EuroMed 2024
The 10th International Euro-Mediterranean
Conference on Digital Cultural Heritage

2nd-4th December 2024, Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus

EUROMED
International Conference on Digital Heritage

Schedule Tuesday 3rd December 2024

Workshop 2: Cultural & Creative Tourism as a Driver for Sustainable Development

Tuesday 3rd December: 2024 09:00-18:00

Cultural Heritage has always been a net attractor for tourists from ancient times (Pausanias' Description of Greece 2nd century AD) through to the medieval pilgrimages (*Codex Calixtinus: Iter pro peregrinis ad Compostellam – Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela* 12th century AD) and from the "Grand Tour" of the 17th and 19th centuries to modern bucket list destination package deals. Figures for EU tourism in 2019 placed the value of the whole EU tourist market sector at approximately €572 billion, and that 40% of all destination selections are based on cultural offerings.

Tourism can significantly contribute to local economies, bring investment and infrastructure developments into regions and support employment. As a tool to revitalise marginalised or underdeveloped regions and promotion of cultural tourism can bring significant benefits to communities, but this is not without risk or consequences. Notably since the anthropause of the global pandemic, there has been a global backlash to tourism from local residents with high profile destinations like Venice, Italy, Mount Fuji, Japan and The Canary Islands, Spain, rethinking tourist activities and access.

This workshop will consider the role that Digital Cultural Heritage can play in supporting informed, responsible and sustainable Cultural Tourism from both sides the service provider and the consumer tourist.

Antonella Fresa

Workshop Organiser

Horizon Europe SECreTOUR Project, Italy
Director of Design & General Manager, Promoter srl, Italy

In cooperation with
- The UNESCO Chair on Digital Cultural Heritage

Workshop Tuesday 3rd December 09:30-17:45			

SECreTOUR Sustainable Creative Tourism

Time	Paper Title & Speaker
08:30-09:00	Registration
09:00-09:30	Saving Cultural Property in Armed Conflict: The Work of The Blue Shield *Peter Stone, UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection & Peace at Newcastle University, Blue Shield International, The United Kingdom*
09:30-09:50	Cultural Tourism: Bridging Heritage & Places, Learning & Promoting Sustainable Practices *Antonella Fresa, Promoter srl, Italy*
09:50-10:30	EU Policy Framework *Giuliana De Francesco, Policy Officer, European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, Belgium*
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break (30 minutes)

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Time	Paper Title & Speaker
11:00-11:15	A Charter for Sustainable Cultural Tourism: Co-creation of the Updated Edition *Manos Vougioukas, The European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN), Belgium*
11:15:11:30	Tourism as a New Market in the Data Space for Cultural Heritage *Jolan Wuyts, Europeana Foundation, The Netherlands*
11:30-11:45	Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future: Cultural Heritage Tourism in Malta *Tony Cassar, Heritage Malta, Malta*
11:45-12:00	3D Big Data for Digitally Enhanced Cultural Tourism *Sander Münster, Time Machine, Austria*
12:00-12:15	Participative Interpretation using Interactive Digital Storytelling *Jonathan Barbara, Saint Martin's Institute of Higher Education, Malta*
12:15-13:00	All participants: Discussion & Brain Storming Session *Rapporteur: Carolina Islas Sedano, University of Turku, Finland*
13:00-14:00	Lunch Break (60 minutes)
14:00-14:15	Communicating (Digitally) the Natural & Cultural Heritage of Monte San Giorgio (Switzerland) *Lorenzo Cantoni, UNESCO Chair in ICT to develop & promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites at the USI, Switzerland*
14:15-14:30	Every Contact Leaves a Trace: QR Codes & Bottom-up Tourism Intelligence- The Historic Graves Case Study *John Tierney, Eachtra Archaeological Projects, Ireland*
14:30-14:45	Interested or Just Curious? Irish Graveyards: From Community-led Heritage Projects to Community-led Tourism Experiences *Maurizio Toscano, Eachtra Archaeological Projects, Ireland*
14:45-15:00	The Evolving Concept of Authenticity in Heritage and Cultural Tourism *Anna Vichnevetskaia, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China*
15:00-15:15	Multidimensional Approach Fostering Sustainable Tourism Growth in Rural & Remote Regions *Evdoxia Eirini Lithoxoidou, Centre for Research and Technology Hellas, Greece*
15:15-15:30	Building an Enhanced Visitor Experience Though Cultural Memory: eFikardou *Elena Karittevli, Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus*
15:30-16:00	Coffee Break (30 minutes)
16:00-16:15	Crafting Landscapes *Sharon Pisani, University of St Andrews, The United Kingdom*
16:15-16:30	Be-Cultour Project: A Co-creation Experience on Circular & Sustainable Tourism in Algarve Portugal *Daniela Toledano, University of Algarve, Portugal*
16:30-16:45	Barbora Route: Cultural Pilgrimage Tourism as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Central Slovakia *Darina Rojíková, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia*
16:45-17:00	Public Renaissance: Location-based Interpretation of Early Modern Urban Space *Fabrizio Nevola, University of Exeter, The United Kingdom*
17:15-17:45	All participants: Discussion & Brain Storming Session *Rapporteur: Manos Vougioukas, The European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN), Belgium*
17:45-18:00	Closing Comments

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Abstracts

Saving Cultural Property in Armed Conflict: The Work of The Blue Shield

Peter Stone
UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection & Peace at Newcastle University, Blue Shield International, The United Kingdom

09:00:-09:30

In 1953 Luther Evans, Director General of UNESCO, addressed those drafting what was to become the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, stressing that they had been brought together not only to draft the convention but also to create the "Red Cross for Cultural Property". Evans realised that cultural property protection (CPP) could not be delivered by the fledgling UNESCO but would need an independent, impartial, and neutral organisation. While the assembled experts renamed Evans' organisation the 'Blue and White Shield' after the formal emblem of the organisation it was not to be until 42 years later that the International Committee of the Blue Shield was actually established.

This presentation introduces the work of the international NGO, now simply referred to as 'The Blue Shield', which is committed to working in partnership with the heritage, uniformed, and humanitarian' sectors, encouraging them to see the relevance and importance of CPP to their disparate agendas. The Blue Shield stresses the intertwined nature and indivisibility of the protection of people and their cultural heritage and argues that cultural and natural heritage can be used as a vehicle for peace and reconciliation rather than simply as an excuse for conflict. Such work cannot be left until conflict breaks out but must become an integral facet of peacetime activity, concentrating on what unites, rather than what divides, us.

Cultural Tourism: Bridging Heritage & Places, Learning & Promoting Sustainable Practices

Antonella Fresa
Promoter srl, Italy

09:30-09:50

For people living in a territory, it is normal that the heritage and the places of that area are linked by history, by traditions, by geography, by the narrations of ancestors. However, nowadays, these liaisons risk being broken by forms of tourism that are looking at the destinations as mines to be exploited. The consequences are, among others, turistification, overtourism, gentrification, negative impacts on the natural landscapes.

When tourism is conceived as a tool to complement and diversify the income of the territories, a way of giving visibility and recognition to rural areas and their inhabitants, a means to promote the installation and the generation of services that are beneficial both for local communities and for visitors, then it can contribute to the respectful development of the areas.

Focusing on culture, nature, knowledge, and experiences, it would be possible to generate fair, creative and sustainable tourism approaches that meet together visitors and the heritage communities.

The SECreTour project, funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Programme, is a research and innovation action started on 1/3/2024. The project lasts 3 years, focusing on cultural tourism in the European peripheries, assessing different local contexts, needs and types of cultural heritage.

Specific goals are considered by the project while testing and experimenting new forms of tourism development, to promote alternative business models, to enable governance and citizen engagement not only for touristic-economic planning, but also for community building and cultural heritage management and protection.

A series of pilot cases have been chosen to represent a wide range of European territories, communities and heritage, including rural and agrarian landscapes, memory places of local identities, minorities, and conflictive dark heritage. Through these pilots, the project will experiment the adoption of new paradigms in local contexts, facilitating effective communication and cooperation, and activating co-creative problem-solving through interdisciplinary and trans-sectoral approaches.

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A Charter for Sustainable Cultural Tourism: Co-creation of the Updated Edition

Manos Vougioukas
The European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN), Belgium

11:00-11:15

The 'Charter for Sustainable Cultural Tourism' was first proposed in September 2014, at the 7th Conference of the European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN) held in Volos, Thessalia Region, Greece. The 'Thessalia Charter' as it became known was updated in 2106 and in 2018, the latter being the ECTN contribution to the European Year of Cultural Heritage. A major updating is required after 10 years to incorporate all relevant initiatives, developments and synergies.

The purpose of this Charter is to bring together in a single, comprehensive and integrated document the main principles, features, findings, conclusions and recommendations on smart and sustainable cultural and heritage tourism development and promotion. It aims to build on all relevant previous initiatives, declarations, resolutions, opinions and charters, to exploit synergies and facilitate implementation by national, regional and local authorities. The overall aim is to encourage sustainable and responsible tourism policies and actions across Europe and beyond, through engaging culture and heritage with innovation, resilience and cohesion.

The ECTN Charter is a statement of principles on regional policies and strategies which guide the development, planning, management, operations and promotion of smart and sustainable cultural and heritage tourism in the European Union and beyond, for the benefit of tourist destinations, host communities, businesses, citizens and visitors.

The updating process, starting at the 17th ECTN Conference held in Dublin, Ireland, in October 2024, is based on co-creation involving key stakeholders, such as EU institutions, Europa Nostra, European Travel Commission, ICOMOS ICTC, NEMO, ICOM, NECSTouR, GSTC, WTACH, UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO) and UNESCO, as well as relevant academic and research institutes.

The updated edition aims to include, inter-alia, the following:

- EU Transition Pathway for Tourism.
- European Capital of Smart Tourism.
- Europa Nostra Europe Day Manifesto and Declarations.
- UN Tourism relevant conferences conclusions.
- Sustainable Development Goals.

Tourism as a New Market in the Data Space for Cultural Heritage

Jolan Wuyts
Europeana Foundation, The Netherlands

11:15-11:30

Europeana's increased efforts towards encouraging reuse of digital heritage in the data space for cultural heritage will lead it to try and penetrate new markets, namely the Media and Tourism markets. Both of these markets have their own set of opportunities and challenges. This talk aims to open up discussions around the challenges and opportunities for the tourism sector: are there needs in the Tourism sector that can be answered by digital heritage platforms? What activities, file formats, curated datasets, and engagement does the sector need? What specific actors within the sector are most useful to target? And what return on investment can be expected from fostering reuse in Tourism?

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Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future: Cultural Heritage Tourism in Malta

Tony Cassar
Heritage Malta, Malta

11:30-11:45

Cultural heritage tourism in Malta provides a unique lens into the island's history, showcasing UNESCO World Heritage Sites, traditional architecture, and vibrant cultural events. The tourism sector here is evolving, with visitors increasingly seeking immersive experiences that connect them to Malta's diverse past. Malta's rich historical narratives, compact size, and high density of heritage sites make it a standout Mediterranean destination, significantly contributing to the national economy by bolstering GDP and providing employment in heritage-related sectors.

However, this growth brings challenges, including the need to balance preservation with tourism demands, manage infrastructure, and address congestion at key sites. A shift toward sustainable tourism practices is necessary to maintain both visitor satisfaction and community well-being.

Digital transformation plays a pivotal role in enhancing Malta's cultural tourism appeal. Initiatives like virtual tours, online ticketing, and interactive digital guides offer visitors engaging ways to explore Malta's heritage before arrival and enrich their experiences on the islands. These tools are particularly appealing to younger, tech-savvy travellers.
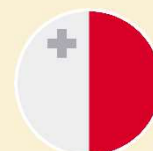
Expanding Malta's heritage tourism requires tapping into niche markets and promoting lesser-known sites to diversify its cultural offerings. Targeting specialized tourism, like dark tourism and military history, can attract specific audiences, while extending activities into shoulder seasons can address seasonal dips in tourism. To stay competitive, Malta must balance heritage preservation with tourism growth by embracing sustainable, immersive experiences and involving local communities, ensuring its heritage remains significant for future generations.
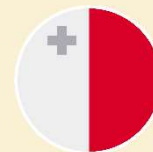
Participative Interpretation using Interactive Digital Storytelling

Jonathan Barbara
Saint Martin's Institute of Higher Education, Malta

12:00-12:15

The use of Interactive Digital Storytelling affords the provision of multiple perspectives for the interactor to engage with as they explore the subject matter presented (Koenitz, 2023). Such multiple perspectives could be different interpretations offered by various archaeologists for a given cultural heritage site, based on different schools of thought (Grima, 2001, 2003, 2005) or in comparison with their own experience excavating other contemporary sites (Malone, 2008). Curators regularly face the challenge of evaluating these perspectives, some belonging to the archaeologist performing the original discovery while others belonging to more recent interpretations, in order to present a mostly singular interpretation to accompany a site or artefact, with the more traditional perspective usually gaining more attention (Stroud, 2019). An Interactive Digital Narrative can bring this selective process to the visitor by presenting the different perspectives and allowing the interactor to make their own decision as to which interpretation to subscribe to. This is particularly applicable to Neolithic sites about which little to no documentary evidence is available to shed light on their purpose or use, such as the Neolithic Temples of Tarxien, Malta. A prototypical ideation tool that can help compare these perspectives has been designed and developed, allowing for the representation of the various perspectives, the evidence for these perspectives, and the sources for these evidences. Such a prototypical tool can help design interactive narratives that present and allow interactors- to explore and make their own interpretations based on these perspectives.

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Communicating (digitally) the Natural & Cultural Heritage of Monte san Giorgio (Switzerland). Notes from the SECreTour project

Antonio Lenzo, Adine Gavazzi & Lorenzo Cantoni
Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland

14:00-14:15

Overlooking Lake Lugano and administratively split between Switzerland and Italy, Monte San Giorgio was inducted into the UNESCO World Heritage Site list in 2003, joining the Horizon EU SECreTOUR project as a pilot case in 2024.

Already well-known for its remarkable paleontological record relating to the Triassic period, more recent interdisciplinary research has cast light on the complexity of the site's natural, cultural and religious heritage, both tangible and intangible, suggesting a wealth of narratives to be recovered.

We will consider the role and affordances of digital storytelling in reaching a variety of audiences through multi-layered, multimedia narration.

Every Contact Leaves a Trace: QR Codes & Bottom-up Tourism Intelligence- The Historic Graves Case Study

John Tierney
Eachtra Archaeological Projects, Ireland

14:15-14:30

The Historic Graves pilot is part of the Horizon EU SECreTOUR project which commenced in April 2024. Using geolocated community surveys of historic graveyards published to www.historicgraves.com this pilot is researching sustainable cultural heritage approaches to developing creative and engaging tourism products.

A key tenet of the SECreTOUR approach is that tourism can be a tool used for the benefit of local communities. This talk examines how co-created local trails, built on top of the original community historic graveyard surveys can develop into a national tourism resource providing heritage information to residents and tourists alike whilst also gathering previously untapped tourism intelligence. Just as the community groups have co-ownership of the heritage survey datasets, they also become co-owners of the associated tourism intelligence.

The methodology being researched combines rich and deep geolocated genealogical datasets with simple, low-cost, parish level heritage trails which, using dynamic QR codes, gather anonymised tourism intelligence as well as providing a means for building potential conversations between visitors and the local communities. This talk will cover pilot research in West Waterford.

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Interested or Just Curious? Irish Graveyards: From Community-led Heritage Projects to Community-led Tourism Experiences

Maurizio Toscano
Eachtra Archaeological Projects, Ireland

14:30-14:45

This contribution explores the evolution of the Historic Graves project, a community-driven initiative that began over a decade ago. Initially founded by a small group of archaeologists working with two primary stakeholder groups—local Irish communities connected to graveyards by proximity and members of the Irish diaspora linked to graves by genealogical ties—the project sought to document and preserve the cultural heritage of historic graveyards in Ireland through digital technology. By empowering local communities to survey, map, and share information on gravestone inscriptions and cemetery histories, the Historic Graves project became a recognised genealogical and educational resource.

Over time, the project gradually developed into a significant tourism resource, creating a geolocated genealogical dataset that identifies ancestral origins across Ireland. This has encouraged diasporic tourists to visit specific places associated with their family histories, enhancing their connection to Irish heritage while fostering a deeper sense of place and identity for local community members.

In recent years, European-funded innovations actions transformed this resource into a more structured tourism product, with online destination microsites and onsite trails. Local community volunteers now play an active role, both in creating Points of Interest (POI) booklets and in guiding tourists, and in curating the content offered by the destination module, offering a participatory heritage experience.

A significant aspect of the project's success lies in its model of engagement, which resembles a narrowing pyramid form: a broad base of "curious" users exploring the surface of the content offered (being that the online platform or the printed booklets), a smaller segment of "interested" users, registering online or scanning QR codes to explore additional content, and a dedicated few who could become "true fans", who actively participate in heritage documentation and support. This model underscores the project's unique ability to engage and deepen connections with cultural heritage across various levels of interest and involvement.

The Evolving Concept of Authenticity in Heritage & Cultural Tourism

Anna Vichnevetskaia[1], Y. Wang[1], Y. Li[1], N. Webb[2]
[1]Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou, China, [2]University of Liverpool, Liverpool, The United Kingdom

14:45-15:00

This study explores the impact of Extended Reality (XR) technologies on cultural heritage tourism, focusing on their capacity to enhance authenticity and visitor engagement. The notion of authenticity remains a contentious issue in heritage conservation and cultural tourism studies. Interpretations of what constitutes 'authentic' span a broad spectrum. At one end of this spectrum lies the view of authenticity being enshrined in the originality of an object. This perspective emphasizes the material originality of artefacts and sites, placing value on tangible, verifiable attributes. It aligns closely with conventional conservation practices that prioritize the preservation of physical integrity. In contrast, more recent constructivist and post-modernist approaches have shifted the focus to socially constructed and even entirely subjective experiences of authenticity. These interpretations recognize authenticity as a social or deeply personal phenomenon, acknowledging that perceptions of what is 'real' or 'genuine' can vary significantly among different observers or participants.

The introduction of digital technologies into this landscape has further complicated and expanded our understanding of authenticity. As tourism settings increasingly engage Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR) applications, it is crucial to unravel how these digital innovations influence perceptions of authenticity and shape cultural experiences. This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining the complex interplay between XR technologies, evolving concepts of authenticity, and cultural tourism experiences. It looks at how XR can bridge traditional object-based authenticity with more contemporary, experiential interpretations, potentially enhancing both dimensions. Through a series of case studies, we demonstrate XR's unique ability to reveal hidden historical narratives,

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reconstruct past environments, and facilitate interaction with inaccessible artefacts. These experiences help visitors connect to heritage sites on a deeper level while allowing us an expanded understanding of authenticity in the digital age. This research advances our understanding of how innovative technologies can create more authentic, meaningful, and engaging heritage experiences in an increasingly digital world.

Multidimensional Approach Fostering Sustainable Tourism Growth in Rural & Remote Regions

Evdoxia Eirini Lithoxoidou[1], Stelios Krinidis[1,2], Polyvios Raxis[3], Dimosthenis Ioannidis[1] & Dimitrios Tzovaras[1]
[1]Centre for Research and Technology Hellas, Greece, [2]Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, [3]Atlantis Research

15:00-15:15

The TOURAL project aims to revitalize rural and remote regions in Europe through sustainable and creative tourism development, emphasizing local community engagement, innovative business models, and new job opportunities. By prioritizing rural and remote areas, the project seeks to create a balanced approach between urban tourism hubs and underdeveloped rural communities. Through a multidimensional model, TOURAL will address diverse tourism niches—underwater cultural and nature heritage, cultural and creative tourism, cultural science tourism, and silver tourism (UCCST). This integrated approach aims to leverage a range of value-chains and collaborations with local stakeholders, fostering cross-border and macro-regional synergies.

TOURAL's framework emphasizes inclusivity and participation. Local communities and stakeholders will co-design policy pathways, collaboratively developing tourism offerings, services, and business models to foster the unique regional strengths. This participatory approach aims to ensure that tourism initiatives will resonate with community interests while promoting sustainable economic growth. The strategic dimension of TOURAL involves assessing barriers and sustainability, establishing action plans, and testing concepts through small-scale implementations that are validated with stakeholders' feedback.

Furthermore, TOURAL is emphasizing policy innovation, supporting updates to Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) using a bottom-up approach. Capacity building is central, with workshops and training sessions aimed at upskilling the local workforce, addressing community needs, and managing potential conflicts. In terms of business planning, the project envisions multi-destination, diversified tourism packages that will support the project's smart UCCST goals.

Finally, through its work in the business financing front, TOURAL will offer a one-stop-shop for partnerships, mentoring, and funding, creating a stable foundation for regional tourism value chains to flourish. This comprehensive approach plans to empower rural regions to become attractive, sustainable tourism destinations, unlocking new economic opportunities and enhancing the quality of life for local communities.

Building an Enhanced Visitor Experience Though Cultural Memory: eFikardou

Elena Karittevli
Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus

15:15-15:30

This paper focusses on the case study of Fikardou Village (Cyprus), a UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List monument, highlighting its unique cultural value by referencing historical evidence identified during our research. Our contribution investigates Fikardou's cultural offerings by presenting and analysing the major outcomes of three H2020 EU-funded projects (TExTOUR, MNEMOSYNE, IMPACTOUR) that include Fikardou as a major component in their research programme. By elaborating on selected successful outputs such as policy interventions, new cultural tourism trends, advances in visitor management systems, and new business and/or governance models that arise from this specific case study, we argue for the advances that have been achieved in the cultural tourism sector in Cyprus, as exemplified through the experience of Fikardou Village as a developing cultural tourist destination exploring and embracing digital technology as a force multiplier in achieving its aims.

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Crafting Landscapes

Llara Fuente Corripio[1] & Sharon Pisani[2]
[1]The University of Oviedo, Spain, [2]University of St Andrews, The United Kingdom

16:00-16:15

How can the integration of crafts and interpretative tourism enhance the understanding and preservation of cultural landscapes, fostering sustainable territorial development?

In recent decades, the concept of heritage has significantly expanded beyond monuments to include intangible elements, the surrounding environment, and the intrinsic connection of local communities. This broader perspective has given rise to the notion of cultural landscapes, defined by UNESCO as "combined works of nature and of man" expressing a long and intimate relationship between people and their environment. Along ide these shifts, the tertiarization of economies and a renewed interest in rural areas have positioned tourism as a pivotal tool for territorial development. Within this context, crafts hold untapped potential for fostering a holistic vision of culture. Crafts are dynamic processes embodying the knowledge, skills, and cultural expressions of communities. Deeply intertwined with their originating landscapes, they reflect the availability of natural resources, climatic conditions, and historical land-use practices. Preserving both crafts and landscapes is essential, as each sustains the other.

Landscapes, often central to tourism campaigns and a "pull factor" for travellers, are frequently shaped by centuries of human activity. However, the decline of practices such as farming or livestock keeping threatens to erase these landscapes and the knowledge they embody. Tourism initiatives cantered on craftsmanship provide immersive experiences, allowing visitors to engage with its creation and understand its significance. Interpretative tours focusing on the interplay between human activity and the environment address this issue, offering insights through rich storytelling that combines historical facts and anthropological narratives. By connecting visitors to local traditions and heritage, these tours create a holistic understanding of cultural landscapes. Additionally, technologies like VR and mobile apps recreate immersive environments, enabling tourists to appreciate the complex relationships between natural surroundings and cultural practices. This approach enriches visitor experiences while promoting sustainable tourism that preserves these essential landscapes.

Be-Cultour Project: A Co-creation Experience on Circular & Sustainable Tourism in Algarve, Portugal

Daniela Toledano[1], Paula Gomes da Silva[1,2], Desidério Batista[1,3] & Manuela Guerreiro[1,4]
[1]University of Algarve, Portugal, [2]Linking Landscape, Environment, Agriculture and Food (LEAF), Portugal, [3]Center for Art History and Artistic Research (CHAIA), Portugal, [4]Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (CinTurs), Portugal
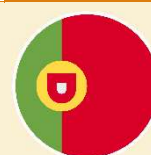
16:15-16:30

In 2021, the University of Algarve/Algarvensis Geopark was selected to join the Be.Cultour project community as a mirror innovation ecosystem. Be.Cultour project, which took place between 2021 and 2024, had as it main goal the transformation of cultural heritage, particularly in remote and economically depressed areas, into a catalyst for social and economic growth, through the implementation of innovative, circular, human-centred tourism. The consortium brought together a network of actors to co-create tools and solutions to enhance cultural heritage while empowering local communities to develop sustainable and innovative tourism solutions.

To achieved the objectives Be.Cultour created a community, consisting of 6 pilot heritage ecosystems and 16 mirror innovation ecosystems that worked in a peer learning system that included knowledge transfer, namely: methodologies, tools and practices.

The aim of this article is to report on the experience of Geopark Algarvensis as a mirror ecosystem throughout the duration of the project, especially through the peer learning events and the toolkit resources.

Algarvensis Geopark covers an area of 2428 km2, of which 1585 km2 are terrestrial and contain an important geological heritage, as well as natural and cultural heritage. A significant part of this territory, to the north, are unpopulated, economically impoverished rural areas with poor connections to the south coast.

The framework provided by the Be.Cultour project made it possible to systematise information and collect new data on potential natural and cultural resources for sustainable and circular tourism, to identify opportunities and stakeholders among local people, non-governmental organisations,

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economic operators and local and regional authorities. It was also an opportunity to design a pilot project for circular tourism through sensory experience, with an ecopolicentric character, capable of revitalizing the villages, promoting the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, the permanence of the local population and attracting new residents and economic activities.

Barbora route: Cultural Pilgrimage Tourism as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Central Slovakia

Darina Rojíková, Kamila Borseková & Alexandra Bitušíková
Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

16:30-16:45

The territory Central Slovakia was once among the wealthiest and most developed regions of the former Kingdom of Hungary and Europe, primarily due to its extensive mining activities. Historically rich in social, economic, and technological development, the region now faces challenges rooted in two primary issues: the insufficient development of rural areas, particularly in villages further from urban centres, and the unsustainable growth of urban tourism. Pilgrimage tourism appears to offer a promising approach to addressing both of these issues, especially considering the existence of the Barbora Cultural Pilgrimage Route. The Barbora route connects historically significant mining locations and showcases the region's tangible, intangible, and industrial heritage, including natural beauty and sites related to historical copper, gold, and silver mining in the mountains of what was then Upper Hungary.

This paper examines the Barbora Cultural Pilgrimage Route as a potential catalyst for the sustainable development of Central Slovakia. In addition to detailed information about the Barbora Route, the paper also compiles extensive statistical data on the municipalities along the route, including socio-economic and demographic profiles, as well as business statistics. This data offers a comprehensive view of the area's overall profile and potential, includes strengths and weaknesses. Through a comprehensive overview of the Barbora Route, this paper explores its potential to stimulate balanced regional development and sustainable tourism model across Central Slovakia.