

Interreg Europe project Cult-RInG – Cultural Routes as Investment for Growth and Jobs

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Cultural Routes as Investment for Growth and Jobs: EU Project is launched

A new interregional cooperation project has been launched, starting in January 2017, on 'Cultural Routes as Investment for Growth and Jobs' (Cult-RInG), co-funded by the EU European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the Interreg Europe programme.

The **Cult-RInG** project is led by the **Region of Central Macedonia** in Greece with five other destination authority partners: **Lazio Region** in Italy, **Region Västra Götaland** in Sweden, **Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Board** in Poland, **Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho** in Portugal and **Pafos Regional Board of Tourism** in Cyprus.

The **European Cultural Tourism Network** (ECTN) based in Brussels is an Advisory partner in charge of project communication matters.

Cult-RInG is the only project in the Interreg Europe programme that focuses on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

Cultural Routes (CRs) of the Council of Europe (CoE) have been established for the past 30 years, stressing the importance of European identities. The CoE's Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) on CRs currently comprises 33 routes contributing to protection and development of natural and cultural heritage. CRs are used as powerful tools to promote and preserve EU's shared and diverse cultural identities. CRs provide a better understanding of the history of Europe through interregional exchanges of people, ideas and cultures. The impacts of CRs on SMEs' innovation and competitiveness have showed that CRs are at the heart of cultural tourism development; they have achieved a noteworthy impact and progress, and shown remarkable potential for SME generation, networking, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and for promoting the image of Europe. CRs represent a source of innovation, creativity, small business creation, and cultural tourism products and services development. There is a common challenge, in terms of evaluating and exploiting the benefits of existing CRs and deploy them in the development of new CRs, so that Growth & Jobs targets can be met faster.

The overall objective of the Cult-RInG project is to highlight the value of investments in European Cultural Routes, in terms of their contribution to Growth & Jobs, with capitalisation of good practices, policy learning, policy implementation, development of new Cultural Routes, monitoring and capacity building. Main outputs are action plans on CR development and upgrading, with implementation and monitoring of improved policy instruments in six regions, communication and dissemination tools for policy

learning and capacity building, contribution to EU policies and EU2020 targets. The beneficiaries are regional authorities looking for capturing the benefits of CRs, both existing ones with greater visibility and new ones, NGOs, European Networks, EU institutions, international organisations and stakeholders.

The project sub-objectives are:

1. To exchange experience amongst the partners in established Good Practices on Cultural Routes performance and development, for sustainable cultural tourism, together with stakeholders.
2. To apply and transfer the results of exchange of experience on Cultural Routes and make them available to a wider audience of public authorities and stakeholders across Europe.
3. To exploit the results of exchange of experience with capitalisation, for integrated improvement of regional and local policies and strategies for Cultural Routes development.
4. To improve specific policy instruments in the partner regions, through policy learning and capacity building for improved governance and structural change, based on Cultural Routes.
5. To deliver Action Plans in partners' regions and monitor their implementation.
6. To identify, justify, propose, plan, implement and monitor appropriate Pilot Actions on Cultural Routes development and promotion (for Phase 2).
7. To contribute to the Policy Learning Platform of the programme for ensuring continuous EU wide policy learning on Cultural Routes.
8. To support, integrate and provide added value to initiatives at EU Level regarding influence on and mainstreaming to Structural and Investment Funds Programmes, regarding Cultural Routes.
9. To disseminate the Project's outputs and results beyond the interregional partnership and throughout the EU, and influence policy makers in other regions, EU Institutions (EP, CoR, EC), Council of Europe (CoE), institutes (EICR), international bodies (UNESCO, UNWTO) and relevant networks (European Heritage Alliance, Europa Nostra, ECTN, NECSTour) on the impacts and benefits of Cultural Routes.

The first phase of the project (2017-2018) will focus on exchange of experience and policy formulation resulting in action plans for implementation during the second phase (2019-2020).

The policy learning process will be organised with a focus on three specific themes related to CR impacts and development, viz:

- **Evaluation of existing CRs** (expost), in terms of socioeconomic development, direct and indirect benefits for Growth & Jobs. Six CoE certified CRs through the partner regions are selected: Via Francigena (Lazio Region, Italy), Saint Olav Ways (Vastra Gotaland region, Sweden), Via Regia (Podcarpatckie region, Poland), Santiago De Compostela (CIM Alto Minho, Portugal), Phoenicians (Pafos, Cyprus), Iter Vitis (Central Macedonia, Greece). The evaluation will follow CoE tools, criteria, principles and processes, which assess CRs in terms of stimulating cultural tourism, particularly in remote and lagging areas, and for the contribution they make to local communities

in terms of: economic development and employment via the creation of tourism SMEs implementation of a variety of innovative practices within such SMEs advancing cultural understanding of the local population and CR visitors through the preservation of heritage and traditions increasing the overall attractiveness of destinations retaining local populations and improving their quality of life raising awareness of a common cultural heritage via open cultural events and festivals, as well as by means of social media.

- **Capitalisation of established best practices** from previous projects (especially CHARTS and CERTESS completed projects in the INTERREG IVC programme).
- **Development of new interregional CRs** (based on the above evaluation and capitalization), such as St Paul's steps (through Pafos - Cyprus, Macedonia - Greece & Lazio, Rome - Italy).

The project approach includes Interregional Workshops, leading to the production of 'Policy Guidelines', staff exchanges in order to provide hands on experience and thus strengthen the policy lessons, study tour where key issues and good practices can be demonstrated on the ground for the benefit of policy makers, stakeholder engagement, action plans preparation and implementation monitoring including new cultural routes development and enhanced visibility of existing routes, with links to SMEs, host communities, sustainable cultural tourism development, and mainstreaming of the results into Operational Programmes and European Structural and Investment Funds.

All project events this year will be shared in the frame of the UN '**International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017**' and all project events next year will be included in the activities for the '**European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018**', in close cooperation with the European Institute of Cultural Routes, the Council of Europe and EU institutions.

The Cult-RInG project will conclude with an international conference, as a high level event, in the Spring of 2020.

Cult-RInG project is made possible by the financial support from the European Union – the Interreg Europe programme and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

- Ends -

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Notes to Editors:

1. Cult-RInG project Partnership:

Region of Central Macedonia, Greece (Lead Partner)
Lazio Region, Italy

www.pkm.gov.gr
<http://www.regione.lazio.it>

Region Vastra Gotaland, Sweden

Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Board, Poland

Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho

Pafos Regional Board of Tourism, Cyprus (Lead Partner)

European Cultural Tourism Network, Belgium

www.vastarvet.se

www.podkarpackie.travel

www.cim-altominho.pt

www.visitpafos.org.cy

www.culturaltourism-network.eu

2. **Interreg Europe programme** is one of the instruments for the implementation of the EU's **cohesion policy** and helps regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy. The Cooperation programme covers the whole territory of the European Union and Norway and Switzerland. The programme is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with a budget of €359 million for the 2014-2020 period. More information about the programme: www.interregeurope.eu .