



BEST PRACTICE: CARBONIA, ITALY



Key Challenge

Maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage sites.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Digital solutions; Investments in infrastructure and product development; Research and Innovation.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Island

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 145.6 km²

Population | 26,565 in 2022

Type of Tourism | Rural; Cultural; Gastronomy.

Tourism Organisation | No Destination Management Organisation (DMO), tourism is organised by the municipality in cooperation with regional tourism associations and cultural institutions.

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

Additional Challenges Covered | Creating local added value through tourism; Lack of stakeholder management (multi-level, cross-sectoral).

Context & Background

Carbonia was founded in 1937, mainly to provide housing for the workers of the nearby coal mines. The mines closed in 1970, leading to high unemployment and the conversion to the metallurgical industry. Tourism gained importance through the renewal of the modernist, urban and mining landscape and the archaeological sites dating back to 9000 BC, providing added value for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage. In 2022, 404,631 tourist overnight stays were recorded, with the share of GDP and employment being less than 5%.

Key Challenge

The preservation of cultural heritage represents a unique opportunity to create a new identity for the destination, with tourism promoting this renewal through the valorisation of cultural heritage, helping to curb depopulation and create new jobs.

Implementation of Solutions: To transform the destination and create a new identity, the focus was on preserving and enhancing the cultural heritage, taking full account of the needs of the local population

SOLUTIONS

- Regeneration and valorisation of industrial and archaeological monuments including:
 - Project “[*Carbonia: the landscape machine*](#)” (1999), which regenerated the town urban structure and converted the Serbariu mine and its infrastructure reopening the mining site as a park and museum.
 - Use of innovative, interactive technologies in the “[*Museo del Carbone*](#)”, such as touch screens and interactive maps, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) installations that visually tell the story of coal mining in Carbonia.
 - Use of new technologies in the [*Museum System of Carbonia \(SiMuC\)*](#) to enhance the guest experience in this vast archaeological area, for example with free audio tours, QR codes, etc. For example, the [*Archaeological Museum of Villa Sulcis*](#), which is part of SiMuC, displays virtual reconstructions recreating ancient sites and artifacts.
- *Preservation of the traditional language of Sardinia “Sardu”*, the traditional language of Sardinia, which is spoken by around 60,000 people. In Carbonia, all tourist information is available in Sardu, reflecting the town's commitment to preserving the language. Carbonia is also part of the [*European Network for Linguistic Equality \(ELEN\)*](#), which promotes linguistic equality for lesser-used languages across Europe.
- *Membership in cultural networks* for research and innovation, enhancement of cultural and architectural sites, promotion of cultural tourism and dissemination of knowledge such as [*ATRIUM \(Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes\)*](#) or the [*“European Route of Industrial Heritage”*](#) (ERIH).

Replicability potential: Medium (requires strong political will and high investments).

Cost & funding source: Investments in cultural infrastructure have been financed mainly from national funds, but also from the region and from EU funding programmes such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and other EU structural funds.

Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Funding opportunities; Involvement in international cultural heritage networks; A well-outlined strategy and action plan; Continuity of political leadership of the municipality.

Barriers: No barriers identified.

Results and Impacts

- Since the start of the “Carbonia, the landscape machine” project, the negative demographic trend in the city has been curbed and employment has increased by 12%.
- The authentic cultural offer by highlighting the Sardu language is also well received by the local population.
- Increased reputation as an important cultural heritage site.
- 72% increase in tourist numbers from 2022 to 2023.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- It is worth investing in interactive and immersive technologies such as VR, AR and digital archives to make cultural heritage more accessible and engaging for a diverse audience.
- To create a sense of ownership and ensure long-term support for heritage projects, it is advisable to involve local communities and empower them to participate in the preservation of cultural heritage through educational programs.
- Networking with kindred organisations is a key element and mutual learning is one of the main aspects of Carbonia's success.

Useful Links

[Tourism in Carbonia](#)

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