

11 AVENUES. 11 PROPOSALS

TOURISM; CULTURAL HERITAGE

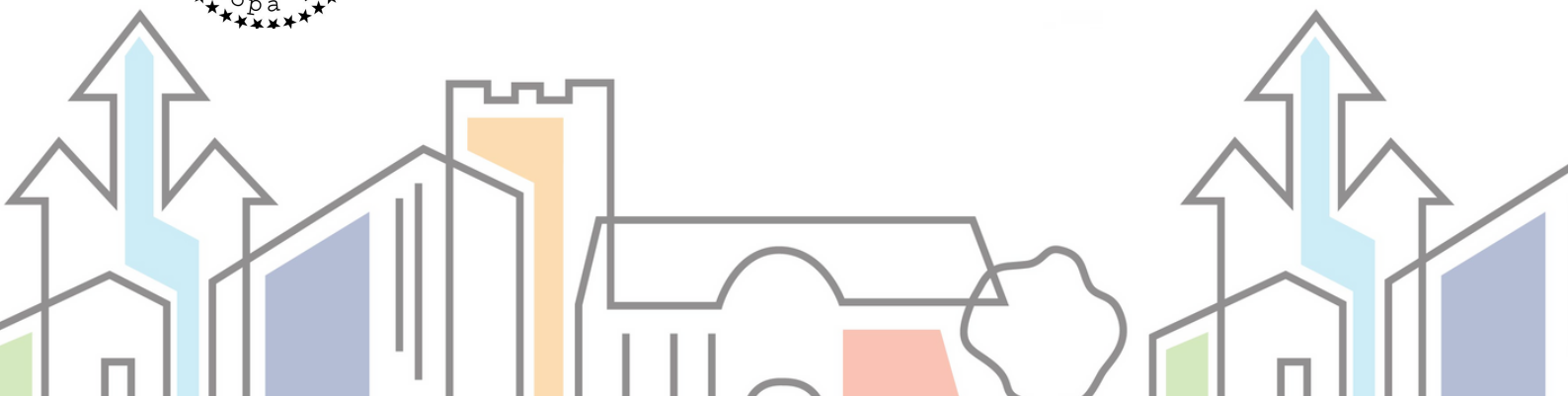
With the adoption of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 accompanied by a unique Recovery Plan conditions have been created to develop a more just, resilient and sustainable Europe. A robust and new cohesion policy is one of the cornerstones of this ambitious endeavour.

The 'Meet the Citizen 2.0' project of the European House covers 5 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CZ, HU, HR, RO and SK); all of them are massive beneficiaries of the EU Cohesion Fund. Our 11 working papers indicate possible avenues how to use effectively these financial instruments in remote, less developed areas of these countries highlighting not only the importance of EU assistance in daily life of citizens but simultaneously contributing to reducing the still significant gap between the citizens and the EU institutions.

Each paper of ours offers not only a brief analyses of an important aspect of cohesion policy in Central and Eastern Europe but proposes also practical solutions for the involvement of citizens, their organisations and other stakeholders in practising partnership for making cohesion policy a success.



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Civil actors need to have more opportunities to participate in tourism and related cultural activities in Central Europe. Successful implementation of new tourism strategies in the region requires new approaches to launching well-designed actions in partnership with a large number of local and regional stakeholders. Promoting tourism linked to preserving common historical and cultural heritage in the region is a central part of those actions.

Central Europe shows a diverse historic and cultural heritage marked among others by the Danube Limes (border) originating from the time of the Roman Empire, the emergence of Christian kingdoms and principalities, achievements in sciences, arts, language and literature which were taken into a common European cultural space in the Middle Ages and in the European Modern Age. On the other hand, political development led to division in the Central European region. Countries like Hungary, Poland, Romania, the former Czechoslovakia and East Germany were parts of the Eastern Bloc and regained their independence after 40 years with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. At the same time, countries in the region like Austria and West Germany followed the Western-type democratic and pluralistic order. With the accession to the European Union, historic and cultural diversities of the Central European territory have contributed to overcoming prejudices and hostile attitudes of societies.

Tourism and related cultural activities have an important role in this context therefore citizens and civil organisations from the region should be increasingly involved in sustaining this positive development. But what do tourism activities relating to historic and cultural heritage mean concretely? How can civil actors carry out such activities in the context of cross-border cooperation?

There are several best practices in the region which provide useful information. For example, the Danube Limes project has followed 900 kilometres of the middle reaches of the Danube, with sections of the Limes in Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. In these countries 152 archaeological sites have been mapped for those who want to discover fortresses, bastions and watchtowers raised by the Roman legions. The project was built on a broad partnership with cities, museums and other regional and local stakeholders.

A similar cooperation led to the Etnofolk project that aims to preserve the diverse Central European folk culture and traditions in the digital age by setting up a database (a collection of 135,000 images). The database has been linked to travelling exhibitions in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia, and has been used in education.



These examples show that successful tourism projects aimed at preserving the common historical and cultural heritage in the region include a variety of issue areas. Building broad partnerships, exchange of experiences, testing pilot products and the application of new approaches are crucial in this regard. All these coordinated actions should increase the involvement of local inhabitants including citizens and civil society organisations having knowledge and professional skills. It has also become clear that tourism activities aimed at preserving historic and cultural heritage cover cross-cutting issues linking culture, history, research, technology, nature protection, transport and several other fields. Therefore, civil actors who intend to participate more in tourism projects need to acquire knowledge and professional skills in one or more areas listed above.

Recently, the environment for making a dynamic civil contribution to boosting tourism and related cultural activities in Central Europe has been more challenging. The Covid-19 crisis led to lock-downs and has devastating effects on the tourism industry. In 2020 the tourism nights spent in Central Europe dropped between 80% and 95% depending on countries and regions. Many regions are hit by the crisis stronger than the European average, such as the coastal regions in the South and North of Central Europe as well as the Alpine regions, all of which are heavily dependent on tourism.

High unemployment, health safety measures, changing habits and attitudes of citizens; the consequences of the pandemic have a long-term impact on tourism development strategies funded by the EU within the 2021-2027 financial framework. All this may require the stakeholders to adopt new approaches to project generation in order to ensure the viability of future solutions for tourism in the region. In this line, there are proposals made by the OECD which are well suited for preparing tourism projects at transnational level:

- developing new health protocols for travel;
- restoring travellers' confidence with new safe and clean labels for the sector, digital applications in promoting campaigns for visitors and domestic tourism;
- preparing comprehensive tourism recovery plans.

Successful civil contributions need stable funding as well. Civil actions must be linked more to the EU Funds for use within the 2021-2027 financial framework.

The Union is encouraging applicants to combine simultaneously different EU funding sources (e.g., European Social Fund, Interreg, Erasmus+) when preparing their projects. Rural development – rural tourism.



Follow-up, proposals

Those civil organisations which intend to start tourism activities aimed at preserving historic and cultural heritage should foster partnerships with actors in creative industries. Tourism development strategies should be better connected to different domains such as history, culture, arts, research, rural and urban development etc. Exchange of best practices and training courses can help civil actors to take a more active role in the implementation of tourism projects. The tourism industry of the future must be resilient in facing external challenges. The impact of the Covid-19 crisis must be taken into account which may lead to a significant change and revision of tourism development strategies for Central Europe. In this context, the use of new civil approaches to tourism development in the region should be based among others on a constant follow-up of trends that can be found in the recommendations of the Union and those of other international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO and WTO.



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