Cultural Heritage in Mountain Regions

A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Environment and resource efficiency

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Cultural heritage: an asset for attractiveness and the future of our mountains!

A foreword by Euromontana

The cultural heritage consists of cultural and creative resources of tangible and intangible nature, with a recognised societal value, which must be preserved to the benefit of future generations. It comprises natural, built and archaeological sites, museums, monuments, artworks, historic cities, agronomic, forestry and food practices, literary, musical, audio-visual and digital works, as well as the knowledge, the practices and the traditions of Europeans. This heritage is particularly rich and diversified in mountain areas: **cultural richness** is an integral part of **identity and pride of mountain people**.

Mountain areas also have a very rich natural heritage, and many natural sites have cultural aspects too, since their physical, biological, or geological characteristics have influenced the way of life in mountain communities. At the same time, typical farming practices such as pastoralism have influenced the natural features of mountains for ages, contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of ecosystem services. All of this clearly shows how culture and natural heritage in mountain areas are intrinsically intertwined.

In the face of today's globalisation challenges, the cultural and natural heritage represents one of the few factors with the potential to drive the **socio-economic development of mountain areas, contribute to the wellbeing of their inhabitants and help preserve their way of life.** It is therefore a major **strategic resource for the future**, which can offer multiple social, environmental and economic benefits, provided that it is sustainably used and managed. The rich cultural heritage has also a very **strong potential for innovation**. As such, it can be used to revitalise mountain regions and foster the development of new entrepreneurial ideas to **strengthen their attractiveness**.

To better preserve and valorise the cultural heritage of mountain regions, it is essential to keep an adequate level of funding, which needs to be used for preserving and better developing this place-specific resource while creating jobs, including in the most remote mountains. Technological innovations, such as 3D visualisations or 3D impressions should be better shared and made more accessible, including for SMEs.

Attractiveness of the cultural heritage in mountain regions should be explored on the basis of a holistic approach: not only for the purpose of developing tourism but also to bring in and integrate new inhabitants, which is extremely important in mountain areas subject to depopulation. In those areas the promotion and the transmission of the cultural heritage are particularly critical. Intergenerational dialogue and exchange programmes between inhabitants of large urban areas and small villages are equally important for keeping the cultural heritage of mountains alive.

Confronted with declining public funding, the challenges of globalisation and urbanisation, climate change as well as with growing environmental and physical pressures, mountain heritage sites are threatened, and their situation is sometimes worsened by poor tourism management practices. Their **better preservation and valorisation** are nevertheless still possible, and they represent a key factor for creating employment opportunities in mountain regions and improving their overall attractiveness. The potential of the green and digital transformations that lie ahead should be exploited to achieve these goals.

Marie Clotteau, Director

EUROMONTANA

Summary

Mountains cover [nearly 30%](#) of the EU territory. Together with rural and remote areas they are home to 57% of the population and account for 46% of the gross added value produced in the EU[1]. Besides hosting an invaluable and very fragile natural heritage they also possess an extremely rich cultural heritage, intrinsically linked to our common European history. Their uniqueness comes however with multiple challenges, determined *inter alia* by depopulation and the systemic lack of services: finding ways to valorise the cultural heritage can be a powerful antidote to address them.

The present policy brief therefore provides an outlook on EU initiatives that local and regional authorities should refer to for boosting sustainable development in mountain areas through the valorisation of the cultural heritage. It also presents a selection of Interreg Europe good practices and EU-funded projects of particular interest and featured by a high degree of replicability and adaptability to mountain regions.

European policy context

Cultural heritage of mountain regions is cross-cutting issue of extraordinary policy relevance for ensuring full implementation of the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage. Its importance clearly emerges from EU Macro-Regional Strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region.

European Framework for the Cultural Heritage

2018 was designated by the EU as the [European Year of the Cultural Heritage](#). As such, it marked an important moment for the recognition of the cultural heritage as a crucial element of sustainable development at the local and regional levels. To keep momentum going and inspire future action in 2018 the EU institutions endorsed the [European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage](#) based on the main European policy pillars of **inclusiveness**, **sustainability**, **resilience**, **innovation** and **global partnerships** as well as the following **guiding principles**:

- **Holistic approach**: actions should encourage the understanding of ideals, principles and values embedded in mountain cultural heritage, especially if they underpin European integration and promote heritage interpretation. Actions should be future-oriented, put people at their heart and be based on sustainability and innovation.

- **Mainstreaming & Integration**: action should exploit cross-sectoral synergies with regional and rural development, education, and social cohesion. They should tap into digital transformations, contribute to nature conservation, integrate accessibility solutions and contribute to the success of sustainable local tourism.

- **Evidence-based policy-making**: the impact of actions to promote and enhance the cultural heritage in mountain regions should be monitored by the competent local and regional authorities for the purpose of better informing policy-making.

- **Multi-stakeholder cooperation**: policy solutions valorising the cultural heritage of mountain regions are effective if co-designed in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. Evidence shown in the next section reveals that cooperation platforms and public-private partnerships are key to guaranteeing their long-term viability.

Whilst the guiding principles and pillars primarily informed the implementation of actions by the European Commission in 2019 and 2020 in cooperation with institutional partners and stakeholders at all levels, they are equally important for **local and regional policymakers** since these **bear the primary responsibility of using and managing the cultural heritage treasured in mountain areas in a sustainable way.**

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[1] See data reported by the EP Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas & Smart Villages available [here](#).

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EU Strategy for the Alpine Region

The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) was adopted by the European Commission in May 2015 upon request of the European Council. It identifies a series of major challenges where a macro-regional response is useful as well as the opportunities that the 48 regions and the 80 million inhabitants of the Alps can jointly seize thanks to the economic dynamism of the area and the value of natural and cultural resources. Tourism and cultural heritage are among these challenges and opportunities.

- **Tourism**: The Strategy underlines the importance of spreading tourists more evenly across the macro-region. This can be achieved by adopting a 'concerted approach' to sustainable and accessible tourism, investing on R&I, involving SMEs and training workers. It also focuses on improving the geographic and seasonal distribution of the tourism flows in the Alpine region while boosting employment and growth is an imperative for the macro-region.

- **Cultural heritage**: On the Alps, the cultural heritage is intertwined with nature. These mountains are in fact the second largest biodiversity reservoir, one of the most important water towers of Europe and possess very strong assets from a cultural and historical standpoint. All of this in tested by multiple challenges and pressures, including population decline, anthropogenic activities and climate change that complicate matters for sustainable development in the macro-region.

The Strategy is accompanied by an Action Plan which defines four thematic objectives and a series of targeted actions to achieve them. Action 6 on the preservation and valorisation of cultural resources (and natural/ water ones) is expected to help implement EUSALP thematic objective 3 on 'a more inclusive environmental framework and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future'.

In its September 2016 resolution, the European Parliament endorsed the EUSALP and stressed the need of protecting popular cultures and customs in the Alpine Region. EU lawmakers called for coordination and exchange of best practices in the implementation of macro-regional strategies in the area of natural and cultural heritage management by virtue of the relevance that such practices have for sustainable tourism. Parliamentarians also invited regions to formulate tourism strategies on cultural heritage and innovation, pointed to the social, cultural and economic dimension of diverse Alpine customs and traditions.

Interreg Europe voices

Many Interreg Europe projects are devoted to boosting regional sustainable development through the cultural heritage. While some put in common horizontal policy solutions that can be transferred to all regions, some others zoom in on the peculiarities of mountain regions and the heritage they safeguard.

Reaching out to Interreg Europe projects: the FINCH experience

The Piedmont Region (Italy) is leading the ongoing FINCH project on 'Financing impact on regional development of cultural heritage valorisation'. We asked Anna Maria Caputano, FINCH project manager, and regional officers from the culture and mountains unit about financing schemes for the valorisation of mountain cultural heritage.

Which financial instruments have you set up or used to valorise the culture heritage of mountains in your Region?

«ERDF co-financing, particularly in the context of interregional cooperation, provides valuable opportunities. In this sense, the Interreg ALCOTRA programme is enabling a lot of projects. Among these, I would like to recall PA.C.E. on 'Patrimoine, Culture, Économie', which is looking at ways to protect the built cultural heritage from climate-related hazards. Thanks to PA.C.E. we are restoring the Exilles Fort and improving its accessibility. In parallel, the project is powering tourism promotional activities for many forts. Besides Exilles, also Vinadio, Fenestrelle as well as those making up the so-called Esseillon Barrier in the Savoy Department (France). In the 2014-2020 programming period EU support has been equally important on two other fronts. It enhanced the management and valorisation of our network of hiking trails, which concurs to ensuring the accessibility of the cultural heritage treasured by the mountains of our Region. It boosted the modernisation and digitalisation of museums, often in the framework of cross-border initiatives».

Based on your experience, what are the financial solutions that are the most suitable for valorising the cultural mountain heritage?

«Thanks to FINCH project cooperation, we have thoroughly investigated public-private partnerships (PPPs) and we can claim they constitute a viable solution for valorising this kind of heritage. Within the ERDF co-funded Duchi delle Alpi project, for instance, the participation of 'Fondo Ambiente Italiano' (FAI) was instrumental to the restoration of Castello della Manta, on the slopes of Monviso. Moreover, we are also starting to witness important signs with regard to the revitalisation of the entrepreneurial fabric of our mountains. This is triggered by the establishment and growth of tourism start-ups, which can have an important role for the valorisation of the cultural heritage. The LEADER method which brings together public, private and civil-society stakeholders for rural development in the form of local action groups (LAGs) is also advancing efforts in this direction. More generally, we believe that any policy on mountain heritage should aim at its integration into the 'cultural landscape', which is precisely the approach that secured the inscription of Langhe, Roero and Monferrato onto the UNESCO List of World Heritage sites. In this sense too, well-functioning PPPs remain a primary factor for the organisation of cultural events like exhibitions, shows and film festivals which can serve the purpose of integrating the mountain heritage into the wider cultural landscape and attract visitors interested in our mountains. Not only for practicing sports but also for getting to know their history and culture».

Credits: photo by nonmisvegliate from Pixabay.

Reaching out to Interreg Europe projects: the CRinMA experience

We also reached out to the Małopolska Region (Poland), which successfully led the now concluded CrinMA project on 'Cultural Resources in the Mountain Areas'. This box reports the interview conducted with Grzegorz First, Project Manager at the Małopolska Region, to get direct insights on lessons learned and future prospects for interregional cooperation in this field.

What are the main lessons learned thanks to interregional cooperation in the context of the CRinMA project?

«The main lessons learned thanks to CRinMA have three dimensions: strategic, operational and policy related. First of all, it allowed us to further untap the strategic value of the cultural heritage as a clue component for the cross-border development of mountain regions in the EU. The cultural heritage is in fact recognised by all project partners not only for its contribution to tourism development but also for its wider socio-economic dimension in the regions as well as for its strong interconnection with the natural heritage of the mountains. We consider it as a 'transmission belt for an economy of values, which is essential for local employment and the wellbeing of mountain inhabitants and tourists alike. From an operational perspective we have understood that practices and solutions for enhancing the mountain heritage are really endless: ecomuseums, educational camps for students, dispersed hotels are only few of the choices that can be made. Thanks to the project we have also observed that involving the most senior members of the community is always a good choice. As the guardians of memory and keepers of traditional knowledge, they bring added value to the implementation of projects. This is something we clearly witnessed in all our study visits. Policy-wise, the finding and observations made within the CRinMA were a determinant factor for us, as we have used them to inform the Action Plans prepared for Interreg Cross-border Programmes in the 2021-2027 period».

What steps are projects partners planning to take to further enhance the preservation and the promotion of their cultural heritage?

«As briefly mentioned, we have devoted particular attention to transferring the findings of the CRinMA project to a new policy instrument, namely the Interreg Poland-Slovakia programme 2021-2027. And we did so in partnership with the Podkarpackie Region (PL) and the Prešov Region (SK). We have in fact considered that some proposals and good practices identified by CRinMA project partners could successfully lead to the implementation of new projects on the promotion and preservation of the cultural heritage on our mountains. For instance, we are convinced that the 'ecomuseum' concept deserves to be further explored and that we should untap into its potential to address socio-economic issues, which would be in line with the EU regional development policy priorities for the present programming period and eligible to receive support from EU funds. Additionally, we are enthusiastic about the prospect of keeping up the good cooperation with all CRinMA project partners. We have in fact decided to take part in the 5th Interreg Europe call and we hope we will have the chance to carry out future activities together».

Policy solutions for the cultural heritage in mountain regions

The present section is devoted to showcasing good practices identified in the context of Interreg Europe projects that could inspire local and regional policymakers to take actions in favour of the cultural heritage of mountain areas. Moreover, it touches upon a variety of interregional cooperation projects implemented thanks to ERDF co-funding in mountain areas. All information provided demonstrates that successful policy solutions to valorise cultural heritage of mountains often revolve around museums, castles, thematic trails as well as food-and-wine traditions.

Museums

The Interreg Europe projects CRinMA on cultural resources in the mountain areas and KEEP ON on effective policies for durable and self-sustainable projects in the cultural heritage sector offer examples that are showing the great potential of museums to foster the exchange of knowledge and to catalyse tourism flows towards mountain areas.

The International Mountain Museums Alliance

Launched in Turin (Italy) and established under the auspices of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in late 2015, the International Mountain Museums Alliance (IMMA) is a network sharing one mission: to conserve, promote, study and valorise mountain cultures. IMMA's goals are to support professional exchanges and mutual learning among members and to implement joint projects. All institutions adhering to the Alliance have high-quality, permanent exhibitions which are open to the public and managed by scientific committees with no lucrative purposes. Each year on 11 December, IMMA's member celebrate the International Mountain Day by showcasing objects and mountain archives as well as the history of mountain exploration. IMMA's current members are: Museo Nazionale della Montagna "Duca degli Abruzzi" (Italy), Musée Alpin de Chamonix-Mont-Blanc (France), Musée Pyrénéen de Lourdes (France), Muzeum Tatrzańskie Zakopane (Polonia), Servei General d'Informació de Muntanya di Sabadell (Spain), the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies (Canada).

Further information about the practice is available here. Image Source: https://www.facebook.com/immalliance/

Ecomuseu de Ribeira da Pena (Portugal)

Located on the border between the Portuguese Regions of Minho and Trás-os-Montes, the Municipality of Ribeira de Pena treasures a peculiar, rich and identity-defining cultural heritage, which the local community is very proud of. The mission of the 'Ecomuseu', a composite, polycentric cultural institution, is to preserve, promote and popularise such heritage to the benefit of the community and a growing number of visitors. The Ecomuseu also plays a central role in animating the local cultural life by proposing events and educational experiences. One of the highlights of the Ecomuseu is the 'Museu do Linho', a space dedicated to showcasing the art of crafting flax, a traditional activity in the villages of Cerva and Limões, where a women cooperative of weavers is established. A protocol between the Municipality and the aforementioned cooperative makes possible for the weavers to hold flax craft workshops and to sell their products directly in the ERDF co-financed museum: a win-win solution showing how much the cultural heritage and local sustainable development are inextricably interlinked.

Further information about the practice is available here. Image Source: http://www.ecomuseu-rpena.pt/

When it comes to museums, Alpes'Interpretation can be considered a real source of inspiration. The project is run in the context of the Interreg ALCOTRA programme between France and Italy for the restoration of two strongholds, the *Château des Rubins* and the *Château de Magland* in Haute Savoie, which have been turned into interpretation centres with the mission to educate about the alpine natural heritage and environmental sustainability while valorising history and architecture. The same programme is also the cradle of iALP. Jointly implemented by the *Museo Nazionale della Montagna* managed by the Turin section of the Italian Alpine Club (CAI) and the *Musée Alpin de Chamonix-Mont-*

Blanc, this project has allowed the two institutions to experiment digital solutions for improving the attractiveness of their private collections and led to the creation of a dedicated website.

Castles

Various Interreg Europe projects offer viable solutions to bring castles and fortresses back to life thanks to stakeholder engagement strategies, restoration activities, branding techniques and targeted communication campaigns. Among these, Innocastle and SHARE can be recalled together with the CRinMA and RFC projects which, as reported in the boxes below, has successfully identified a series of interesting good practices specifically revolving around castles in mountain regions.

The barrier free Castle of Stará Ľubovňa (Slovakia)

The Stará Ľubovňa Castle is managed paying special attention to persons with disabilities. Since 2011 the castle has started to become accessible to hearing and visually impaired people. Videos containing text narrated in sign language are used and made available to visitors who can download them via QR codes on their mobile and/or on tablets that can be borrowed on site. A tactile path has also been created, comprising a 3D bronze model of the castle structure. In addition, birds of prey are used for therapeutic activities to treat and alleviate mental health issues. The good practice at hand offers a successful example of how to implement the principles and obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and is aligned with the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

Further information on the practice is available here. *Image Source:* Photo by makamuki0 from **Pixabay.**

Strategic promotional campaign of restored castles (Slovakia)

In 2017, the tourism board of North-eastern Slovakia carried out an engaging promotional campaign to comprehensively boost the attractiveness of 13 restored castles and ruins in the Prešov region, in cooperation with a local NGO ('*Rákoci* path') and a series of local stakeholders involved in the organisation of events. At the core of the campaign there were contests. Visitors could indeed 'compete' to collect 'stamps' at events organised at the restored castles for getting a symbolic 'prize', i.e. a royal crown decorated with 'precious' stones. In addition, thanks to a mobile app called 'Let's Discover LETOHRAD', they could also find out everything about the heritage treasured by the restored castles and ruins in a fun and interactive way, e.g. by trying to solve quizzes, taking pictures, etc. The prize at stake through the app, to be awarded to the 'best discoverer', was a weekend stay in the region, assigned together with another funny and symbolic price: the 'royal sceptre'. Based on feedbacks received by visitors, a follow-up promotional campaign was organised in 2018. The initiative favoured cross-promotion of cultural activities hosted at each site and was instrumental to increasing tourism flows in the region.

Further information about the practice is available here. *Image Source: https://flightsim.to/file/17103/slovakia-saris-castle-sarissky-hrad*

Castles and Stars Festival (Spain)

The Gúdar Javalambre county in the Province of Teruel (Aragon) hosts on annual basis a festival called '*Castillos y Estrellas*', which combines the fruition of the fortified medieval heritage of this mountainous area (a portion of the Iberian System) with stargazing and night sky watching. The main purpose of the initiative is to break the seasonality of tourism in the county municipalities by offering an attractive slow tourism alternative during the low season, when skiing facilities and resorts are normally closed. The format of the festival foresees that groups of maximum 40 people make a guided tour of the castles and a learning experience called 'sunset interpretation' which is followed by a proper stargazing session. Along these three distinct moments, visitors are accompanied by cultural heritage professionals and astronomers ('Starlight Guides'). The initiative is run in partnership with local authorities as well as with hotels and restaurants which benefit from it because of the increase of overnight stays and reservations in the low touristic season.

Thematic Trails

The selected good practices in the boxes below indicate that trails are a perfect solution for preserving, promoting and valorising the cultural heritage in mountain regions. The Green Pilgrimage and ThreeT Interreg Europe projects offer a plurality of solutions that can be successfully adopted for this purpose.

Trails to Mount Ceahlau: The Romanian Olympus (Romania)

After Mount Athos in Greece, Ceahlau Mount in the Carpathians is commonly regarded as the second holy mountain of Orthodox Christians. The first records of pilgrimages to this religious site date back to 1612 and the tradition of ascending the holy mountain continues after almost 400 years. The construction of a monastery on the Ceahlau plateau in 1992 after the fall of the Communist regime and the development of 7 trails by the Ceahlau National Park allowing visitors to arrive on top from all possible directions were instrumental in reinvigorating this tradition. The Mount is also the setting of many legends on the ancient gods of the Dacians, which is why it is also known as 'the Romanian Olympus'. Together with another monastic site located in the Vânători Neamț Nature Park and accessible via 10 pilgrimage trails, it offers a quite extraordinary combination of historical, cultural, religious and natural values which can be appreciated by all kinds of mountain tourists. The network of trails is marked, maintained, and kept safe by Park administrations, rangers, alpine guides and rescuers.

Further information about the practice is available here. Image Source: https://www.uncover-romania.com

Alpannonia ® - Hiking without boarders (Austria - Hungary)

Stretching from the Austrian Alps to the Hungarian Plain, the Alpannoia route aims to develop a long-distance, cross-border hiking and to build a harmonised and geographically balanced tourism offer along it. As a project, Alpannonia was implemented in two steps. At first, partners from Hungary and Austria cooperated for defining and signposting over 150 km of the main route and its ramifications. They also created hiking gates as well as resting and recreational areas along the way. The project aim was to develop a cross-border long-distance route, to develop the same quality & unique tourism offer along it. Once the hiking infrastructure was ready, partners worked together also to train tour guides and undertake awareness-raising actions targeting the general public and local businesses that could be receptive of the opportunities stemming from cross-border hiking promotion. On top of this, to further increase the appeal and image of Alpannonia as a tourist product marketing campaigns were conducted, the hiking route was optimised and extended (Alpannoia® plus) and a long-term strategy for the operation of the hiking route was adopted. The project, which was made possible thanks to ERDF co-financing, saw the competent regional authorities seeking the direct involvement of tourism and hiking experts.

Further information about the practice is available here. *Image Source: https://www.alpannonia.at*

The Coffee Smugglers trail in Marvão (Portugal)

During the Salazar dictatorship *o contrabando do café* (coffee smuggling) was prohibited and punished with prison time. However, it kept on being secretly practiced in the Municipality of Marvão (Alto Alentejo) where smugglers would set off at night and at their own risk in the direction of La Fontañera (Extremadura, Spain) for selling coffee in exchange of primary goods that were scarce in the community because of the regime. Today, 47 years after the Carnation Revolution, the Municipality of Marvão celebrates coffee smuggling to Spain with a 13 km thematic trail, historical re-enactments and testimonials from those who took part in and witnessed such an adventurous trade. Excursions along the trail, from which stunning views on the Marvão castle and its surrounding nature can be enjoyed, are normally organised each year at the beginning of May in cooperation with local stakeholders interested in the preservation of local history. In 2020, the traditional excursion could not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Municipality did not give up on celebrating the history of coffee smuggling and launched a social media campaign called '*Histórias do Contrabando do Café*' to disseminate anecdotes and stories about it.

Further information about the practice is available here. *Image Source: RAMSAT project*

The EU has supported the development of countless sustainable tourism projects which received ERDF co-financing, including for the establishment of thematic trails. One notable example in this respect is represented by the Ecotour project. Promoted within the Interreg France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen programme, Ecotour aims to improve cross-border ecotourism trails across the Ardennes while enhancing the visibility of traditional gastronomy, which constitutes a key element for the cultural heritage as well as the identity of communities living on these mountains. Equally interesting is to look at 'DOLOMIA Way of the Dolomites'. Carried out in the framework of the Interreg Italia-Österreich

programme, this project disseminated knowledge and raised awareness on Dolomite rocks by mapping geosites and quarries where this mineral is extracted, studied restorative conservation methods for Dolomite-made artifacts and supported sustainable tourism development on these mountains, which were included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site List in 2009. Interreg Poland-Slovakia is another programme devoting particular attention to mountain cultural heritage. In this respect, it is worth to recall the Wallachian Culture Trail project, which is implemented by partners of both countries with the view to save from disappearing the heritage linked to shepherding on the Carpathians. As an economic activity, pastoralism has in fact contributed for centuries to shaping a 'material and spiritual culture' on the Polish-Slovak boarder which is now put at risk by a plurality of factors, including depopulation and the transformation of the local economy.

Credits: photos by Sébastien Goldberg, Pietro Rampazzo and Maksym Harbar from Unsplash.

Food culture

Gastronomy as a part of the cultural heritage is celebrated by many Interreg Europe projects and works as a pull factor for sustainable tourism at all latitudes. As illustrated below, Local Flavours and MOMAr are proving particularly successful in the identification of good practices on food culture that could serve as an inspiration to help redirect tourist flows to hills and mountain in a sustainable and competitive way.

The 'Visit Prosecco Hills' consortium (Italy)

This good practice offers insights on how to maximise the impact of ERDF co-financing for the development and promotion of tourism products and services which can play a decisive role in enhancing the value of local oenological experiences. The Veneto Region and the Municipalities on the hills where the prosecco wine is typically produced, halfway between the two mainstream destinations of Venice and the Dolomites, have in fact joined forces to foster the establishment of a consortium of enterprises, i.e. the 'Visit Prosecco Hills', that could mutually gain from the marketing of products and services to attract tourists towards the wine tasting experience. The consortium gathers SMEs like hotels, restaurants, tour operators, mountain bike and scooter rental shops as well as stores selling local products. The factor that sticks out prominently in the case at hand is the combination of a strong policy vision with the solid entrepreneurial philosophy rooted in the community. Such combination was indeed essential to guarantee the success of the 'Visit Prosecco Hills' business model. Other European wine-growing regions may certainly get inspired by the use of EU resources and the marketing strategies adopted to boost the promotion of the prosecco hills, which were recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019.

Further information about the practice is available here. *Image Source:* Alberto Caliman from Unsplash

Discovering the 'terroir' in rural and mountainous Corsica (France)

An 'interpretation center' dedicated to local *charcuterie* is an attractive factor for sustainable tourism in the Municipality of Cozzano (South Corsica, France), a rural village in the valley of the Taravo wild river. A local association ('*Amici di U Mondu Di U Porcu'*) is running such center since 2015 in partnership with the local administration, farmers and producers, united by a mission: to showcase regional *savoir-faire*, gastronomic traditions as well as local stories and beliefs around the porc. The center organizes on site didactical activities for school children as well as guided visits to farms and local businesses dedicated to tourists. More in general, it acts as a space where tourists can gather information on local producers of cured meat (as well as saffron, honey and other specialties) and where to find them. As a good practice, this 'interpretation center' can serve as an inspiration to local policymakers committed to finding interesting ways to direct tourist flows from coastal areas to rural locations on the mountains.

Further information about the practice is available here. *Image Source:* Photo by Raimondo Giamberduca from Photohound

European support for cultural heritage in mountain regions

EU Financial Support

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF) for the period 2021-2027 is adopted. Both the European Parliament and the Council consider regional policy pivotal to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, pursue European Green Deal (EGD) policy goals and trigger the recovery: no region should be left behind of this efforts and this includes remote mountain regions.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) has been a major force in supporting mountain cultural heritage as it can be inferred from the interregional cooperation projects in the scope of this policy brief. During the 2014-2020 programming period, the Fund supported various form of investments with 4.7 billion EUR, targeting the promotion of the cultural heritage through digital technologies and the creation of local jobs in the running of such heritage sites among others.

The ERDF Regulation for the 2021-2027 period mandates that the fund will keep on addressing the reduction of disparities among regions, with particular attention to those that suffer from severe and permanent or natural demographic handicaps and therefore face specific development challenges such as mountain regions. Smart villages, in particular, are expected to receive ERDF support for increasing the resilience of communities in rural, mountainous and remote regions through decentralised services, digital technologies and innovations. Concerning investments on creative and cultural industries, cultural services and cultural heritage sites, it is established that they can be financed under any of the EU regional development policy objectives[2], provided that they also contribute to the specific objectives enshrined in the ERDF Regulation (Article 3).

Other than the ERDF, funding instruments like the new Single Market programme, Horizon Europe and the LIFE programme are also expected to offer support opportunities to cultural mountain heritage either directly or indirectly. EU Research and innovation policy is very likely to play a major role in this respect by making available considerable resources. The Horizon Europe work programme covering 2021-2022 foresees in fact a specific destination on 'Innovative research on the European cultural heritage and cultural and creative industries' as well as one on 'Resilient, inclusive, healthy and green rural, coastal

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[2] See Article 5(1) of Regulation (EU) n. 2021/1060 of 24 June 2021.

and urban communities'[3]. The first encompasses calls amounting to a total of 144,5 million EUR and the second has earmarked 128 million EUR. Both destinations and their underlying calls will deliver on the Horizon Europe strategic plan defining R&I policy priorities between 2021 and 2024.

Interreg Europe

Interreg Europe projects entail the sharing of experience and development of regional action plans to improve policy frameworks. Each project gathers and studies policy examples, hundreds of which are available in the Good Practice Database of the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform (PLP). Some of them have been featured in this brief.

The PLP is pro-actively supporting learning and exchange of experience and a number of on-demand services which, among others, can support the revitalisation of the cultural heritage in mountain regions. These services include an online helpdesk, matchmakings and the peer reviews. The latter represent a constructive tool for managing authorities and other local or regional authorities to obtain input and feedback on the challenges policymakers are facing. Carefully selected European peers are invited to the host region for a structured exchange of experiences and to provide input and recommendations addressing the specific local challenge.

Recommendations and key learnings

The recommendations that can be formulated with regard to the policy solutions that are most frequently adopted in the frame of interregional cooperation projects committed to valorising the cultural heritage of mountain regions as presented in this policy brief can be summarised as follows:

Museums

- Respond to ERDF calls for projects to develop, restore and revitalise your local museum thanks to EU co-financing. Turn your museum into an attractive factor for sustainable mountain tourism and into a driver for local economic development.
- Create synergies between mountain museums at local, regional and national levels. Learn from the IMMA network how to foster mutual cooperation between museums, how to promote the cultural heritage as well as the history of mountain exploration.
- Establish partnerships with local stakeholders like associations, NGOs and cooperatives. Make sure they are involved in the co-design and implementation of the activities of your museum.
- Get inspired by the Portuguese Ecomuseu of Ribeira de Pena (*Museu du Linho*) on how to showcase traditional crafts in an innovative way while supporting local female-led businesses.
- Discover how Haute Savoie (France) and Val d'Aosta (Italy) shared local competence and skills for turning strongholds into museums to showcase and valorise the natural and cultural heritage in the Alps–Mediterranean Euroregion.
- Make a virtual tour of the Mountain Museums website (iALP, Interactive Alpine Museum project) and visit their galleries to get insights on how the cultural heritage of your mountains could be promoted through innovative digital solutions.

Castles

- Browse good practices of Interreg Europe projects like Innocastle, SHARE and seek ways to adapt them to the built cultural heritage on your mountains.
- Improve access to castles, fortresses, and historical mansions in your region for persons with disabilities as requested by the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030. Discover how the Stará Ľubovňa castle (Slovakia) has become barrier-free thanks to innovation and technology.
- Develop creative strategies, communication campaigns and events to promote restored castles in your region. See how the Lethorad campaign has boosted the attractiveness of 13 restored

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[3] Projects to be implemented in rural mountain areas are eligible for calls under this destination.

castles and ruins the Prešov region (Slovakia), thanks to a strong partnership between NGOs and regional tourism board as well as to fun/engaging visitor contests.

- Learn how the Gúdar Javalambre county (Aragon, Spain) is combining the fruition of its fortified medieval heritage with stargazing and night sky watching to break the seasonality of tourism in a mountainous destination usually frequented for skiing.
- See how cross-border cooperation programmes such as Interreg Italia-Österreich are promoting castle restoration like in the case of the ongoing KTA_BAU_TR project, which addresses the ruins of the Lichtenberg Castle (Bozen Province, Italy) and the Nauders Fortress (Tyrol, Austria), aiming to contribute to cultural tourism, friendship and the dissemination of shared values.
- Consult the libraries of the RCF and FINCH Interreg Europe projects to learn about financing mechanisms as well as public-private partnerships that you could resort to for revitalising castles and fortresses on your mountains.

Thematic Trails

- Rediscover, manage and maintain thematic trails crossing mountains in your region.
- Exploit synergies between high-altitude religious sites such as monasteries on top of mountains and the natural environment which surrounds them. Valorise their cultural, spiritual and natural features through pilgrimage trails like it is done in the Neamt County (Romania).
- Develop long-distance hiking as a form of sustainable tourism based on the valorisation of the cultural and natural heritage in your region. Get insights from Alpannonia ® to see how long-distance hiking is promoted across the Kőszeg mountains and hills on the Austrian-Hungarian border.
- Learn about the Coffee Smuggling route in Marvão (Alto Alentejo, Portugal) and find out how your local history can be revitalised and celebrated thanks to a thematic trail.
- Consult the library of the RAMSAT project to find inspiration on the use of the natural and cultural heritage to develop adventure tourism products (including thematic trails) on your mountains.
- Navigate the keep.eu database and get access to an extraordinary amount information on EU-funded cooperation programmes implementing projects on the development of trails, such as Ecotour on the Ardennes, DOLOMIA on the Dolomites and the Wallachian Cultural Trail on the Carpathians.

Food

- Adopt a local and regional policy framework supportive of initiatives related to celebrating the food-and-wine tradition of your mountains.
- Discover everything about the 'Visit Prosecco Hills' business model (Veneto, Italy) and consider ways to adapt it for the purpose of valorising oenological experiences on hills and mountains in your region.
- Set up dedicated structures to valorise gastronomic specialties and rural traditions like it is done by the 'interpretation center' in Cozzano (South Corsica, France) and direct tourist flows from hotspot destinations to lesser known but equally fascinating mountain locations.
- Make sure local stakeholders (i.e. producers, farmers, cultural associations) with a clear interest in valorising wine-and-food value chains are involved in the co-design of initiatives, events and strategies. They possess know-how and skills to define creative solutions and turn mountain gastronomy into a strong pull factor for sustainable tourism.
- Explore the AlpFoodWay project which, in the context of Interreg Alpine Space, identified 150 food-related practices and started the process toward the UNESCO recognition of the Alpine food heritage.

Horizontal issue

- Get to know Euromontana and learn about their commitment to use and sustainably manage the cultural heritage as a driver for regional development in mountain regions.

- Look into the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage and discover the role of the cultural heritage for the implementation of macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region.
- Read the interview on the lessons learned within the CRinMA project and discover how partners intend to keep up their interregional cooperation efforts.
- Read the views of the FINCH lead partner on how to implement a plurality of mountain cultural heritage valorisation measures thanks to EU financial support and public-private partnerships.
- See how the ERDF and other funding instruments like Horizon Europe are expected to support regional efforts to valorise mountain cultural heritage through projects that will deliver on EU overarching policy objectives and enable green and digital transformations.

Sources for further information

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform information:
- Policy Brief – Sustainable Tourism: strategies to counteract overtourism
- Policy brief – Built cultural heritage
- Policy brief – Cultural routes in Europe
- Story – Off the beaten track: regional strategies boosting tourism through heritage
- Webinar – Cultural heritage and sustainable tourism
- Webinar – Cultural routes
- Webinar – Creative hubs: support infrastructures for creative and cultural industries
- Thematic workshop – Cultural heritage
- Online discussion – Tourism and Cultural and Creative Industries in the post COVID19 period

Other sources:
- EUSALP, The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (2021)
- EUSALP, Euro-alpine general states on mountain tourism in transition (2021)
- European Commission, Economic benefits of material cultural heritage in mountain areas (2019)
- European Commission, Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage in Europe (2014)
- European Commission, Mountain Areas in Europe: Analysis of mountain areas in EU member states, acceding and other European countries (2004)
- Messner Mountain Museums (website)
- European Parliament, resolution on the EU Agenda for Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas (2018)
- European Parliament, Study – Cohesion Policy in Mountain Regions (2016)
- European Parliament, Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas & Smart Villages
- UNESCO, Alpinism inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2019)
- UNESCO & German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Visitors count! Guidance for protected areas on the economic analysis of visitation (2021)
- Euromontana, Cultural routes: an e-learning tool to drive mountain areas on the path of sustainable tourism (2019)
- Euromontana, Vatra Dornei Declaration on 'Cultural heritage: an asset rooted in the territory synonymous with attractiveness and the future of our mountains!' (2018)
- Council of Europe, Routes4U – Feasibility study on a mountain heritage route in the Alpine region (2019)
- Council of Europe, Transnational heritage and cultural policies in the Alpine Region (Routes4U project)
- Council of Europe, Branding strategies for the Alpine Region (Routes4U project)

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform on Environment and resource efficiency

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Contact us to share your views on this policy brief!

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