



Be.CULTOUR:

“Beyond CULTural TOURism: human-centred innovations for sustainable and circular cultural tourism”



HORIZON 2020

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Abstract

The Be.CULTOUR project is centered on fostering circular, sustainable, and human-centered cultural tourism in remote and lesser-known regions across Europe. By focusing on the regeneration of cultural heritage and introducing innovative tourism practices, the project aims to empower local communities, stimulate economic opportunities, and promote environmental sustainability. Through a co-creation process with six Pilot Heritage Sites and multiple Mirror ecosystems, Be.CULTOUR integrates local cultural and natural heritage into the tourism sector, transforming these destinations into vibrant, sustainable hubs that attract both visitors and investments.

A key outcome of the project is the **Larnaca Manifesto**, also known as the **Beyond Tourism Manifesto**, which synthesizes the policy recommendations that emerged from the interactions and experiences of the Be.CULTOUR Community. The manifesto serves as a strategic guide for policymakers, cultural stakeholders, and tourism professionals, offering a roadmap for building resilient, inclusive, and circular tourism ecosystems. These policy recommendations are based on the outcomes of extensive community engagement and collaboration during the project, highlighting the importance of locally-driven initiatives, stakeholder participation, and the integration of circular economy principles into the tourism landscape.

The document outlines specific objectives to guide sustainable tourism development, including empowering local communities through capacity building, ensuring inclusivity in tourism practices, and promoting responsible and fair tourism behavior. It also emphasizes the need for innovative digital tools, the regeneration of public spaces, and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage as key pillars for achieving sustainable growth. By implementing these policy recommendations, regions can develop a sustainable tourism model that fosters cultural preservation, economic vitality, and environmental stewardship for the long-term benefit of both locals and visitors.



Partners involved in the document

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3	ICLEI Europe – Local governments for Sustainability	ICLEI	X
4	Iniziativa Cube S.r.l.	INI	X
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6	Haute Ecole ICHEC - ECAM - ISFSC	ICHEC	X
7	Open University of the Netherlands	OUNL	X
8	APT Basilicata	APT-BAS	X
9	Diputación Provincial de Teruel	PGT	X
10	Larnaca and Famagusta Districts Development Agency	ANETEL	X
11	Laona Foundation	LAONA	X
12	Västra Götaland region	VGR	X
13	Stalna Konferencija Gradova I Opstina	SCTM	X
14	Agentia Pentru Dezvoltare Regionala Nord-Est	NERDA	X
15	Verde e Moldova	VEM	X



Table of Contents

Foreword	6
Introduction – The Be.CULTOUR journey: building a long-lasting Community	7
Policy recommendations	7
Circular economy in cultural tourism: creative, sustainable, beautiful destinations	8
Innovative strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage and landscape	8
Sustainable infrastructures for circular tourism	15
Digitalisation & smart destination management for circular cultural tourism	23
Digital infrastructures and tools for the tourism sector	23
Strategies for place branding, online and offline communication and heritage storytelling	29
Enhancing the human dimension of circular cultural tourism	36
Inclusion of local stakeholders, operators and people	36
Creating a sense of European belonging through culture	44
Stimulating the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem for circular cultural tourism	51
Developing the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem in less-known and remote areas	51
Building an enabling environment for sustainable investments and circular businesses	58
Conclusions	64
Beyond Tourism Manifesto (Larnaca Manifesto)	65



Figures Summary

<i>Figure 1 PHS Local Workshops</i>	8
<i>Figure 2 Be.CULTOUR Community activities</i>	1
<i>Figure 3 Policy Learning Lab 1 – Brussels</i>	2
<i>Figure 4 Second Policy Learning Lab - Siacca</i>	4
<i>Figure 5 Example of a Worksheet used during the workshop</i>	5



Foreword

Antonia Gravagnuolo, Be.CULTOUR Scientific Coordinator

The Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR – Beyond Cultural Tourism project was developed between 2021 and 2024 involving over 100 European organisations working to co-develop innovative strategies, services and products for circular and sustainable cultural tourism, beyond usual tourism products to stimulate cultural regeneration and exchanges in less-known and remote cultural heritage and landscape areas.

The Be.CULTOUR methodology was centred on communities involvement, cultural values regeneration, circular economy and human-centred approaches to cultural tourism. The success of circular and human-centred cultural tourism destinations lays not only in the number of tourism arrivals, but also – and most importantly – in the capacity to regenerate cultural heritage and landscapes, enhance wellbeing of residents and visitors, promote relationships, cultural exchanges and lifestyle changes towards sustainability, regenerate the environment, biodiversity, ecosystems and “beauty”, build longer-term sustainable jobs in culture and tourism industry, generate innovative circular businesses blending social and financial returns.

Through Be.CULTOUR, stakeholders in six European pilot heritage sites and 25 additional “mirror” heritage sites¹ had the opportunity to work together building circular strategies for the regeneration of heritage and landscapes towards enhancing the attractiveness of remote cultural regions.

During the journey, Be.CULTOUR promoted a structured dialogue and continuous reflection on the barriers and bottlenecks in the implementation of circular cultural tourism, as well as solutions, examples and recommendations, sharing the experiences and knowledge of many stakeholders and Community representatives all over Europe. This report summarizes the results of the dialogue undertaken within the Be.CULTOUR Community, providing policy recommendations oriented to update and enhance European and regional/local policies in cultural and sustainable tourism towards circular, resilient, human-centred and sustainable cultural heritage and landscape tourism destinations.

Moreover, the Be.CULTOUR Community engaged in the development of the “Beyond Tourism Manifesto”, or so-called “Larnaca Manifesto” as it was presented and discussed publicly for the first time in Larnaca, Cyprus, in May 2024. The Manifesto synthesizes the main recommendations addressed to policy makers, as well as culture and tourism stakeholders, professionals and operators towards a joint effort to build circular cultural tourism destinations. The Manifesto was already signed by several European organisations and represents a legacy for a joint work beyond the research and innovation project funding, building a long-lasting network of like-minded stakeholders, organisations and people.

¹ 16 mirror ecosystems, 6 heritage sites involved by Chambers of Commerce in the Mirabilia network, 3 Adviser organisations engaged in the Be.CULTOUR Community of Interest through a open call issued in 2021.

Introduction – The Be.CULTOUR journey: building a long-lasting Community

Be.CULTOUR has aimed to empower European regions to collaborate and develop innovative, circular solutions for heritage regeneration and regional development beyond cultural tourism. The project has focused on implementing co-creation activities, developing Local Action Plans, and creating innovative solutions for circular cultural tourism in six Pilot Heritage Site (PHS) Ecosystems in Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Sweden, Serbia, and the cross-border region of North-East Romania-Moldova. Additionally, a Community of Interest has been established to involve additional sixteen organisations (Mirror Ecosystems) and three “Adviser” organisations (Historic Environment Scotland, UK; CreaTour network, Portugal; Future for Religious Heritage, Belgium/Europe) committed to participating in a peer-learning program and replicating the Be.CULTOUR methodology in their own territories. Moreover, 6 Chambers of Commerce in Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia and Spain were involved through the Mirabilia network to replicate the project methodology and provide insights for further development of circular cultural tourism at European level.

As peer learning progressed, it became increasingly evident that facilitating a continuous flow of knowledge and information among local ecosystems is crucial for identifying common challenges and solutions, as well as for learning from each other and replicating best practices. One of the core objectives of Be.CULTOUR has been, indeed, to stimulate conversations and foster learning among different stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem. This has involved the project Community of Practice composed by the six Pilots and the Community of Interest including the additional mirror ecosystems.

The Be.CULTOUR policy recommendations are the outputs of the several project activities and exchanges that took place between the communities. Both the Pilot Heritage Sites and the Mirror ecosystems took part in several project meetings, events, study-visits, both online and onsite, with the aim of defining needs, challenges, strengths and weaknesses of circular cultural tourism strategies.

The Pilot Heritage Sites main project activity, which contributed to the key findings included in this document, has been the organisation of three local workshops, engaging local stakeholders to explore, ideate and prototype solutions and strategies. These regions served as on-the-ground innovation hubs to address sustainability challenges unique to each context and providing a framework for the whole communities to meet and work together.



Vulture-Alto Bradano area Basilicata Italy	NOVEMBER 2021  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MAY 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MAY 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP
The cultural park of Rio Martin Teruel- Aragon Spain	NOVEMBER 2021  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MARCH 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP	JUNE 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP
Forsvik and Rydal Industrial Heritage Sites Västra Götaland Sweden	NOVEMBER 2021  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MARCH 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MAY 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP
The Route of Stephan the Great and Saint North-East Romania-Moldova cross-border area	DECEMBER 2021  LOCAL WORKSHOP	APRIL 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP	JUNE 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP
Larnaca rural cultural landscape, Larnaca Cyprus	NOVEMBER 2021  LOCAL WORKSHOP	APRIL 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP	JUNE 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP
Bač, Sremski Karlovci and Irig Vojvodina Serbia	NOVEMBER 2021  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MARCH 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP	MAY 2022  LOCAL WORKSHOP

Figure 1 PHS Local Workshops

The local workshops aimed to gather key insights and information on tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets of the six pilot heritage sites and identify local potentials for the co-design of Action Plans, co-development of ideas, and final deployment. More information on the Local Workshops can be found in the [deliverable 3.5 Action Plans and concept solutions for sustainable cultural tourism in pilot heritage sites](#).

The project has also used different strategies to gather inputs on challenges, barriers, and possible circular cultural tourism solutions from beyond the Community of Practice. The Community of Interest, made of the sixteen mirror ecosystems and three project advisors, was also actively involved and consulted in the process of shaping and analysing the key findings, and recommendations deriving from its place-based perspectives, included in this document. These strategies include setting up open spaces for collaboration and exchanges in the form of online events such as "community conversations," "community meetups," and webinars, as well as in-person activities like local workshops, study visits and policy learning labs.

Figure 2 "Be.CULTOUR activities" shows the project activities involving the project Community of Interest, Pilot Heritage Sites and Advisors
























	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
2021										 Community Conversation	 Conference on Cultural synergies	
2022	 Meetup with Mirrors and Advisors	 Community Conversation		 Community Conversation		 Mirabilia Network Conference	 Policy Workshop  Community Conversation		 Hackathon  Policy Learning Lab	 Policy Workshop		 Community Conversation
2023		 Webinar: Circular cultural tourism	 Webinar: Power of networks	 Webinar: Innovative solutions for circular cultural tourism	 Webinar: Values-based innovative marketing	 Webinar: Community-led and innovative entrepreneurship for circular cultural tourism			 Webinar: Creative tourism  Policy Learning Lab	 Webinar: BREAKFAST AT SUSTAINABILITY'S	 Webinar: Innovative finance for circular cultural tourism	
2024			 Webinar: Innovative finance for circular cultural tourism			 Final Conference						

Figure 2 Be.CULTOUR Community activities

The **Be.CULTOUR Community Conversations** consisted in a series of online meetings that brought together local authorities, destination managers, cultural heritage experts, academia professionals, cultural and tourism operators and civil society organisations from the Community of Interest and the Community of Practice within the Be.CULTOUR project. These interactive sessions served as platforms for participants to learn from each other, share challenges and good practices related to circular cultural tourism, and collaboratively identify innovative approaches to overcome barriers and enhance actions and strategies towards sustainable tourism.

By fostering knowledge exchange, promoting collaboration, and encouraging collective problem-solving, Community Conversations played a crucial role in driving positive change and enabling the development of more sustainable and inclusive tourism practices. Some Community Conversations have focused on specific challenges. For instance, the second Community Conversation focused on innovative strategies for the inclusion of local communities, while the third focused on how to align bottom-up community plans with previous ongoing strategies. More information on the Community Conversations can be found in *Deliverable 4.4 Report of Peer-learning Scheme*.



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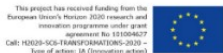


Figure 3 Policy Learning Lab 1 – Brussels



On 9 September 2022, the **First Be.CULTOUR Policy Learning Lab** on circular cultural tourism was held in Brussels. The purpose of the event was to spark interactions and start gathering inputs on challenges and opportunities for circular cultural tourism in the post-pandemic era. With a panel discussion and two interactive workshops the event encouraged engaging discussions and shared practical learnings through the facilitation of the Pilot Heritage Sites representatives, leading the Be.CULTOUR project implementation in their local ecosystems. The sessions were indeed designed to mirror the methodologies used in the PHS local workshops conducted and, in particular, the [Be.CULTOUR Toolkit](#).

The workshops focused on specific themes related to circular cultural tourism and aimed to identify potential solutions and strategies for the main challenges identified. The groups were assigned to focus on one of the main challenges of circular cultural tourism identified during the Pilot Heritage Site's local workshops:

- **CIRCULAR INVESTMENTS** - Circular investments for infrastructure, mobility and tourism services
- **DIGITALISATION** - Digitalisation and smart data management: exploiting the potential of digital tools for better accessibility and monitoring of cultural sites
- **SYNERGIES** - Cooperation and collaboration towards higher circularity: heritage innovation networks potential, barriers and experiences
- **INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM** - Stimulating the local innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem through cultural tourism: barriers and solutions/experiences
- **HUMAN CAPITAL** - Enhancing human capital towards human-centred development: skills, knowledge, education, culture & heritage
- **REMOTENESS** - Remoteness as value? Transformative travels in less crowded cultural sites.

The outcomes of the workshop have been used as the first basis for developing the project policy recommendations, synthesized in four main topics as described in next sections.





Figure 4 Second Policy Learning Lab - Sciacca

The **Second Be.CULTOUR Policy Learning Lab** took place in September 2023 in Sciacca. The primary objective was to further develop the inputs collected in the first years of project, taking stock of the key lessons learnt and solutions put forward in the Communities, identifying potential gaps yet to be addressed and discuss how EU institutions and regional authorities can better support positive change in circular cultural tourism. The output of the Lab was a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to enhance strategies, actions, and plans promoting circular cultural tourism. The main session was organised as a workshop where participants discussed four main topics and eight subtopics:

- Circular economy in cultural tourism: creative, sustainable, beautiful destinations
 - Innovative strategies for the preservation of tangible and natural heritage
 - Develop sustainable infrastructures for tourism
- Digitalisation & smart destination management for circular cultural tourism
 - Digital infrastructures for the tourism sector
 - Strategies for place branding, communication and storytelling
- Enhancing the human dimension of circular cultural tourism
 - Inclusion of the local ecosystems
 - Creating a European sense of belonging by revitalising ancient cultural routes
- Entrepreneurial ecosystem, innovative business and financial models for circular cultural tourism
 - Develop a human-centred quadruple helix local ecosystem in tourism
 - Build an enabling environment for investments

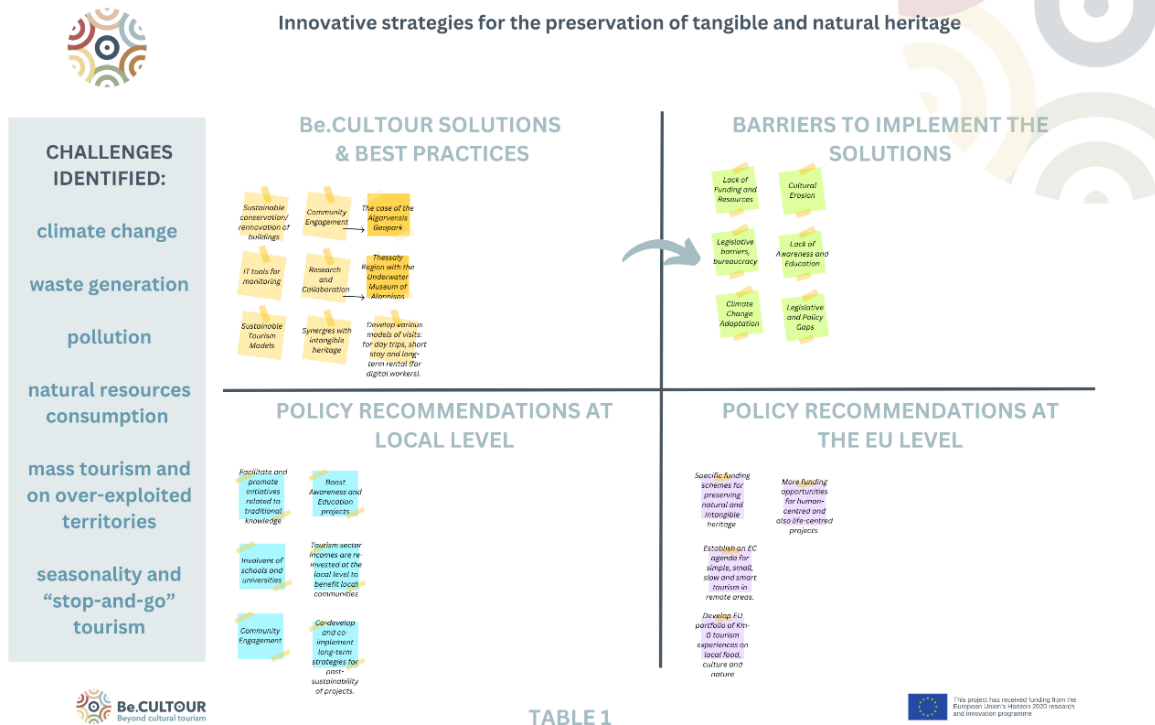


Figure 5 Example of a Worksheet used during the workshop

As showed in Figure 5 - Example of a Worksheet used during the workshop, attendees were asked to share best practices from their respective regions, outlining the primary obstacles when adopting innovative solutions to preserve both tangible and natural heritage and discussing the ways in which the EU, national, and local institutions can support regions in implementing these solutions.

The project's policy recommendations also include the inputs collected from additional events involving external speakers, such as **conferences**, **transfer workshops** and **project webinars**. Indeed, a series of Be.CULTOUR **webinars** guided participants towards a comprehensive understanding of circular and sustainable cultural tourism practices, with a mix of on-ground experience and sector expertise of innovative practices and show how to apply them in specific contexts.

Nine editions focused on different but interrelated topics, involving experts from project partners and external stakeholders:



- 1) Circular cultural tourism: the role of Heritage Innovation Networks for co-creation and communities' empowerment - *24 February 2023*
- 2) Understanding the European value of cultural heritage: Power of networks - *24 March 2023*
- 3) Innovative solutions for circular cultural tourism - *21 April 2023*
- 4) Values-based innovative marketing for less-known cultural tourism destinations – *15 May 2023*
- 5) Community-led and innovative entrepreneurship for circular cultural tourism – *23 June 2023*
- 6) Creative tourism and the role of arts, interpretation and storytelling - *15 September 2023*
- 7) Breakfast at sustainability's – *5 October 2023*
- 8) Innovative finance for circular cultural tourism – *30 November 2023*
- 9) Smart data management for circular cultural tourism assessment and monitoring – *15 March 2024*

The webinar recordings are available on the [dedicated webpage](#).

The following sections provide the results of the structured dialogue within the Be.CULTOUR Community and the policy recommendations developed. Finally, the text of the “Beyond Tourism Manifesto” (Larnaca Manifesto) is reported, which summarises Be.CULTOUR concept, approach and guidelines/recommendations towards circular and human-centred cultural tourism.



Policy recommendations

All the inputs collected during the above-mentioned project meetings and activities are combined in this document to serve as a comprehensive basis and strategic roadmap for local and regional authorities, as well as European institutions, involved in the development and promotion of circular cultural tourism. The document addresses key challenges and provides targeted policy recommendations across four pivotal topics and eight sub-topics, each crucial for the sustainable growth of cultural tourism:

1. Circular economy in cultural tourism: creative, sustainable, beautiful destinations
 - Innovative strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage and landscape
 - Sustainable infrastructures for circular tourism
2. Digitalisation & smart destination management for circular cultural tourism
 - Digital infrastructures and tools for the tourism sector
 - Strategies for place branding, communication and storytelling
3. Enhancing the human dimension of circular cultural tourism
 - Inclusion of local stakeholders, operators and people
 - Creating a sense of European belonging through culture
4. Stimulating the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem for circular cultural tourism
 - Developing the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem in less-known and remote areas
 - Building an enabling environment for sustainable investments and circular businesses

For each of the eight main topics addressed, a structured approach has been adopted to explore, analyse, and provide strategic insights. This structure comprises four essential sub-chapters designed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, barriers to implementation, examples of solutions and targeted policy recommendations. The intent is to provide a nuanced and actionable framework for local and regional authorities, as well as European institutions, to navigate the complexities of circular cultural tourism.

Circular economy in cultural tourism: creative, sustainable, beautiful destinations

'Climate change is the most urgent global challenge of our times that affects all spheres of our lives, every economic sector, every region and city. The tourism ecosystem will not only benefit from a cleaner and healthier environment but will also be an important player, contributing to the shared goals of a climate-neutral Europe'.²

Circular economy strategies in the tourism sector are primarily linked to reducing **the environmental drawbacks** of the tourism industry, such as **pollution and waste generation**, and beyond by embracing the broader notion of sustainability. The tourism sector plays a pivotal role in the EU commitment to cut emissions by at least 55% by 2033.³

Circular economy models in the tourism sector are related to enhancing green mobility services, recycling and reusing materials and products in the building sector, conserving and reusing cultural heritage sites and landscapes, promoting locally based food and craft products stimulating re-generative local economies. Moreover, circular models are also related to the reduction of tourism pressure on over-exploited territories, overcoming mass tourism, seasonality and “stop-and-go” tourism, promoting lesser-known and less crowded destinations, but also tackling tourism dependency by diversifying the local economy and avoiding focusing on only one economic sector or tourism typology.

According to the **UN World Travel Organisation**, sustainable tourism development "takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities".⁴ Indeed, circularity is based on the capacity of cooperating and collaborating between different actors: public institutions, citizens, private companies and organisations, as well as the third sector and research actors, in a quadruple helix synergistic model. However, this cooperative capacity is not easy to build, especially in remote and depopulated areas, and should be enhanced by identifying strategies, networks/actors, and inspiring managers and leaders.

Innovative strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage and landscape

The European tangible heritage reflects the diverse cultures, traditions, and histories of its societies. It fosters a sense of identity and belonging among communities, allowing them to connect with their predecessors' achievements and experiences, promoting a shared European identity. Moreover, heritage sites often serve as focal points for local communities, fostering a sense of pride and cohesion. They can be venues for cultural events, celebrations, and community gatherings, enhancing social well-being. The same can be said regarding natural heritage that, including landscapes, biodiversity, and geological formations that has evolved over time, holds immense value for both local communities and tourists. The inherent value and

² https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-tourism-transition/green-transition-tourism_en

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

⁴ <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>

vulnerability of the heritage sites must serve as a powerful catalyst for action against climate change and the collective preservation of cultural heritage. This should bring a shared commitment to foster collaboration, enhance social capital, and strengthen social cohesion. To preserve the historical and natural European heritage effectively, especially in the face of challenges such as climate change, over-tourism, unsustainable city development and pollution, it is crucial to develop innovative approaches that consider the complexities and vulnerabilities of these valuable assets.

Heritage and landscape preservation - Barriers and bottlenecks

Preserving historical heritage and cultural landscapes brings many challenges, for example regarding adaptive reuse processes, specific skills required, materials to use, funding issues and overall attractiveness of the heritage sites especially in remote areas. Preserving tangible, intangible and natural heritage in line with the circular and human-centred approach is a complex effort that requires careful consideration of several critical challenges.

Lack of Funding and Resources: Preservation efforts demand substantial financial and human resources. Insufficient funding can impede proper maintenance, conservation, and research, leaving heritage sites vulnerable to deterioration due to the low quality of the materials and skilled workforce for proper maintenance and restoration controls. It also fosters an environment of competition as opposed to collaboration among enterprises and SMEs.

Cultural Erosion: Traditional knowledge, skills, and practices related to heritage sites may diminish, especially if younger generations lose interest in their cultural heritage or communities face pressures to modernise.

Legislative barriers, bureaucracy, regulations, state and regional level dialogue: Bureaucratic hurdles often arise due to the intricate administrative procedures and decision-making processes within the EU framework, hindering the swift execution of circular tourism initiatives. Stringent regulations aimed at preserving cultural heritage and promoting environmental sustainability may create compliance challenges for stakeholders, impeding the seamless integration of circular practices. Additionally, establishing a coherent dialogue between the diverse state and regional levels is crucial but can be intricate, given varying priorities and interests. Inadequate or outdated legal frameworks and preservation policies can hamper the adequate protection and management of heritage sites.

Heritage Adaptation to Climate Change: Climate change poses a significant threat to historical and natural heritage, leading to increased risks of erosion, flooding, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels.

Lack of Awareness, Training and Education: The importance of preserving historical and natural heritage can be overlooked, leading to indifference and lack of awareness regarding conservation efforts. Trained professionals in traditional skills, for example on specific restoration and preservation of cultural landscapes, also represent a massive gap in the sector due to the lack of training and knowledge portfolios in the educational sector. This directly affects the workforce, which is characterised by shortage and low-paid jobs in the heritage sector.



Heritage and landscape preservation - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Below it is provided a set of possible solutions emerging from the Be.CULTOUR Community experiences and knowledge.

Sustainable Conservation of cultural heritage and landscapes

In June 2022, the European Council adopted the Recommendation on Learning for Environmental Sustainability. With explicit reference to the **cultural and creative dimensions** that the NEB initiative also brings, it recommends investment in green resources and infrastructure (buildings, grounds, and technology) for learning, socialising, and recreation to ensure healthy and resilient learning environments.⁵ **Innovative approaches should prioritise sustainable conservation practices that minimise the environmental footprint of preservation efforts.** This includes adopting eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient technologies, and low-impact construction methods to protect the integrity of heritage sites while reducing environmental harm.

The case of the North-West Regional Development Agency in Romania

In the case of the North-West Regional Development Agency in Romania, there is a significant challenge related to the conservation, protection, and restoration of the Northwest LIMES heritage site. Due to improper repairs, poor management and insufficient funds, some features are no longer visible, are challenging to identify and or fail to attract and engage the local communities, resulting in lifeless, empty and unattractive sites. Innovative projects involving digital tools and proper restoration linked to energy efficiency and circular cultural approaches would boost the LIMES heritage site's attractiveness and competitiveness.

Technological Advancements implementation

Advances in technology offer new tools and techniques for documenting, monitoring, and preserving heritage sites. Digital twins, 3D scanning, virtual reality, and data analytics can be leveraged for preservation and restoration efforts.

The case of Kuldiga District Municipality, Latvia

*The Kuldiga Municipality has pioneered **digital data analytics** for cultural tourism in Latvia regarding the global visitor **flow analysis by artificial intelligence**. It has received the Sustainable Tourism Innovation award VISTAS in 2014, ITB, Berlin. Among their best practices: Digital data analytics for culture tourism in Latvia regarding the visitor flow analysis by artificial intelligence in the local climate context; development of **Forest trail** In Latvia and Lithuania and expanding the Baltic Coastal Hiking route in Lithuania; revival of Industrial heritage for tourism development; the adaptation of the Venta River to tourism in the border areas of Lithuania and Latvia (ViVa), Etc.*

⁵ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9242-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

Sustainable Tourism Models implementation

Innovative heritage preservation approaches emphasise the development of sustainable tourism models. Balancing tourism growth with heritage conservation ensures that the influx of visitors contributes positively to the preservation efforts rather than causing harm. One tool to support this process is the European Tourism Indicators System' (ETIS) developed by the European Commission.⁶ ETIS is a system of indicators suitable for all tourist destinations, encouraging them to adopt a more intelligent approach to tourism planning. Moreover, the [EU Tourism Dashboard](#) supports destination managers and tourism operators to implement sustainable tourism models, collecting and analysing data in EU regions. Be.CULTOUR developed a dedicated indicators framework for circular and human-centred cultural tourism that can be used by destination managers, tourism operators and all tourism stakeholders to orient and monitor tourism towards circularity.

The case of the Ecoamgueddfa - the first ecomuseum in Wales

*Cyngor Gwynedd Council, UK, has developed a regenerative tourism model that highlights, celebrates, values and promotes the knowledge and skills within the region: Ecomuseum in Pen Llŷn. The strategic locations of the Ecomuseum sites around the coast of the region, each with its unique offer highlighting the living marine, environmental, artistic (visual and performing arts), and linguistic heritage, encourage more people to visit these heritage assets out of the primary holiday season, **bringing added economic benefits and developing interest and cultural awareness** within the local community. Augmented reality products also open the experience to those who might not physically be able to participate and bring Wales and Pen Llŷn to a global audience. The Ecomuseum will share learning opportunities with other regenerative tourism projects being developed in the region.*

Circular models implementation focused on recycling and reclamation of wastes and materials

Circular strategies, particularly within the hospitality industry, should incorporate the recycling and reclamation of materials. In the context of food management, the UNWTO has issued the Global Roadmap to Food Waste Reduction, offering practical guidance to support accommodation providers and cruise lines in sustainable food management and waste reduction.⁷

⁶ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-funding-and-businesses/funded-projects/sustainable/indicators_en

⁷ <https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-tourism/food-waste-reduction>

Sustainable mobility for tourism to reduce carbon footprint of global tourism

In 2018, 240 million people in the EU, corresponding to 64 % of the population, went on at least one private trip. ⁸ Solid and sustainable mobility infrastructures are essential for tourist destinations, playing a crucial role in supporting regional economic growth and creating safe, liveable, and appealing spaces for everyone.

The case of the Svilupumbria – land of Saints and Green heart of Italy

*The St. Francis Way is the primary spiritual itinerary in Umbria and is part of a larger project aimed at connecting all **walking, cycling and bridle trails**, offering a sustainable mobility alternative to visit heritage without cars. The circular economy approach to this and all other cultural assets guides the region in identifying the relevant stakeholders, assessing the current gaps, identifying key objectives, develop, and implementing a circularity plan. The Region's main goal is to **drastically reduce the negative impacts produced by cultural tourism** along the St. Francis Way, as a pilot action for testing a circular economy model applied to all cultural tourism assets in Umbria.*

The case of the Veneto Region – slow mobility itinerary in the Prosecco hills

*The Prosecco Hills are focusing on creating a **slow-mobility itinerary** that connects notable sites in the Veneto region. Other initiatives include **outdoor tourism and widespread accommodation** facilities with few beds. The Veneto Region recently adopted two regional laws for slow and green tourism: **one for cycle tourism and one for routes**. The Regional Strategic Plan for Tourism, annually updated in compliance with these rules, includes specific “slow and green” actions addressed to cycle tourism, routes, and equestrian tourism.*

Community Engagement and Collaboration for a healthy environment

Innovative approaches encourage active involvement and collaboration with local communities. Including their perspectives, knowledge, and traditional practices can lead to more sustainable and culturally sensitive preservation solutions, stimulating civic responsibility and a special connection of people with Nature, the care for the environment and for cultural and natural heritage.

The case of the Algarvensis Geopark

In the Algarvensis Geopark, the University of Algarve combines a geo-conservation strategy and a set of environmental education and awareness policies to promote sustainable socio-economic development based on geo-tourism activities involving local communities. Algarve policies include the recognition of Ecosystems Services and a system of payments for local services “keepers”. This approach to the care of the environment and ecosystems can be transferred to other landscapes and cultural/natural sites to enhance conservation and regeneration, as well as economic and development opportunities for local communities.

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/eumove/bloc-4a.html?lang=en>

Research and Collaboration across academia and local communities

Innovative approaches encourage interdisciplinary research and collaboration between professionals and local communities. This should include partnerships with other heritage sites facing similar challenges. Such collaborations can lead to breakthrough solutions and foster a more holistic understanding of heritage preservation.

The case of the Thessaly Region with the Underwater Museum of Alonnisos/Sporades & The Underwater Museum of Western Pagasetic Gulf.

A strategic, innovative approach for valorising a historic site has been achieved in the case of the Thessaly Region with the Underwater Museum of Alonnisos/Sporades and the Underwater Museum of Western Pagasetic Gulf. The opening of four more diving parks in the Sporades and the Western Pagasitikos aims to establish the most important network of underwater museums in the Eastern Mediterranean, allowing tourists to dive and discover hidden underwater archaeological sites.

Synergies with intangible heritage expressions

Circular cultural tourism approaches are used to valorise the natural and tangible heritage through its deep relation to the local intangible heritage. In particular, it enhances its relationship with the local language, agri-food and cultural heritage through the involvement of the local communities.

The case of the Tasa Project – Algarve, Portugal

*TASA's mission is to innovate crafts, affirming it as a profession of the future and not just of the past. The project combines **traditional design** and rescuing ancestral techniques threatened with extinction due to mass production with **sustainable practices** and values through different workshops and labs. More information: <https://projectotasa.com/>*

Heritage and landscape preservation - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities

- **Funding and Resources:** Tourism sector incomes can be re-invested at the local level to benefit local communities. Local authorities should be the ones providing funding for infrastructure building, promotion of local heritage, organisation of events, and the planning of cooperation meetings with other European regions. Thus local authorities should have access to adequate funding resources to support heritage and landscape preservation, based on the specific knowledge of places and the special connection with local communities desires and needs.

- **Tackle cultural Erosion:** Facilitate and promote initiatives related to traditional knowledge, skills, and practices related to heritage sites. Involve the schools and education centres to ensure these practices are passed down from generation to generation, avoiding the loss of unique local knowledge. A mindset and cultural change should be supported to make traditional knowledge, skills, and practices related to heritage sites a trigger for entrepreneurial and professional activities much needed to face contemporary cultural challenges.
- **Boost Community Engagement:** Encourage active involvement and collaboration of local communities in the care and regeneration of cultural heritage and landscape, enhancing the capacity to turn costs into investments able to generate financial returns besides cultural, social, environmental benefits. Involve citizens in the decision-making process by adopting a bottom-up approach when planning news strategies or activities related to local heritage through different types of actions and tools.
- **Awareness and Education:** Plan activities in collaboration with schools and universities to foster awareness of the importance of preserving the local heritage sites. Build on the knowledge of local actors by making them ambassadors of their territory.
- **Train workforce:** Improve labour conditions in the cultural and tourism sector by guaranteeing training opportunities and fair wages. The working conditions must be improved starting from the local level, ensuring that local guides and cultural and creative industry professionals can develop their capacities and have livelihoods to avoid potential brain drain from remote and rural areas in particular.

For European Institutions

- **Funding and Resources & Climate Change Adaptation:** Define specific funding schemes for preserving natural and intangible heritage through innovative strategies and technologies. These should include funding schemes for defining innovative approaches allowing for adaptive conservation strategies that consider the changing climate and its impact on heritage sites, ensuring their resilience and protection. Be.CULTOUR investigated how to make better use of European Structural Investment Funds and established a prototype of Pledge Fund for cultural and heritage tourism entrepreneurs.
- **Support small-scale businesses to accelerate and support green transition:** Next-generation EU funds should be deployed to support, sustain and grant visibility to places and businesses at the local level, creating a ripple effect from the bottom.

- **Develop EU portfolio of Km-0 tourism experiences on local food, culture and nature:** Promote good practices and local examples to raise awareness and increase impact both at local and EU level, leveraging the enormous cultural richness and diversity of Europe. This will foster knowledge exchange and sharing of success stories and lessons from rural and urban areas and across European communities.
- **Acknowledge the fundamental unsustainability of the current growth-based development paradigm** as a threat to natural and cultural heritage and contribute to a more appropriate ontology around the relationship between natural and cultural heritage commons, economics and tourism as an economic sector. Natural and cultural heritage need to be recognised as commons in need of proper commons governance (Elinor Ostrom, David Bollier & Silke Helfrich).
- **Advocate for innovation strategies that support an economic transition through tourism.** (See example below relating to infrastructures⁹). Tourism as a transformational pathway needs to decouple the host-visitor relationship from the exploitative and extractive economy and instead support non-exploitative reciprocal exchanges.

Sustainable infrastructures for circular tourism

In an era defined by growing environmental concerns and the enhancement of local cultures and values, the need to develop sustainable infrastructures for tourism has become a priority to reduce the negative impact of over-tourism and massive seasonal flows. As the world seeks to strike a delicate balance between economic growth and ecological preservation, the concept of circular cultural tourism at the local level has emerged as a promising solution. This innovative approach to tourism not only aims to protect and showcase the unique cultural heritage of a region but also seeks to minimise its **environmental footprint, fostering a harmonious relationship between travellers, communities, and the environment**. In this context, developing sustainable infrastructures becomes not just a necessity but a vital foundation for nurturing a flourishing and enduring form of tourism that respects and enhances the cultures and environments it encounters. This section will explore and encourage the development of infrastructures to support circular cultural tourism and its potential benefits for both local communities and the broader European tourism industry.

⁹ Club of Rome (1972) Limits to Growth. Ostrom, Elinor (1990) Governing the Commons. Lietaer, Bernard (2001) The Future of Money Greco, Thomas (2009) The End of Money and the Future of Civilization Lietaer, Bernard et al (2012) Money and Sustainability. The missing link. Report to the Club of Rome. Bollier, David & Helfrich, Silke (2019) Free, Fair & Alive: The insurgent power of the Commons Dixon-Decleve, Sandrine et al (2022) Earth for All. A survival guide for humanity. Report to the Club of Rome.

World Heritage Catalysis <https://www.whcatalysis.org/>

Lack of Funding and Resources

Establishing a sustainable infrastructure for tourism needs to be supported at both the EU and local levels with financial resources. Innovative circular cultural tourism solutions are often developed by local entrepreneurs and citizens, who seek to improve their livelihoods. However, financial resources and funding opportunities are very limited in this sector, especially in rural and remote areas. Cultural and Sustainable Tourism is not often seen as a priority by local and regional authorities, and funding resources are deployed in other areas, leaving these entrepreneurs without solid support. Moreover, sustainable solutions in tourism, such as digital apps, net-zero cultural initiatives, and green transport, must first be sustained by a well-developed infrastructure, which is often missing and requires additional funding resources to reach a circular metabolism also at territorial level.

Legislative barriers, bureaucracy

Circular tourism implies re-using an object, thus reducing waste or unexploited buildings and/or items. However, this approach is not always supported at the national level, where the legislative framework sometimes acts as a barrier, hindering the active and adaptive reuse of old buildings for community use. Requirements for re-using historic buildings are often obstacles, both in terms of capabilities and financial resources, that local communities cannot overcome, thus leading to the abandonment and decay of these buildings. The preservation of tangible cultural heritage, especially related to heritage buildings, is a vital principle embedded in many legal frameworks of most European Countries. This principle is nonetheless linked more often to a materialistic concept of heritage that does not consider the social linkages and benefits of the protection and preservation of heritage. Moreover, bureaucracy usually consists of long procedures involving more than one governance level (local, regional, national), creating more limits to developing successful actions.

Lack of knowledge and expertise in innovative solutions

European regions are cradles of good practices related to circular solutions for sustainable tourism. They possess a unique and diverse heritage and use different resources to preserve and promote it. Their cherished expertise is enhanced particularly in rural and remote areas or, more often, promoted and shared at the regional level without reaching the national and EU levels.

This gap in the exchange of knowledge and innovative solutions results can be filled with exchange programs and participation in EU initiatives fostering collaboration and boosting the promotion and visibility of local ecosystems.

The term 'circular economy' is typically understood to refer to material flows, with less attention given to finance. However, without a flow of payments in the opposite direction to materials, a circular economy cannot become self-sustaining, making investment less attractive - despite



demands for progress from both government and investors.¹⁰ A barrier relates to economic and financial literacy and the ability to distinguish between the different types of economic and financial innovation, such as 'decentralised finance' (DeFi) vs 'regenerative finance' (ReFi) and 'collaborative finance' (CoFi):

- DeFi (decentralised finance) is based on blockchain cryptocurrencies created to take the money system out of the centralised control of the banks.
- ReFi (regenerative decentralised finance) attempts to use crypto specifically to fund regenerative projects. ReFi is, however, criticised for not having delivered when building sustainable alternatives. It has been instrumental in putting a price on nature, making it vulnerable to asset-grabbers. In ReFi, there is much emphasis on carbon credits, which reduces the complexity of everything that needs to be done regarding sustainability/regeneration to a single measure. The idea of tokenisation doesn't capture the complexity of the regenerative work that needs to be done. Also, many ReFi isn't about financing regeneration but token sales, which create a stock of capital, whereas a flow is more beneficial.
- CoFi (collaborative finance) is about issuing credit collaboratively, avoiding destructive competitive dynamics in an emerging system, and not making enemies of each other but uniting to provide a viable alternative to capitalism. No one project is going to do that, especially in competition with lots of others trying to do similar things.¹¹

Sustainable infrastructures for circular tourism - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Below it is provided a set of possible solutions emerging from the Be.CULTOUR Community experiences and knowledge.

Develop sustainable and feasible strategies for circular destinations

In creating circular destinations, the goal is to rethink the entire destination as circular, highlighting the importance of reaching dependency in terms of energy, water, and materials through renewables, recycling, and reuse strategies. This sustainable and circular strategy must include the hotel's sector and the promotion of heritage sites by incorporating them into regional, national and transnational cultural and touristic routes. "Slow" tourism and "diffused" hospitality models, developing self-sufficient management systems at the local level based on shared values, uniqueness of the area, and cooperation.

¹⁰ Ref. Credit Commons Society <https://creditcommonsociety.org>

¹¹ Sources Low Impact <https://www.lowimpact.org> , Matthew Slater <https://matslats.net/refi-austria-unconference-cca> Credit Commons Society <https://creditcommonsociety.org> Mutual Credit Services <https://www.mutualcredit.services>

The case of Timis County Council

*In Timis (RO), the concentration of the touristic heritage in one site and the accessibility to remote surrounding areas are considered the main challenges. To make **the rural village of Charlottenburg** and its surroundings a circular cultural tourism destination, the local strategy for tourism and sustainable development has included an incentive programme for accommodation units to increase the use of green energy and short supply chains. Moreover, the strategy consists of the **preservation and capitalisation of built heritage** through the creation and sponsorship of the use of natural materials in the construction or arrangement of houses and of opportunities for the development of circular tourism activities.*

Governance structure

As mentioned in the **NEB compass**: “To achieve the goals of the European Green Deal and the transition towards a sustainable society, a fundamental change needs to happen on many levels. Sustainability is achievable only through a collective effort by many actors. (...) A Multi-level engagement across scales, fields, and time is necessary to anticipate the effects that global issues can have on the local dimension, and vice versa.”¹² This type of strategy often starts with an inclusive and responsible governance structure that manages the process of transforming local goods and services into tourist products by ensuring quality, providing constant monitoring of impacts and ultimately generating better income opportunities for all. This model is characterised by a bottom-up and more informal governance approach, which looks at the citizens as the leaders of the actions. In this case, residents are the promoters and final beneficiaries of the circular cultural tourism actions, and the decision-making power is shared among the community. This concept encourages looking at tourists as temporary residents, directly involving them in the community activities and letting them dive deep into the local culture.

The case of Saltaire Inspired and the support by Bradford City Council

*The broader district of Bradford has just launched a **ten-year cultural strategy, ‘Culture is Our Plan’**, committed to building on the creativity of the local community, blending heritage, the arts, diversity and inclusivity. Bradford is one of the youngest cities in Europe, and there is an energy to nurture community-driven sustainability and human-centred approaches to re-create and re-design impactful cultural experiences.*

¹² https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/document/download/405245f4-6859-4090-b145-1db88f91596d_en?filename=NEB_Compass_V_4.pdf

The case of Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi in Sciacca

The methodology used by Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi in Sciacca (IT) applies circularity approaches starting from citizens by creating a network of skilled people who take, transform and reuse resources from the area where they live into tourist products without waste. The project includes the **reduction of plastic use and various strategies for the reuse of local products** that involve citizens, accommodation companies and local artisans. One example of this strategy is the use by all project accommodations of personalised ceramic dispensers made by local potters, which are then filled with bio soap and shower gel. This project not only **reduces the waste of packaging and single-use soaps** but also creates a competitive advantage for the accommodations, the potters and the destination as a whole. Additionally, for the hospitality sector (accommodations, bars and restaurants), a series of defined actions have been agreed upon to be undertaken for a more sustainable and circular way of welcoming tourists.

Sustainable and circular cultural events

Cultural events and festivals have a great meaning and are of significant importance for developing a local community socially and economically and preserving the local intangible and tangible heritage. Cultural events and festivals attract tourism in both crowded and remote areas, promoting and celebrating local cultural identity, crafts, music and food, sharing diverse cultures and traditions, fostering exchanges, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Following the ease of Covid-19 restrictions, there has been a sharp increase in the organisation of cultural events and festivals of all large sizes. If the sustainability of these events was a challenge before the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever, it has become a priority to ensure festivals and cultural events are planned in environmentally, socially and ethically sustainable ways.

The case of Kuldiga District Municipality

The "**Kuldiga Street Art Festival**" aims to transform old and partially abandoned industrial buildings into artworks. It has been developed as a green interdisciplinary event intending to meet a growing number of green criteria every year. Kuldiga plans to become **an Open-Air Art Gallery** encompassing all three pillars of the New European Bauhaus initiative by being a sustainable, beautiful place made by all citizens together. The festival's key objective is to make more creative living spaces together with inhabitants and bring the city closer to nature by using sustainable materials in murals.

The case of Afrobanana Festival in Cyprus

In Cyprus, the Afrobanana festival is an example of a cultural **festival and experimental lab promoting circular innovative solutions**. The festival consists of several workshops and activities linked to arts, sports, music, biodiversity, the use of recycled plastics and the circular economy. More information: <https://www.afrobanana.com/>

Transformation and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage

One of the project's innovation areas lies in the innovative ways to create an audience for industrial heritage sites as iconic architecture places and “modern cathedrals” telling the history of flourishing European manufacturing. Industrial revolutions have always generated deep cultural changes in society, while scientific and cultural evolutions have also oriented them. The types of industries and manufacturing activities in diverse European territories, for example, coal, mining, and textile industries, have profoundly influenced local culture and history. At the same time, they have stimulated the development of arts and design, as in the European Bauhaus, generating iconic architectures and products. **European industrial heritage represents a unique testimony of this creativity. At the same time**, visiting contemporary innovative craft/production places could be enhanced as ‘real world’ cultural experiences, stimulating the entrepreneurial spirit and promoting responsible entrepreneurial culture.

Forsvik and Rydal Museum

The Action Plan for Västra Götaland focuses on revitalizing the industrial heritage sites of Forsvik and Rydal, transforming them into vibrant cultural tourism hubs. By preserving their industrial legacy and creating immersive, year-round experiences, the region aims to attract visitors while promoting the historical significance of these sites. Efforts have been made to encourage longer visits and settlement, improve accessibility without the need for cars, and support sustainable, creative businesses that contribute to the local economy. Key successes include the development of hiking trails, cultural events, and a self-service grocery store in Forsvik, which has enhanced both the tourism experience and local livability.

Community involvement has been crucial, with locals actively participating in promoting and preserving their heritage. Moving forward, the region plans to expand educational programs on industrial history and partner with local businesses to create new events, attracting international visitors and promoting sustainable tourism. With these foundations in place, Forsvik and Rydal are set to become key destinations that blend historical richness with modern, sustainable tourism.

The case of Stadsregio Parkstad Limburg – attracting tourism in a black coal mines region

*The cultural history of Parkstad Limburg has not been at the centre of tourism in the region, primarily focused on attractions and theme parks. By partly shifting the focus to cultural tourism, the region entices tourists and inhabitants to discover more of the region, extend their visit and regain the region’s pride. To achieve this goal, the region aims to **use and renew its unique industrial heritage assets**. Their strategy focuses on the **five timelines**, which highlight the most important transitions of the region: the Roman Period, the Middle Ages, the Mining Period, the Transition Years and the New Time. The touristic experience is centred on different timelines and provides full immersion experiences around the region by using modern techniques, like a **digital graffiti wall and storytelling through movies and podcasts**.*

The case of Saltaire Inspired

*Saltaire Inspired is committed to building on the local community's creativity, blending industrial heritage, the arts, diversity and inclusivity to develop a coordinated approach to a circular cultural offer of cultural experiences, venues and organisations. Saltaire Inspired is a small organisation **co-creating art events within the unique historical & contemporary context of Saltaire Industrial Village**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The organisation involves residents, schools, community groups & businesses, ensuring cultural experiences for all who live, work & visit Saltaire. Their projects and co-created programmes connect them within a complex network comprising **residents, over 150 artists and designers, strategic partners**, and initiatives such as Arts Council England and the British Council.*

Sustainable infrastructures for circular tourism - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities:

- **Financial support:** Financial support for innovative ideas in circular tourism, especially in remote areas. Provide funding mechanisms at local and regional levels for tools and services that can foster awareness raising on the impact of climate change on sustainable tourism, support circular and low-carbon solutions to tourism and better management of tourist flows in local and rural areas. This will also boost local entrepreneurship, fostering innovation and research based on local resources and skills development.
- **Establish an inclusive governance structure:** As advocated by the NEB initiative, support multilevel governance at the local level, with ideas and initiatives sparked by citizens and local communities and then supported by the municipalities and city councils. This ensures inclusivity of the circular cultural tourism solutions, cohesion of the different social strata and the sustainability of the innovative approaches endorsed by the communities and supported by local and regional authorities.

For European Institutions:

- **Public-private people partnerships (PPPs):** Promote Public-private people partnerships, especially for sustainable development of rural areas.
- **Capacity building:** Increase EU Measures related to capacity building for all stakeholders under the 4Ps. Develop an EU Competence Center and Advisory Hub for PPPs.

- **Upscaled instrument for innovation:** Develop a permanent upscaled instrument for entrepreneurship under Erasmus +.
- **Boost knowledge sharing on innovative solutions** developed under Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe projects, as well as other European, National and local innovation actions to exploit the knowledge and experience of European innovators.



Digitalisation & smart destination management for circular cultural tourism

“As in every ecosystem of our economy and our society, digitalisation impacts and transforms tourism. Platforms, online payments, and social media – to give but a few examples – greatly impact how we live and do tourism. The European Commission pays close attention to this process to support the competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience of the tourism sector in the EU”.¹³

ICT, AI, 5G and IoT systems can be used for better tourism flow management to avoid overcrowding, enhance accessibility and safety, and foster evidence-based policies to strengthen local communities’ wellbeing, as well as the visitor experience. This includes the development of applications for enhanced travel experience, for example, visiting less-known and less-crowded places, discovering ‘hidden treasures’ or accessing creative and unconventional guides to places. **Through digital tools, visitors and residents can also be facilitated to become active actors in local, sustainable development policies**, expressing their preferences and needs and thus participating in enhancing local context, going beyond tourism by embracing regional/local sustainable development.

However, several barriers can hinder the development and application of such tools and models, among which the lack of infrastructures in most remote areas, the poor quality and availability of data, and the difficulty in balancing the attractiveness of destinations with the conservation of their authenticity.

Digital infrastructures and tools for the tourism sector

Digital infrastructure, digital tools and smart data management can enhance the accessibility and sustainability of remote and less-known cultural sites. Digital tools such as applications for cultural events, virtual travels, augmented reality, and sharing economy services such as shared mobility, accommodation, guides, etc. can significantly improve the overall quality of the cultural experience and support marketing strategies. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and physical places; it also includes traditions, performing arts, events, knowledge, languages, and skills. Digitalisation can provide personalised experiences for visitors, enhancing enjoyment both before, during, and after their visit. Additionally, it holds the potential to furnish tourists with seamlessly integrated remote information about services, promotions, maps, events, experiences, existing infrastructure, and levels of sustainability and safety.

Digital tools can be used to tailor experiences to different visitor groups, including (with informed consent) data collection and analysis via social media, car traffic, and digital surveys. Digital tools could be used to enhance, rather than replace, physical experiences, e.g. In Teruel, there is an App that works only when you are physically present at the rock art caves to enhance the experience. It is important to ensure that privacy regulations are respected by local tourism operators, that the use of AI is governed in a democratic and transparent way, and that the EU level contributes to internet connectivity projects so that digitalisation can progress. Moreover,

¹³ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-tourism-transition/digital-transition-tourism_en

the readiness of stakeholders is a crucial determinant for the successful adoption of digitalisation. This readiness hinges on the skill levels and governance systems in place, capable of fostering synergies among various stakeholders, residents, visitors, government levels, and sectors.

Digital infrastructures and tools - Barriers and bottlenecks

Lack of qualified and skilled workforce

Most of the tourism sector workforce is under-equipped and not trained to use and put in place digital tools to improve the quality of their tourist services. This causes frustration and aversion towards the implementation and use of digital tools, especially when related to silver tourism.

GDPR and privacy issues

Uncertainty regarding GDPR compliance, reluctance to disclose data practices, and potential fines create challenges in addressing privacy concerns. Moreover, data collection and analysis are challenges both at regional and local levels because of a lack of democratic and transparent decision-making regarding the use of AI and digital technologies.

Climate impact of digital technologies

The CO2 footprint of digital hosting facilities and servers is enormous, especially for AI tools, which consist of a barrier, especially for rural and remote tourist destinations. Initial investment costs, lack of awareness, and the need for industry-wide commitment may hinder the transition to sustainable digital technologies.

Digital infrastructures and tools - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Below it is provided a set of possible solutions emerging from the Be.CULTOUR Community experiences and knowledge.

Promote smart data management tools

ICT, AI, 5G and IoT systems can be used for better tourism management to avoid overcrowding, enhance accessibility and safety and foster evidence-based policies to strengthen local communities' well-being and the visitor experience. This includes the development of applications for improved travel experience, for example, to visit lesser-known and less-crowded places by discovering 'hidden treasures' or accessing creative and unconventional places. Moreover, by implementing a human-centred approach, digital tools can be helpful to monitor the performance and attractiveness of cultural sites. Be.CULTOUR has developed a prototype of Digital Twin for tourism regions, tested and validated in the Netherlands (Limburg area).

The case of Kuldiga District Municipality

In Kuldiga District Municipality, the main challenge is to boost Circular Cultural Tourism innovations through augmented reality (AR) solutions such as an AR city guide, an AR cultural tourism map, AR museums, increase existing 3D art and AR for restaurants and hotel dining. The local NGO "Art and Technology Centre" and the Municipality itself have collected a list of best practices, such as the Green Street Art Festival, dedicated to local climate and digital issues. In Kuldiga, they have also been pioneers in digital data analytics for culture tourism in Latvia, monitoring and analysing the visitor flow through artificial intelligence. This innovation helped them identify the number of visitors to the festival and predict these numbers regarding the weather conditions.

Citizen Science and Gamification

The project encourages the integration of citizen science and gamification elements to enhance visitor engagement and contribute to sustainable tourism practices. Through digital tools, visitors and residents can also be facilitated to become active actors in local sustainable development policies, expressing their preferences and needs and, thus, going beyond tourism by embracing regional/local sustainable development.

The Be.CULTOUR project used gamification to create tailored digital experiences, such as games and treasure hunts, that make learning about the site's history engaging and fun for different audiences. A public-private partnership is key to promoting these efforts, ensuring collaboration across sectors. Additionally, digital tools like interactive maps will monitor the performance and attractiveness of cultural sites, providing potential tourists with all the necessary information before visiting, enhancing the overall experience.

Videogames for heritage fruition in Vulture – Alto Bradano, Basilicata region, Italy

The Action Plan for Basilicata focuses on revitalizing the Vulture-Alto Bradano area by integrating cultural heritage with modern technology. A key initiative has been the development of videogame experiences, such as the "Metapontum" adventure in Minecraft and the "Caccia al Tesoro a Melfi" treasure hunt on Roblox, which allow players to explore the region's historical landmarks in an engaging, interactive way. These games blend entertainment with education, incorporating local cultural references like the Arbëreshë community's symbols.

In addition to games, virtual tours on platforms like FlyVR have expanded access to the region, allowing users to explore its heritage remotely. These digital experiences have drawn international attention, enhancing both tourism and local appreciation for Basilicata's history. Supported by a network of local stakeholders, future plans include further gamification, augmented reality apps, and partnerships with international travel agencies to promote the region globally.

The case of Pen Llŷn Coastal Path Online Walking Guides

The Ecomuseum in Pen Llŷn aims to bring back learning to Pen Llŷn by catalysing actions and further innovation that will strengthen the links between the Ecomuseum and the wider local environment. This is done by **providing better information** for visitors **through the use of digital apps, and Augmented Reality can improve their experience and open the door to information** about the natural environment and the culture and heritage of the region. The Museum has developed a set of [online handy guides](#) to the North Coast, South Coast, Mariner's Trail, which provide thorough information for any interested visitor.

The Digital Twin developed for Heerlen, Limburg area, the Netherlands

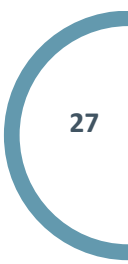
The Be.CULTOUR project has developed a Digital Twin prototype for Heerlen, Netherlands, aimed at improving cultural tourism and heritage management. This virtual model integrates geospatial data, IoT sensors, and advanced visualization technologies to help policymakers make informed decisions for sustainable development. A proof-of-concept experiment focused on energy efficiency and urban greenery distribution, revealing valuable insights into Heerlen's ecological and urban landscape. The Digital Twin's potential lies in its ability to simulate various scenarios, supporting urban planning and enhancing cultural tourism, with future plans to incorporate more real-time data and community involvement.

Adoption of eco-friendly technologies

The project encourages and advocates for the proactive adoption of eco-friendly technologies within the tourism sector. Embracing sustainable practices in digital infrastructures is critical for reducing the overall environmental impact of tourism-related activities. The project encourages businesses to invest in energy-efficient solutions, implement eco-friendly practices, and integrate technologies that align with environmental sustainability goals. Embracing eco-friendly technologies not only aligns with global environmental stewardship objectives but also enhances the long-term viability and competitiveness of businesses within the evolving landscape of the tourism sector. Through collaborative efforts and a shared commitment to sustainability, the adoption of eco-friendly technologies becomes a catalyst for positive change, fostering an industry-wide transition towards responsible and environmentally conscious practices.

For local and regional authorities:

- **Training for digital skills:** Provide training opportunities on digital tools and skills at the local level. Local and regional authorities should collaborate with educational institutions and industry stakeholders to design and implement targeted training programs that address the specific digital skills needed in the local tourism sector. Intergenerational workshops should also be considered to better transfer knowledge.
- **Investments in facilities** such as internet connection, digital infrastructures, and services in rural and remote areas. Local and regional authorities should incentivise businesses to adopt smart data management tools through subsidies and training programs. They can foster collaboration among local businesses to collectively invest in shared data infrastructure.
- **Data Analysis:** Promote informed and consented data collection/analysis via social media traffic analysis to targeted sustainable offers and learn about visitors' interests. Local and regional authorities should collaborate with businesses to establish clear guidelines on GDPR compliance, promote transparency in data practices, and facilitate public awareness campaigns on privacy protection. Regional Authorities should also make sure that local tourism operators respect data privacy regulations.
- **Establish partnerships or networks of remote destinations to learn and exchange:** Regional and Local Authorities should promote collective governance and quintuple helix approaches to tourism to break the silos between the different, interconnected services.
- **Ecofriendly technologies:** Local and regional authorities should incentivise businesses to adopt green technologies and implement energy-efficient practices. They can collaborate with energy providers to explore renewable energy sources for digital infrastructure.



For European Institutions:

- **Training for digital skills:** Provide an EU digital skills training and toolkit for circular cultural tourism providers. The training should encompass different skills related to digitalisation and smart destination management in the tourism sector, including training in useful technical tools such as ARC and GIS.
- **EU-wide platform to promote best practices and visual tools:** An online repository with direct access to digital best practices all over Europe would be beneficial for the enhancement of peer-learning activities. Establish partnerships or networks of remote destinations to learn and exchange.
- **Assess the actual need for digitalisation:** Using digital tools is not necessarily the solution in every aspect of the sustainable tourism sector. The widespread use of AI can make certain businesses redundant, causing expertise and workforce shortages. The EU should also be critical on the type of digitalisation process that is beneficial for the tourism industry.
- **Investments in network facilities and infrastructures:** the EU should provide funding streams and investment mechanisms for facilities such as internet connection, digital infrastructures, and services in rural and remote areas. This should be accompanied by guidance on how to use them for local and regional authorities.
- **Data management:** European institutions should allocate funds to develop and promote smart data management tools, data collection at local level and open data. Additionally, they can establish standards and frameworks to ensure interoperability across diverse systems, fostering a cohesive and competitive European tourism ecosystem, also leveraging the potential of the EU Tourism Dashboard as a base platform for all tourism stakeholders. European institutions should provide comprehensive also guidelines on GDPR compliance for the tourism sector data, especially in case of use of sensors and technologies that can threaten people's privacy; offer educational resources, and establish a certification system to recognize businesses that adhere to privacy standards.
- **Ecofriendly technologies:** European institutions should provide financial incentives, research grants, and policy frameworks that promote the adoption of sustainable digital technologies in the tourism sector. Collaboration with technology companies and environmental organisations can foster innovation in this regard.



Strategies for place branding, online and offline communication and heritage storytelling

A significant aspect of valorizing cultural heritage and enhancing its benefits for both local communities and visitors lies in how these assets are communicated and branded. Place branding is essential to creating a cohesive and recognizable identity that resonates with both locals and tourists, transforming cultural and historical sites into destinations with strong emotional and cultural connections. Many of the Be.CULTOUR mirror ecosystems have embraced this concept, developing innovative communication strategies that highlight their local history and traditions, such as crafts, gastronomy, and experiential tourism. These efforts focus on storytelling, leveraging the region's unique resources to create a place-based, human-centered brand that differentiates the area from others.

Place branding goes beyond marketing; it shapes the identity and perception of a location, integrating its cultural richness into a narrative that attracts visitors while fostering local pride. Digital platforms play a key role in this, offering tools to craft immersive experiences that engage tourists before they even arrive. By using digital storytelling, regions can highlight their cultural assets, creating anticipation and a deeper connection for visitors. For instance, websites, social media, and interactive apps can introduce potential tourists to the traditions, festivals, and history of a place, building a brand that speaks to authenticity and uniqueness.

However, the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for place branding. While AI-generated itineraries and digital experiences can enhance a tourist's planning process by offering tailored suggestions and insights, there is a concern that these tools might overshadow the personal touch and local expertise that traditional travel agencies and guides offer. Despite these challenges, place branding strategies that emphasize the human, authentic, and local aspects of cultural heritage can continue to thrive by focusing on what makes each location unique and irreplaceable.

By investing in storytelling and digital communication, regions can effectively build a strong, recognizable brand that not only attracts visitors but also ensures that the cultural heritage is celebrated, preserved, and beneficial to the local communities.

Strategies for place branding - Barriers and bottlenecks

Confusion over Labels and Benefits

One of the major barriers to effective place branding in circular and sustainable tourism is the overwhelming variety of labels—sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and others. This diversity can lead to confusion among stakeholders, making it difficult to communicate a clear and cohesive identity for a destination. Tourists may struggle to differentiate between these concepts, and local businesses may not fully understand how to integrate them into their offerings, weakening the impact of the brand. Without clear guidelines or definitions, stakeholders can become divided over how to align their efforts with the chosen label, ultimately diluting the brand's message.

Defining a Common Narrative

Crafting a unified narrative that captures a destination's cultural heritage while promoting sustainability is another significant challenge. Aligning diverse local elements—historical, cultural, environmental—into a single, compelling story requires a deep understanding of local identity and values. However, balancing this authenticity with market demands and global sustainability standards can be difficult. Additionally, differing perspectives among stakeholders—such as local authorities, business owners, residents, and tourism operators—often lead to fragmented narratives, making it harder to present a cohesive brand. Inclusivity, too, must be carefully managed to ensure that all voices and aspects of the local culture are represented, without alienating any group.

Limited Resources for Digital Tools

Many local communities lack the financial and technical resources needed to update and maintain the digital platforms essential for modern place branding. In smaller or less economically developed regions, digital infrastructure may be outdated, and local actors often lack the expertise to manage new technologies effectively. Furthermore, stringent requirements for accessing funds can be a bottleneck, particularly for start-ups and small enterprises that find it difficult to meet the digital and financial standards needed to obtain grants. As a result, these communities struggle to build the digital presence necessary to compete in a global tourism market, hampering their ability to create engaging online experiences that reflect their brand.

Fragmentation of Stakeholders and Competing Interests

Sustainable tourism often involves a wide range of stakeholders, from local governments and businesses to NGOs, residents, and international bodies. Coordinating these actors can be difficult, especially when their interests diverge. Local businesses might prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability, while environmental groups focus on preservation over profit. This fragmentation can slow decision-making processes and dilute the effectiveness of branding efforts, as stakeholders may not fully align with the overall strategy. Achieving a balance between economic, environmental, and cultural goals requires careful negotiation, and failure to do so can result in inconsistent messaging and weakened brand identity.

Slow Adoption of Circular Economy

Practices incorporating circular economy principles into tourism branding is still a relatively new concept. Many regions may lack the knowledge or infrastructure to fully adopt circular practices, such as reducing waste, reusing resources, or minimizing energy consumption. Additionally, tourists themselves may not be familiar with the benefits of circular tourism, making it harder to communicate the added value of such initiatives. Without clear examples or case studies to demonstrate the tangible benefits of circular tourism, destinations may struggle to integrate these practices into their place branding in a way that resonates with both visitors and locals.

Resistance to Change

Cultural resistance is another barrier, especially in regions where traditional tourism practices have been long established. Local communities or businesses might resist adopting new sustainable or circular approaches, particularly if they fear these changes could disrupt their existing revenue streams or lifestyle. This hesitation can make it harder to implement the necessary shifts in branding, especially if stakeholders are not convinced of the long-term benefits. Overcoming this resistance requires not only education and awareness campaigns but also tangible incentives that show the economic and cultural advantages of embracing sustainable tourism.

Lack of Measurable Impact

Finally, measuring the success of place branding efforts in sustainable tourism can be difficult. Without clear metrics, it is challenging to demonstrate the impact of branding initiatives, especially when it comes to sustainability. This lack of data can hinder the refinement of strategies and make it harder to secure ongoing funding or stakeholder buy-in. Effective place branding requires consistent evaluation and adjustment, but without measurable outcomes, destinations may struggle to adapt and improve their strategies over time.

Together, these barriers create a complex environment for place branding in circular and sustainable tourism. Overcoming them requires coordinated efforts, increased resource allocation, stakeholder collaboration, and the development of clear, cohesive narratives that resonate with both local communities and global audiences.

Strategies for place branding - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Below it is provided a set of possible solutions emerging from the Be.CULTOUR Community experiences and knowledge.

Define a narrative

Among the practices and strategies implemented by some representatives of both the mirror ecosystems and Pilot Heritage Sites, building an attractive narrative that valorises a region's local heritage assets has been encouraged and identified as a successful example. History and cultural heritage can be reinterpreted using modern technologies and, through storytelling, can be communicated to citizens, boosting touristic experiences and opportunities.

The case of Stadsregio Parkstad Limburg

*In Stadsregio Parkstad Limburg, the focus is on its rich 2000-year history. In 2020, the 16 municipalities of South Limburg approved a **new tourism vision**. One of the critical elements of the new concept, “Destination South Limburg 2030”, is **connecting the strategy** for developing the touristic sector **to the true DNA of the region**. A new narrative has been developed during brainstorming sessions with various stakeholders and followed by expert consultations. The conclusion was that Parkstad's DNA resides in 5 dominant “eras” or “timelines” that mark the region and that can also be expressed visually. Visit Zuid Limburg started using this **narrative by actively communicating these five timelines** in every phase of the “customer journey”. The five timelines have been incorporated into themed routes and used in storytelling activities through anecdotal stories for every timeline and shared via podcasts, maps and films. Some events have been organised to support the new narrative, and social media has reinforced the approach. Moreover, a new museum dedicated to timelines has been opened.*

Labeling local tangible and intangible heritage and crafts

Storytelling does not just entail developing a tale or designing a compelling strategy around the cultural DNA of a region. Communication and place branding can focus on a particular trait or a cultural aspect of an area or land. Local crafts and historical objects can be reinterpreted and valorised with innovative strategies that highlight local identities while placing them in the heart of a modern narrative.

The case of the Piast Route

*In the case of the Wielkopolska region, Greater Poland Tourism Organisation, the goal is to find innovative and inclusive strategies to promote the **Piast Route as a symbol to showcase and spread the authentic historical objects** related to the beginnings of Poland and the Christian religion on its territory. In particular, the key is to reshape the Piast Route image, promote it as an essential element of local identity, find new methodologies for the communication and storytelling elements and implement innovative strategies.*

Promote "remote working" destinations

To align with modern trends and the current needs of tourists and citizens, some Be.CULTOUR regions have developed strategies to make the most of their cultural assets while bringing economic and social benefits to the local communities. Remote workers and some of the Be are more and more numerous. CULTOUR regions have started to develop strategies to attract them, while enhancing their culture and creative offer.

The case of Savonlinna, Finland

*Savonlinna is a seasonal tourist destination. The strategic goal is to make it an all-year-round cultural destination with events, cultural attractions and activities attracting significant domestic and international tourists during spring, summer, autumn, Christmas and winter. The aim is to **develop and expand partnerships into digital media, creative industries, local cultural production, and heritage sectors to attract not only tourists but also digital nomads and creative people as full- and part-time residents to the city.** The approach to destination management is to significantly increase the **inclusion of stakeholders and small and medium-sized enterprises** in tourism and creative industries and improve the usage of data and knowledge management for building a competitive regional tourism cluster.*

Develop branding tools and identities around cultural heritage.

Considering both the importance of cultural tourism for destinations and the necessity to develop it in a sustainable way, Be.Cultour tourism project sets the aim of sustainably developing the tourism industry in underexploited and overexploited areas and cultural landscapes, encouraging local, regional, national and international cooperation. Through its activities, Be.CULTOUR promotes the application of the Human-Centred and Circular Economy approach in the tourism industry with a double purpose: (1) to ensure tourism has a positive impact on people and nature, reinforcing the cultural heritage and the landscape values in a long-term perspective, and, at the same time, (2) to avoid the development of a “stop-and-go” consumer-oriented approach, whose risk is to deprive destinations. Specifically, in the Be.CULTOUR project, local heritage innovation networks will work together to create and test sustainable human-centred innovations for circular cultural tourism. These networks will develop a strategic heritage-oriented development project that promotes inclusive economic growth, improves locals' wellbeing and contributes to environmental regeneration.¹⁴

Sviluppumbria – the green heart of Italy

*Sviluppumbria co-created a new sustainable destination brand as the "green heart of Italy". By doing so, Umbria is investing in a new touristic identity for the region, connecting all **walking, cycling and bridle trails**, offering a sustainable mobility alternative to visit heritage without cars. This branding technique, with a particular concern for the environment and circular economy, responds to the emerging trends of tourism and attracts a new generation of young, conscious tourists, connecting sports respect for the environment and culture.*

¹⁴ Be.CULTOUR D5.12 Pilot Heritage Sites Brand Strategy, Analysis, Brand Systems

The case of RDA Srem

RDA Srem has implemented the projects "Bicycle Tourism towards rural and regional development Srem" and "Cycling Danube - the establishment of the regional cycling route Srem"; focused on bicycle tourism and the development of regional cycling routes in the National Park "Fruška goraGora," along the Danube and Sava rivers, and the protected natural areas "Obedska bara" and "Zasavica." These initiatives have enhanced the infrastructure, trained service providers, and provided opportunities for eco, ethnic, agricultural, gastronomic, and health-focused rural tourism.

Strategies for place branding - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities:

- **Label for local products:** Define a specific label for local products, providing a branding manual for external promotion and organise hackathons and activities for defining innovative strategies to promote them.
- **Map and co-create:** Local authorities should map stories or local tangible and intangible heritage and work with the local community to preserve it by creating a local brand approved by citizens, making them local ambassadors. The actions should then be co-implemented by involving the local stakeholders through iterative approaches.
- **Simplify procedures to be licenced as a tourist guide:** Online training to license local tourist guides is an effective alternative to in-person training. Residents can often be the most knowledgeable guides but don't usually have the resources and time to complete the proper training.
- **Encourage remote working:** Local and regional authorities should promote destinations for remote work. This involves investing in digital infrastructure, providing financial incentives for businesses and remote workers, and collaborating with relevant stakeholders to create a supportive ecosystem. Clear communication and marketing campaigns targeting remote work communities will be essential to the success of this initiative.

For European Institutions:

- **EU labels:** Put in place coherent, standardised, transparent labelling practices supported by local and regional authorities and European institutions, ensuring a unified and coherent approach to place branding and communication in circular cultural tourism.
- **Skill development programs:** the importance of financial support and skill development programs, endorsed by both local and regional authorities and European institutions, to ensure sustainable, up-to-date digital infrastructures that enhance the effectiveness of place branding initiatives in the evolving landscape of circular cultural tourism.
- **EU tourism platform:** European institutions should invest in developing a unified EU tourism platform, fostering collaboration with local authorities, businesses, and cultural institutions. Financial incentives and regulatory support can encourage participation, ensuring a broad representation of circular cultural tourism experiences.
- **Digital skills training for circular cultural tourism providers:** European institutions should allocate funding for comprehensive digital skills training initiatives, collaborating with educational institutions and industry associations. Certification programs and ongoing support can ensure the sustained development of digital competencies within the circular cultural tourism sector.
- **Sustainable destination labels:** European institutions should lead efforts to create a unified EU-wide system for collecting and approving sustainable destination brands. Collaboration with industry experts, NGOs, and local authorities is crucial, along with clear guidelines and incentives to foster adoption.
- **Joint European Sustainable Festival platform:** European institutions should support the development of a collaborative platform for sustainable festivals, providing financial incentives, promoting cross-sector partnerships, and establishing clear criteria for inclusion. This approach can enhance the visibility and impact of sustainable cultural events across the EU.



Enhancing the human dimension of circular cultural tourism

Addressing the challenges at the intersection of tourism and climate change demands a focused effort to strengthen the human dimension of circular cultural tourism. One critical issue is the depopulation of rural areas, driven by young people migrating to urban centers in search of better opportunities. This demographic shift not only weakens local infrastructure but also erodes the authenticity of cultural experiences, as fewer residents remain to uphold traditions and maintain the vibrancy of local heritage.

A lack of trust among local stakeholders further complicates efforts to promote sustainable tourism. Collaboration is often hindered by competition for limited resources, as businesses and communities prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. This rivalry weakens the potential for collective action, making it harder to implement comprehensive, locally-driven solutions. Building strong local networks, based on trust and cooperation, is essential to overcome these hurdles and foster innovative approaches that support both tourism and cultural preservation.

Additionally, the pressures of mass tourism, which often leads to the over-exploitation of natural and cultural treasures, can degrade both the environment and the quality of visitor experiences. In many destinations, this unchecked growth threatens not only ecological sustainability but also the integrity of cultural heritage.

Adopting a circular cultural tourism approach—one that emphasizes sustainability, collaboration, and the empowerment of local communities—presents a viable path forward. By focusing on long-term benefits, reducing environmental impact, and promoting equitable resource distribution, circular tourism can mitigate these challenges and ensure that tourism contributes positively to both cultural preservation and climate change mitigation. In this way, destinations can thrive, not only as tourist attractions but as living, resilient communities deeply connected to their heritage and environment.

Inclusion of local stakeholders, operators and people

The involvement of the local ecosystems through human and community-centred bottom-up approaches is at the core of Be.CULTOUR methodology.

Human-centred services and products are generally linked to placing the ‘real’ needs of people and communities at the centre of the design process, overcoming extreme standardisation and providing diverse, tailor-made experiences, considering the person’s special needs. This concept can be effectively applied to develop inclusive tourism services and products. For example, cultural tourism “for all” is based on inclusive products and services addressing people with special needs. Building a collaborative atmosphere among stakeholders in the local ecosystem is crucial to ensure innovation in rural and remote areas.

Inclusion of local stakeholders - Barriers and bottlenecks

Competition and Mistrust: In many communities, entrepreneurship and free market competition create barriers to collaboration and inclusivity. Rivalries among local businesses, historical disputes, and a general lack of effective communication can lead to mistrust. This often prevents stakeholders from coming together to support collective tourism initiatives. Without a shared vision, these divisions hinder the development of a cohesive, sustainable tourism model, making it difficult to fully harness the potential of local resources and talent.

Lack of Interest and Engagement: Local communities may be disengaged from tourism development efforts due to a perceived disconnect from the benefits, or from a historical lack of inclusion in decision-making processes. If local stakeholders do not see how tourism initiatives will directly improve their livelihoods, or if past efforts have favored external actors, there may be little motivation to participate. This disengagement is particularly detrimental to the long-term sustainability of tourism, as local involvement is key to preserving cultural and natural resources.

Top-down Local Hierarchies: In many regions, decision-making structures are hierarchical, with authority concentrated at the top. This top-down approach often excludes local communities from meaningful participation in tourism planning and development. Without a mechanism for grassroots involvement, local knowledge, values, and priorities are sidelined, reducing the effectiveness of circular and sustainable tourism initiatives. Empowering local voices in decision-making is crucial for fostering inclusion and ensuring that tourism development reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.

Lack of Funding and Resources: Resource scarcity is a significant barrier to local stakeholder inclusion. Educational programs, capacity-building efforts, and community engagement initiatives often lack sufficient funding, which limits the ability to raise awareness and foster participation. Many place-based tourism projects rely heavily on volunteers, as there are not enough financial resources to support paid positions or long-term initiatives. Without adequate investment, local communities struggle to build the skills and infrastructure needed to fully engage in tourism efforts, leading to fragmented participation and underdeveloped initiatives.

Legal and Policy Barriers: Existing legal frameworks can also pose challenges to stakeholder inclusion, particularly when they do not prioritize community involvement or inclusivity. Policies that focus on large-scale tourism development often overlook the importance of local ecosystems and the benefits of community-based tourism. In some cases, legal restrictions may prevent local stakeholders from having a say in how tourism is developed in their region. Reforming these frameworks to encourage inclusivity and participation is essential for creating a tourism model that is both circular and sustainable.

Cultural Disconnect: In some communities, there may be a cultural disconnect between tourism initiatives and the local population. If the tourism model does not reflect or respect local



traditions, values, or ways of life, residents may feel alienated, leading to resistance or disengagement. Tailored communication strategies that acknowledge and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of a place are needed to bridge this gap and foster a sense of ownership and pride in tourism development.

Time and Capacity Constraints: Local stakeholders often have limited time and capacity to engage in tourism initiatives, especially in rural areas where residents are preoccupied with daily survival or economic concerns. The additional time commitment required for engagement in long-term tourism planning, training, or collaborative decision-making may deter participation, particularly if immediate benefits are not clear. Providing flexible participation options and emphasizing the long-term value of engagement is crucial to overcoming this barrier.

Addressing these barriers requires targeted strategies that build trust, foster collaboration, and ensure that local stakeholders feel empowered and directly connected to the benefits of tourism development. By addressing competition, improving communication, reforming hierarchical structures, and ensuring adequate funding and legal support, it is possible to create a more inclusive and sustainable model of circular tourism that benefits all.

Inclusion of local stakeholders - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Below it is provided a set of possible solutions emerging from the Be.CULTOUR Community experiences and knowledge.

Boost cooperation and trust among local stakeholders.

Often, the local stakeholders operating in the tourism sector don't know or collaborate because of a lack of trust in each other. Insufficient cooperation and trust among local stakeholders hinder the holistic inclusion of local ecosystems in tourism initiatives. Fragmented efforts and a lack of synergy may impede sustainable development.

Build local networks of stakeholders and associations to discuss needs and challenges and enhance cooperation and trust among local stakeholders, fostering a shared vision for inclusive tourism.

Sciaccia: info points all over the town

Sciaccia has implemented an innovative "diffused info point" system, strategically placing information points in everyday locations such as tobacco shops, restaurants, cafes, and other businesses throughout the town. This approach ensures that tourists can access helpful information about the town's cultural heritage, attractions, events, and services at almost any time of day. By integrating info points into businesses that are part of daily life, visitors have the convenience of obtaining guidance even outside traditional tourist office hours.

This system creates a 24-hour network of accessible information, allowing tourists to explore Sciacca's history, including its famous thermal baths, artisan ceramics, and medieval architecture, while also getting practical advice on transportation, dining, and local activities. The "diffused info point" concept not only enhances the visitor experience by making information readily available but also strengthens connections between tourists and the local community, supporting both tourism and the town's economy.

Raise awareness of the heritage value of local territories for the local communities.

Dedicated communication and dissemination campaigns and activities to showcase and give visibility to the local heritage. These awareness campaigns and educational programs should highlight the heritage value of local territories, fostering a sense of pride and ownership among local communities. These initiatives could involve "local ambassadors" and "inspiring local leaders". Identify inspiring managers and leaders.

In-person activities and physical spaces for collaboration can support this acknowledgement process.

Sviluppumbria: walking visits around the city

During the implementation of Interreg Europe SHARE, aimed at introducing sustainable approaches to cultural heritage in urban areas, Sviluppumbria involved a group of local stakeholders in a walk-meet in the city of Foligno, in Umbria. Representatives from the Regional Government, Municipalities, Associations, NGOs and Trade organisations walked for two hours through the historical part of town, guided by cultural heritage experts. The main focus of the visit was to combine a working meeting with the enjoyment of our surroundings and make communities aware of their heritage as part of everyday life. All throughout the walk, participants discussed cultural heritage and its challenges in the face of climate emergencies while getting to know Foligno's city centre at the same time.

Vojvodina, Serbia

In Vojvodina, Serbia, local hubs such as the Community Centre and Business Competence Centre in Bač have become key drivers for boosting local skills and promoting regional products. As part of the Be.CULTOUR project, these hubs focus on strengthening local economic growth through cultural engagement and entrepreneurship, particularly in the areas of crafts and tourism. By offering training, resources, and collaboration opportunities, these centres enable local artisans, small businesses, and community members to enhance their skills and develop sustainable products that reflect the region's rich heritage. In addition to fostering local talent, these hubs play a vital role in integrating the region's unique cultural offerings—such as traditional crafts and sensorial heritage experiences—into the broader European tourism landscape. They also promote sustainable tourism practices by encouraging local participation and the preservation of intangible cultural traditions, positioning Vojvodina's towns like Bač, Sremski Karlovci, and Irig as culturally vibrant destinations for both domestic and international visitors.

Put in place participatory governance

Engage local stakeholders and visitors in the territorial development through participatory governance instruments. Develop self-sufficient management systems at the local level based on shared values, uniqueness of the area, and cooperation.

The case of the Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi in Sciacca

The Museo Diffuso dei 5 Sensi Sciacca focuses on the identities of the people living in the area by involving them in horizontal and circular economy approaches for responsible and sustainable tourism. The result is a local community engaged in its territory's accountable and sustainable development. This case also shows how a non-profit community cooperative, in only two years, has become a community network engaging more than 55 local entities.

One of the goals of Sciacca is to guarantee viable long-term planning, providing socioeconomic fairly distributed benefits to all stakeholders, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities, and contributing to equality and poverty alleviation.

This makes it possible to move from fragmentation and limited integration between supply and demand in tourist and cultural services to a cooperative, participative, circular and inclusive network ecosystem that they call “Conscious Community”, based upon the Economy of Beauty.

The case of Saltaire Inspired

Saltaire Inspired is committed to building on the local community's creativity, blending heritage, the arts, diversity and inclusivity to develop a coordinated approach to a circular cultural offer of cultural experiences, venues and organisations.

Saltaire Inspired is a small organisation dependent on volunteers and residents, aiming to develop human-centred and sustainable creative approaches to co-create experiences with residents, local businesses, schools and colleges, and visitors. Through their projects and co-created programmes, they are connected within a complex network comprising residents, over 150 artists and designers, strategic partners, and initiatives such as Arts Council England and British Council.

Implement inclusivity processes

To truly foster inclusivity, it is essential to develop and implement systems, procedures, and policies that actively engage and reflect the perspectives, needs, and rights of minority groups or individuals with limited accessibility. These inclusive processes are designed to break down barriers, ensuring that everyone—regardless of background, identity, or abilities—can fully participate in decision-making, access services, and engage in all aspects of societal life.

By prioritizing diversity and accessibility at every level, these processes not only promote equity but also create environments where all voices are heard, respected, and valued. Inclusivity is not just about providing access; it's about fostering an atmosphere of belonging, where differences are embraced and everyone has the opportunity to contribute and thrive.

Raise awareness of the available local and European funding for innovation

Communicate and explain the functioning of EU funding programmes and opportunities. Dedicated info points with informative material in local languages could support the spread of information.

Sviluppunbria: InnoCom Project

The project Interreg Europe InnoCom aims at improving local and regional policies through integrating communication tools towards SMEs in Umbria and in partner regions. These are usually outdated and present bureaucratic barriers to access funds and opportunities. The project stems from a good practice implemented by Region Umbria during the COVID emergency, when support funds were released to target SMEs who hadn't experienced it. In particular, a simple, self-explanatory video was created to help creative and cultural industries access and navigate calls for proposals and tenders. At the end of InnoCom, the seven participating partners coming from Ireland, Latvia, Slovenia, France and Romania will have learned from each other and be able to transfer good practices and experiences from one region to another.

Inclusion of local stakeholders - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities:

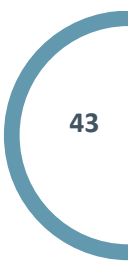
- **Boost collaboration and inclusive decision making:** Local and regional authorities should facilitate regular forums for dialogue, promote community engagement initiatives, and offer incentives for collaborative projects. Local and regional authorities should adopt inclusive decision-making frameworks, establish community councils, and incorporate local representatives in tourism planning committees. Providing training on participatory processes can empower community members to actively engage in governance.
- **Spaces for co-creation:** Provide local work and co-creation spaces in order to facilitate collaborations. Establish physical spaces where the local stakeholders can meet, share ideas and build collaborations. These public local hubs could also host “competences centres” in order to provide the necessary skills to boost local innovations. These places could also host corners for giving visibility and selling the local products. Move from competition to collaboration would indeed generate positive externalities and common benefits.

- **Communication strategies:** Enhance local heritage awareness of the communities with strong communication at each level of society. It would be beneficial to develop branding tools and identities around cultural heritage.
- **Tourism as visitors:** Engage the visitors in the territorial development of the place they visit. Facilitate experience tourism by involving the local agri-food stakeholders and focusing on local traditions, arts and crafts. This would avoid the loss of intangible heritage and boost sustainable forms of tourism.
- **Tourism for all:** design your heritage sites based on inclusive products and services addressing people with special needs.
- **Criteria for funding:** include in the criteria for fundings aspects like the gender representation and the community involvement.
- **Local governance best practices database.** Create a centralised repository of information and resources that highlight effective practices in the field of local governance. This database would be designed to serve as a valuable resource for governments, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners seeking guidance on how to improve the functioning and effectiveness of local governance structures and processes.

For European Institutions:

- **Enhance citizen and stakeholder engagement:** In alignment with the EU New European Bauhaus (NEB) Mission, prioritize and support community-led initiatives that emphasize social innovation. These projects should place value on local involvement, fostering collaboration between citizens, stakeholders, and public entities to ensure sustainable and inclusive development.
- **Inclusive Criteria for Funding:** Expand funding criteria to incorporate key aspects such as gender representation and community participation. By embedding these principles in the evaluation process, funding can drive more equitable, diverse, and inclusive outcomes in project implementation.

- **Increased Funding for Local Hubs.** Establish new funding streams dedicated to the regeneration and adaptive reuse of public buildings for the creation of local hubs. These hubs should serve as spaces for collaboration, innovation, and skill-building, driving local economic growth and fostering a sense of community ownership.
- **Development of European Portfolios:** Create an EU-wide portfolio of "Km-0" tourism experiences, centered on local food, culture, and nature, where all revenues are reinvested in community development. This initiative would promote sustainable, locally-driven tourism while ensuring that the economic benefits directly support local communities and preserve their cultural heritage.
- **Skills transfer.** European institutions should allocate funding for cross-cultural awareness campaigns, support cultural exchange programs, and collaborate with national and local authorities to integrate heritage education into broader curricula. Providing grants for community-led heritage initiatives can further strengthen the connection between local communities and their territories. Moreover, a "European Platform for Skills Transfer" could be envisioned as a collaborative platform or network designed to promote the exchange of skills, expertise, and best practices among individuals, organisations, and regions within the European Union.
- **New KPIs for tourism.** Define new KPIs for tourism that don't involve economical or only quantitative indicators but also social ones. The measurement of quality of life in the touristic areas should be a crucial aspect. Indicators like the price of houses, the mobility services, the occupation and the percentage of second houses would be beneficial.
- **Local communities involved in the projects' evaluation.** Involve the local communities of the areas of implementation of the innovation in the project evaluation. This will allow to assess the perception of the projects' impact at the local level.



Creating a sense of European belonging through culture

*The vehicle of Cultural European Routes can be a strong connective tissue to allow for the formation of inter-regional shared culture while respecting local contexts, including EU and the neighbouring countries promoting cross-border cooperation, collaboration and dialogue. [...], Europeanisation should not be seen as a drive for homogenisation but rather as a process that showcases the palimpsest of the European region and how local identities historically developed through shared and diverging underlying value frameworks. European Cultural Routes and European Heritage Label can be strong incentives here to appreciate both differences across regions and the overarching Pan-European storyline (**Policy Recommendations by Horizon 2020 Sustainable Cultural Tourism Projects**).*

Traveling across Europe offers a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the continent's incredibly rich and diverse culture, history, and identity. It not only provides a platform for educational and recreational activities but also fosters a deeper understanding of European identity, values, and shared heritage. This cultural exploration helps strengthen the bonds among Europeans, highlighting the common threads woven through their collective history.

Cultural Europeanisation emphasizes a shared sense of belonging, rooted in the continent's vast tangible and intangible cultural heritage, from historical landmarks to traditional customs and breathtaking landscapes. By recognizing and celebrating these commonalities, Europe fosters a unified cultural identity that transcends national borders while respecting regional uniqueness.

The development of **European Cultural Routes** and **European Heritage Labels** plays a critical role in promoting this shared identity. These initiatives are powerful tools for linking Europe's diverse cultures, creating networks of collaboration among heritage sites, and spotlighting the continent's collective historical narrative. Being part of a European route or receiving a European label enhances the visibility of destinations, offering them greater opportunities to attract visitors, share resources, and tackle common challenges. Ultimately, these efforts strengthen Europe's cultural fabric, fostering a deep, pan-European sense of belonging.

Creating a sense of European belonging - Barriers and bottlenecks

Concept of Europeanisation misunderstood: The "Europeanisation" concept can be easily misunderstood at different levels, including among policymakers, academics, or the general public. It's crucial to underline that Cultural Europeanisation is not about homogenising or making all European cultures the same. Instead, it promotes the appreciation and preservation of cultural diversity while fostering a sense of unity and common identity within the broader European context.

Resource Competition: Heritage sites often compete for limited resources, such as funding, visitors, and preservation efforts. This competition can make it challenging for these sites to collaborate on joint projects, as they may view each other as rivals for the same resources.

Tourism Competition: Heritage sites are frequently tourist attractions, and they may perceive each other as competitors in the tourism industry. This can result in a reluctance to cooperate, as they may fear that collaboration could benefit one site at the expense of another.

Branding and Identity: Heritage sites may have distinct branding and identities that they wish to protect. Collaboration can sometimes blur the lines between these identities, leading to concerns about losing uniqueness or individuality.

Resource Constraints: Revitalising ancient cultural routes requires substantial resources, including funding, expertise, and time. Limited resources can impede the development and maintenance of these initiatives.

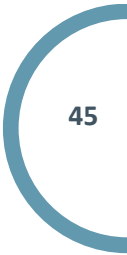
Inclusivity and Representation: Ensuring inclusivity and representation of all European regions and cultural identities is vital for creating a European sense of belonging. Overlooking certain regions or minority cultures can lead to feelings of exclusion and hinder the overall goal.

Lack of Engagement: Many Heritage sites might not be aware of the existence and significance of European Cultural Routes and European Heritage Labels. The lack of awareness can result in a limited level of engagement and participation.

Lack of Awareness: Local stakeholders, including communities, organisations, and individuals, may not have a comprehensive understanding of the broader European cultural context. This lack of awareness can result from limited access to information, education, or communication channels that promote a pan-European perspective.

Isolation of Local Identity and cultural disconnect: Strong local identities can sometimes lead to isolation or insularity, making it difficult for local communities to connect with or relate to the concept of European identity. People may focus primarily on their local heritage and traditions. The lack of knowledge about shared heritage across Europe can lead to a disconnect between local culture and the broader European cultural tapestry. Local stakeholders may not see the relevance or connections between their traditions and those in other European regions.

Language barriers: Diverse languages spoken along cultural routes may present challenges for effective communication and collaboration. Overcoming language barriers is essential for fostering a sense of unity and encouraging cross-cultural exchange along the routes.



Creating a sense of European belonging - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Below it is provided a set of possible solutions emerging from the Be.CULTOUR Community experiences and knowledge.

Storytelling campaign on cultural routes

Limited awareness and engagement with cultural routes hinder the creation of a European sense of belonging. The absence of effective storytelling campaigns results in a lack of appreciation for the diverse cultural heritage woven into these routes. The project encourages the development of compelling storytelling campaigns that highlight the historical, artistic, and social significance of cultural routes, with a storytelling that includes local heritage sites in common European cultural routes.

Boost the European “common diversity”

The perception of cultural routes as separate entities rather than interconnected threads in the rich tapestry of European heritage limits the potential for a shared sense of belonging. The project encourages initiatives that celebrate the "common diversity" of Europe, recognising and promoting the unique contributions of each cultural route while emphasizing their interconnectedness in the broader European narrative. The analysis of the local value can bring to the building of bridges with the European one. This can support the building of a sense of communalities. Cultural Europeanisation acknowledges and celebrates the incredible diversity of European cultures. It recognises that Europe is a mosaic of distinct languages, traditions, cuisines, art forms, and histories. Rather than erasing these differences, it seeks to promote mutual respect and understanding among them.

Unity is Strength

Collaboration is key to enhancing the visibility and appeal of heritage sites. By partnering with other sites that share similarities in history, culture, or are part of the same European route, you can create a more enriching experience for visitors. Dedicate space within your site to promote these partner locations, enabling visitors to plan a seamless journey across connected heritage sites. This interconnected approach not only provides continuity in their experience but also increases visibility and footfall for all participating sites, strengthening the collective heritage network.

Include Intangible Heritage

Heritage is not just about physical monuments or sites. Incorporating intangible heritage, such as local traditions, agrifood culture, and artisanal products, can significantly enhance the visitor experience. European routes focusing on culinary heritage or craft traditions offer unique insights into the cultural fabric of regions, making the journey even more immersive and engaging for visitors.

Cultural Exchange

Fostering cultural exchange is at the heart of Europeanisation. Promoting cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation between nations helps preserve and celebrate diverse cultural heritages while encouraging the exchange of artistic, intellectual, and traditional knowledge. Supporting initiatives that enable these exchanges not only protects cultural heritage but also strengthens Europe's shared identity by promoting mutual understanding and collaboration across borders.

Inclusivity

European heritage should be inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of cultural, linguistic, or regional differences. It is important to create environments where individuals can connect with multiple layers of identity—regional, national, and European—without one undermining the other. Inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging, enabling everyone to engage with European heritage in a way that resonates with their personal background.

Gamification

Gamification presents a dynamic and interactive way to engage people with European heritage and deepen their connection to a shared European identity. A creative idea is to introduce a "European Heritage Passport," where visitors can collect stamps from various heritage sites across Europe. This playful approach not only encourages exploration and learning but also fosters a sense of adventure and unity as visitors journey through Europe's diverse cultural landscape. This tool could serve as a fun, educational incentive to explore the rich tapestry of European history, culture, and traditions.

The case of North-East Romania

The Route "Stephan the Great and Saint" encompasses a chain of tourism objectives and areas, relevant for the history of both Romania and Republic of Moldova.

The cultural route covers a cross-border area, mixing in a charming way territories and stories from these two countries. It was initiated by the National Agency for Investments (Republic of Moldavia) and the Ministry of Tourism (Romania) and comprises a chain of sites related to the history of Stephan the Great. From these, 20 tourist sites are situated in the North-East Region of Romania and 9 are in the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, to the elements of tangible heritage, an important role is played by the intangible resources that bring life and content to the tourism experiences offered here (stories, legends, knowledge, crafts and traditions), all linked to the great Prince of Old Moldavia.

The case of Västra Götaland

The Action Plan for Västra Götaland, focused on the industrial heritage sites of Forsvik and Rydal, includes the innovative "Meet the Locals" initiative. This project emphasizes community engagement by encouraging visitors to connect with local residents and experience the region's rich industrial history through personal interaction. The initiative invites tourists to explore cultural heritage firsthand by staying with local hosts, participating in workshops, and engaging in everyday life, providing an authentic and immersive experience.

"Meet the Locals" also promotes sustainable tourism by fostering a deeper connection between visitors and the community, enhancing the region's appeal and encouraging longer stays. By integrating local knowledge and traditions, this initiative strengthens both the tourism offering and community pride, ensuring that residents are active participants in preserving and promoting their cultural assets. This approach not only enhances the visitor experience but also supports local economic growth and sustainable tourism development in Västra Götaland.

The case of Leeuwarden

As the European Capital of Culture in 2018 (LF2018), Leeuwarden embraced its role not just as a cultural hub, but as a catalyst for fostering a deeper sense of European belonging. Through a series of events, artistic collaborations, and community initiatives, the city worked to highlight the shared values and heritage that unite Europeans. Since LF2018, Leeuwarden has focused on preserving this legacy by promoting activities that continue to bridge cultures, foster dialogue, and celebrate the diversity of Europe.

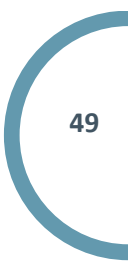
By building on the foundation of LF2018, Leeuwarden has positioned itself as a symbol of European unity, offering a platform where locals and visitors alike can experience a shared European identity. Through cultural exchange, cross-border partnerships, and storytelling, the city continues to foster a collective sense of belonging that transcends national borders, reinforcing the idea of a unified yet diverse Europe.

Creating a sense of European belonging - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities:

- **Joint Marketing:** Support Heritage sites collaboration on marketing efforts to attract visitors interested in exploring multiple sites with common cultural roots. This can be a win-win situation, as it promotes all the sites involved.

- **Resource Sharing:** create platform or occasion dedicated to resource sharing. Sharing resources, such as expertise, preservation techniques, or educational programs, can benefit all heritage sites while minimizing resource competition.
- **Coordination:** Creating a coordinated calendar of events or collaborative cultural programs can ensure that different heritage sites complement each other rather than compete for visitors.
- **Education and Awareness:** Promote education and awareness initiatives at the local level that emphasise the shared cultural heritage and historical connections across Europe. This can include school programs, cultural events, and information campaigns. Develop educational programs and curriculum materials that integrate visits to heritage sites into classroom learning. Encourage teachers to use heritage sites as real-world examples for various subjects.
- **Partnerships:** Establish partnerships between heritage sites and educational institutions. These partnerships can include agreements for guided tours, special access, and educational events at heritage sites.
- **Cultural Exchange Programs:** Facilitate cultural exchange programs that bring together individuals and groups from different regions to share their cultural experiences and traditions.
- **Collaborative Projects:** Encourage collaborative projects between local communities and European cultural organisations. These projects can help local stakeholders see the value in their contributions to the broader European cultural tapestry.
- **Support for Local Initiatives:** Provide support and funding for local initiatives that aim to preserve and celebrate their unique cultural heritage while also recognizing its European connections.
- **Inclusive Storytelling:** Promote inclusive storytelling that highlights the local, regional, and European dimensions of cultural heritage. This can help people understand the multi-layered nature of their identities.



For European Institutions:

- **Better wording:** Define a clearer and more inclusive wording for the Europeanisation concept.
- **Dedicated programmes:** Set up more programs preserving local traditions and intangible heritage and encouraging Europeanisation by analysing similarities and common paths across Europe. Boost the development of cultural roots.
- **Support coordination:** Creating a coordinated calendar of events or collaborative cultural programs at the European level can ensure that different heritage sites complement each other rather than compete for visitors.
- **Inclusive Storytelling:** Promote inclusive storytelling that highlights the local, regional, and European dimensions of cultural heritage. This can help people understand the multi-layered nature of their identities.
- **Collaboration with schools and Universities:** Boosting collaboration among schools, universities, and heritage sites is a valuable approach to facilitate the Europeanisation process. By engaging these key stakeholders, the European Union (EU) and its member states can promote a deeper sense of European identity and shared cultural heritage among future generations.
- **Scholarships and Grants:** Offer scholarships and grants for students and researchers interested in studying and preserving cultural heritage. This financial support can incentivise more individuals to engage with these topics.
- **Public Engagement:** Organise public events spread in Europe and cultural heritage awareness campaigns that involve both educational institutions and heritage sites. This can include exhibitions, workshops, and cultural festivals.



Stimulating the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem for circular cultural tourism

Cultural heritage plays a vital role in revitalizing local communities by fostering a shared sense of identity and values, while also strengthening local ecosystems. By leveraging heritage assets, communities can create new opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly in circular cultural tourism. Entrepreneurial skills, a motivated workforce, and collaboration among stakeholders are essential to transforming remote cultural sites into thriving destinations of renewed attractiveness. These elements help harness the potential of circular economy approaches, contributing to sustainability and economic resilience.

Many rural areas rich in cultural heritage face depopulation as young people move to urban centers in search of better prospects, draining local talent and skills. To reverse this trend, it is crucial to incentivize entrepreneurship and job creation within these communities. Attracting return migration and promoting remote work opportunities can also help retain and bring back skilled individuals. By fostering local business growth, these areas can become vibrant hubs of cultural and economic activity.

However, a significant barrier to this transformation is the lack of local capacity for innovation. Many communities and businesses lack the knowledge, resources, or expertise to develop new business and financial models that align with sustainable and circular practices. Establishing a local "quadruple helix" ecosystem—bringing together public, private, academic, and community sectors—can support entrepreneurs by providing the necessary infrastructure, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities.

Another challenge is the fragmented nature of stakeholder efforts in many regions. Without coordination, various local actors often operate independently, resulting in inefficient and isolated initiatives. Encouraging collaboration and information sharing through platforms that facilitate joint initiatives can help break down silos, enabling a more cohesive and effective entrepreneurial ecosystem. By fostering this kind of collaboration, rural areas can better position themselves as attractive, sustainable destinations that tap into the rich cultural heritage and innovative potential of their communities.

Developing the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem in less-known and remote areas

Circularity is based on the capacity of cooperating and collaborating between different actors: public institutions, private companies and organisations, as well as the third sector and research actors, in a quadruple helix synergistic model. However, this cooperative capacity is not done, especially in remote and depopulated areas, and should be enhanced by identifying strategies, networks/actors, and inspiring managers and leaders. In some cases, the local community developed as a territorial "enterprise" in which all actors have a role and contribute to shared objectives (e.g. the "community enterprises", community cooperatives and foundations). Trust is a key element of this capacity for cooperation and collaboration.

However, this cooperative capacity is not easy to build, especially in remote and depopulated areas, and should be enhanced by identifying strategies, networks/actors, and inspiring managers and leaders.

Developing the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem - Barriers and bottlenecks

Gatekeepers, Mindset & Building Trust: Gatekeepers, individuals or entities controlling access and resources, can hinder the participation of various stakeholders. Overcoming their resistance often requires a shift in mindset and building trust among stakeholders to foster collaboration.

Paradigm Shift is Lengthy and Time-Consuming: Implementing a paradigm shift in how tourism is managed and developed can be a lengthy and time-consuming process. It often involves changing established norms and practices, which can encounter resistance.

Available Services, Resources, and Infrastructures: The availability of public services, transportation options, and necessary infrastructure, such as land and facilities, can impact the development of a local ecosystem. Insufficient resources and infrastructures can limit the potential for growth.

Administrative Burden and Bureaucracy: Complex administrative processes and bureaucratic red tape can slow down the development of a local ecosystem. Streamlining administrative procedures is crucial for efficiency and innovation.

Lack of Resilience Plan for Shock and Crisis: The absence of a resilience plan to address shocks and crises, such as economic downturns or pandemics, can leave the ecosystem vulnerable. Preparedness and adaptability are essential for long-term sustainability.

Need for Tailored Strategies to Attract Investments: Attracting investments to support local tourism initiatives often requires tailored strategies. A one-size-fits-all approach may not work, and developing the right incentives is crucial.

Lack of Human Resources, Competences, and Skills: The tourism sector requires a skilled workforce, and the lack of human resources with the necessary competences and skills can be a significant barrier to development. Education and training programs are vital to address this gap.



Lack of Respect for Seasonal Work: In some regions, tourism-related work is often seen as seasonal and low-status, leading to a lack of respect for those in the industry. Changing perceptions and improving working conditions are essential to attract and retain talent.

Lack of long-term vision: Without a clear and long-term vision for the development of the local ecosystem in tourism, short-term goals and actions may not align with the broader sustainable and inclusive objectives. A well-defined, forward-looking vision is essential for guiding decision-making and ensuring that development efforts are consistent with long-term goals.

Lack of collaboration: Ineffective communication and collaboration between government bodies and agencies can hinder the implementation of circular cultural tourism initiatives. This may be due to bureaucratic obstacles, differing priorities, or a lack of coordination.

Developing the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem - Examples and possible solutions suggested

The Be.CULTOUR Community has identified several potential solutions to stimulate entrepreneurial innovation within local tourism ecosystems, based on shared experiences and knowledge.

Building Local Networks of Stakeholders

Establishing local networks and associations creates a platform for tourism stakeholders to collaborate, share best practices, and address common challenges. These networks foster a culture of cooperation, helping to align goals and strategies across the community.

Boosting Trust Among Local Stakeholders

Trust is the foundation of effective collaboration. Strengthening relationships and trust among local stakeholders in tourism leads to improved coordination, joint problem-solving, and more successful outcomes for community-led initiatives.

Living Labs

A living lab is a dynamic testing environment for innovation, where real-life settings allow for experimentation with new ideas and approaches. In tourism, living labs can facilitate the development of innovative solutions by offering a space to refine and implement new concepts that meet local needs.



Local Action Groups

Community-based Local Action Groups (LAGs) play an important role in shaping tourism development initiatives. These groups empower local actors by involving them directly in policymaking, enabling a bottom-up approach to tourism development that reflects community priorities.

Micro-Cooperatives in Local Areas

Micro-cooperatives provide an opportunity for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector to collaborate. These cooperatives enable shared resources and collective bargaining power, helping local entrepreneurs grow and succeed in competitive markets.

Scientists Living in Rural Areas

The presence of scientists in rural areas can drive local innovation by applying research and scientific knowledge to address regional challenges. In Portugal, for example, scientists have actively contributed to developing local solutions that enhance tourism and economic growth.

Digital Nomads Ecosystem Giving Back

Digital nomads, who often live and work in rural or remote areas, can positively impact local communities. By supporting local businesses, sharing their skills, and participating in community activities, digital nomads create a symbiotic relationship that enriches both the community and their own experiences.

Through these solutions, rural and local communities can develop robust, innovative tourism ecosystems that not only preserve their cultural and natural heritage but also promote economic growth and sustainability.

Developing the entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities:

- **Regulation:** Develop local legislation or political strategies in favour of the establishment of human-centred circular cultural touristic destinations.
- **Governance System for Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration:** Establish a governance system that encourages knowledge sharing, dissemination, and collaboration among local stakeholders, including communities, businesses,

academia, and government bodies. This system should promote open dialogue and cooperation to foster innovation and sustainable tourism practices.

- **Representation and Engagement:** Represent the results of local processes and initiatives at higher administrative levels. Ensure that the local voice is heard and considered in regional and national decision-making processes. Uphold engagements and commitments made to the local community.
- **Involvement of Local Action Groups:** Actively involve local action groups in the governance and decision-making process. These groups, consisting of community members, are valuable sources of input, ideas, and local expertise.
- **Alignment of Public Procurement with EU Regulations:** Align the local public procurement system with EU regulations related to innovation and sustainable practices. This ensures that public funds are used to support initiatives that contribute to the development of a human-centered local ecosystem.
- **Adequate Policy for Seasonal Tourism:** Develop and implement a comprehensive policy framework for seasonal tourism that addresses the specific needs of the sector. Make employment contracts more attractive for young and experienced professionals, and provide flexible and industry-specific contract options.
- **Raise Awareness and Respect for the Sector:** Promote respectful awareness of the tourism sector, highlighting its importance, contributions to the local economy, and its role in preserving cultural and natural heritage.
- **Provision of Infrastructure and Resources:** Provide necessary infrastructure and resources, including improved mobility options, access to agricultural land, and innovation spaces. These resources can support the development of tourism initiatives and innovation.
- **Business Training and Sustainability Regulations:** Offer training and regulatory support to local entrepreneurs and businesses to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability. Encourage long-term planning and responsible business practices.
- **Promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility:** Encourage successful local entrepreneurs to contribute to the community through Corporate Social Responsibility



(CSR) initiatives. This can foster collaboration between businesses and the local ecosystem.

- **EU Topics and Marketing Strategy:** Identify EU topics and themes that are relevant to the local territory. Develop a marketing strategy to attract EU meetings and conferences to the region, showcasing its unique contributions to these topics.
- **Small Investment Portfolio and Microfinance:** Create a small investment portfolio and promote microfinance opportunities tailored to the tourism sector. This can help small businesses and startups access capital for growth and innovation.
- **Tax Diversification for Seasonal Tourism:** Ensure that the legal system allows entrepreneurs in the seasonal tourism sector to diversify their activities without facing overly burdensome tax implications, such as double taxation.
- **Intermediate Support Bodies:** Establish intermediate support bodies that can bridge the gap between the public administration and local businesses and organizations. These intermediaries can facilitate communication, access to resources, and collaboration.
- **Giving Back for Exploiting Nature:** Promote sustainable tourism practices that emphasise giving back to nature and the environment. Encourage initiatives that offset the environmental impact of tourism activities.
- **Promotion of Silver Tourism:** Promote tourism projects and activities addressing and engaging people over 55 years old as a new interesting target for innovative tourism businesses. Silver tourism encompasses various economic activities, such as travel agencies, tourist information offices, entertainment, transportation, cultural heritage, and health and wellness, all complementing an integrated approach for senior tourism.

For European Institutions:

- **Invest in Missing Skills and Upskilling/Reskilling:** Invest in local-level education and training programs to address missing skills and promote upskilling and reskilling for the local workforce. This ensures that the community has the necessary competences for a sustainable tourism sector.

- **Promote Peer-to-Peer Exchange and Best Practices Sharing:** Create platforms and initiatives that encourage peer-to-peer exchange and study visits among local stakeholders. Facilitate the sharing of best practices and success stories to inspire and educate local communities.
- **Protection for Fragile Businesses (Seasonality):** Develop policies and mechanisms to provide increased protection and support to businesses in tourism, especially those affected by seasonality. This can include financial assistance during the off-season and measures to ensure business continuity.
- **Access to Finance for Different Organizations:** Create diverse financing options and resources that cater to various types of organizations within the local ecosystem. This may include grants, loans, and funding opportunities tailored to the unique needs of different stakeholders.
- **Consultation with Local Needs and Policymakers:** Foster a two-way dialogue between EU institutions, local communities, and policymakers. Actively consult and engage with local stakeholders to understand their specific needs and challenges. This bottom-up approach can lead to more effective and relevant EU policies.
- **Funding schemes:** Cohesion policies should support investments for promoting cooperation, synergies and partnerships among different actors.
- **Support Data Management Systems for Small Cities and Regions:** Provide assistance and funding to help small cities and regions develop user-friendly data management systems. Access to data and analytics can enable informed decision-making, sustainable tourism planning, and innovation within the local ecosystem.



Building an enabling environment for sustainable investments and circular businesses

Human-centred tourism prioritizes the development of local human capital by fostering skills and entrepreneurial capacity, empowering communities to benefit from sustainable tourism opportunities. This approach strengthens local entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly through cultural tourism, by encouraging innovation that is rooted in the region's cultural and natural heritage.

From the perspective of tourism service providers, human-centred businesses commit to respecting human rights, with a particular focus on the rights of tourism workers. These businesses ensure that their operations do not exploit workers and adhere to ethical labour practices. Furthermore, they contribute to the broader goal of creating an equitable and sustainable tourism industry.

For visitors, human-centred tourism is tied to responsible and fair tourism practices. Tourists are encouraged to contribute positively to the sustainable development of the destinations they visit, being mindful of their environmental and social impact. By avoiding exploitative behavior, visitors play a crucial role in supporting local economies, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting ethical travel.

This holistic approach to tourism fosters a circular business environment where sustainability, human rights, and ethical practices are at the core, ensuring that tourism benefits both local communities and visitors alike.

Building an enabling environment for sustainable investments - Barriers and bottlenecks

Addressing Regional Gaps: Low-income and rural areas often face challenges in accessing relevant skills and expertise required to develop and implement successful Cultural Tourism projects.

Finding best practices to replicate: Currently, many projects remain unrealised not due to financial constraints but rather due to the absence or the difficulty in finding well-defined and best practices. Improving data on costs and benefits can bridge this gap and unlock the full potential of cultural tourism investments.

Regulation: Often the complex and miscellaneous legislation and regulation on topics such as trade, industrial development, competition, nature and environment, cultural heritage, safety, health and consumer protection, set at local, national and European levels, represents an obstacle to the definition of local goals to develop sustainable tourism.

The case of the Welsh Government

In March 2021, the Welsh Government of Cyngor Gwynedd published its “Beyond recycling Strategy” with the aim of keeping resources in use for as long as possible to avoid waste. The goals are one planet resource use, becoming zero waste by 2050, Net Zero emissions, maximising economic potential and making resource efficiency part of Welsh culture. These circular economy principles are front, and centre to their culture and heritage-based tourism offer as they work with local heritage sites, communities and visitors to consider resource use, zero waste and emissions, especially through sustainable travel.

Moreover, frequently, the political, legislative, and regulative frameworks for the development of tourism reflect a traditional model in support of economic growth measured in terms of GDP and jobs that does not consider the importance of the sustainability of the sector.

The case of Veneto Region

In Veneto Region, two regional laws are dedicated to slow and green tourism: one for cycle tourism and one for building cycling routes. In compliance with these regulations, the Regional Strategic Plan for Tourism, annually updated, includes specific “slow and green” actions addressed to cycle tourism, routes and equestrian tourism. This plan is drafted with an open and participatory approach that involves local stakeholders. Moreover, there are specific management plans for the different areas of the region, which take into account all tourist aspects: from education to market promotion, including international relationship and networking.

Building an enabling environment for sustainable investments - Examples and possible solutions suggested

Drawing from the experiences and insights of the Be.CULTOUR Community, several key solutions have emerged to create an environment that supports sustainable investments and fosters circular businesses in the tourism sector.

These solutions focus on creating the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth while ensuring the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability. By implementing these strategies, local communities can strengthen their resilience, attract responsible investments, and build a more sustainable and innovative tourism ecosystem.

Local community developed as a territorial “enterprise”

Limited recognition of local communities as territorial enterprises hampers their ability to attract investments and fully harness their economic potential. The challenge lies in shifting perceptions to view communities as dynamic entities capable of sustainable development. The project encourages the transformation of local communities into territorial enterprises by promoting a holistic understanding of their economic, cultural, and social assets. Emphasising the unique value proposition of each community is vital for attracting investments and fostering local development.

Identify inspiring managers and leaders

The project encourages the identification, training, and support of inspiring managers and leaders within local communities. Empowering individuals with the skills to drive community initiatives fosters a resilient and visionary leadership culture.

Establish a favourable investment environment

Establishing a favourable investment environment is crucial at both EU and national/regional levels. To attract a wide range of potential investors, it is essential to enhance the availability and reliability of data regarding the costs, benefits, and impacts of cultural tourism initiatives.

Address Regional Gaps

Disparities in economic development and investment opportunities across regions can perpetuate inequalities. Addressing regional gaps is crucial for achieving balanced and sustainable growth at the local and European levels. The project encourages targeted policies and initiatives that address regional gaps, promoting inclusive and equitable development. This includes strategic investments, capacity-building programs, and collaboration to ensure that no region is left behind.

Building an enabling environment for sustainable investments - Policy recommendations

For local and regional authorities:

- **Local best practices repository:** Establish a centralised database documenting and cataloguing successful local governance practices. This repository serves as a knowledge-sharing platform, allowing local and regional authorities to learn from each other's experiences and replicate effective strategies.
- **Local ideas branding:** Develop branding from local communities' ideas based on their identities and what they value as important in the territory.

- **Boost entrepreneurship of young people by creating innovative solutions and setting start-ups:** Encourage and support the entrepreneurial spirit of young individuals within the community. This involves providing resources, mentorship, and infrastructure to enable the creation of innovative solutions and the establishment of start-ups, contributing to local economic growth and youth empowerment.
- **Regulation:** Implement and refine regulatory frameworks at the local and regional levels. This involves establishing clear rules and guidelines governing various aspects of community life, business operations, and development activities to ensure consistency, fairness, and adherence to legal standards.
- **Build managerial skills of community stakeholders:** Facilitate training programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing the managerial and leadership skills of individuals involved in community governance. This includes local leaders, administrators, and key stakeholders, equipping them with the necessary skills to effectively manage and lead community initiatives.
- **Participatory hubs for discussion:** Create participatory hubs or forums that bring together craft artisans and various stakeholders for open dialogues and discussions. This inclusive approach ensures that artisans actively participate in decision-making processes, share insights, and contribute to the development of policies that impact their craft and the community at large.

For European Institutions:

- **A financial supporting mechanism:** Develop an Investment Readiness Facility (IRF) for sustainable cultural sector (comprising also cultural heritage). This will allow to address the barriers and challenges mentioned above and improve the financial landscape for cultural tourism initiatives.

The IRF can be managed by the respective public authorities and funded through dedicated European Structural Investment Funds (ESIFs) or through the direct funds of the EC.

The instrument can support the following goals:

- Design circular business models and organisational innovation;
- Build technical, economic, financial, impact measurement and legal expertise;
- Ensure high degree of replicability of similar initiatives;
- Remove existing barriers (administrative, financial, market failures etc.);
- Mobilize private investments;

- Bundle projects and mix interventions to reach critical size, exploit also financially and economically unsustainable projects and achieve the expected returns and impacts.
- **Training programmes and guidelines:** To foster tourism development in to low-income areas, it is essential to provide clear demonstrators, training programs, and guidelines that focus on sustainable business models. Rural areas, in particular, may face challenges related to accessing training opportunities and a readily available workforce. To bridge this gap, academic knowledge from European funding programs like Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe should be adapted and shared with local communities. The aim is to develop, disseminate, and promote practical tools that can enhance local innovation ecosystems in rural and remote areas. These efforts should include the collection, monitoring, evaluation, and interpretation of critical data to support the development of sustainable Cultural Tourism initiatives.
- **European Platform for skills transfer:** Set up a European Platform for skills transfer which will serve as a digital hub for accessing resources, training materials, and expertise related to Cultural Tourism. This will facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge across European regions, particularly focusing on low-income and rural areas, in order to promote sustainable Cultural Tourism initiatives and foster socio-economic development. The platform should be developed in collaboration with regional and local authorities, cultural institutions, academia, and industry stakeholders to ensure that it meets the specific needs and challenges of different regions.
- **Regulation:** Advocate for and implement a specific regulation at the European Union level that ensures uniformity in tax benefits across all member states. This aims to create an equitable and consistent taxation framework, particularly in the context of supporting specific sectors or initiatives, fostering a level playing field for businesses and individuals throughout the EU.
- **Tax reliefs for culture and heritage sectors:** Establish standardized tax relief policies at the European Union level, specifically tailored to benefit the culture and heritage sectors. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that these tax reliefs are accessible and advantageous for small actors and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) within these sectors, promoting their sustainability and growth.
- **EU platform for innovative financing schemes:** Create a centralised European Union platform that facilitates and promotes innovative financing schemes, including crowdfunding, for cultural and heritage projects. This platform would serve as a hub for connecting project initiators with potential backers, fostering a supportive ecosystem for creative and cultural initiatives.

- **Simplify EU procedures and programmes:** Streamline and simplify procedures within EU programs, such as Creative Europe, to enhance accessibility for local realities and small communities. This involves reducing bureaucratic barriers and making the application and participation processes more user-friendly, ensuring that a broader range of local actors can actively engage in European cultural and creative initiatives.



Conclusions

The Be.CULTOUR project has successfully demonstrated the transformative potential of cultural heritage in fostering circular, sustainable, and human-centered tourism. By integrating community-led initiatives, stakeholder collaboration, and innovative practices, the project has created a dynamic model for revitalizing remote and lesser-known regions, turning them into vibrant and sustainable tourist destinations. The project's core achievements lie in promoting cultural heritage as a catalyst for economic regeneration, enhancing local ecosystems, and establishing an entrepreneurial innovation environment that fosters sustainable growth.

A critical component of this transformation has been the adoption of the "quadruple helix" model, which brings together public institutions, private enterprises, local communities, and academia. This collaborative framework has not only facilitated the sharing of knowledge and resources but also addressed long-standing challenges such as competition, mistrust, and limited local capacity for innovation. By fostering trust, cooperation, and shared ownership, Be.CULTOUR has empowered local actors to take a more active role in preserving, promoting, and capitalizing on their cultural heritage.

The emphasis on digital tools, innovative storytelling, and the creation of immersive experiences has further enhanced the project's impact, positioning cultural tourism within the broader European tourism landscape. The integration of European cultural routes, coupled with the use of digital platforms to promote sustainable tourism, has fostered a stronger sense of European belonging while connecting local heritage sites to a global audience.

At the heart of the Be.CULTOUR project's policy recommendations is the **Beyond Tourism Manifesto (Larnaca Manifesto)**, a synthesis of the project's vision and guidelines for the future of circular destinations. The Larnaca Manifesto serves as a guiding framework for regions looking to develop sustainable and inclusive cultural tourism models. It emphasizes the importance of community participation, circular economy principles, and the protection of cultural and natural heritage. As a key orientation for future circular destinations, the manifesto advocates for policies that prioritize local empowerment, digital transformation, and the long-term sustainability of tourism ecosystems.

In conclusion, the Be.CULTOUR project has laid a strong foundation for the future of circular cultural tourism, offering valuable insights and practical solutions for regions across Europe. The Larnaca Manifesto encapsulates the project's key policy recommendations and provides a roadmap for regions seeking to embrace sustainable tourism practices. By continuing to invest in local ecosystems, foster collaboration, and expand digital infrastructures, cultural tourism can play a pivotal role in promoting economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and a shared European identity.



Beyond Tourism Manifesto (Larnaca Manifesto)

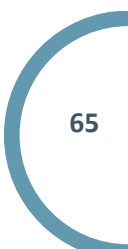
On May 16, 2024, a round table discussion titled "The Cultural Landscape as a Powerful Factor in the Development of Sustainable Tourism and Circular Economy" was held in Larnaca, Cyprus. This event, hosted at the Environmental Information Center in Skarinou, organized under the guidance of Deputy Minister of Culture in Cyprus, served as the preliminary conclusion of the Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project. Key collaborators included ANETEL, the Laona Foundation, and various European entities such as Italy's National Research Council (CNR), ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), KU Leuven from Belgium, and Serbia's Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO).

During the round table, experts discussed the connections between cultural landscapes, sustainable tourism, and the circular economy. A notable aspect of the event was the presentation and adoption of the **Beyond Tourism Manifesto, also known as the Larnaca Manifesto**. This document presents a vision for cultural tourism that emphasizes sustainability, cultural heritage, and community well-being. Influenced by numerous international documents and declarations, the Manifesto outlines ten core principles aimed at fostering a new approach to tourism.

The Beyond Tourism Manifesto serves as a comprehensive guide for policymakers, stakeholders, and communities, advocating for a balanced and integrated approach to cultural tourism that respects and enhances Europe's cultural landscapes and heritage.

Following the round table event in Larnaca, the Manifesto was further discussed during the final conference of the Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project in Napoli, held from June 5-7, 2024. This conference attracted significant attention from the entire Be.CULTOUR community, underscoring the Manifesto's importance and potential impact. The principles of the Manifesto were widely endorsed, with several organizations and stakeholders across Europe already signing it, committing to integrate these guidelines into their cultural tourism and sustainability strategies. This widespread support highlights the Manifesto's role in shaping the future of cultural tourism, ensuring it is sustainable, inclusive, and deeply connected to preserving cultural landscapes.

Annex 1 reports the full Manifesto as discussed and approved by the Be.CULTOUR Community.



Beyond Tourism Manifesto (Larnaca Manifesto): Towards Circular and Human-Centred Cultural Tourism through Cultural Landscape regeneration

This **Manifesto**¹⁵ aims to:

1. **promote an understanding of cultural tourism**, which moves away from a “stop-and-go” consumer-oriented approach - “value extractive” industry, generating negative environmental, social and cultural impacts on local communities and ecosystems - towards one that puts culture, tangible and intangible cultural heritage and landscapes, human needs, wellbeing, health and circular economy at its centre, paying attention to nature, communities and cultural diversity, specifically fostering a virtuous relationship between sustainability, aesthetic values and inclusion/participation through the concept of landscape;
2. **stimulate the recognition and regeneration of European cultural landscapes** as a key resource for the benefit of citizens and communities, their cultural development, identity and wellbeing as well as for cultural tourism. In this sense beauty is a generative force able to foster new economic activities and social inclusion and cultural landscape represents a unique resource for social, economic, environmental and cultural development;
3. **provide a baseline for specific cooperation framework** towards the development of circular and human-centred cultural tourism destinations, focusing on the quality and beauty of cultural landscape as leading values;
4. **provide a means to orient the evaluation of investments according to circularity principles**, contributing to the conservation of cultural landscapes in a sustainable and non-extractive way, promoting a circular model that keeps the financial benefits within local communities.

Recalling and incorporating¹⁶:

- 11 even international documents and declarations recognizing the fundamental role of cultural heritage and landscape for a sustainable and fair development, set out below, and;
- 10 definitions of key terms set out in the Annex:

¹⁵ Developed within the Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR (Beyond Cultural Tourism) research and innovation project (2021-2024)

¹⁶ See Annex

DOCUMENTS AND DECLARATIONS:	DEFINED KEY TERMS:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites (1962), 2. the UNESCO Convention concerning the protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), including the category of Cultural Landscapes (1992), 3. the European Landscape Convention (2000), 4. the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), 5. the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), 6. The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (2013), 7. the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (2015), 8. the United Nations New Urban Agenda 2030 (2017), 9. the UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (2011), 10. the ICOMOS & Europa Nostra European Cultural Heritage Green Paper (2021), and 11. the recent European Union's New European Bauhaus initiative (2021) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural landscape 2. Authenticity 3. Integrity 4. Cultural tourism 5. Circular economy 6. Circular tourism 7. Circular cultural tourism 8. Environmental and cultural carrying capacity 9. European value of cultural heritage 10. Human-centred tourism model

Recalling also, the conclusions of the Horizon 2020 CLIC project on the adaptive reuse of cultural heritage and landscapes within a circular economy perspective (2017-2021). Circular cultural tourism destinations refer to the organisation of a “regenerative circular symbiotic ecosystem”¹⁷ in cultural landscapes and cultural heritage sites.

It is considered that:

- Such recommendations **will contribute** to the achievement of the targets of the European Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan, EC's Circular Cities and Regions Initiative, new EU Agenda for Culture and EU Agenda for Tourism, the Circular Cities Declaration, at local, regional, national and European levels.

¹⁷ The “Regenerative circular symbiotic ecosystem” was defined within the Horizon 2020 CLIC project (www.clicproject.eu) (2017-2021). It is based on: **autopoietic** (regenerative) capacity – capable of re-generating the natural, social, cultural and economic-financial resources necessary for its functioning; **symbiotic** capacity – promoting collaboration and cooperation among all stakeholders and co-creators (“prosumers”) of landscape; **generative** capacity – able to generate net positive impacts in the territorial area such as new jobs, enhanced attractiveness, higher landscape quality/beauty, greater safety, inclusion, wellbeing and health (Fusco Girard, 2021, 2024).

- The establishment of a multi-regional/multi-state international network/community adopting this Manifesto **further contributes** to the achievement the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in particular SDG n.17 on Partnerships for the Goals, as well as to the implementation of the UN New Urban Agenda 2030.

Destinations, organisations and individuals adopting this Manifesto:

- recognize the principles;
- encourage the authorities to promote and implement them in their planning initiatives towards cultural tourism in an inclusive way, avoiding economic leakage and prioritizing communities' wealth and wellbeing;
- provide and share clear and comprehensive recommendations to their stakeholders on how to enhance beauty, participation and sustainability improving Circular and Human-Centred Cultural Tourism according to terms, principles and documents mentioned;
- identify and share solutions adopted, including the strengths and weaknesses experienced;
- raise awareness of circular cultural tourism among institutions, citizens and entrepreneurs, promoting public-private-people partnerships, regulatory measures such as incentives (carrot and stick approaches), and collaborative practices for collective care;
- contribute to the recognition, recording, evaluation, and protection of the characteristics and values of the cultural landscape;
- contribute to the creation of policies for the preservation and promotion of the landscape; and
- adopt measures and solutions for the protection of the integrity and authenticity of the characteristics and values of the cultural landscape.

Principles

The Roundtable Meeting in Larnaca, Cyprus, held on 16th May 2024, based on the experiences of European research and innovation actions developed under the Horizon 2020, Be.CULTOUR project, and on the contributions of the participants, adopts the following principles and encourages the authorities of the participating countries to promote and implement them in planning their initiatives towards – and beyond – cultural tourism.

1. **Cultural Landscape** is a key resource for communities' wellbeing, cultural tourism attractiveness and social inclusion. Cultural Landscape conveys diverse cultural values linked to its functionality/uses, including the production of food ("foodscapes"), maintenance of soil fertility, conservation of (agro)biodiversity, maintenance of hydrogeologic balance, wise use of water and other natural resources. Cultural Landscapes convey also aesthetic values such as beauty, harmony, etc., as a main source of attractiveness for cultural tourism, since tourism demand is particularly strengthened by the aesthetic dimension. In turn, Cultural Tourism can be a stimulus to maintain Cultural Landscapes alive (as "living landscapes"). Consequently, it is necessary to preserve, conserve, enhance, regenerate and valorise Cultural Landscapes within the circular economy perspective, particularly addressing wasted/abandoned landscape areas, promoting their reuse and re-purpose, while conserving their authenticity and integrity. In line with the New European Bauhaus initiative, environmental sustainability, communities' engagement and aesthetic values are interlinked and should be prioritised within cultural tourism development strategies.



2. **Circular cultural tourism destinations**, especially remote, rural and lesser-known areas, can become transformative travel destinations, viz. destinations for travels that stimulate people to “stretch, learn, and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world”. Their unique characteristics, viz. being distant from mass tourism and rich in cultural, intangible (e.g. linguistic), environmental and aesthetic values may offer out of the ordinary travel experiences, in deep connection with Nature and History, people and places, learning about sustainable lifestyles, traditional skills, rural regeneration models, cultural and spiritual experiences that go far beyond the usual tourism activity; here, remoteness can become a value, satisfying evolving human needs in contemporary society.
3. **Traditional knowledge** in cultural destinations is a fundamental intangible heritage to be preserved – such as the “Art of dry-stone walling, knowledge and techniques”, inscribed in 2018 in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Such knowledge helps appreciation of the landscape’s evolution and plays an important role in empowering people to understand climate emergency and see themselves reflected in actions for building climate resilient futures, it also supports the identification of compatible technologies and strategies in heritage sites able to reduce energy needs and enhance renewable energy use without damaging cultural values.
4. Tourism destinations and enterprises aim to adopt a **Circular Business Model**, blending financial viability with social, economic and environmental impacts, through a multidimensional approach, thus focusing on multi-criteria evaluation processes which turn financial results into sustainable outcomes. Also having the aim of identifying new synergies and symbioses, relationships of interdependence among actors/stakeholders, and supporting the adoption of new financial tools able to leverage impact investment capital. A cultural mindset shift, supported by entrepreneurial education, is required to go from short-term return oriented, linear business models to circular business models, focused on longer-term results and generation of net positive impacts.
5. **Entrepreneurship, Investments and Innovation are key areas** that influence the success of tourism in Cultural Landscapes, with the implementation of new technologies aimed to address unsustainable impacts. Cultural tourism can be a valid option for the diversification of income and support of local livelihoods in remote and rural areas, enhancing their overall economic and social resilience, supporting also basic services for local communities for residents and second-home owners to re-inhabit Cultural Landscapes. To this end, new forms of social entrepreneurship and impact investments need to be supported and stimulated, such as community enterprises.
6. Focusing on **Circular Regeneration of Natural Resources** is necessary for circular cultural tourism destinations. In this context, wasteful over-consumption should be avoided, while adopting, as appropriate, local sourcing of innovative or traditional, high-tech or low-tech systems to recover and regenerate key resources for human life, such as water, soil and biodiversity, including on-site generation of energy from renewable sources whenever possible, minimization of waste production and the use of plastics and packaging in hospitality, attractions and food services, and the promotion of environmentally friendly mobility systems.





7. **Digital Tools** are an important resource for conservation, monitoring, characterization, assessment and valorisation of Cultural Landscape. Digital documentation and mapping of cultural heritage, encompassing *inter alia* traditional construction or agricultural techniques, among other areas, can avoid the risk of loss of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and traditional knowledge held only by older generations, who may also be the last surviving speakers of their native language. Such documentation and recording aim not only to conserve the memory of ‘what was’, but to engender more sustainable approaches to the issues of today and afford respect to intangible heritage (e.g. linguistic). Moreover, digital tools and advanced technologies can support Cultural Landscape protection and resilience in case of extreme natural events such as fires, landslides and floods [4]. Needless to say, a cultural and human-centred approach should be adopted, going beyond the focus on technical instruments, and prioritising the integration of sustainability, participation and beauty in line with the New European Bauhaus.
8. **The European Value of Cultural Heritage** is showcased through circular cultural tourism destinations, contributing to the regeneration of European cultural values, including historic and social values, as well as food production in traditional cultural landscapes, bringing people near to history, culture and identity; through travelling, all people can learn about common roots and values, enhancing inter-cultural exchanges, relationships, friendship and dialogue for a cohesive and democratic Europe and the world at large. Inevitably this will rely on one or more common languages; but targeted efforts should be made to ensure visitors respect local intangible heritage, including languages.
9. **Human-Centred Destinations**, as defined in this Manifesto, promote the recognition and regeneration of Cultural Landscape beauty as a shared value able to enhance communities’ and visitors’ engagement, participation and collective care. Human-centred circular destinations also offer community-based, relational experiences *for all*, including services and products for people with special needs, ensuring due diligence for human rights and paying particular attention to workers’ rights, local communities’ needs, and in general to people’s health and wellbeing. These destinations can provide the opportunity for integrally sustainable lifestyles especially for young generations who aim at sustainable work-life balance, healthy environment and food, and relationships that are collaborative instead of competitive.
10. **Multilevel governance arrangements**, financing initiatives and collaborations are needed to preserve, manage and regenerate Cultural Landscapes, strengthen social inclusion of their communities, build social capital, enhance education about on Cultural Landscape for all ages, support farmers and other “custodians” of Cultural Landscape, as well as support self-sufficiency and circular economy. The governance in the tourism sector should embed processes of co-programming with local communities, co-design and co-management of Cultural Landscape for the regeneration of these communities.



ANNEX

1. INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS

1. UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites (1962),
2. UNESCO Convention concerning the protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), including the category of Cultural Landscapes (1992),
3. European Landscape Convention (2000),
4. UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003),
5. UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005),
6. The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (2013),
7. the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals – Goal 11 Target 11.4 (2015),
8. the United Nations New Urban Agenda 2030 (2017),
9. UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (2011),
10. ICOMOS & Europa Nostra European Cultural Heritage Green Paper (2021),
11. European Union’s New European Bauhaus initiative (2021).

2. DEFINITIONS

*Cultural landscape*¹⁸

Cultural landscapes are defined as the “combined works of nature and of man”. “They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal. The term “cultural landscape” embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature. Protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land-use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape. The continued existence of traditional forms of land-use supports biological diversity in many regions of the world. The protection of traditional cultural landscapes is therefore helpful in maintaining biological diversity” - UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1992).

Cultural landscapes include a variety of typologies such as rural landscapes, historic, urban landscapes, seascapes, which can be highly threatened by excessive and uncontrolled tourism activity. Moreover, it is acknowledged that people and communities are an integral part of the landscape, and can contribute to both the degradation or the regeneration of landscape values.

¹⁸ Cultural landscapes as defined by UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1992) that included cultural landscapes as a category within the World Heritage List <https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/>

Authenticity¹⁹

Authenticity of cultural heritage and landscapes can be defined as the link between heritage attributes (characteristics) and values, depending on the nature of the heritage and its cultural context, linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information, which may include authentic form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. Authenticity permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.

Integrity²⁰

Integrity of cultural heritage and landscapes can be defined as a measure of the completeness or intactness of the attributes (characteristics) that convey heritage value. The key words to understanding integrity are ‘wholeness’, ‘intactness’ and ‘absence of threats’. These can be understood as follows:

- Wholeness: all the necessary attributes are within the property;
- Intactness: all the necessary attributes are still present – none are lost or have been significantly damaged or have decayed;
- Absence of threats: none of the attributes are threatened by development, deterioration or neglect.

Cultural tourism²¹

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, language, value systems, beliefs and traditions.

Circular economy²²

The circular economy is a regenerative economic model based on the principle of “decoupling growth from resource consumption”, shifting from a linear model of “take-make-dispose” based on short-term economic returns to the detriment of ecosystems and future generations, to a closed loops model, sustainable in the longer-term, in which each kind of resource (material, water, energy, knowledge) is recovered instead of becoming “waste”, recycling and reusing it as input for new production processes, mimicking the functioning of Nature.

¹⁹ The concept of Authenticity is described in the UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, paragraphs 79-86. The concept of Authenticity of cultural heritage was first affirmed in the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964). A comprehensive definition of Authenticity in relation to cultural heritage is contained in the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994).

²⁰ The concept of Integrity is described in the UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, paragraphs 87-95.

²¹ Definition adopted by the UN Tourism General Assembly, at its 22nd session (2017). It is worth referring also to Cultural Tourism also according to the ICOMOS “INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL TOURISM CHARTER - Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance”, adopted by ICOMOS at the 12th General Assembly in Mexico, October 1999.

²² The definition of circular economy is adapted from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2015) and other scientific studies analysed by Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project – see Deliverable D3.1 Protocol/Methodology for human-centred innovation in sustainable and circular cultural tourism available at Be.CULTOUR website www.becultour.eu

Circular tourism²³

Traditionally, tourism relies on huge quantities and flows of exhaustible natural resources and largely reflects a linear take-make-dispose production model. So, if not properly managed, tourism can become a very demanding economic sector and can be a source of pressure on local resources, especially if based on the linear economy model. Circular tourism is the tourism that transforms its processes from linear (take-make-dispose) to circular (take-make-use-remake). It limits impacts on the environment, in which tourism actors (traveller, host, tour operator, supplier) adopt an eco-friendly and responsible approach.

Circular cultural tourism²⁴

Circular cultural tourism defines a **sustainable and regenerative cultural tourism model** that aims to foster **sustainable and equitable regional development** implementing a **“human-centred” circular economy** model grounded on recognising the significance of cultural landscape. This can be achieved through the enhancement of abandoned, underused, lesser-known, or lesser-valued, cultural and natural heritage; enhancement of human capital; reduction of tourism pressure on over-exploited territories, reduction of wastes and natural resources consumption (energy, water, soil, biodiversity), increase of clean energy and green transport means, recycling and reuse of materials and products, and enhancement of locally based food and craft productions. Also, by empowering local communities, enhancing ecosystems, local identity, wellbeing, health and cultural and linguistic diversity and stimulating local entrepreneurial innovation through cultural tourism.

Environmental and cultural carrying capacity²⁵

Carrying capacity in Biology is defined as the maximum number of a certain species that can exist in a habitat without over-consuming the resources needed for their life. In the tourism sector, the concept of the carrying capacity is defined as the maximum number of people who may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing damages to the physical, economic and socio-cultural environment and/or an unacceptable decrease in the quality of life of residents, as well as visitors' satisfaction. In the same sense cultural carrying capacity refers to enjoyment of a cultural asset without diminishing its value (e.g. photo pollution) or reducing the anticipated experience of the visitor (e.g. overcrowding, exterior noise etc.).

European value of cultural heritage²⁶

Cultural tourism can be an opportunity to learn about common European culture and history, deepening the European identity, and acknowledging common roots within local identities and specificities, recognizing unique symbolic, historic, cultural, social, spiritual values, which are expressed in exceptional “places”, landscapes, languages, traditions and arts. Hence, cultural tourism can be a powerful driver to intensify cultural exchanges between European communities and beyond, enhancing cultural diversity, social cohesion, identity, mutual respect, knowledge and trust.

²³ The definition of circular tourism is adapted from Fusco Girard and Nocca (2017) and other studies analysed by Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project – see Deliverable D3.1 Protocol/Methodology for human-centred innovation in sustainable and circular cultural tourism available at Be.CULTOUR website www.becultour.eu

²⁴ The definition of circular cultural tourism was developed within the Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project

²⁵ The definition of Tourism Carrying Capacity is provided by World Tourism Organisation (UNEP/MAP/PAP, 1997)

²⁶ The definition of European value of heritage was developed within the Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project

Human-centred tourism model²⁷

The human-centred tourism model recognises the needs of people and communities within tourism development strategies, including ensuring equal access to cultural and natural resources to both present and future generations, aiming to improve wellbeing, cultural identity, health, and quality of life. Cultural landscapes thus represent key resources, as their quality can be interpreted as an “indicator” of wellbeing, reflecting the history of a community, its identity and values, and its role as driver for peace and security through intercultural exchanges. The aesthetic values embedded in cultural landscapes are strictly interlinked with tourism attractiveness, as catalysers of new economic and social activities, in line with the “New European Bauhaus”²⁸.

²⁷ The definition of Human-centred tourism model was developed within the Horizon 2020 Be.CULTOUR project – see Deliverable D3.1 Protocol/Methodology for human-centred innovation in sustainable and circular cultural tourism available at Be.CULTOUR website www.becultour.eu

²⁸ The “New European Bauhaus” initiative (2021) strongly invites the development of a virtuous circle between economic development, social inclusion and aesthetic values, valorising cultural heritage and landscapes.

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