IMPACTOUR
IMproving Sustainable Development Policies and PrActices to assess, diversify and foster Cultural TOURism in European regions and areas

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Final

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Abstract

This document presents policy recommendations to the European Commission (EC), derived from the experience of the IMPACTOUR Project and, in particular, the data-driven IMPACTOUR Tool for strategic management of Cultural Tourism impact in destinations. It addresses three main EU policy areas: Research and innovation, Cultural Heritage and Tourism. Recommendations from the project are directed to ongoing policy initiatives including: Horizon Europe, Culture, Media and Sport, Digital Transition, Green Transition, Tourism Resilience and Accessible Tourism.

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1 Executive Summary

This document provides a Policy Brief to the European Commission (EC), derived from the experience of the IMPACTOUR Project and, in particular, the resulting data-driven **IMPACTOUR Tool** for strategic management of Cultural Tourism impact in destinations.

Through a process of stakeholder consultations with 28 pilot destinations, IMPACTOUR has contributed knowledge, new methods and innovative technologies that are of value to three broad EU policy areas, namely: Research and Innovation, Cultural Heritage and Tourism.

Recommendations from the project are directed to ongoing policy programmes and initiatives including: Horizon Europe, Cultural Affairs, Cities and Regions, Digital Transition, Green Transition, Tourism Resilience and Accessible Tourism.

Noting the strong convergence of policy goals put forward by key Cultural Tourism actors including ICOMOS, the European Cultural Tourism Network, the European Heritage Alliance and the EC, there is a clear need for a concerted effort to support all parties with evidence-led decision support and innovative research. Engagement with research communities, practitioners and stakeholders at all levels will be critical to the implementation of EU policies for Cultural Tourism.

To this end, the IMPACTOUR project has nurtured collaboration between all six projects under the Horizon Call, "SOCIETAL CHALLENGES - Europe In A Changing World - Inclusive, Innovative And Reflective Societies", culminating in the EC/University of Leuven "International Conference on Cultural Tourism Advances" held in Brussels on 27-28 June 2003. At this pivotal event, the six Horizon projects proposed a CT Research Cluster, which would serve both as a resource of technical tools and as a "Hub" for policy discussions and practical cooperation for the CT Community in Europe. IMPACTOUR's Website and its established online Community are offered as a possible platform for this Hub, going forward.

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2 Policy Development in the IMPACTOUR Project

The main ambition of the IMPACTOUR project was to create an innovative and easy-to-use methodology and data-enabled tool to measure and assess the impact of Cultural Tourism (CT) on European economic and social development and to improve Europe's policies and practices on CT, strengthening its role as a sustainable driving force in the growth and economic development of European regions.

The IMPACTOUR Tool is designed to support CT policy-makers and planners at a destination level, giving them the possibility to assess the possible outcomes of strategic planning and management decisions, thanks to a data model fed by multiple CT destinations. While the IMPACTOUR Tool has a distinctly practical purpose, its use will support evidence-based policies and priorities for urban, rural and natural destinations as well as cultural routes. As such, the project enables policymakers and practitioners to apply innovative business models and financial strategies, leading to efficient use of private and public investments and structural funds.

The development of the IMPACTOUR Tool is based on a methodology that identifies appropriate strategies suitable for different Cultural Tourism categories, aiming to promote balanced development. This methodology identifies key success factors based on a comprehensive assessment of Cultural Tourism impact at regional, national, and European levels. It was developed by analysing successful and unsuccessful strategies and mapping information from various IMPACTOUR project pilots. The goal was to gather insights from best and failed practices and incorporate lessons learned into the Tool.

To create an effective decision making system that aligns with the initial context and replicability, the following categories were considered: governance strategies, business models and investments, local stakeholders' engagement and diversification, and marketing strategies. These key success factors help classify existing strategies and evaluate the impact of new policies.

Broadly speaking, the IMPACTOUR project targets three main EU policy areas that, together, can contribute to a vibrant, sustainable CT development in European destinations. These are:

- Research and innovation
- Cultural Heritage
- Tourism.

Throughout the project, several activities took place involving the research community, pilot cultural tourism destinations and CT professionals, providing important input to the direction of the project and contributing to its eventual policy outcomes. These are described in the following sections.

2.1 Policy-related Activities with Pilot Destinations

2.1.1 Webinars with researchers, pilots and practitioners

The second IMPACTOUR webinar took place after the first summer of Covid-19 "lockdown" on the 30th of November of 2020, with the online presence of the available Pilot sites. Common elements highlighted by the sites who presented their experience and plans were the following:

- Sites used lockdown to study alternative solutions and new strategies for summer time in particular.
- Sites are giving relevance to tourism which could exploit nature and open spaces.
- Visitors are becoming more and more local and domestic/nearby rather than international, so experiences are important to be offered to make them rediscover places they already know.
- Digital is explored as an alternative to in-person experiences but it can be expensive, and the extent to which it contributes to sustainability varies.
- Social media campaigns have been launched everywhere among the sites to reach tourists and promote values like safety, local goods, circular economy (including employment and supply chains), environmental sustainability and health within the context of the UN SDGs.

Topics were opened on the IMPACTOUR community website to further discuss these issues.

IMPACTOUR held a joint online Workshop with projects SPOT and SMARTCULTUR, followed by a Gamified Workshop with Pilot sites. At these hybrid events, pilots and stakeholders worked together on a challenge related to their typology (Ruralia, Itineralia, Urbanalia, Naturalia), being helped by different "wisemen" to focus on possible objectives/aspects/solutions (like accessibility, social awareness, co-creation, business plans, digitalisation), and imagining the location in 5 years, after having accomplished the agreed objective for the development of the location.

The work provided rich insights and direction for the elaboration of consensual CT strategies. Results were shared with the IMPACTOUR community in a PDF report.

2.1.2 IMPACTOUR Workshop on Cultural Tourism Destinations for All

The IMPACTOUR partner, ENAT, organised a Webinar for IMPACTOUR partners and Pilot Sites, with guests from other H2020 CT projects, on the subject of Accessible Tourism – policies, tools and methods highlighting objectives and methods for developing accessible cultural tourism destinations for all visitors. That is, destinations offering environments, facilities, services and experiences that are accessible to visitors with disabilities and/or other guests with specific access requirements.

Great importance was given to the topic of indicators related to accessibility for all, noting a range of good practices in data collection, (access audits, numbers of visitors with access requirements) as well as accessibility information that should be offered by Cultural Tourism Destinations. Accessibility indicators are elaborated in the international schemes, ETIS and GSTC. These, as well as ENAT's best practice resources, have contributed to the development of the IMPACTOUR Tool's accessibility indicators, within the social dimension of CT development strategies.

2.1.3 "ReDiscover Europe" Workshop

IMPACTOUR was a co-organiser of the "ReDiscover Europe" Workshop which took place on Europe Day 9th May 2021, with the participation of Portuguese and Slovenian Ministers of Culture and over 400 participants. It provided a unique opportunity to discuss the role of sustainable Cultural Tourism in today's Europe. Besides important keynote presentations, the workshop included panel debates with catalyst viewpoints from policy makers, scientific researchers, industry and cultural tourism practitioners:

Theme 1: Post-COVID cultural tourism – what have we learned, what might we do differently, an opportunity for Big / SMART Data?

Theme 2: People – accessibility, inclusion/exclusion, market needs

Theme 3: Technology – digital gateways, mobile interactive content / co-curation, dynamic modelling and tourism management.

At the end of the webinar, it was possible to share a [Consensus Declaration](#) which has been further circulated to stakeholders and policymakers around Europe.

The IMPACTOUR Consensus declaration is reproduced here, in full, as it provides an "anchor" for the major policy lines that are contained in this briefing report:

" Tourism, and in particular Cultural Tourism, was a growing sector, with 15% of annual growth and employing one out of ten people all around the world, until COVID-19 suddenly struck every sector in the global ecosystem. However, this was not the first time the tourism sector had been adversely affected. One can recall the 9/11 attacks, the SARS pandemic or the 2009 global economic crisis where the tourism sector always managed to come back stronger and healthier. It always managed to recover by being resilient, optimistic, daring and innovative.

Suddenly, the world went from 'over tourism' pressure to a 'no tourism' state… Now is the time to evolve towards a sustainable tourism balance. It is the time to promote a circular economy in touristic destinations, moving away from "take-make-disposal" models towards waste reducing and recycling models, locally reinvesting tourism revenues. The challenge of recovery is an opportunity to reset our defaults: we (all together) must rethink and adopt a communities-centric approach built on visitors-locals relationships and responsible infrastructure. In the future paradigm, relationships between visitors and locals will be far more important, and those relations start long before the actual visit…and hopefully will endure in time…

During the crisis, 90% of countries fully or partially closed down their UNESCO World Heritage properties, cutting off a major source of their income and revenue, according to Mechtild Rössler, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. In her keynote address she continued: 'The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on cultural tourism in Europe has been unprecedented. New models and approaches are required for a resilient and sustainable tourism recovery that supports communities, creates jobs, promotes culture, and protects heritage and its transmission.'

Culture has been known to be, at the same time, a driver and an enabler for sustainable development. For its cultural richness, this is particularly true in Europe, whether one considers global or local ecosystems. This most treasured resource is of utmost importance for the sustainable development of education, economy and tourism. Cultural Tourism emerges as the key driver to merge development, growth and protection of Cultural Heritage, whilst bringing a new local communities-centric approach. Every sustainable action should ensure good conservation practices, trustworthy heritage benefits and local economic support.

Cultural tourism sites are undergoing many existential threats, such as increased risk of looting and vandalism, business closure, lack of confidence, travel restrictions, economic recession and rising energy costs, and huge uncertainty about the future. In order to become resilient and sustainable, the Cultural Tourism sector must put its efforts into environmental conservation and development, reconstruction of degraded sites, responsible travelling and local communities' engagement.

As local communities are the primary beneficiaries of sustainable Cultural Tourism, it is of utmost important to develop their sense of natural and cultural pride, being themselves, not copying others. The International Monetary Fund expects a 6% recovery following the pandemic, after experienced a 3% downgrade. This recovery is already occurring locally. It should be noted that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism was six times larger than international tourism.

Data and the use of data is fundamental to improving information quality and exchange between sectors and between stakeholders inside the Cultural Tourism ecosystem. The information that can be extracted from so-called 'smart' data is of fundamental importance when evolving towards a collaborative economy framework. Multisector and multidisciplinary approaches involving local communities (Cultural Tourism providers), users (tourists) and connection intermediaries (digital platforms) are vital, enabling every decision to be supported by recorded evidence and analysis of good practices.

Local communities, in particular local SMEs, cooperatives or CCIs (Cultural and Creative Industries), can act as incubator sites of people-centric innovation and Cultural Tourism entrepreneurship. Acting locally and thinking globally, they will engage all in society – children and young people, women, senior community members and minorities – in order to reach out to new markets and tourists, creating new emotional bonds strongly founded on local cultural roots. This brand-new generation of entrepreneurs, based on resilient lifelong learning strategies, should be strongly supported by time-deep knowledge and cutting-edge technologies. Deep respect and engagement of local communities is of upmost importance because they can act as unique incubators of accessible people-centric innovation within Cultural Tourism, moving forward towards social inclusion and cohesion, thus promoting shared identity and unity.

The pandemic has increased, to levels never conceived before, the use of digital tools. Multidisciplinary approaches are needed in order to make digital Cultural Tourism an attractive and sustainable activity, providing tourists with new experiences, urging them to visit the sites and providing benefits by engaging positively with local communities and stakeholders. Cross-sectoral decision-making platforms, such as the envisaged IMPACTOUR Tool, will play a fundamental role in future business models.

Digital transformation is the basis for a new diversity paradigm, where new offers and markets will come into place. Cultural Tourism new markets and new tourist profiles will undoubtedly consider new indicators where quality outperforms quantity. Often forgotten, accessibility issues will provide huge benefits for the Cultural Tourism ecosystem. **"**

The three themes of the 2021 Europe Day workshop concluded:

- Data: the world is emerging smarter from COVID – no longer growth at any price; tourists are more informed before travelling; tourism should no longer be consumption but considerate;
- People: tourists are more holistic in their awareness of communities and climate impact; expectations of accessibility in all stages of tourism experiences are more holistic and inclusive; domestic tourism will feature more strongly in the road to recovery and future patterns of life;

- Technology: the legacy of COVID will be hybrid visits – digital complementing reality; dynamic management of capacity (quantitative) will enhance experiences (qualitative) for visitors and host communities.

This is no time for nuances. The IMPACTOUR partners and workshop participants have expressed a commitment to be optimistic, daring and innovative, to Rediscover Europe and to rethink Cultural Tourism, working towards a more resilient and sustainable future.

For the RECOVERY of Europe, cooperation of all of us is needed because we are

#StrongerTogether and **#UnitedInDiversity.**

2.1.4 Workshop on policy making, preparation and post-project life of projects' web portals - Lisbon and online as a hybrid event, 5th July 2022

IMPACTOUR coordinator, UNINOVA, hosted a workshop with partners from five other H2020 Research and Innovation projects, SPOT, SMARTCULTOUR, TEXTOUR, INCULTUM and BE.CULTOUR to share experiences and discuss ideas for applying ICT to Cultural Tourism (CT) development in the EU.

There was broad agreement that **the major issue is not basically ICT development but rather ICT implementation, which is hindered by poor internet access and lack of basic infrastructure, especially in rural and outlying areas, where many CT destination pilots are located.**

The ageing of the population and digital exclusion is especially prevalent in rural areas and viable solutions require carefully coordinated actions, involving a range of actors – SMEs, public authorities, utility companies and civil society - working together.

Key messages from the workshop included the following:

- It is important to understand that **tourism (and cultural tourism) is a TOOL and not an OBJECTIVE.**
- **Cultural tourism cannot be a replacement for other economic areas.** Local communities should receive a share of financial receipts (services payment) from tourism income in order to keep their traditional activities alive.
- **The focus should always be on the local communities**. Their sustainable development is mandatory, particularly if rural communities are considered.
- **Sustainable development of traditional local communities should benefit from the European projects' deployment** (through SMEs, preferably local ones).
- **Careful application of ICT and implementation of structural measures should go hand-in hand.**
- **Financial incentives to local authorities are also important. Structural funds should be used to develop basic infrastructure** as a means of developing considerate application and sustainability of ICT.

The meeting provided a list of conclusions for consideration by the European Commission when formulating future RTD and Innovation policies and programmes. These conclusions were grouped under a series of headings addressing: CT policy, (differentiated from Tourism policy), Europeanisation, Coordination of EC Research and Innovation, CT as a Sustainable

Development paradigm, Infrastructure, Implementation and Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation. (**See: Deliverable 7.9 Policy recommendations**)

The workshop participants concluded that a European hub to aggregate project results would be an interesting initiative. This hub would not be a simple repository of written deliverables but a true repository of products and outcomes of the projects. The creation of a cultural tourism research project cluster was also considered a valuable initiative in order to allow the transfer of results into the society. Furthermore, it is important that local governments increase the support to cultural tourism and not only tourism.

2.1.5 International Summit on Digital Transition, Madeira, 25th to 27th October 2022

UNINOVA, in cooperation with the Madeira Regional Government and other partners, organised an International Summit on Digital Transition. The summit covered several related topics, including Cybersecurity, e-learning, Big Data, Health, Energy/Smart Cities, Tourism and Cultural Tourism, Manufacturing, Maritime and more.

Keynote speeches by high-level participants from policy-making and practice were followed by thematic presentations, mostly dedicated to European projects, and panel discussions. The interventions considered EC guidelines, calls and future research and innovation policies.

Additionally, the IMPACTOUR partners who attended used the opportunity to further discuss the creation of a Cultural Tourism Cluster - an idea which emerged from a meeting held by the coordination of the six running cultural tourism H2020 projects in July 2022 (see above 2.1.4).

3 IMPACTOUR's contribution to EU Policies and Initiatives

3.1 Introduction

Tourism is an extremely heterogeneous and multi-facetted activity involving a wide range of actors and stakeholders across all three sectors. The tourism product is a complex mix of tangible resources (e.g. buildings, beaches, heritage sites), and of goods and services produced by different sectors (hospitality, transport, attractions, etc.) that are directly related to serving visitors at the destination. In addition, tourism activities generate costs and benefits that are not only borne and enjoyed by the tourism operators which are directly involved in them but also by the destination as a whole, including residents, community organisations and local businesses.

A study commissioned by the European Parliament noted that: *"The vision of tourism as a complex system of actors and actions translates into a clear difficulty in defining coherent and well-integrated tourism policies. Potentially almost all the proposals submitted by different activity/policy areas of the EU (environment, transport, culture, information society, taxation, etc.) can affect tourism directly or indirectly. They can impact on the development of a coherent EU tourism approach aiming at competitiveness and sustainability of the sector, in accordance with the goals of the renewed Lisbon Strategy."*

European Parliament Working Paper, 2007.[1]

Tourism policies can generally be assigned to one of two main groups:

Group 1: Policies not directly intended for tourism that act on some or many elements of the tourism system (heritage, environment, etc.) with the aim of developing and protecting that element in itself or as a part of a policy addressing a sector that is different from tourism. For example, travel restrictions were introduced to help prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus in 2020 and the following years, which had a major, negative economic and social impact on the travel and tourism sectors.

Group 2: Policies specifically developed for tourism which include policies acting on some elements of the tourism system (e.g. cultural heritage sites and monuments) implicitly or explicitly, aiming at affecting the tourism system. An example of this is providing EU Structural Funds to make accessibility improvements for persons with disabilities at heritage sites in order to ensure inclusive access to tourism.

Reflecting on the inherent complexity in policymaking for tourism, the IMPACTOUR project offers a number of key recommendations in several policy areas, based on learning outcomes from establishing the data-driven IMPACTOUR Tool for cultural tourism management based on indicators across 28 European destinations.

This policy brief aims to provide recommendations for sustainable cultural tourism development, focusing on three main areas: Research and Innovation, Cultural Heritage and Tourism.

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[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL-TRAN_NT(2007)389603

3.2 Research and Innovation

3.2.1 Establishing a Cultural Tourism Research-Innovation Cluster

To foster innovation in cultural tourism, the establishment of a Cultural Tourism Research-Innovation Cluster is recommended. This cluster will serve as a platform to aggregate developed tools, methods, and research efforts, allowing for better coordination and synergy among stakeholders. It is important to include non-research partners and require credible business plans to bridge the gap between research and practical implementation. Additionally, providing clear information on funding possibilities and guidelines for optimal usage will support innovation in the sector.

3.2.2 Promoting Smart Investment and Information Dissemination

Investment in research and innovation is crucial for the sustainable development of the cultural tourism sector. To encourage smart investment, it is necessary to provide stakeholders with clear and accurate information on funding opportunities and guidelines. By facilitating access to funding and promoting transparency, stakeholders can make informed decisions and allocate resources effectively, leading to innovative and sustainable cultural tourism practices.

The European Commission's [Guide on EU funding for tourism](#) compiled by DG GROW provides a comprehensive overview of financial support for smart investments.

3.2.3 Enhancing Data Collection and Analysis

Accurate data collection and analysis are fundamental for evidence-based policy-making and sustainable cultural tourism development. The EU should support research efforts to collect comprehensive data on visitor behaviour, tourism impacts, and cultural heritage management. Data-based tools can inform decision-making processes, enable targeted interventions, and facilitate monitoring and evaluation of sustainability objectives.

At the European level, a promising instrument for the collection and the analysis of tourism related data is the [European Tourism Dashboard](#), active since 2022.

3.3 Cultural Heritage

3.3.1 Fostering Community Engagement and Collaboration

In pursuit of the regeneration of European industries after the COVID pandemic, the EU-level [Tourism Transition Pathway](#) initiative was launched in 2021 by the EC, for which stakeholders have been called to send pledges to co-create the Tourism sector of tomorrow, in 27 highlighted areas.

In this co-creation process, **active engagement and collaboration with heritage communities and multi-stakeholder networks** are seen as vital mechanisms for sustainable cultural tourism development. Sector actors concur that the EU should support participative methodologies that foster mutual understanding and collaboration among diverse actors. By actively involving local communities, policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs and activists, cultural tourism can be developed in a way that respects local values, generates inclusive benefits and fosters a sense of community ownership.

A deeper national and regional level of engagement could be embraced by the many stakeholders (including destinations and civil society organisations) who participated in the collection of pledges.

3.3.2 Supporting Green Certifications and Circular Procurement

To drive sustainability in cultural tourism, it is crucial to support green certifications and circular procurement practices. Green certifications can guide tourists in making sustainable choices, while circular economy procurement ensures that goods and services are sourced sustainably, minimizing energy consumption / carbon impact and waste generation. By incentivising and promoting these practices, the EU can accelerate the transition towards a circular and sustainable cultural tourism sector. The Europa Nostra policy report, European Cultural Heritage Green Paper 2021 demonstrates the relevance of cultural heritage for achieving the ambitious goals of the European Green Deal, launched by the European Commission to make Europe the first carbon-free continent by 2050.

Two important initiatives of the EU Commission tied to these aspects are:

The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, with its publications

The Ecolabel for tourist friendly tourist accommodations

3.3.3 Strengthening Cross-Border Cooperation and Exchange

Cross-border cooperation and exchange are vital for sustainable cultural tourism development. The EU should facilitate collaborations between neighbouring regions and countries, promoting joint marketing initiatives, cross-border itineraries, and shared experiences. By fostering cooperation, cultural tourism can transcend national boundaries, create unique cross-cultural experiences, and encourage regional development.

In this respect, the Committee of Regions has promoted the new European Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance, launched in 2020.

COSME/EISMEA have often highlighted and promoted transnational cultural tourism and itineraries through this programme.

3.3.4 Enhancing Infrastructure for Sustainable Cultural Tourism

Investments in infrastructure play a vital role in supporting sustainable cultural tourism. It is essential to develop high-quality infrastructure, including digital infrastructure and sustainable mobility systems. By integrating digital technologies, destinations can enhance visitor experiences (for advance planning and onsite), promote cultural heritage, and streamline tourism operations. Furthermore, adopting circularity strategies in accommodation, food chains, transport, energy, and water management will contribute to a more sustainable and resource-efficient cultural tourism sector.

The EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism text, adopted by European Parliament on the 25 March 2021, highlights the needs for funding and enhancing sustainable transport infrastructures (comprising road transport, trains, ports and marinas), while it underlines the importance of culture and cultural heritage in European tourism and stresses the need to support the tourism industry in implementing the principles of the circular economy.

3.3.5 Europeanization: Leveraging European Routes and Education

European routes and the Erasmus program have been successful initiatives in promoting Europeanization and education in cultural tourism. Building on these examples, further

efforts should be made to elevate European routes and the Erasmus program through joint ticketing systems. This will enhance the Europeanization of cultural tourism and facilitate educational experiences for students, contributing to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Europe's cultural heritage.

In this regard, initiatives like DiscoverEU (an action of the Erasmus+ programme that gives 18 year old citizens and above the opportunity to discover Europe through learning experiences, travelling predominantly by rail, explore Europe's diversity, learn about its cultural heritage and history, and connect with people from all over the continent) are going in the envisaged direction.

3.4 Tourism Policies and Associated EU initiatives

3.4.1 Transforming Tourism into a Full-Value Policy Sector

The recognition of tourism as a full-value policy sector is crucial for its effective development. It is recommended that tourism be acknowledged in important EU documents and programs such as the Green Deal and Structural Development Funds. By providing specific recognition, tourism can receive the necessary attention, resources, and support to drive sustainable cultural tourism development.

3.4.2 Tourism Transition Pathway

Led by DG Grow (Tourism), the Tourism Transition Pathway is the first EU strategy towards the green and digital transition of EU industry and it is intended to be the key framework for tourism development in the next years. It involves a process of industrial co-creation and co-implementation with commitments by public and private stakeholders across sectors and levels in the tourism ecosystem. Within the themes of **green and digital transition** and **resilience**, the IMPACTOUR project has pointed to concrete ways of improving:

- data analytics and real-time experience management
- digital never-ending tourism and virtual experiences
- digital empowerment and knowledge of tourism providers and consumers
- destination governance for supporting well-being for all
- adaptive capacity for a changing world of tourism
- supporting equity, accessibility and social impacts of tourism.

IMPACTOUR partners have given their support to work towards these policy objectives, as shown in the sets of pledges and commitments from stakeholders.

3.4.3 Promoting Inclusive and Accessible Tourism

EU Tourism policy highlights the need for equitable access to tourism, both as a human right and as a commercial opportunity. It is increasingly recognised that making tourism accessible for persons with disabilities, older persons and others with specific access requirements benefits over 150 million people with access needs in Europe (ENAT). Accessibility measures are required in tourism infrastructure and services, accessibility of information at destinations or on the web, information about the accessibility of tourism services, the need for accessible accommodation, and accessibility of new forms of tourism (e.g. ecological tourism).

The IMPACTOUR project outputs can contribute to several EU policies and initiatives that relate to tourism accessibility:

- The New European Bauhaus initiative is a broad-based, muti-disciplinary EU initiative for creating buildings and environments that are sustainable, aesthetically beautiful and accessible for all. This initiative, although it is not a funding programme has fostered a large number of innovative EU projects funded through Structural Funds, Horizon and other programmes. It can support CT destinations in developing accessible heritage venues through networking and new partnerships.
- The European Accessibility Act sets out requirements applicable to all digital consumer services with a view to ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness.
- The AccessibleEU Resource Centre was launched by the European Commission in 2023, with the purpose of supporting the implementation of EU policies and legislation on accessibility for persons with disabilities in all 27 Member States.

Developing innovative solutions can also enhance the tourism experience of persons with disabilities and ensure accessibility. For example, developing accessible virtual reality and augmented reality solutions, which provide alternative ways to access natural and cultural sites. It also enables family or group visits where some members have access limitations (physical and/or mental). Furthermore, cultural (tourism) visits can offer therapeutic value through sensory experiences, including interactives and engagement activities, and use of storytelling and memory recollection, for example for persons with Alzheimer's disease.

Making tourism accessible also brings advantages to the tourism ecosystem as it can increase the potential demand, promote off-season tourism and balance seasonality effects, as well as improve the ecosystem's reputation.

3.4.4 European Capitals of Culture

The EU Commission supports the European Capitals of Culture under the Treaty on European Union (TEU) to "respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and […] ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced' (Article 3 TEU)". Furthermore, Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) recognises that the EU's competences in the field of culture are to "carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States".

European cities (of all sizes) can access and use the resources of IMPACTOUR, and the data management Tool in particular, to enhance their competences in managing their cultural assets, with a view to controlling visitor flows and enhancing the quality of the visitor experience. IMPACTOUR has leveraged the experiences of the destination pilots of Matera, Italy, which was EU Cultural Capital (2018), and Košice (2013).

3.4.5 Smart Tourism: Capitals of Europe and Green Pioneer

The European Commission has established two recognition initiatives under the umbrella of "Smart Tourism", with competitions to promote smart and sustainable tourism in the EU, network and strengthen destinations, and facilitate the exchange of best practices.

The European Capital of Smart Tourism recognises outstanding achievements by European cities as tourism destinations in four categories: sustainability, accessibility, digitalisation as well as cultural heritage and creativity.

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism, successor of the European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) competition, rewards smaller destinations that have implemented successful strategies to boost sustainable tourism through green transition practices.

These initiatives support the spread of best practices in Smart Tourism destinations, where the practical use of data is evidenced in tourism offers, tourism management and the sustainable preservation and development of cultural heritage. Again, the results of the IMPACTOUR can contribute to the smart tourism ambitions of destinations, through evidence-based methods and tools, reinforcing strategies which can optimise visitor flows and support holistic planning of destinations, to benefit both visitors and local communities.

3.4.6 ICOMOS, ECTN and European Heritage Alliance Charters

ICOMOS – the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and ECTN – The European Cultural Tourism Network have stated their increasing concerns about the degradation of cultural heritage along with social, ethical, cultural, environmental and economic rights issues associated with tourism. ICOMOS (2022) "…calls for a charter that advocates responsible and diversified cultural tourism development and management contributing to cultural heritage preservation; community empowerment, social resilience and wellbeing; and a healthy global environment."

The objectives of the ICOMOS Charter of 2022 are:

- "Objective 1 - To place the protection of cultural heritage and community rights at the heart of cultural heritage tourism policy and projects, by providing principles that will inform responsible tourism planning and management for cultural heritage protection, community resilience and adaptation;
- Objective 2 - To promote stakeholder collaboration and participatory governance in the stewardship of cultural heritage and management of tourism, applying a people-centred and rights-based approach, emphasizing access, education and enjoyment;
- Objective 3 - To guide cultural heritage and tourism management in supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Action policy."

The ICOMOS Charter goes on to emphasise "…principles for regenerative tourism destination management that is conscious of heritage values, as well as their vulnerability and potential. It seeks the fair, ethical and equitable distribution of tourism benefits to and within host communities, contributing towards poverty alleviation. The Charter promotes the ethical governance of cultural heritage and tourism…".

The ICOMOS Charter further underlines that**…"There is a need and opportunity to recalibrate the perpetual economic growth-based approach to tourism, recognizing and mitigating its unsustainable aspects.** [Original emphasis].

It continues: "Any cultural tourism strategy must accept that cultural heritage protection, social responsibility and 'sustainability' are not merely options or brand attributes, but rather necessary commitments and, in fact, a competitiveness asset. In order to remain successful and sustainable in the long term, cultural tourism proponents must put this commitment into practice and become a force that supports community resilience, responsible consumption and production, human rights, gender equality, climate action, and environmental and cultural heritage conservation."

These statements confirm the importance of the aims and objectives of IMPACTOUR, and the work carried out to monitor and moderate the impact of visitors on CT sites and destinations.

In addition, the ECTN and partners in the European Heritage Alliance have produced numerous papers, reports and declarations in recent years which highlight the need for a re-balancing of the position of cultural heritage tourism vis-à-vis European and global policies for sustainable development, protection of CT assets, visitor accessibility and community involvement in visibility and use of cultural heritage.

The IMPACTOUR project has worked to deliver tools and methods that align strongly with the principles and proposals put forward by these organisations thus giving substance to the actions that are called for, in particular regarding evidence-based CT management and decision-making, through holistic, co-creation perspectives. The centrality of the IMPACTOUR project's outputs for supporting CT policy implementation was confirmed by key actors, including ICOMOS and ECTN at the final project conference, "International Conference on Cultural Tourism Advances" held in Brussels, 27-28 June 2023.

Indeed, the contributions of all six concurrent Horizon CT projects[2] at the University of Leuven conference led to suggestions from the audience and panel speakers for further concertation of efforts by the participating researchers, beyond the project implementation periods.

Answering to these proposals, IMPACTOUR confirmed that its partners intend to maintain the IMPACTOUR Community Website as a possible Research-Innovation Cluster "Hub" for all six projects (and other CT stakeholders), and invited their collaboration in the joint exploitation of all the tools developed under the Horizon Call, "SOCIETAL CHALLENGES - Europe In A Changing World - Inclusive, Innovative And Reflective Societies".

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[2] SPOT, IMPACTOUR, CULTOUR, TeXTOUR, INCULTUM, SmartCulTour.

4 Conclusions

This policy brief has provided recommendations for sustainable Cultural Tourism development in Europe based on the experience of the IMPACTOUR project and its tangible results in the form of policy-development workshops, reports and the data-driven IMPACTOUR Tool. By considering the areas of EU policy and initiatives related to research and innovation, Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Europe can leverage its Cultural Heritage to create thriving, responsible and sustainable Cultural Tourism destinations.

It is imperative to recognise tourism as a full-value policy sector, establish a Cultural Tourism Research Cluster, invest in sustainable infrastructure, support circularity strategies, engage active heritage communities and stakeholders, and prioritise research and innovation. By implementing these recommendations, Europe can lead the way in sustainable cultural tourism and foster a sense of European identity and togetherness.

5 References

At month 38 of the project, four scientific articles related to the IMPACTOUR project have been published and one is under review. The scientific articles are as follows:

1. João Martins (Project Coordinator) participated in the special Issue on: A European Perspective on Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Sustainable Development and Regional Resilience of the journal "Sustainability". The article, Innovative Tools for Tourism and Cultural Tourism Impact Assessment by IMPACTOUR colleagues has been published in the scientific journal, *Sustainability* 2020, *12* (18), 7470; https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187470 The article draws on an original research study of 15 cultural tourism destinations in Europe, conducted in 2020 within the framework of the H2020 project, IMPACTOUR, co-funded by the European Union.

2. Tarmo Kalvet & Maarja Olesk & Marek Tiits & Janika Raun, 2020. "Innovative Tools for Tourism and Cultural Tourism Impact Assessment," Sustainability, MDPI, vol. 12(18), pages 1-30, September.

3. Ivor Ambrose and Katerina Papamichail, "Information Tools for Cultural Tourism Destinations: Managing Accessibility", in ToSEE – Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe, Vol. 6, pp. 25-37, 2021.

4. Pedro Pereira, João Martins, Graham Bell, Tarmo Kalvet, Shabnam Pasandideh, "COVID-19 and mitigation strategies: the IMPACTOUR Pilots Community perspective". In: ToSEE – Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe, Vol. 6, pp. 587-606, 2021.

IMPACTOUR partner, TECNALIA has submitted the following article which is under review by the Editor to be published in the Journal of Tourism Destination and Marketing and Management:

5. Mikel Zubiaga de la Cal, Alessandra Gandini, "Sustainable Cultural Tourism: Proposal for a Comparative Indicator-based Framework" https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-destination-marketing-and-management

Additional scientific papers were delivered at the joint **"International Conference on Cultural Tourism Advances",** Brussels, 27-28th June 2023, organised by the European Research Executive Agency together with six Horizon projects, IMPACTOUR, SMARTCULTOUR, SPOT, TEXTOUR, INCULTUM and Be.CULTOUR, within which can be listed:

6. Joao Martins, Pedro Pereira, Shabnam Pasandideh, Kashyap Raiyani, Tarmo Kalvet, Mikel Zubiaga De La Cal and Alessandra Gandini; "Redefining Cultural Tourism Leadership: Innovative Approach and Tool"; International Conference on Cultural Tourism Advances, 27-28th June 2023; KU Leuven, Belgium

7. Shabnam Pasandideh, João Martins, Pedro Pereira, Alessandra Gandini, Mikel Zubiaga De La Cal, Tarmo Kalvet, Tatjana Koor, Amaia Sopelana and Amaia Lopez

de Aguileta; "Co-Creation Method for Fostering Cultural Tourism Impact"; International Conference on Cultural Tourism Advances, 27-28th June 2023; KU Leuven, Belgium.

These scientific papers, presented on Day 1 of the conference, are planned for publication by Springer, reflecting the breakthroughs and future perspectives of Cultural Tourism.

6 Annex A: List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

Acronym/ Abbreviation	Description
CT	Cultural Tourism
EC	European Commission
ECTN	European Cultural Tourism Network
ENAT	European Network for Accessible Tourism asbl.
EP	European Parliament
ETIS	European Tourism Information System
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
ICOMOS	International Council of Monuments and Sites
IMPACTOUR	IMproving Sustainable Development Policies and PrActices to assess, diversify and foster Cultural TOURism in European regions and areas
TEU	Treaty on the European Union