European Commission

CORDIS Results Pack on
cultural tourism
A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

March 2024

Conserving culture and cultural heritage through inclusive and sustainable development

Research and Innovation

Contents

Editorial

Sustainable cultural tourism puts cultural heritage and local communities at the centre of the decision-making process. This will drive good conservation practices and provide an authentic experience for visitors while supporting the local economy.

The market for cultural tourism is significant, accounting for almost 40 % of all European tourism. Moreover, cultural tourists spend 38 % more per day and stay 22 % longer than other types of tourists in the destinations they visit.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, interest in cultural tourism will continue to grow and act as one of Europe's key markets.

Cultural tourism is marked by visitors' eagerness to discover, experience and learn about a particular destination. Whether sampling gourmet food, living with remote rural communities or travelling Europe's pilgrimage routes, interest in cultural activities is booming.

An increasing number of tourists are therefore searching for a more personal and authentic experience that connects them to a specific place and culture. In short, they seek out attractions, products and activities that are unique and cannot be found elsewhere.

This form of tourism also generates sources of income for local communities. In turn, it helps safeguard cultural treasures to support, strengthen and maintain cultural heritage, particularly in Europe's rural and less-known destinations.

But as destinations become increasingly popular, unchecked mass tourism can present major challenges. Overcrowding, increased levels of noise and pollution, damage to the built environment and disruption to residents' way of life can rob destinations of their value and authentic character. The success of cultural tourism therefore largely depends on working with local communities to achieve benefits for everyone involved. Hence, there is a need to integrate cultural heritage, tourism activities and local communities in a sustainable way.

By implementing a circular tourism approach communities can work with tourism operators and other stakeholders to reduce negative environmental impacts. This is achieved through waste reduction, resource conservation, green transportation and support for local products whilst promoting overall sustainability.

Acknowledging the evolving challenges within the tourism sector, the pursuit of ongoing research and innovation is crucial for creating sustainable strategies that enable the industry to adapt and flourish amid shifting environmental landscapes. The EU's Research and Innovation Agenda emphasises the significance of cultural tourism, and it is centred around generating new knowledge and evidence-based solutions that address these challenges and promote sustainable cultural tourism.

This new CORDIS Results Pack focuses on eight Horizon 2020 research projects that demonstrate the EU's commitment to conserving Europe's cultural heritage and transitioning to sustainable cultural tourism. It explores the potential of cultural tourism for regenerating and valorising cultural heritage and empowering local communities by creating sustainable jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurial activity.

The pack will help policymakers to better understand cultural tourism, develop evidence-based policy options and give stakeholders greater insight into the latest research results. It will also help cultural tourism practitioners to fine-tune their activities based on the latest research and test new tools and solutions developed by the projects.

This Results Pack is therefore aimed at contributing to new perspectives on and insights into cultural tourism and making the target audience more aware of the opportunities that this form of tourism has to offer.

Revitalising European cultural tourism

A novel approach to cultural tourism in Europe, focusing on sustainable, circular strategies in less-known regions, can promote regional development and heritage.

Cultural heritage is often deeply rooted in the identity of a region. Preserving and promoting cultural heritage helps local communities maintain a sense of place and belonging. Breathing new life into underutilised or abandoned historic buildings and sites can revitalise communities, generating revenue and employment opportunities in regions that may otherwise struggle economically.

Involving local communities in cultural heritage preservation and promotion empowers them to take ownership of their heritage. This engagement can lead to community-driven initiatives and a sense of responsibility for the region's development.

Working towards circular tourism across Europe

The EU-funded Be.CULTOUR project focuses on Europe's remote, rural and less-known destinations and aspires to redefine cultural tourism through a circular economy approach. Circular tourism aims to reduce negative environmental impacts while promoting overall sustainability. It focuses on waste reduction, resource conservation, green transportation and support for local products.

Be.CULTOUR has brought together a network of innovators, including public institutions, civil society organisations and companies to co-develop strategies, tools and solutions for the integration of a human-centred circular economy in cultural tourism. It seeks to regenerate and valorise cultural heritage, empowering local communities by creating sustainable jobs and enhancing entrepreneurial capacity.

"Participants view cultural tourism as instrumental in learning about European culture and history, thereby strengthening European cultural identity, social cohesion and well-being," explains project coordinator Antonia Gravagnuolo.

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Community networks and actions

The project has formed a community of dedicated regional representatives who aspire to shape the future of cultural tourism in their areas. This community shares a vision for a circular, human-centred society and has worked together to address challenges in remote or overexploited areas related to cultural tourism.

The community comprises six pilot ecosystems in Aragon (Spain), Basilicata (Italy), Larnaca (Cyprus), Västra Götaland (Sweden), Vojvodina (Serbia), and the cross-border area of north-east Romania and Moldova, alongside another 16 regions that will replicate the pilot methodologies and tools and adapt them to their own regional context. Action plans encompass innovative strategies for integrating circular cultural tourism within local and regional development frameworks.

Solutions include platforms for digital nomads, European cultural routes and innovative approaches to engage younger generations in cultural heritage. Additionally, the project introduces multidimensional evaluation tools and smart data management systems for strategic planning and management of circular destinations, along with place-branding methodologies to empower local communities.

Cultural tourism solutions

The initiative in Larnaca promotes authentic rural experiences in traditional landscapes through homestays and hospitality in rural villages. Visitors actively participate in local activities like agriculture, landscape maintenance and crafts. Basilicata, Italy, is exploring contemporary interpretations of cultural heritage sites through artistic creation, gamification, virtual travel experiences and creative storytelling to enhance the enjoyment of heritage.

The project transcends the traditional view of tourism as an objective 'per se', repositioning it as a tool for community building, innovation and sustainable cultural entrepreneurship, while promoting European culture, history and identity as part of a 'transformative' travel experience.

In the region of Romania-Moldova, the focus is on appreciating a more intimate reflexive inner journey, a spiritual travel experience through the cultural route of Stephan the Great. The pilot in Aragon, Spain, emphasises the cultural value of nature as heritage, promoting activities like ecotourism and adventure tourism in natural heritage sites and local rural products. The Västra Götaland region, Sweden, on the other hand, seeks to create an audience for industrial heritage sites, presenting them as iconic architectural places that tell the history of European manufacturing.

"The project transcends the traditional view of tourism as an objective 'per se', repositioning it as a tool for community building, innovation and sustainable cultural entrepreneurship, while promoting European culture, history and identity as part of a 'transformative' travel experience," concludes Gravagnuolo.

PROJECT

Be.CULTOUR – Beyond CULtural TOURism: human-centred innovations for sustainable and circular cultural tourism

COORDINATED BY
National Research Council in Italy

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

CORDIS FACTSHEET
cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004627

PROJECT WEBSITE
becultour.eu/

Unlocking Europe's cultural wealth

European cultural tourism seeks sustainable strategies. A decision support tool enhances heritage experiences, effectively assessing cultural tourism's societal impact.

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Travelling to experience the cultural aspects of a destination – known as cultural tourism – accounts for 39 % of international tourism and constitutes a key driver of the growth and economic development of European regions and cities. Travellers are fuelled by their quest to experience the heritage, arts, traditions and lifestyle of a new place.

Cultural tourism extends beyond sightseeing, promotes cross-cultural understanding and appreciation for diversity, and often contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions. However, in many regions, the potential of cultural tourism has not been fully exploited and there is a considerable knowledge gap in how it truly affects the economic competitiveness and social well-being of places. Bridging such gaps is integral for preserving and promoting the richness of global cultural heritage.

Promoting sustainable cultural tourism across Europe

The EU-funded IMPACTOUR project aims to promote sustainable cultural tourism strategies across Europe. For this purpose, the consortium undertook systematic comparison of pan-European information related to cultural tourism, including strategies that influenced urban and regional transformation, successful and unsuccessful implementation models, and innovative techniques.

"To measure the effects of cultural tourism on the environment, society, economy and culture, we used performance indicators, helping create better tourism strategies and actions," outlines project coordinator João Martins.

The IMPACTOUR decision support system

Central to IMPACTOUR's objectives was the creation of a user-friendly tool to measure the impact of cultural tourism on European economic and social development. It was designed and developed to provide recommendations for the site managers based on their site characterisations and their objectives to achieve a greater positive impact of cultural tourism.

The solution collates gathered knowledge and facilitates the assessment of cultural tourism policies using data analytics algorithms with AI and machine learning strategies. Moreover, it functions as a decision support system, aiding stakeholders in tailoring strategies to their specific site characteristics and objectives.

The tool comprises modules for data visualisation and management, decision support and monitoring. It helps the characterisation of tourism destinations, recommending suitable strategies and actions, and enabling stakeholders to track the progress of their proposed actions through performance indicators.

Cultivating a European scope

Undoubtedly, one of the project's most notable achievements lies in its collaborative approach, including the participation of 32 pilot sites around Europe, where only 5 were project partners. The project fosters a participatory approach and facilitates information exchange among stakeholders.

"The establishment of the IMPACTOUR community, fostering discussions beyond project boundaries, became a cornerstone for knowledge sharing and societal engagement in sustainable cultural tourism development," emphasises Martins.

Furthermore, amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, IMPACTOUR served as a platform for exchange, enabling pilots to navigate and mitigate its adverse effects, consequently integrating these insights into the project's methodologies and tools. Overall, the project improved cultural tourism management and boosted visibility and attractiveness. With strategies fostering innovation and creativity in cultural tourism, new job opportunities will be created alongside enhanced social cohesion.

"We encourage people to connect with and take pride in Europe's diverse cultural heritage and natural features, reinforcing their sense of belonging while appreciating the traditions of minority cultures," concludes Martins.

We encourage people to connect with and take pride in Europe's diverse cultural heritage and natural features, reinforcing their sense of belonging while appreciating the traditions of minority cultures.

PROJECT

IMPACTOUR – IMproving Sustainable Development Policies and PrActices to assess, diversify and foster Cultural TOURism in European regions and areas

COORDINATED BY
UNINOVA in Portugal

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

CORDIS FACTSHEET
cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870747

PROJECT WEBSITE
impactour.eu/

Local communities and stakeholders give cultural tourism a boost in Europe's periphery

The EU-funded INCULTUM project is developing sustainable cultural tourism in out-of-the-way regions by engaging local communities and implementing participatory actions.

By working together, local populations and stakeholders can unlock cultural tourism's potential in marginalised and remote areas. When locals put their community first, cultural tourism then becomes a tool for regional development from a social, economic and environmental perspective, and not an end in itself. As a result, all efforts to achieve such development revolve around locals, and not tourists.

Participatory models and collaborative practices for cultural tourism

The INCULTUM project explores this very potential when managed by local communities and stakeholders.
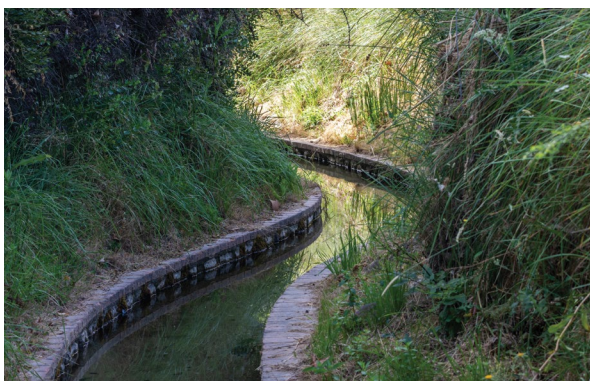
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"Innovative participatory and collaborative approaches are being adopted to turn locals into protagonists. They minimise the negative effects of uncontrolled touristic growth, learn from and improve good practices, and translate them into strategies and policies," explains project coordinator José Maria Martín Civantos, professor at the University of Granada's Department of Medieval History and Historiographic Sciences and Techniques. "Furthermore, INCULTUM fosters intercultural understanding by implementing bottom-up strategies that can have positive effects for both locals and tourists."

Exploiting heritage resources as a common good

Project partners collaborated with stakeholders, local administrations and policymakers to develop and validate sustainable strategies in deprived, remote, peripheral and deindustrialised regions across eight EU Member States and Albania, each with a rich cultural and/or natural heritage. Efforts in these pilot regions ranged from analysing cemeteries in Ireland to examining tourism flows in the remote areas of Sweden's archipelago and great lakes.

For example, in Spain's Granada High Plains, 'payment for services' agreements were established to protect irrigation systems that primarily date back to the Middle Ages. Despite the great historical and socio-economic importance of such systems, they are undervalued by local institutions and sometimes by the community itself.

Such agreements come in the form of an administrative document signed between irrigation communities – comprising farmers and traditional irrigation system users – and municipalities. Payment is not always financial. It could involve a mutual understanding in which public institutions offer support, for instance, by providing labour to maintain hydraulic infrastructures.

The agreements include the maintenance and protection of new visitor itineraries conceived during INCULTUM. Several pathways, which run along the irrigation channels traditionally used to distribute water, have been converted into cultural routes. Farmers proposed, built and now manage these routes, thereby promoting agricultural heritage, while presenting irrigation communities in a positive light. Guided by farmers, tourists learn about the territory and local rural culture.

Capacity building and knowledge transfer for sustainable tourism

A training portal offers various resources in sustainable tourism, cultural heritage and innovative participatory approaches, as well as the involvement and engagement of living territories and communities. Local stakeholders and communities, university students, researchers, public administrators, business development operators, tourism specialists and cultural heritage managers all benefit from the training offer.

INCULTUM identified, collected and analysed data on various aspects of urban and regional development, cultural tourism and a wide selection of socio-economic indicators. Results contributed to recommendations for designing effective and sustainable cultural tourism policies.

"Empowering the pilot communities through protection and development of their heritage has boosted local tourism," concludes Civantos. "As INCULTUM's insights ripple into policy, research and practice, they have the potential to shape a more sustainable and culturally enriched future for Europe's fringes."

Empowering the pilot communities through protection and development of their heritage has boosted local tourism.

PROJECT
INCULTUM – Visiting the Margins. INnovative CULtural ToUrisM in European peripheries

COORDINATED BY
University of Granada in Spain

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

CORDIS FACTSHEET
cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004552

PROJECT WEBSITE
incultum.eu/

The road less travelled: hidden gems near pilgrimage routes

Novel web and mobile apps are putting rural points of interest on pilgrims' maps to unleash the potential of slow tourism for travellers and local economies.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims set out on spiritual journeys across Europe, retracing historical routes and visiting places of worship. However, they rarely stray from the defined routes, missing an extraordinary opportunity to enrich their experiences while supporting the economic well-being of primarily rural areas.

The EU-funded rurALLURE project has created an IT platform, travel apps and content that could transform off-the-beaten-track rural areas from passive witnesses into active hosts of the pilgrim flow, for mutual benefit.

More than 40 % of people surveyed en route and online said they would spend more time on routes than suggested in travel guides if they were told about new points of interest. Our project outcomes are a first step towards harnessing this potential.

Pilgrims explore the vibrant present along historical routes

The rurALLURE portal and apps enable users to select from recommended trips or to create their own personalised itineraries with additional side trips and points of interest. They also connect users with local transport, accommodation and dining and leisure activities along each route.

"More than 40 % of people surveyed en route and online said they would spend more time on routes than suggested in travel guides if they were told about new points of interest. Our project outcomes are a first step towards harnessing this potential," says project coordinator Martín López Nores of the University of Vigo.

Local stakeholders were essential in choosing safely accessible rural points of interest, since geographical information databases are often lacking the latest information. Some sites or roads no longer exist, are blocked or are unsafe due to insufficient maintenance.

According to López Nores: "We were amazed by the tremendous interest shown by stakeholders – more than 100 organisations signed agreements as associate partners, providing resources for the documentation and organisation of featured trips."

An expanded view of pilgrimages: slow tourism

The rurALLURE project did not only create a pilgrimage information platform linked to a web portal and mobile apps. In the process, they tapped into the opinions of more than 10 000 tourists as well as hundreds of stakeholders and tens of regional, national and international policymakers.

This led to a key project outcome: confirmation that people who travel along pilgrimage routes are increasingly motivated not solely by traditional religious or spiritual aspects. Other motivators included having fun, adventure and intense emotional experiences, viewing beautiful landscapes and having direct contact with nature. Improved physical condition and health, enjoying free time with family and friends, disconnecting from routine and meeting new people were also cited.

Further, "a new slow traveller profile would happily use weekends to travel selected segments with no intent of reaching the final destination. These routes could become a pan-European infrastructure for slow tourism that would be particularly beneficial for the traversed rural territories," adds López Nores.

© Martín López Nores

Tools and best practices

In addition to the portal and apps, rurALLURE's photo contests were a highly successful engagement strategy, achieving nearly 7 500 photo and video submissions over 2 years. With their transparent selection process, adaptable structure and integration with social media platforms, the contests were recognised as a best practice by the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme.

The project also created the European Cooperation Network along Pilgrimage Routes. "Cooperation will be the key to turning current pilgrims of one route into future pilgrims of other destinations. After many years as competitors, we are moving towards fruitful cooperation among stakeholders associated with pilgrimage routes," López Nores states. "This promises rural businesses that are viable, provides families with opportunities in rural environments and, ultimately, creates rural populations that thrive," López Nores concludes.

PROJECT

rurALLURE – Promotion of rural museums and heritage sites in the vicinity of European pilgrimage routes

COORDINATED BY

Anton Dohrn Zoological Station in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

The University of Vigo in Spain

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004887

PROJECT WEBSITE

rurallure.eu/

Reshaping cultural tourism in Europe for sustainable growth

Europe's cultural tourism potential has been unlocked by the SmartCulTour project with smart, co-creative strategies for sustainable growth and regional development.

Cultural tourism has emerged as a dynamic force for economic growth, particularly in rural areas and urban peripheries of European regions. To harness its potential, the EU-funded project SmartCulTour has redefined the landscape of cultural tourism, deploying innovative strategies that engage stakeholders in co-creating sustainable cultural tourism practices. By amalgamating traditional and non-traditional data sources, the project has developed a comprehensive decision-support system (DSS) to monitor regions effectively. Through field tests in six living labs, the project brought a fresh perspective to regional development, especially in rural peripheries and the urban fringe, emphasising sustainable cultural tourism as a growth catalyst. The project's comprehensive research has identified sustainable practices that positively impact regions, formulating proposals for local interventions.

Between overtourism and underexplored destinations

SmartCulTour pinpointed a significant issue prevalent in many European destinations that concerns the unequal growth of tourism. This results in inefficient resource utilisation and disparities in costs and advantages. While some locations grapple with the negative impacts of overtourism, a considerable portion of European regions remains underexplored, presenting untapped tourism potential. "On a more empirical level, through a broad selection of indicators on the level of local administrative units, the

project led to a statistical validation of the positive relationship between cultural tourism and local sustainability and resilience, a relationship which has often been implicitly considered but has seldom been quantified," comments Bart Neuts, SmartCulTour project coordinator.

The data scarcity lesson

One of the key challenges was the scarcity of local-level data, necessitating novel strategies to enrich official statistics. Additionally, the project faced difficulties in integrating for-profit private companies within the living labs and was challenged by a lack of funds for infrastructure-related interventions. Overcoming these issues required the implementation of common data collection guidelines, the flexibility to include new members in the living labs as needed, and the exploration of future funding opportunities. "In order to overcome the challenges of data scarcity, official statistics were enriched with big data and machine learning algorithms. Finding new ways to collect large-volume data at low cost is particularly important for less visited, regional destinations where traditional visitor surveys would be prohibitively expensive," points out Neuts.

On a more empirical level, through a broad selection of indicators on the level of local administrative units, the project led to a statistical validation of the positive relationship between cultural tourism and local sustainability and resilience.

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A toolkit to refine cultural tourism

An essential aspect of SmartCulTour's approach was the adoption of a co-creative, bottom-up methodology for destination planning and development. By fostering inclusive stakeholder engagement through arts-based and service design tools, the project created a level playing field for diverse interests and visions. The SmartCulTour tookit has been designed to assist destinations in implementing local actions for sustainable cultural tourism. Through a mix of creative, visual and quantitative tools, the toolkit ensures a holistic approach to cultural tourism development.

The upcoming tourism landscape

Looking ahead, the project aims to extend its impact by integrating its toolkit into the operations of interested regions and European destination management organisations (DMOs). The collaboration with related projects such as SPOT

and IMPACTOUR is expected to yield synergistic outcomes, amplifying the collective influence of these initiatives in the European cultural tourism landscape. With its emphasis on sustainable practices and community involvement, SmartCulTour has set a precedent for future cultural tourism initiatives, fostering resilience and equitable development in European regions.

PROJECT

SmartCulTour – Smart Cultural Tourism as a Driver of Sustainable Development of European Regions

COORDINATED BY
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

CORDIS FACTSHEET
cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870708

PROJECT WEBSITE
smartcultour.eu/

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Sustainable tourism and other mobilities: changing the narrative

A seminal study on the explosion of short-term rental practices and the resulting social exclusion of local communities provides a clear basis for positive change.

Sustainable tourism is a multifaceted concept – sustainability is not equivalent to eco-friendliness and it is not related solely to responsible behaviours on the part of visitors and their hosts. Any evaluation of sustainability must consider whether the lifestyles and livelihoods of the destinations' residents can be sustained.

This is exactly what the EU-funded SMARTDEST project has done. It analysed how the development of cities as hubs of tourism and other mobilities, such as expat workers, lifestyle nomads and students, affects the lives of resident communities.

Pan-European trends challenging urban social cohesion and reproduction

"SMARTDEST explored and addressed this phenomenon through the co-design of solutions via CityLab case studies in six EU

© Rovira i Virgili University

cities and Jerusalem, Israel. The project identified five critical trends across Europe," explains project coordinator Antonio Paolo Russo of Rovira i Virgili University.

A real estate market increasingly catering to short-term use has created a lack of affordable housing and led to a relentless erosion of local structures. This decreases residents' access to services and networks that guarantee social cohesion and social reproduction.

An overreliance on the visitor's economy and consumer services is simultaneously reducing opportunities for the highly skilled while significantly increasing positions for poorly paid and precarious work. It is also spurring decreasing protection of citizens' rights to health and rest in an increasingly 24/7 environment. Finally, the rise of smart cities is widening social divides yet further empowering the most skilled city users.

"To complicate matters further, mobile short-term dwellers generally have greater financial means and influence than the most vulnerable and less adaptive strata of local populations. This puts them at an advantage in negotiating for space, services and infrastructure. Urban policy often favours or accommodates this, rather than striving to maintain social cohesion and restructuring the governance of tourism development to consider the needs of affected communities," adds Russo.

Working together to address over-tourism and vulnerability

The SMARTDEST Social Innovation Kit, a web-based platform, empowers users to chart the trends analysed in the EU and in case study cities, map various interdependent indicators, learn about the work conducted in CityLabs and engage with researchers.

Possibly the most outstanding result is that tourism workers increasingly can't afford to live in the cities to whose global success they contribute. They are condemned to exclusionary commuting lives. At the same time, quite unexpectedly and despite the evidence, some governments and industry stakeholders still think that tourism can continue to grow and benefit local communities...

Future versions will enable other cities and stakeholders to upload their data, expanding the evidence base and enabling them to benchmark trends and challenges against those of the CityLabs.

SMARTDEST produced open-access databases at the EU and case study levels, algorithms, case study reports, thematic policy briefs and more than 20 high-impact journal papers, mostly in open-access format. This will help policymakers, citizens and cities facing similar challenges evaluate trends and make appropriate decisions.

A tale of two cities

"Possibly the most outstanding result is that tourism workers increasingly can't afford to live in the cities to whose global success they contribute. They are condemned to exclusionary commuting lives. At the same time, quite unexpectedly and despite the evidence, some governments and industry stakeholders still think that tourism can continue to grow and benefit local communities and are ready to invest large amounts of public money to sustain such growth," explains Russo.

SMARTDEST has provided a wealth of data and evidence to support the counter-narrative, enabling vulnerable groups and their advocates to proactively petition for change through direct engagement or the democratic process.

PROJECT
SMARTDEST – Cities as mobility hubs: tackling social exclusion through 'smart' citizen engagement

COORDINATED BY
Rovira i Virgili University in Spain

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

CORDIS FACTSHEET
cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870753

PROJECT WEBSITE
smartdest.eu/

Sustainable cultural tourism development leveraging multi-level synergy

A cultural tourism decision support tool will help Europe's rural and urban areas lay the groundwork to sustainably promote their unique cultural heritage.

Experiencing and learning about the culture of places visited is something most tourists do to varying degrees while on a trip. This can be planned – for example, taking part in local cooking or pottery classes – or simply occur as a side effect of being present, one of the reasons for getting out of our regular environments.

Cultural tourism, though, makes cultural immersion the intent of the trip. It is one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the global tourism market. The EU-funded SPOT project has developed new methodologies, tools and guidance documents to better understand and promote cultural tourism in Europe.

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Fifteen case studies: the multifaceted potential of cultural tourism

SPOT evaluated numerous regions with a plethora of opportunities for cultural tourism, including urban areas rich in architecture and cultural experiences, as well as disadvantaged areas, which are often rural. These rural areas can turn the disadvantage of remoteness and lesser industrial activity into an advantage, thanks to the resulting preservation of cultural heritage.

The rural areas studied are rich in natural beauty, traditional architecture and folklore. SPOT also explored the further development of media tourism in two locations, where tourists are often drawn after reading or watching content set in or featuring these areas. Finally, the project included rural regions without a tradition of tourism but a desire to create one.

Good practices, golden rules and policy briefs

A comparison of the case studies leveraged: statistical data; a survey of visitors, providers and residents; and a discussion with stakeholders. It evaluated six aspects: local engagement and benefit, shared vision, sustainable development, infrastructure (transport, accommodation, sanitation), implementation, and policy formulation.

Based on the comparison, SPOT created 'Golden Rules' for local and EU-level stakeholders to improve the conditions supporting cultural tourism development. "The results clearly showed that local actors play a very important and active role in the decision-making process. Their involvement is also crucial at higher levels when discussing cultural tourism planning and strategies. Cultural tourism is rooted in European, national, regional and local culture. Engagement at all levels is essential for cultural development and, consequently, the overall development of particularly disadvantaged areas, which cannot compete economically with the most prominent destinations in this sector," notes Milada Šťastná of Mendel University in Brno, project coordinator.

In addition to the Golden Rules, the project produced 28 policy briefs, 20 examples of good practice and articles in scientific journals.

SPOT-IT tool: tailored decision support

The open-access SPOT-IT decision support tool can help stakeholders interested in planning and promoting cultural tourism. According to Šťastná: "The tool evaluates characteristics, including geographical location and climate, the attractiveness of cultural tourism, available infrastructure, as well as potential social, ethnic, political and environmental challenges. Cultural tourism development must always follow a sustainable development approach regarding economic, ecological and social dimensions." The basic package can incorporate additional levels of analysis according to the individual needs of countries or regions.

Cultural tourism received a boost from the COVID-19 pandemic as people sought less populated areas with natural social distancing. The SPOT-IT tool and the project's 92 written outputs will help stakeholders at all levels build on this momentum, promoting Europe's extraordinary cultural heritage, particularly in disadvantaged areas, for the benefit of travellers and economies.

The tool evaluates characteristics, including geographical location and climate, the attractiveness of cultural tourism, available infrastructure, as well as potential social, ethnic, political and environmental challenges.

PROJECT

SPOT – Social and innovative Platform On cultural Tourism and its potential towards deepening Europeanisation

COORDINATED BY
Mendel University in Brno in the Czech Republic

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

CORDIS FACTSHEET
cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870644

PROJECT WEBSITE
spotprojecth2020.eu/

Step-by-step method transforming local cultural tourism

The EU-funded TExTOUR project is introducing methodology to improve the sustainability of cultural tourism for remote local communities in Europe and beyond.

The success of cultural tourism largely depends on working with local communities to offer benefits for everyone involved. This approach provides opportunities for economic growth and social development in far-flung and underserved areas rich in culture.

However, socio-economic development carries the risk of harming the environment and negatively impacting community life. Therefore, there is a need to integrate cultural heritage, tourism activities and local communities in a sustainable way.

Developing sustainable cultural tourism

The TExTOUR project introduces strategies to address economic, cultural, environmental and social sustainability through inclusive and diverse participation of local communities.

"Overall, our aim is to take innovative solutions already applied in major tourist destinations and implement them in less developed and lesser-known places. This way, they can use their cultural tourism sources as assets in regional development," explains project coordinator Daniel Basulto García-Risco, European R&D project manager at Santa María la Real Foundation of Historic Heritage in Spain.

Working towards co-developed cultural tourism

TExTOUR created a seven-step methodology for local communities interested in developing their tourism industry by taking advantage of their heritage capital. This addresses all aspects of sustainable planning at each stage of the process. It encourages a wide variety of local community actors to get involved in preparing strategies and an action plan from the outset. Communities follow these guidelines to identify their territories' strengths and weaknesses. This helps to determine the best way to conserve and improve their heritage without damaging it. It takes about 6 months to reach the final implementation phase.

In addition to local communities, the project engaged policymakers, tourism businesses, civil society groups, universities, research institutions and intergovernmental organisations in the design and validation phase.

Project partners tested the methodology in eight diverse and complementary pilot regions with a rich cultural and historical heritage. These sites, which included inland, coastal, rural, urban and remote areas, are located in 10 EU Member States as well as Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Montenegro, Russia and Ukraine.

Communities are putting the method into practice by carrying out activities that range from gastronomy events to interactive classes for children. For example, in June 2023, three guided tours were organised in Umgebindeland, a cross-border region between Germany, Poland and Czechia. The tours brought attention to the element that united the three Member States: the historic half-timbered houses unique to the region.

Inspiring others to adapt cultural tourism actions

TExTOUR wants to ensure that the methodology, along with all other processes and tools delivered until the end of the project in September 2024, will be accessible long-term for other sites wishing to further develop their regions.

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Developing a region's cultural tourism is a process in which the entire community – government, administrations, enterprises, organisations and others – should actively participate so that the solutions proposed correspond to that community's real interests and needs.

Eco Museum Zagori (Greece), Itinerarium Rosalie (Italy), Sabbioneta (Italy), Caretos na região de Trás-os-Montes (Portugal) and Menjez Village (Lebanon) are already replicating and upscaling the methodology.

In addition, a freely accessible platform serves as a digital repository for all knowledge gained during TExTOUR and includes a user manual and video tutorial.

"Developing a region's cultural tourism is a process in which the entire community – government, administrations, enterprises, organisations and others – should actively participate so that the solutions proposed correspond to that community's real interests and needs," concludes García-Risco.

PROJECT

TExTOUR – Social Innovation and TEchnologies for sustainable growth through participative cultural TOURism

COORDINATED BY
Santa María la Real Foundation of Historic Heritage in Spain

FUNDED UNDER
Horizon 2020 – Society

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