florida is remarkable for its gentile and laid-back lifestyle. The “First Coast” tour links Greenway users to America’s oldest settlement, St. Augustine, which was established by the Spaniards in 1560. Traversing through Duval County, tourists travel through a vast expanse of lowcountry wetlands and salt water marsh, then into the populated areas of Jacksonville, Florida’s most populated city. The majority of the First Coast journey winds its way along live oak shaded roadways, canals and waterways, historic towns and villages and across tributaries of the St. John’s River.

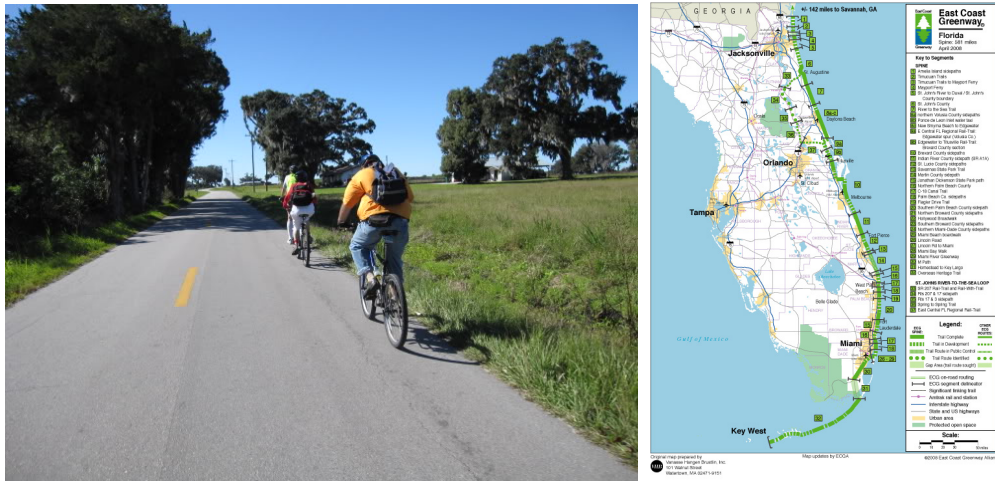


Figure 9 (left): First Coast Tour riders along a rural road in Northeast Florida.
Figure 10 (right): Map of Florida section of East Coast Greenway.

Summary

Twenty years ago, a partnership between a non-profit American organization and a non-governmental Czech Republic organization was not only unthinkable, it was impossible. Today, the East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA) and the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation (CEG) have reached out to share information and learn from each other in ways that have benefited both organizations. The CEG has taken stock of how American non-governmental organizations have worked together to assemble land and resources to create linear parks (greenways) and travel routes that reveal the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Czech Republic. The ECGA has learned that an interconnected resource can be operated and opened for heritage and ecotourism. This has served to expand the membership base for the Alliance and provided support for developing and opening for use more sections of the Greenway. Both organizations have developed methods and practices that serve to define sustainable tourism practices for similar projects throughout the world.