RURITAGE – Heritage for Rural Regeneration

Introduction

The transdisciplinary RURITAGE project turns rural areas into laboratories to show how natural and cultural heritage can act as engines for regeneration. It aims to use the expertise of a range of disciplines and professions to promote change towards sustainable development in real-life environments.

Keywords

Cultural heritage, natural heritage, (landscape) architecture, rural planning, urban sociology, digital humanities, geo-information-system techniques, landscape & ecosystem services, natural history, evaluation & monitoring, business models and tools, social innovation graphic & game design, systems solutions

Summary

This transdisciplinary project on rural regeneration is funded by the Innovation Action funding scheme of Horizon 2020. Coordinated by architects, the consortium consists of 38 partners from 19 countries, and includes research organisations, education establishments, private for-profit entities, and public bodies. The partners analysed the lessons learnt from already established natural and cultural heritage sites, identified potential new sites, and co-developed innovative heritage-led regeneration plans for the six chosen replication sites. They also aim to foster networking, mobilise investments, and increase local employment.

> **Rural areas all over the world are facing chronic economic, social and environmental problems. This is resulting in unemployment, disengagement, depopulation, marginalisation or loss of cultural, biological and landscape diversity... The RURITAGE project suggests that the challenges of rural areas can be overturned by utilizing heritage potential.**
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> Ruritage website

The project team understands cultural and natural heritage as part of a "broader definition of cultural ecosystem services", providing both tangible and intangible benefits to local residents and visitors. The project identified six key topics for further work (so-called systemic innovation areas): art and festivals, integrated landscape management, migration, pilgrimages, resilience and sustainable local food production. Arts and Humanities disciplines were involved in the co-design of the research and contributed to the identification of these systemic innovation

areas as well as additional cross-cutting themes[1]. In addition, 'Arts and festivals' are also examined as a means for societal change:

> " Art and festivals are... becoming increasingly popular in rural areas as a means to revitalize local communities. Making arts more accessible to rural communities... has an impact that goes well beyond what can be measured in economic terms. By enabling participants of all ages and abilities to take part in artistic activities, RURITAGE generates new cultural capital and further increases creativity. Successful reinforcement of rural societies through arts creates inclusion through awareness of diverse cultures and identities.

> Ruritage website

Project outputs are varied: An online Replication Toolbox provides a collection of good practices and lessons learned, a Decision Support System, a serious game for stakeholder involvement, and a step-by-step replication guide. A Digital Rural Heritage Hub has been developed to facilitate knowledge exchange. Six co-developed innovative heritage-led regeneration plans support regeneration in the replication cases. In addition, a RURITAGE Atlas tool has been created that enables the integration of various sources into a virtual map, and the analysis of interactions between them. Finally, a webinar series, and several academic and policy-related publications have also been produced.

Beyond these digital outputs, physical rural heritage hubs were established:

> " The hub is constituted by a community of local stakeholders as well as a physical meeting place where co-creation activities take place... It is thereby a living lab where local stakeholders and inhabitants cooperate for developing new heritage-led regeneration strategies for their territory.

> Ruritage website

Collaborative monitoring and evaluation procedures are also important components of the project. These aim to collect new evidence for rural regeneration innovations. A methodology for Community-based Heritage Management and Planning (CHMP) and a set of evaluation criteria for changes in community capital[2] were negotiated in a group decision process that allowed for different weightings across the cases (Olmedo and Barrientos 2019). Dashboards are used to monitor, compare and learn from the replicator cases, and at the time of writing (April 2021), the Global Performance Indicator of community capital

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[1] E.g. cultural ecosystem services, mental wellbeing, cultural and natural heritage safeguarding, appreciation and interpretation

[2] Community capitals comprise cultural, natural, built, social, human, and financial capitals.

https://www.shapeid.eu

indicates improvements of 17-30% in the replication sites compared to the baseline levels (ruritage ecosystems website).

To sum up, this architecture-led, transdisciplinary project illustrates how a joint framework (e.g. systems innovation areas, cross-cutting themes, community capital types) and joint intellectual tools (for transferring lessons learnt on replication cases, for participatory planning, for monitoring) were developed to guide group decision processes. Monitoring and evaluation criteria have also been thoroughly negotiated and are shared for learning and monitoring purposes. Furthermore, the easy-to-read website showcases that a common language has been found to effectively communicate complex issues.

Importantly, the project is an example of *arts in research,* – drawing on the AHSS-specific expertise of contextual knowledge for policy application[3] – as well as *research about arts* – when considering arts and festivals as one of the systemic innovation areas.

Further Resources

- [RURITAGE project website](#)

- [RURITAGE on cordis](#)

- Olmedo, David; Barrientos, Francisco (2019): [Monitoring Programme and Procedures](#). D4.2.

- [Dashboards on RURITAGE ecosystems website](#)

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[3] AHSS knowledge can facilitate the scaling of policy to local levels based on a nuanced understanding of regional and local issues and stakeholder participation.