# BEST PRACTICE: CORK, IRELAND

## Key Challenge

Maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage sites.

## Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Digital solutions; Investments in infrastructure and product development; Research and Innovation.

## Case Classification

**Type of Destination |** Urban

**Territorial Level |** < NUTS 3

**Size of the Tourist Area |** 820 km$^2$

**Population |** 584,156 in 2022

**Type of Tourism |** Rural; Coastal, maritime and inland water; Cultural; City; MICE; Gastronomy.

**Organisation |** Cork City and County council (strategic tourism planning and management); Visit Cork public-private sector partnership (tourism marketing).

**Main Stakeholders Affected |** Local authorities/ government; Local residents; Tourists; Other tourism service providers; Research and Development (R&D) organisations.

**Additional Challenges Covered |** Spatial and temporal concentration of visitors; Measurement and monitoring of sustainable tourism.

## Context & Background

Cork, with its rich cultural heritage, is the second most visited city in Ireland after Dublin, with around 2.5 million overnight stays in 2023. Tourism accounted for 14.4% of GDP in 2023 and is considered an important value-added factor for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage.

## Key Challenge

The protection and conservation of cultural heritage sites is vital to the preservation of Irish culture and history. Tourist spending supports conservation efforts, thereby preventing erosion of the cultural landscape and ensuring that Cork remains an attractive cultural tourist destination.

**Implementation of Solutions:** The city and the county have a strong framework for the preservation of cultural heritage, which is supported by national and local initiatives as well as by active citizen engagement.

## SOLUTIONS

- There are over 1,100 listed buildings and structures in Cork with various conservation plans in place. The conservation of these heritage sites is based on a number of conservation and management plans, most notably the Cork City Development Plan, which includes a dedicated volume on *Built Heritage Objectives*.

- The *"Playful Culture Trail"* – a joint project of around 30 museums, galleries and attractions (launched in 2021) – makes cultural heritage inviting for children in the summer months through interactive, playful components.

- Cork is using new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) to enhance its historical attractions. One example is *Spike Island*, which has implemented AR experiences that allow visitors to *view historical recreations* via their mobile devices.

- The participation in the project "*Big and Open Data for Atlantic Heritage (BODAH)*" (2019-2021) aimed to achieve a higher level of sustainability in local tourism and cultural heritage management. Together with the Technical University Munster, an early warning model that uses on-site sensor equipment in conjunction with locally and regionally available live data was developed. This tool can be used, for example, to estimate the number of visitors to a cultural heritage site on any given date, to finally better manage visitor flows.

**Replicability potential:** High (requires innovation-minded leadership, and funding).

**Cost & funding source:** "Playful Cultural trail" funded by Cork City Council on a small budget with participation from most of the attractions; 30,000 euros per year funded by the Spike Island organisation; 1,573,373 euros for BODAH project co-funded (75%) by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

## Success Factors & Barriers Regarding the Implementation

*Success factors:* Ireland's Department of Cultural Heritage as a strong partner for conservation; External funding sources (national or EU); High level of local community engagement; Ongoing communication to bring together all relevant stakeholders.

*Barriers:* Insufficient funding for certain projects; Regulations that slow down the entire process (monument protection, safety aspects, etc.); Stakeholders who are not willing to participate in the initiatives.

## Results and Impacts

- Cork has protected the cultural heritage for the future and made it accessible to all who are interested.
- Preservation helps people to identify more with history and their community (an important point given the Irish diaspora).
- Visitor numbers increased by 10%.
- Greater visitor satisfaction through visitor management.

## Takeaways

- It's crucial to preserve the authenticity of the cultural site or tradition, ensuring that restorations or activities respect the original form, values, and significance of the heritage.
- Engaging local communities is essential, as they are the custodians of the heritage. Their input, participation, and benefit from tourism can foster pride and ensure the heritage is protected in a way that honours their traditions
- Regular checks on the current condition of heritage sites are highly recommended.
- Tourism should be managed in a way that minimizes environmental impact and prevents over-tourism, which can damage cultural sites.

## Useful Links

- [Arts, Culture & Heritage](#) |  Cork City Council

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