

BEYOND THE WALLS

PROJECTS SHAPING HERITAGE AND COMMUNITIES



Public Cultural Institution Fortress of Culture Šibenik

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Fortress of Culture Šibenik is a public cultural institution established by the City of Šibenik (HR) in 2016. Its mandate is to manage the city’s revitalised fortification system and ensure the sustainable preservation and use of cultural heritage. The institution manages St. Michael’s Fortress, Barone Fortress and St. John’s Fortress, alongside the House of Art Arsen (a mixed-arts venue) and the Croatian Coral Center on the island of Zlarin. St. Michael’s Fortress is a cultural attraction with a unique open-air summer stage on the Adriatic coast. Barone Fortress is a boutique location with the most beautiful view of the city of Šibenik and its surroundings. St. John’s Fortress, the largest of the three fortifications, has an educational centre for cultural and creative industries within its walls. House of Art Arsen is a mixed-arts venue - a house for all arts, promoting independent art and new talents. The Croatian Coral Center Zlarin is a cultural centre dedicated to reviving and preserving the heritage of the island community of Zlarin.

Fortress of Culture Šibenik promotes Croatian and European culture through a contemporary approach to sustainable management of cultural sites, programme production, heritage research and interpretation, community engagement, and education. In less than a single decade of existence, the institution has successfully transformed five landmarks - sites that until 2014 were largely undervalued and lacked a public function - into central spaces of urban regeneration and cultural activity. As a result, the institution has gained national and international recognition within the cultural and creative industries.

Today, the designated heritage sites and venues function as dynamic cultural hubs that foster local development, positioning Šibenik as a vibrant urban environment attractive not only to local and international visitors, but also to entrepreneurs and investors. By integrating heritage preservation with economic stimulation, social engagement and sustainability goals, the institution helps deliver the city’s development strategy. The management model of the For-

treass of Culture Šibenik is widely acknowledged for its role in transforming the local environment into a dynamic cultural hub. On the basis of these achievements, the institution has received several national and European awards and has been recognised at European level as an example of good practice in cultural heritage management.

Sustainability is integrated into day-to-day operations of the Fortress of Culture Šibenik. This is reflected in its contribution to the local economy by attracting visitors and supporting local businesses, as well as by encouraging community participation through initiatives such as the Friends Club loyalty programme, which involves residents in cultural activities and decision-making processes. The institution also implements targeted projects and events aimed at raising awareness of environmental protection. Overall, its activities attract nearly 200,000 visitors annually across the five cultural infrastructures under its management, while generating more than 500 diverse cultural events designed for audiences of all ages. By combining environmental sustainability with economic vitality and social inclusion, the institution delivers multifaceted impacts that benefit both the community and the environment, while also broadening access to cultural participation. These outcomes are further supported by a diverse offer of educational programmes, ongoing investment in staff development and initiatives dedicated to educating citizens and cultural stakeholders at both local and regional levels. At the European level, the institution actively participates in research, knowledge exchange, EU - funded projects and collaborative networks across the cultural and heritage sectors.

Thanks to all these activities, Fortress of Culture Šibenik has become a widely recognised example of good practice in the management of cultural and creative sector organisations. For further information on its practices, please consult the URBACT good practices catalogue¹ and/or the Cultural Heritage in Action good practices catalogue².

¹ <https://urbact.eu/good-practices/fortress-culture>
² <https://culturalheritageinaction.eu/transforming-fortresses-into-a-major-cultural-hotspot>

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[Barone Fortress](#)
[House of Art Arsen](#)
[Croatian Coral Center Zlarin](#)



Introductions

Heritage as a Driver of Development

When Fortress of Culture Šibenik began its development journey, our task extended far beyond managing revitalised monuments. Our ambition was to create a vibrant, open and contemporary cultural institution—one that preserves heritage by giving it renewed purpose in the life of the city, its residents and its visitors.

The projects presented in this publication have played an important role in turning that vision into reality. They have enabled us to improve infrastructure, introduce new digital content, develop cultural and educational programmes, increase the accessibility of our sites and embed sustainability into our everyday operations. More importantly, they have created opportunities for meaningful cooperation with the local community and dozens of partners from Croatia, across Europe and beyond.

Behind every contracted project lie months of preparation, strategic thinking and collective effort. Their achievements cannot therefore be measured solely in financial terms or numerical indicators. They are reflected in the knowledge and skills of our employees, the trust of our partners, new audience experiences and the Institution's ability to recognise change and respond to it responsibly and innovatively.

This publication demonstrates what can be achieved when a clear development vision is supported by a professional, dedicated and creative team. At the same time, it reminds us that development is never a completed process. Every successful project raises new questions, opens new opportunities and brings renewed responsibility towards the heritage entrusted to our care.

Gorana Barišić Bačelić
 Director of Fortress of Culture Šibenik

Ideas That Grow Through Cooperation

Every project presented in this publication began with the recognition of a genuine need—within our sites, among our audiences, in the local community or in the everyday work of cultural institutions. The journey from an initial idea to contracting and implementation is both long and demanding. Yet it is precisely through this process that partnerships are formed, knowledge is exchanged and solutions capable of creating lasting change take shape.

Over the years, we have built a department that sees projects not merely as a source of funding, but as opportunities for learning, research and development. Together with colleagues across the Institution and partners from Croatia and abroad, we have developed projects addressing the digital interpretation of heritage, sustainable tourism, participatory governance, environmental responsibility, audience development and social inclusion. We are particularly proud of the initiatives that have grown beyond individual project activities to become lasting programmes and international networks.

The results presented in this publication were made possible by the trust, expertise and commitment of many people. They confirm that a successful project is more than a set of activities and indicators: it is a shared process that brings people together around a clear idea and continues to create value long after the funding period has ended.

I hope this publication will serve both as a record of the journey we have taken and as an invitation to new partnerships, bold ideas and projects that will continue to open cultural heritage to people and to the future.

Đurđa Vrljević Šarić
 Head of the International Cooperation and Projects Department

Heritage, Partnerships and Impact

Projects at a Glance

Since 2017, Fortress of Culture Šibenik has participated in the preparation and implementation of 15 national and international projects focused on the sustainable management of cultural heritage, audience development, digital transformation, inclusion and international cooperation. The Institution has acted as lead partner in 8 of these projects, demonstrating its capacity to independently develop project ideas, manage complex partnerships and implement multiannual activities.

The combined value of the 15 projects presented on the following pages of this publication exceeds EUR 15 million. Twelve projects were funded through European Union programmes, including Interreg, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the European Social Fund and Horizon Europe, while three received support from other national, foundation and corporate sources. Altogether, funding was secured through 11 different programmes and funding schemes.

Project cooperation involved 64 partner participations beyond Fortress of Culture Šibenik: 18 national and 46 international. This structure reflects the Institution's strong European and regional orientation, as well as its ability to bring together cities, cultural institutions, universities, civil society organisations and expert bodies around shared development objectives.

The Socio-Economic Impact Study of Fortress of Culture Šibenik for the period 2014–2024 shows that, between 2017 and 2024, Fortress of Culture Šibenik had implemented and contracted 13 projects, bringing EUR 5.59 million in external funding to the institution's budget. Although the absorption of the aforementioned project funding had not been completed by the end of 2024, as some of the contracted projects were still under implementation, the fact that the total annual revenues of Fortress of Culture Šibenik amounted to a cumulative EUR 17.4 million between 2017 and 2024 clearly illustrates the significance of

project-based funding within the institution's overall operations. Furthermore, by the time of this publication (end of 2026), two additional projects with a combined value of EUR 1.97 million in external funding had been contracted, further demonstrating the institution's sustained and growing capacity to fortify the future by investing in heritage.

Key Project Figures (2017 - 2026)

Indicator	Key Figure
Combined project value	€15+ million
Projects funded through EU programmes	12
Projects funded through other sources	3
Projects led by Fortress of Culture Šibenik	8
Partner participations beyond the Institution	64
National partner participations	18
International partner participations	46
Programmes and funding schemes	11

The figures are significant, but the full impact of these projects is best seen in the changes that remain after their completion: revitalised and more accessible spaces, new digital content, greener events, educational programmes, strengthened staff capacities, engaged communities and international networks that continue to grow. Projects have thus become an important instrument in the long-term development of Fortress of Culture Šibenik and in its contribution to the cultural, social and economic development of the city. The following pages present these projects, with more extensive and complex initiatives, particularly those led by Fortress of Culture Šibenik, described in greater detail.

KREŠIMIR

KREativna ŠIbenska Mreža Integriranog kulturnog Razvoja

Funding programme

Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014 – 2020 (ESF)

Lead partner

Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)

Partners

City of Šibenik (HR), Šibenik youth association Š.U.M. (HR), Youth association "Youth in the EU" (HR), Association Feniks (HR)

Duration

12 months (10/2018 - 10/2019)

Project value

98,933.46 EUR

Keywords

participatory governance in culture, public-civic partnerships, capacity building, networking

Motivation

Culture thrives on collaboration, not isolation. Addressing local challenges and meeting community needs requires feedback and involvement from all stakeholders invested in community life.

A targeted survey implemented during the preparation of the project proposal, which included representatives from 20 local cultural associations, revealed that many civil society organisations and NGOs in Šibenik struggle to sustain their activities. Limited funding, lack of knowledge and weak partnerships with the public sector have prevented them from reaching their full potential.

This highlighted the need to develop capacities for **participatory governance in culture (PG)**, i.e. shared decision-making in culture, and inspired the creation of **KREŠIMIR**, a public and civic network committed to delivering positive cultural change.

Vision

The partners, representing both public and civic sectors, recognised the KREŠIMIR project as a crucial opportunity to strengthen the collaborative bonds needed for Šibenik's cultural development.

To achieve this, the project focused on strengthening stakeholders' knowledge and capacity, **implementing concrete steps to enhance public-civic cooperation** and fostering deeper connections between cultural stakeholders.

These efforts were aiming to cultivate a future where **stakeholders actively co-shape** the city's cultural vision.

How?

- From its inception, one of the project's key priorities was **capacity building of target groups**. The

partners organised three-day tailor-made workshops on PG in culture, along with two-day workshops on NGO management, EU funding, sustainable event management, marketing, as well as promotion and audience development.

- To establish a structured approach, partners began **analysing Šibenik's cultural landscape** - through an extensive data collection process, which included a semi-structured questionnaire completed by representatives of 47 organisations (41 cultural associations, 5 city cultural institutions and the City itself), as well as 48 in-depth interviews.
- Project team members used insights from the analysis to develop an Action Plan setting out specific strategies for more inclusive and integrated cultural planning. The process included **5 stakeholder focus groups and 15 evaluation and work meetings**.
- To support peer learning and skills exchange, partners visited **Pogon - Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth**, an established example of good practice. The exchange provided practical know-how and strengthened networking opportunities. The concluding **Open Door Days** showcased project results through a conference on the benefits of PG and workshops on volunteering and community initiatives. They also marked the official launch of the **KREŠIMIR** network as a long-term platform for collaboration. The launch was followed by partner agreements, which formalised continued cooperation.

Results

- **6 organised workshops** – equipped 100+ participants with tools to strengthen their cultural planning, event organisation and collaboration between civic and public cultural organisations.
- **Šibenik's State of Culture Report** – a detailed analytical document examining cultural activities organised by local stakeholders was developed and published.
- **Participatory Governance Action Plan** - developed and published a concrete strategic plan for fostering inclusive decision-making in the city's cultural governance.
- **Public-Civic Partnership Manual** – a comprehensive guide combining key project findings into a practical framework was developed and published.

- **KREŠIMIR network** – a platform for cultural stakeholders to collaborate, exchange ideas, and drive collective action was established.

Impact

The project secured long-term impact and set out a clear vision for the future. The **KREŠIMIR network** enabled more effective collaboration between cultural stakeholders. Core project documents provided a reliable foundation, while cooperation agreements demonstrated a shared commitment. The data gathered and documents produced under the project have since informed the development of cultural strategies and plans at city level.

The project's success is reflected in its cultural legacy through **diverse programming at the House of Art Arsen and the fortresses**, supported by community feedback from the Fortress Friends Club. This demonstrates the value of participatory governance and the project's lasting impact through new collaborations between **Fortress of Culture Šibenik and cultural associations**, as well as strengthened ties among the associations after the project's completion.

Lessons learned

- **Base before build** – using a needs analysis as a clear framework that provides clear guidelines and a solid foundation for further progress is a priority, especially where project objectives involve multiple subjects.
- **Learn smart** – establish clear learning outcomes for target groups, plan education with relevant content and an appropriate format by applying a tailor-made approach that fosters knowledge exchange and networking opportunities.
- **Connect with proven models** - visit exemplary organisations: it is inspiring and offers valuable know-how exchange.
- **The end is only a beginning** - when building a platform for stakeholders to connect and work together, ensure the network continues beyond the project's end by defining common goals and interests.

More information

[Project website](#)
[Project video](#)

Fortress ReInvented

Innovative Approach and Digital Contents in Fortification Monuments

Funding programme

**Interreg IPA Cross Border Cooperation
HR-BA-ME 2014-2020 (ERDF)**

Lead partner

**Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)/
Šibenik City Museum (HR)**

Partners

**Municipality of Klis (HR), Municipality
of Herceg Novi (ME), Public Institution
City Museum of Zenica (BA)**

Duration

30 months (07/2017 - 12/2019)

Project value

1,310,232.40 EUR

Keywords

**digital innovation, heritage
interpretation and IT, cultural tourism
development**

Motivation

To remain relevant and attractive for future generations and stand the test of time, **infrastructural restoration alone is insufficient**, if heritage sites lack engaging content.

That is where **innovation** plays a role. By applying cutting-edge digital technologies, heritage sites can present their history in dynamic, captivating, and immersive ways.

As its name suggests, **Fortress ReInvented** aimed to reimagine fortified heritage sites and keep their cultural legacy alive for generations to come.

Vision

Recognising the need to develop, innovate and diversify the tourism offer, this cross-border partnership aimed to transform four historic fortresses into modern attractions through digital innovation. These fortresses are: St. Michael's Fortress in Šibenik, Klis Fortress in Klis (Croatia), Vranduk Fortress in Zenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Kanli Kula in Herceg Novi (Montenegro).

The partnership was driven by the idea that **digital storytelling devices** and **immersive technologies** can help heritage sites retain their purpose, reach new audiences and bridge the past and the future.

Therefore, the project's main objective - **investing in new technologies** at fortified heritage sites – was a key priority that contributed to tourism, while ensuring that cultural treasures remain accessible and exciting for all ages.

How?

- Partners first identified their sites' **investment priorities** to understand each other's contexts and build mutual trust. This made project meetings essential for creating a shared activity plan.

- These gatherings were vital for collaboration, particularly on joint activities like the **digital ‘revival’ of the fortresses** through tools such as multimedia guides, live stream screens called Fortress Reality Windows and digital info screens, which became a unifying mission of the partnership.
- Seeking good practice examples, partners organised a five-day study visit to Malta, including a visit to the Heritage Malta organisation. The visit included site visits showcasing IT-enabled heritage interpretation as well as exchange meetings.
- Given the scale of investment, partners prepared **public procurement procedures** to support smooth implementation. They assessed which investments would be most complex and time-consuming. **The most demanding procurement procedure, as it turned out, was related to 3D mapping technology** in the water tanks of **St. Michael’s Fortress**. It required multiple steps, from securing conservators’ full support, to conducting extensive market research, meticulous preparation of tender documentation and the careful installation of digital technology within a protected heritage monument.
- Along with the fortresses’ digital upgrades, the partners prioritised **staff training** by organising workshops to ensure teams could operate and maintain the new technology contents confidently.
- Partners also organised **workshops for tourism stakeholders** (agencies, tour guides, etc.) on the management and maintenance of heritage sites, highlighting how digital solutions can enrich their offer.

Results

- **3D mapping on cistern walls** – Inside the two former water tanks at St. Michael’s Fortress, digital content transforms a small, curved space into a distinctive immersive experience. Using 34 projectors and 16 speakers, the cistern arches become key elements of a time-travel narrative that guides visitors through different historical periods.
- **Audio guide** – offers visitors a new experience across all partner fortresses by presenting historical facts in an innovative way.
- **Fortress reality window** – a joint application through which visitors to all four partner fortresses can follow a live feed of activities at each site.
- **Info points** – installed in the partners’ historic city centres to promote the fortresses’ offer and provide information on partner destinations and local SMEs.

- **Study visit to Malta** – highlighted IT-enabled heritage interpretation and enabled exchanges with Heritage Malta.
- **120 participants** – across all partners, attended courses on quality assurance, standardisation and the digital technology installed at the heritage sites.

Impact

The digital innovations utilised at the fortresses created exceptional experiences that appeal even to visitors who might otherwise overlook cultural sites.

3D mapping in the water tanks and audio guides have become integral and widely popular parts of guided tours at St. Michael’s Fortress.

The Fortress Reality Window continues to connect visitors across partner locations, encouraging exploration of local histories and strengthening cross-border cooperation.

Together, these investments increased the visibility of fortification sites and introduced a renewed approach to interpreting and presenting their stories.

Lessons learned

- **Team sync** – focus on communication and clear responsibilities among project partners and the project team.
- **Master rules and procedures** – a strong understanding of project rules, public procurement procedures and relevant legislation.
- **Learning from peers** – use study visits to exchange experience and explore digital approaches to heritage interpretation.
- **Beat the clock** – respond promptly and respect the time frames; build in buffer periods in case of delays.
- **Engage stakeholders** – create opportunities to share experiences and build capacity through targeted workshops on new practices, content and technologies.

More information

[Project website](#)
[Project video](#)

Šibenik Zero Waste City

Funding programme
Coca-Cola Foundation
Lead partner
Youth association “Youth in the EU” (HR)
Partners
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR), Utility company Zeleni grad Ltd. (HR), City of Šibenik (HR)
Duration
24 months (01/2020 - 12/2021)
Project value
175,000.00 EUR
Keywords
sustainable management, zero waste policies, community engagement, environmental protection

Vision

Croatia ranks among the EU’s lowest performers in environmental awareness, indicating a significant lack of ecological consciousness according to the European Commission’s Special Eurobarometer on Climate Change (2021).

To address this, the local NGO “Youth in the EU”, the utility company Zeleni grad, the City of Šibenik and Fortress of Culture Šibenik joined forces under the Coca-Cola-funded **Šibenik Zero Waste City** project to pursue sustainable waste solutions.

Šibenik’s key cultural attraction, St. Michael’s Fortress, draws large crowds to its events, creating challenges related to waste management and resource use. Therefore, Fortress of Culture set the goal of turning St. Michael’s Fortress into the **first zero-waste concert venue in the region**.

How?

- The institution first identified two focus areas: **introducing sustainable management measures and strengthening education** and awareness among visitors.
- Funding was allocated for the installation of 15 waste-separation bins across Šibenik’s fortresses.
- Four project clean-up actions were organised, bringing the wider community together to care for local spaces.
- The *Eco-Fortress Guardians* workshop was designed to educate children on waste reduction, reuse and recycling. The workshop was integrated into the institution’s existing educational programme *My Fortress of Knowledge*.

- A key innovation was **the introduction of reusable polypropylene cups** during the 2020 Let's Rock Festival at St. Michael's Fortress. Visitors paid a deposit and returned the cups at the end of the evening for a refund. The cups were then washed and reused.

Results

- Disposable plastic cups were **banned** at St. Michael's Fortress.
- **20 000** reusable cups were purchased and put to use.
- A Zero Waste catering/cleaning station was set up at St. Michael's Fortress.
- **15** waste separation bins were installed across the fortresses.
- **A new educational workshop**, the *Eco-Fortress Guardians* was developed and launched within the institution's children's educational programme *My Fortress of Knowledge*.
- **4** environmental clean-up actions were organised, collecting more than **15 tonnes of waste**.

Impact

Even before this project, the institution was committed to environmental practices. The project served as a **catalyst**, formalising and expanding these efforts into comprehensive zero-waste policies.

Today, **all events organised by the Fortress of Culture**—from Šibenik's Adventura Festival to the Night of Fortresses—integrate sustainability measures into logistical planning and promote sustainability awareness among visitors.

More information

[Project publication](#)
[Project video](#)

Connecting Cinemas

Connecting Cinemas in Rural Areas

Funding programme
Creative Europe MEDIA Programme of the European Commission
Lead partner
Neue Kammerspiele (DE)
Partners
Public Art Lab (DE), Public Institution Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR), Amza Pellea Cinema (RO), Cinema Star (GR), M2C (DE), Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (NL) and KEA European Affairs (BE).
Duration
18 months (05/2020 - 11/2021)
Project value
611,455.00 EUR
Keywords
audience development, community engagement, collective cinema-programming

Vision

Šibenik, home to one of Croatia's earliest film screenings (1897), has a strong film heritage. The historic Odeon cinema, reconstructed and reopened in 2021 and renamed the House of Art Arsen (managed by Fortress of Culture Šibenik), symbolises this legacy.

However, cinemas across Europe in the 21st century—especially those in rural areas—face declining audiences and reduced funding, and Šibenik is no exception.

This shared challenge brought partners together through **Connecting Cinemas** to develop a digital network for joint screenings and events, engaging local communities and strengthening Europe's cinematic diversity.

How?

- As the **COVID-19** pandemic closed cinemas and other cultural spaces, partners shifted activities online and adapted accordingly.
- Šibenik, Berlin, Veria (Greece) and Râșnov (Romania) each hosted **CC Labs**, bringing together partners and film professionals to co-create strategies, exchange ideas and test innovative audience engagement methods.
- Key engagement activities included a live-streamed **Film Quiz** (34 international teams competed) and **On My Way to Cinemas**, where audiences filmed their journey to their favourite cinema during lockdown.
- As an alternative to the original programming, the hybrid **CC Lounge's open-air screenings** at Barone Fortress introduced new interactive digital tools (voting, rating, etc.) to elevate the audience experience.

- Lessons learned were consolidated into the **Handbook of Activities**, and an international CC network was established to continue connecting cinemas and engaging audiences.

Results

- An international network was established and integrated into the official Connecting Cinemas (CC) website.
- Digital tools, including Cineart, Cinefun, Watch and QR, were made available via the project website.
- **A Handbook of activities** was produced, providing a roadmap for cultural organisations and cinemas in rural areas.
- A screening programme for House of Art Arsen was co-curated for project screenings.

Impact

Following the project’s completion, House of Art Arsen continued curating diverse film programmes, attracting over **13,000 visitors**, while Barone Summer Cinema—supported by a strong open-air cinema programme—welcomed more than **10,000 visitors**.

Building on cross-border collaborations established through Connecting Cinemas, the venues took a further step towards a membership in **Europa Cinemas**, strengthening their position as key cultural hubs within the Šibenik region’s cinematic landscape.

More information

[Project website](#)
[Project video](#)

EMOUNDERGROUNDS

EMOtional Technologies for the Cultural Heritage Valorisation within Cross Border UNDERGROUNDS

Funding programme
Interreg V-B Adriatic - Ionian ADRION Programme 2014 – 2020 (ERDF)
Lead partner
Municipality of Nardò (IT)
Partners
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR), Municipality of Carpi (IT), Municipality of Andravida–Kyllini (GR), Rijeka Tourist Board (HR), Regional Development Centre Koper (SI), Municipality of Ivančna Gorica, Slovenija (SI), Municipality of Kukës (AL), Tourism Organisation Municipality of Bar (ME), Trebinje Development Agency (BA)
Duration
36 months (01/2020 - 12/2022)
Project value
2,599,994.86 EUR
Keywords
social innovation, cultural heritage gamification, experiential tourism

Motivation

The success of heritage sites depends on addressing and balancing multiple contributing factors, including fostering strong ties with the community and stakeholders, continuously uncovering new historical insights, and using superb technology to translate these findings into captivating experiences.

This is precisely what brought together ten partners across the ADRION region: **the need to further explore the potential of their underground sites** and to develop culture and creativity-based products that foster strong emotional connections within fortified underground spaces.

Vision

The **EMOUNDERGROUNDS project** brought together ten partners seeking to improve the prospects of their underground heritage sites through comprehensive heritage makeovers.

This multifaceted approach included a set of actions, ranging from organising **livestream** arts and cultural events, to the extensive **research of underground “attractors”**, complemented by interactive workshops and, notably, the most thrilling: **VR gamification** that perfectly blends education and entertainment.

By interconnecting heritage research, art, experiential technology and innovative marketing tools, the project aimed to deliver a **strong emotional experience** as a means of enhancing regional competitiveness.

How?

- The project launched with an online kick-off meeting to define each partner’s roles, followed by an Agreement Protocol signing, formalising their commitment to achieving shared goals.

- The next step was developing an **Action Plan** outlining concrete measures for a sustainable and inclusive management of the sites involved and for stakeholder collaboration.
- The research component included identifying experts to conduct a photogrammetric survey of St. Michael’s Fortress to create a precise **3D model** of its interior and exterior walls.
- The findings informed VR scenarios for **cultural heritage games/scenarios** developed for the procured VR equipment.
- The production team was keen on **organising events**, such as the Šibenik Heritage Showcase, connecting communities to their history through music, literature, and storytelling.
- The new Fortress of Culture mobile app further improved accessibility of sites and programmes for users and visitors.
- To **engage young participants** in dramaturgy, digital skills and heritage interpretation, three creative training programmes were organised: Become Virgil, Masters of Digital and Search for Heritage.
- Project results, including new VR games, were showcased at the House of Art Arsen **inauguration event**, where visitors could experience these developments first-hand.

Results

- **A high-precision 3D model of St. Michael’s Fortress** was developed through photogrammetric recording, capturing all faces of the historic walls.
- **A VR platform featuring four games/scenarios** was created to inform and educate visitors about Šibenik’s fortresses in a fun and interactive way; 500 visitors participated in gaming in the first four days.
- **Live stream events** - Šibenik Heritage Showcase brought regional history to life. Musicians Marisol, Je Veux and Boris Štok performed concerts, and the children’s play ‘Zika Zika Muzikaaa!’ demonstrated the media adaptation of literature. The events were free of charge and attracted over 800 attendees, while social media livestreams expanded access.

- **Creative training programmes** engaged 100+ young participants, equipping them with new skills in dramaturgy, digital technologies and her-itage storytelling.
- **A Fortress of Culture mobile app was devel-oped**, providing accurate and timely info on Šibe-nik’s fortresses and events.

Impact

The project has enriched the fortresses’ tourism offer in several ways. The **VR games have become the most sought-after activity**, particularly among younger visitors and those who are not typically enthusiastic about heritage.

Livestreams have made events more accessible, engaging remote audiences and attracting interna-tional tourists. The mobile app has proven to be a reliable tool for visitors to access event information and for the institution to communicate effectively with the public.

Diverse and engaging content - whether VR activities or cultural events, shows and workshops - resonated well with audiences, **as evidenced by a considerable increase in visitor numbers**.

Lessons learned

Design for feeling – prioritise emotional connec-tion and create experiences that captivate, resonate and inspire visitors/audiences, thereby increasing engagement.

Accessibility plus – leverage social media, develop digital platforms and host live streams to expand reach.

Play the history – games and tech, especially VR, can make history feel fresh, exciting and more attractive.

Engage and grow communities – nurture bonds with local communities, as their insights spark fresh ideas.

More information

[Project website](#)
[Project video 1](#)
[Project video 2](#)

FORTITUDE

Historical Fortresses Intensifying Cross-Border Tourism Development

Funding programme
Interreg IPA Cross Border Cooperation HR-BA-ME 2014-2020 (ERDF)
Lead partner
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)
Partners
City of Banja Luka (BA), City of Karlovac (HR), Municipality of Bar (ME)
Duration
30 months (03/2020 - 08/2022)
Project value
1,618,438.72 EUR
Keywords
tourist offer expansion, cultural event organisation, cross-border cooperation, cultural heritage management

Motivation

Although the programme area is rich in historic for-tresses, their full potential remains underused due to shared cross-border challenges. Key issues identified during project preparation included limited opportu-nities for continued collaboration, high tourism sea-sonality, underdeveloped tourism facilities at fortified sites, weak ties between heritage and tourism stake-holders, as well as insufficient management expertise.

To address this, partners developed the idea of an inviting, vibrant **cultural manifestation** that would attract visitors to heritage sites beyond the high sea-son. A cross-border manifestation, alongside **diver-sified and upgraded services**, was seen as vital for enriching the cross-border cultural and tourism offer.

Originating within Fortress of Culture Šibenik, the con-cept received unanimous partner support and quickly evolved into an ambitious, collaboration-driven proj-ect.

Vision

The FORTITUDE project brought together partners across Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herze-govina, united by a shared vision of unlocking the potential of fortified heritage sites, extending activity beyond the peak season and creating added value through cooperation among sites.

The project delivered this vision by establishing four refurbished visitor centres, new permanent exhi-bitions and immersive sightseeing routes in each partner city. While these outputs are significant, the project’s distinctive contribution was the organisation and launch of the first cross-border cultural tourism manifestation in the programme area: **Night of For-tresses**. This joint heritage celebration set the stan-dard for cultural collaboration through strategic net-working.

How?

- The project began during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring rapid adaptation - all meetings and gatherings in the first year moved online.
- Partners monitored pandemic-related market shifts to manage procurements, **prioritising exhibit designs and equipment for souvenir shops and visitor centres**, with built-in buffers for delays.
- **Accredited vocational training** was organised for partners' visitor-facing staff, including foreign-language training and tourist guide courses.
- Across all 4 partner cities, local guides joined **focus groups to design previously unexplored routes** around historic sites, complemented by tactile maps to support inclusive access.
- **Tailor-made heritage management learning sessions** were delivered on site and online in Bar, Banja Luka and Karlovac. In addition, partners visited iconic **French castles** (Amboise, Chenonceau, Cheverny and Chambord) to review good practices and draw inspiration.
- These insights informed preparations for the Night of Fortresses event. Extensive planning covered logistics, partner coordination, media campaigns and development of the official Night of Fortresses website.
- At the project's conclusion, the **Night of Fortresses** was launched in **spring 2022**, bringing together 40 heritage sites across three countries. Each site offered a diverse programme of guided tours, workshops, children's plays, concerts, art exhibitions and more, completely free of charge. The success of the first event set a high standard for future editions.
- **Vocational training** ensured better hospitality and interpretation. Two staff members were certified as tourist guides, and two completed certified language courses in English and German.
- **4 tailor-made sessions** – on cultural heritage management engaged over 70 stakeholders, comprising three workshops in Banja Luka, Bar and Karlovac, as well as a study visit to France.
- **Permanent exhibitions at St. Michael's Fortress** – The Alphabet of Fortresses presents an engaging history of the fortresses, while The Summer Stage: Past and Present showcases the history of the open-air stage. A souvenir shop was also set up alongside the exhibitions.
- **A stairway** to the northern entrance of St. Michael's Fortress was constructed, improving access routes to the site.
- **4 new tourist routes** were enhanced with tactile maps, expanding the cities' cultural offers, revealing previously unexplored historic sites and improving accessibility.

Impact

The new tourist routes offer fresh perspectives on the cultural landscape of the four partner cities by popularising previously unexplored sites, while the upgraded visitor centres and their trained staff continue to enhance the visitor experience at each fortress. In Šibenik, the permanent exhibitions at St. Michael's Fortress are particularly popular and have become an integral part of the site's offer.

Night of Fortresses has become a growing international event, connecting fortified sites across borders. Recognised by international associations EFFORTS and FORTE CULTURA, its promotion is supported within the European Fortress Summer campaign.

In recognition of its exceptional contribution to cultural tourism promotion, Fortress of Culture Šibenik—as the lead project partner and main organiser of the Night of Fortresses—was awarded a silver plaque by the Croatian Tourist Board in the 'Event of the Year' category (2022).

Results

- **Night of Fortresses** – the first joint cultural event—brought together 40 cities across the region, drawing over 6,500 visitors to the four partner sites and offering a diverse programme of activities.
- **The City Point visitor centre** was refurbished and upgraded, featuring a digital kiosk with educational games and quizzes.

Lessons learned

- **Capitalise on your network** – particularly for joint manifestations, motivate sites to participate—as the partners did by engaging 40 regional sites and building a strong network around shared values.
- **Be quick to adapt** – plan flexibly for disruptions (COVID-19), reallocate funds swiftly, monitor market fluctuations affecting procurement and maintain safety—for example, by moving events online when needed.
- **Elevate, don't recreate** – effective planning does not always require reinvention. Enhance what exists by improving hospitality, strengthening interaction with visitors and extending the offer with additional content.
- **Open the gates** – when reshaping heritage events, prioritise accessibility—for example, the Night of Fortresses free-admission model removes barriers and draws people to cultural sites.

More information

[Project webpage](#)
[Night of Fortresses website](#)
[Night of Fortresses video](#)
[Project video](#)

Sustain4Seniors Hub

Sustainable Fortifications for Seniors Learning Hub

Funding programme
Erasmus+, Small-scale Partnerships in Adult Education
Lead partner
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)
Partners
Asociația Mioritics (RO), Kauno Tvirtovės Parkas (LT)
Duration
11 months (01/2024 - 11/2024)
Project value
60,000.00 EUR
Keywords
sustainability, cultural programming, engaging senior citizens, collaborative learning

Motivation

In today’s fast-paced world, shaped by constant change, we must build a socially and environmentally resilient culture. Now more than ever, cultural institutions need to draw on the strength of **inclusive communities** and work together to create a sustainable future.

One group with enormous potential are **senior citizens**. Although often neglected and overlooked, seniors bring a wealth of experience that can help promote healthier and greener lifestyles.

The **Sustain4Seniors Hub** project provided an ideal opportunity for seniors and cultural staff to work together and demonstrate that everyone, regardless of age, can play a role in driving positive change in their communities.

Vision

To transform cultural heritage sites into more inclusive, accessible and sustainable spaces, programme planning must strengthen knowledge of eco-friendly practices and support stronger links to cultural heritage.

That is why **Fortress of Culture Šibenik**, together with its partners **Kaunas Fortress Park** and **Mioritics Association**, developed the idea of turning heritage sites into innovative learning spaces—**hubs that engage senior citizens**.

These learning hubs aimed to equip cultural heritage staff to plan sustainable activities not only **for** seniors, but **with** seniors as active co-creators.

How?

- Although Fortress of Culture Šibenik and its partners shared a common goal, they first needed to get to know each other better, build mutual understanding, and then agree on the steps required to achieve it.

- Collaborative **Project Team meetings** generated initial ideas and set the direction for exploring sustainability. Learning was supported by an external expert, enabling know-how exchange and strengthening knowledge of sustainable programming at cultural sites.
- Across three hubs in **Šibenik, Râșnov and Kaunas**, partners explored different approaches to developing eco-friendly programmes with seniors. The ideas were plentiful: Šibenik focused on training staff in green principles; Râșnov and its seniors organised traditional events with eco twists; Kaunas offered free tours to help seniors learn about sustainable living.
- Building on the success of the activities, partners deepened engagement with seniors through meetings, surveys and workshops—laying the groundwork for long-term collaboration.
- Shared insights prompted the partners to create the **Sustain4Seniors Roadmap**, capturing the core steps for engaging seniors while fostering sustainability and cultural participation.
- Three final events in Kaunas, Râșnov and Šibenik showcased the results and publicly launched newly developed programme lines for seniors, supporting engagement beyond the project. The **final event in Šibenik** featured a panel discussion to disseminate results and introduce the **Silver Programme Line**, followed by the charming theatre play ‘Shooting Star’, performed by a local senior drama troupe.

Results

- Cooperation agreements** – signed between seniors’ associations and partner institutions ensured the sustainability of the developed programmes and consolidated ongoing collaboration between cultural sites and seniors.
- Three new programme lines** were developed, one by each partner, designed specifically to meet seniors’ needs. In Šibenik, the newly created Silver Programme Line introduced an exclusive membership category enabling seniors to access all events under the Silver Line for a symbolic annual fee of € 1. The programme includes theatre performances, concerts and film screenings—all tailored to the interests expressed by seniors during the co-creation process.

- Sustain4Seniors in Cultural Heritage Sites Roadmap** is an online brochure, jointly created by cultural managers from partner organisations. It compiles lessons learned, best practices, and sustainable approaches to engaging senior citizens at cultural heritage sites, and serves as a practical guide to inspire like-minded heritage sites.

Impact

The project empowered senior citizens to become active participants in their communities. Immediately after launching the Silver Programme Line, more than **70 seniors** joined the Šibenik Fortresses Friends Club.

Through workshops, mentoring programmes, and involvement in heritage-related events, seniors continue to play a significant role in shaping environmentally friendly activities at cultural heritage sites. For example, they **contribute to the House of Art Arsen’s repertoire selection**, support the organisation of guided site walks and dance events and create plays. They are also involved in intergenerational activities, passing their rich experience on to young people. The seniors’ cultural involvement undeniably inspires citizens to live more actively and sustainably in the community.

Lessons learned

- Collaboration at the core** – team spirit and the exchange of experience, embracing both differences and similarities across partners’ contexts and approaches to the target group—served as a driving force in bringing the project’s goals to life.
- Learning as a bridge** – bringing diverse groups together by creating shared learning spaces, or hubs, where everyone can grow.
- Strength in unexpected places** – empowering vulnerable groups to shine: they can be change-makers, offer fresh perspectives and sow the seeds for future initiatives.
- Unite through passion** – rallying people around shared causes such as climate action and sustainability.

More information

[EU project database](#)
[Project Roadmap](#)

Sustainable Islands

Small European Islands Mobilised for Sustainability Development of their Territory

Funding programme
Erasmus+, Small-scale Partnerships in Adult Education
Lead partner
SMILO – Small Islands Organisation (FR)
Partners
Abbey of Lérins, Island of Saint-Honorat (FR), Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR), Chimica Verde Bionet, Capraia Island (IT), Whitesand Solutions, Formentera (ES), National Park Asinara (IT)
Duration
24 months (01/2024 – 01/2026)
Project value
92,498.00 EUR
Keywords
sustainable island management, climate adaptation strategies, knowledge exchange and cooperation

Vision

Islands represent only a small fraction of Europe’s territory, yet they shelter **fragile ecosystems** that are increasingly affected by climate change, invasive species, and habitat destruction.

Sustainable Islands, supported by Erasmus+, addresses these urgent challenges by strengthening exchange and technical expertise in sustainable territorial planning and climate adaptation.

Fortress of Culture Šibenik, through its **Croatian Coral Center on Zlarin**, actively contributes to this process, drawing on the island’s experience since its award-winning plastic-free initiative in 2017. The project revises the islands’ strategic plans for sustainability and habitat preservation within the **Sustainable Island certification framework** developed by the Small Islands Organisation (SMILO), thereby guiding long-term island resilience.

How?

- The project began with an online launch meeting, where partners presented their islands, challenges and needs in relation to sustainable management and climate adaptation.
- Partners met at the international SMILO islands meetings, combining training sessions with exchanges of good practice across the five SMILO themes. Representatives of the Croatian Coral Center contributed Zlarin’s experience as a pre-labelled island.
- A three-day technical workshop in Capraia, organised by Chimica Verde in collaboration with SMILO and local stakeholders, brought partners together for site visits, exchanges of best practice and training sessions focused on climate adaptation and sustainable island management.

- On Zlarin, the Coral Center organised public lectures, engaging experts and the community in discussions on climate change and the state of coral ecosystems in the Adriatic. These exchanges supported the drafting of a new Strategic Plan, developed with local stakeholders, as a key step in advancing the island’s progress within the SMILO certification process.

Results

- **Online launch meeting held** – with all partners, shared calendar, communication kit, and project framework agreed.
- **Expert lectures at the Croatian Coral Center on Zlarin** – on climate change impacts and red coral conservation.
- **International meetings** – brought together 70+ participants for five training sessions, networking and field visits.
- **Three-day technical workshop in Capraia** – with 30+ participants, site visits and exchange of good practices.
- **New Strategic Plan for Zlarin** – designed with local stakeholders’ participation, advancing progress in the Sustainable Island certification process.

Impact

The project **reinforced cooperation among European islands**, building technical expertise and shared methods for sustainable territorial planning and climate change adaptation. Exchanges through international meetings, workshops and lectures fostered approaches with strong potential to be shared and adapted across the SMILO network and beyond.

On Zlarin, the adoption of a new Strategic Plan and initiatives led by the Croatian Coral Center Zlarin **continue to strengthen ecological awareness, particularly regarding marine life**, reinforce local governance and support the island’s recognition as a model for small-island sustainability.

More information

[Project webpage](#)



Projects in Action

Photo Gallery



i3.0 Strategic Partnership for Community Innovation

Funding programme
Community Potentials
Lead partner
National Foundation for Civil Society Development (HR)
Partners
EURAC Research (IT), Relatomics Foundation (ZAF), Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR), European Foundation for Philanthropy and Society Development (HR)
Duration
2024-2028
Fortress of Culture budget
414,000.00 EUR
Keywords
social innovation, local community engagement, intergenerational cooperation

Vision

The **Community Potentials Programme** introduced a new model of investing in the social development of local communities by empowering seniors and high school students to design and lead innovative initiatives that create lasting change, foster cooperation, intergenerational dialogue and contribute directly to their communities.

The National Foundation for Civil Society Development appointed strategic partners, and **Fortress of Culture Šibenik was selected to facilitate the programme’s cultural dimension**—serving as a bridge between generations by strengthening bonds through heritage, creativity, and culture.

How?

- **Involving eight cities and ten secondary schools** across three counties, the Programme’s cultural strand began with Fortress of Culture Šibenik analysing the cultural capacities of participating communities and reviewing examples of good practice from EU countries. The institution designed a comprehensive education plan comprising modules for seniors and high school students, motivating them to develop cultural actions.
- Study visits to the **European Academy of Bolzano and to Piacenza** empowered participants and introduced them to community-led initiatives and actions.
- **The Community Potentials training module in Zadar**, together with the study trips and partner visits, motivated participants to design actions. These were presented at the **Factory of Ideas**, and the best project ideas for implementation in communities were selected.

- Approved actions in the County of Šibenik-Knin included installing **automated external defibrillators (AEDs)** in Šibenik and renovating a playground into a safe, modern play space. In Drniš, a Living Room—a shared space for socialising and connecting across generations—was established, and Summer Cinema Nights were organised.
- Complementing the educational modules, study visits and community actions, Fortress of Culture Šibenik organised “Culture in the Community” workshops across all eight participating cities in 2026. Examples from the institution’s practice, guided discussion and group work helped residents of different generations and representatives of institutions and associations identify local cultural assets and develop proposals responding to community needs.

Results 2024-2026

- **Analyses conducted** – an analysis of the cultural capacity of the Programme’s communities and an analysis of good practice in EU communities.
- **Community actions in the County of Šibenik-Knin** – a playground renewed and three AEDs installed in Šibenik; a Living Room opened and Summer Cinema Nights launched in Drniš.
- **Educational modules in culture developed** – one formal module on cultural heritage and community development and one informal module on intergenerational dialogue through culture.
- **Study visits to Bolzano and Piacenza** – showcasing community-led good practice in Europe.
- **Partner visits and capacity-building activities** –organised to strengthen the capacities and cooperation of strategic partners.
- **Community workshops held - eight “Culture in the Community** – Identifying Local Potential” workshops across eight cities in 2026, with 15–30 participants per workshop.

Impact

The Community Potentials Programme strengthens local capacity and demonstrates how collective action drives lasting change. Through the educational modules, communities build the skills and confidence needed to design meaningful initiatives. Actions implemented in Šibenik and Drniš **in 2025 delivered visible results for the community and inspired further action**. The 2026 workshops highlighted shared

priorities for cultural development, including greater youth participation, better access to information about cultural events and closer cooperation between local institutions and associations.

The programme demonstrates that communities thrive when empowered to shape their future together. The programme’s impacts will continue to grow in the coming years, showcasing the benefits of intergenerational cooperation in culture and local communities.

More information

[Project video](#)

FORTIC

From remains Of the war to the aRchiTecture of peace in cross-border area of Italy-Croatia

Funding programme
Interreg Italy – Croatia 2021-2027 (ERDF)
Lead partner
City of Pula (HR)
Partners
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR), Juraj Dobrila University of Pula (HR), CA' FOSCARI University of Venice (IT), Municipality of Cervia (IT), Municipality of Vieste (IT), Town of Korčula (HR)
Duration
30 months (04/2024 - 09/2026)
Project value
2,135,773.60 EUR
Keywords
sustainable heritage management models, inclusive tourist offer, digital innovation, cross- border capacity building, cooperation and networking

Motivation

The **COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted** heritage sites across the Adriatic, halting projects, slowing upgrades and limiting their ability to adapt. Many sites faced similar challenges: reduced visitor numbers, postponed investments and limited resources for innovation.

The resulting **drive for regeneration and greater resilience** underscored the need for collaboration and fresh approaches to fortified heritage management. Seven partners united around this goal, leading to the creation of the FORTIC project. Recognised as a good practice example in cultural heritage management, Fortress of Culture Šibenik focused on transferring and sharing knowledge and experience across the partnership.

Vision

FORTIC aimed to **regenerate heritage sites and enhance their resilience**. United by this vision, partners jointly developed comprehensive, sustainable management models to guide their future work. Partners focused on gaining new insights through cross-border labs and workshops on eco-inclusive heritage management, researching and reinterpreting unused fortress areas, advancing digital innovation, strengthening inclusion through training and expanding the Night of Fortresses (NOF) to Italy by including Italian cultural heritage sites in an existing international cultural manifestation.

In this way, the **Night of Fortresses is strengthened and expanded** through partnership, demonstrating strong collaboration and shared goals among fortified heritage sites across Europe.

How?

- Cooperation and capacity-building were advanced through numerous professional and scientific conferences and learning labs. Fortress of Culture organised **FORTIC Week in Šibenik**, combining the conference Sustainable Business Model for Fortification with the **Green Sustain Lab** at St. John's Fortress. The conference fostered networking and inspired sustainable management strategies, bringing together participants from 13 European countries and supporting collaboration with EFFORTS (European Federation of Fortified Sites). The lab focused on strengthening heritage managers' skills ahead of the upcoming NOF event, promoting the values of sustainability and inclusivity.
- Recognising students as future sources of new ideas in heritage management, the partners organised **two summer schools** within the project. One was held at the St. John's Fortress Campus in Šibenik, encouraging the exchange of knowledge and good practice.
- To foster creativity and collaboration, the St. John's Fortress Campus was enhanced with a **vibrant atrium mural and an equipped gaming room**, providing educational, leisure and entertainment activities for students and other groups during their stay.
- The north-eastern tower of St. Michael's Fortress underwent archaeological excavations. Findings were published and conservation documentation prepared to support restoration, interpretation and a permanent exhibition—marking a key milestone: the last untouched part of St. Michael's Fortress was researched and prepared for revitalisation.
- The Night of Fortresses branding strategy and Goes Green campaign were launched to support NOF expansion to Italy and position the event as a **Euro-pean cultural initiative centred on sustainability**. The strategy strengthens the shared visual identity by tailoring messages, defining target groups and developing an action plan to guide coordination, content development and promotion.
- Inclusivity was strengthened through a six-month, tailor-made **sign language course** for the Fortress of Culture staff. Course participants (eight staff members) were enabled to integrate sign language into Šibenik fortresses' tours, enhancing accessibility on site. In addition, a virtual tour of the Šibenik Fortresses with sign-language translation was developed.

- External experts conducted a **Study of the Socio-Economic Spillover of Fortress of Culture (2014–2024)**, using data from stakeholder interviews, reports, and institutional documentation to assess impacts on tourism, the economy, quality of life and cultural development in the community. Building on these findings, an *Integrated Management Plan for Šibenik's Fortresses until 2030* was developed, setting a clear direction for future investments, service development, human resources, and sustainable management.

Results

- Valorisation documentation for St. Michael's NE Tower** – forming the basis for restoration design and interpretation.
- Two strategic documents developed** – *Study of the Socio-Economic Spillover of the Fortress of Culture for 2014–2024 and Integrated Management Plan for Fortress of Culture Šibenik until 2030*.
- 5-day summer school held** – at St. John's Fortress Campus with 20 student participants in total.
- St. John's Fortress Campus upgraded** – featuring a mural and a thematic gaming area with equipment and content for both educational and leisure use.
- Inclusivity strengthened** – through sign language training for eight staff members and a virtual tour in international sign language.
- Night of Fortresses branding strategy** – supporting NOF's 'Goes Green' label and the inclusion of new sites in Italy (eight joined in 2025); published online in English, Croatian, and Italian.
- Capacity building** – through the Green Sustain Lab, for 30+ participants on green management and sustainable NOF planning (from content planning to logistics).

Impact

FORTIC's legacy is evident in the changes it set in motion. The governance models and management plans developed during the project serve as a compass for each partner, **keeping institutions on a sustainable path**.

Research supporting the valorisation of the north tower of St. Michael's Fortress underpins the revitalisation of the last untouched part of this historic landmark, now a popular attraction. **Upgrading and equipping the St. John's Fortress Campus supported further development of the site into a year-round educational space for professionals, students, researchers, and stakeholders interested in heritage, culture and creativity.**

The sign-language virtual tour prompted further disability-awareness training and led to **adjustments in inclusive content** across guided experiences. Among Fortress of Culture Šibenik staff members who attended the sign language course, two decided to continue their sign-language education with institutional support.

The Night of Fortresses event continues to promote sustainability, inclusion and environmental protection, strengthening and expanding partnerships among sites across Europe and ensuring that FORTIC's impact endures.

Lessons learned

- **Build resilience through data-driven planning** – thoroughly analyse and collect data from multiple stakeholders to develop flexible strategies that not only support adaptation to challenges, but also guide sustainable future development.
- **Capitalise on fresh perspectives** – engage students and young talent to bring innovative ideas and energy, enriching projects and ensuring continuous growth.
- **Keep adapting content for accessibility** – make heritage sites welcoming to all by updating tours and materials, for example by adding sign language and training staff to better support diverse visitors.
- **Apply learning through action** – create opportunities to put workshop insights into practice, for example, integrating Green Sustain Lab knowledge into organising Night of Fortresses Goes Green, aligning activities with sustainability goals.

More information

[Project website](#)
[Night of Fortresses Branding Strategy](#)
[Night of Fortresses Goes Green video](#)
[Green Sustain LAB](#)

Transforming Communities Through Sustainable Management of Cultural Heritage

Funding programme
Erste Foundation
Partnership
Original project design, preparation and implementation by Fortress of Culture Šibenik as lead partner, host and organiser in cooperation with Erste Foundation.
Duration
July 2024
Project value
53,580.41 EUR
Keywords
sustainable heritage, capacity building, international peer-to-peer cultural exchange, heritage study tour

Vision

From a city marked by post-war decline to a vibrant cultural destination, Šibenik's transformation from 2014 to 2024 has been **strongly shaped by the Fortress of Culture**, which has become a recognised model of sustainable heritage management.

Inspired by the success, this exchange programme, funded by Erste Foundation and specially designed and delivered by Fortress of Culture, invited Ukrainian cultural professionals **to learn from Šibenik's experience**, strengthen heritage practices in their communities and contribute to Ukraine's European future.

How?

- Held over seven days at St. John's Fortress Educational Campus, the programme combined lectures, workshops, site visits and cultural events, **providing participants with first-hand insight** into effective and sustainable heritage management.
- Guided tours of Šibenik's fortresses and its historic centre, St Nicholas' Fortress and the island of Zlarin, including the Croatian Coral Center Zlarin, showcased heritage reuse in practice and fostered exchange with local communities.
- Expert-led sessions on EU funding, management models, sustainability, audience development, programming, networking and marketing **provided a strong framework and inspiration** for their future projects.
- **Careful planning and coordination** ensured a smooth flow of activities, concluding with a detailed participant questionnaire to gather feedback and insights.

Results

- **16 Ukrainian professionals** joined the seven-day programme and deepened their knowledge on sustainable heritage management.
- **12 expert lectures, four study visits and four cultural events** blended knowledge-sharing with direct experience of heritage reuse.
- **A promotional video and social media outputs** boosted international visibility.
- **Post-programme questionnaires and testimonials** highlighted inspiration, practical value, and strong networking opportunities.

Impact

Through visits to Šibenik’s heritage sites and exchanges with experts, **participants deepened their understanding** of how sustainable management, creative programming and strategic funding can turn cultural assets into engines of growth.

The exchange strengthened their professional skills and **equipped them with practical approaches** they can apply in Ukraine, fostering cultural vitality and long-term international cooperation.

More information

[Programme video](#)
[Participant testimonials](#)

GIFTSnet

Network for Green and Inclusive Fortified Tourism Solutions

Funding programme
Interreg VI-A IPA Programme Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2021-2027 (ERDF)
Lead partner
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)
Partners
City of Banja Luka (BA), Museum of Herzegovina in Trebinje (BA), City of Karlovac (HR), Municipality of Bar (ME), Municipality of Ulcinj (ME)
Duration
30 months (09/2024 - 03/2027)
Project value
2,244,442.80 EUR
Keywords
sustainable tourism solutions, joint event organisation, capacity and network building

Motivation

Adapting cultural heritage sites to modern environmental and social demands in the programme regions remains challenging. Site operators face limited funding, insufficient knowledge and a lack of services and initiatives to support diversification, inclusion and long-term resilience.

These constraints limit their ability to modernise management or adopt greener practices, and can lead to their potential contribution to sustainable development and **EU Green Deal** objectives being overlooked.

To address these challenges, the partners—building on the successful FORTITUDE collaboration and the Night of Fortresses event (NOF)—joined forces to launch **GIFTSnet**, a project focused on advancing ecological responsibility and inclusion in cultural heritage management.

Vision

This renewed and extended cooperation focuses on **establishing a network** as a platform for heritage operators to connect and deepen their socio-environmental understanding of responsible heritage management through capacity building, networking and long-term cooperation.

Shared knowledge empowers partners to **transform sites into inclusive, green spaces** - from implementing low-impact investments to organising the Night of Fortresses Goes Green initiative as an exceptional celebration of diversity and environmental care.

How?

- The project **kicked off in Ulcinj**, bringing together over 50 stakeholders to present planned green investments and announce the launch of the GIFTS network of heritage site operators, aimed at strengthening ties among Night of Fortresses organisers.
- **GIFTS network** members joined cross-border training on sustainable cultural management, exchange meetings with stakeholders and promotional activities to engage new stakeholders.
- To put the network's goals into practice, Fortress of Culture Šibenik organised **two cross-border workshops in Šibenik**, focusing on sustainable management and the adaptive reuse of cultural heritage infrastructure.
- Using shared know-how, **two NOF editions within the project embraced a 'green shift'**, celebrated diversity, and raised eco-awareness through workshops, exhibitions, tours, films and more.
- Inclusivity was strengthened through **staff training in clear, accessible language** when working with visitors with intellectual disabilities, and through co-creating NOF souvenirs with participants from the Šibenik Inclusion Centre, creating work opportunities for vulnerable groups.
- Nature-based investments were implemented across the heritage sites of six partners. In Šibenik, the most complex challenge was **revitalising the WWII tunnel at St. John's Fortress**, where construction was combined with multi-sensory storytelling to recreate its historic atmosphere. **Smart recycling systems**, including air-quality monitoring and recycling containers, were introduced at three fortresses, while St. John's Fortress additionally received a bio-composter and landscaping to green the plateau.
- **GIFTS network established**—initially, the network had members from 3 programme countries, but was widened towards the project end thanks to regional exchange meetings with stakeholders, international presentations of the GIFTS network and the Night of Fortresses at conferences and congresses.
- **Two CB workshops organised**—two three-day cross-border (CB) trainings (90+ participants) on sustainable cultural management, organised in Šibenik.
- **Inclusion supported in each partner's local setting** – through activities and cooperation such as disability-awareness training for staff, active participation in NOF and the co-creation of NOF souvenirs with participants from the Šibenik Inclusion Centre.
- **Two NOF Goes Green editions organised** – in 2025 and 2026, connecting more than 75 locations in 11 European countries and promoting green values, inclusivity and diversity.

Impact

GIFTSnet's ambition has been translated into tangible results, contributing to a **lasting shift** towards sustainable, green and inclusive cultural management.

As the GIFTS network expands, attracting heritage sites eager to adopt and share these practices, it strengthens **Night of Fortresses as a leading international platform**, inspiring an eco-friendly approach in cultural heritage management.

The innovative recycling system has **drastically reduced waste** at key fortresses, inspiring public institutions and cultural sites alike to embrace green technologies.

Another significant achievement is the revitalised WWII tunnel, now presented as a multi-sensory visitor experience that transforms a dark historical period into a **must-see attraction**.

Ultimately, GIFTSnet has reinforced the institution's readiness to adapt and exemplified competent leadership in the green era.

Results

- **Smart recycling systems introduced at the Šibenik Fortresses**—three fortresses equipped with three sets of smart recycling containers and air-quality monitoring; a bio-composter installed and the plateau greened at St. John's Fortress.
- **WWII tunnel under St. John's Fortress revitalised**—adapted, equipped, digitally interpreted and opened to visitors.

Lessons learned

- **Inclusion means action** – engage vulnerable groups in multiple ways to create real community impact, from making souvenirs and local initiatives to full participation in cultural events.
- **Cultivate a dynamic network** – maintain momentum through regular stakeholder exchanges and a shared platform, boosting collaboration and knowledge-sharing across sites. Include, create, innovate and repeat.
- **Be clear and specific** – when organising events with sustainability in mind, set precise guidelines to ensure that messages on sustainability and environmental protection result in tangible, measurable actions, avoiding vague or superficial claims.
- **Demonstrate sustainability in practice** – combine eco-investments such as smart recycling with cultural events such as NOF to reduce waste, raise awareness and inspire broader adoption across communities.

More information

[Project webpage](#)
[Night of Fortresses Goes Green video](#)

HEPHAESTUS

HEritage Protocols for ArchItecturAl European croSs-bordering siTes evalUationS

Funding programme
HORIZON-MSCA-2023-SE-01
Lead partner
Università degli studi di Firenze (IT)
Partners
Fundacja To Get There (PL), Hochschule Bochum (DE), Institut za povijest umjetnosti (HR), Instytut Kultury Miejskiej (PL), Metaheritage SRL (IT), Politechnika gdanska - Gdańsk university of technology (PL), Tvrđava kulture Šibenik (HR), Università degli Studi di Pavia (IT)
Duration
48 months (11/2024 – 10/2028)
Project value
542,800.00 EUR
Keywords
digital heritage, cross-border capacity building, fortified cultural routes

Vision

HEPHAESTUS addresses the challenges of preserving Europe’s fortresses and military architecture, where inconsistent documentation and the limited application of modern conservation methods hinder their valorisation.

Recognised as an example of good practice in heritage revitalisation, Fortress of Culture Šibenik contributes its expertise to this multidisciplinary effort. Through international summer schools, secondments and collaborative meetings, the project brings together universities, research centres and cultural institutions to develop **3D databases, shared glossaries and joint protocols** that strengthen cross-border cooperation and sustainable heritage care.

How?

- During the **kick-off meeting in Florence**, partners defined roles, identified Adriatic and Baltic case studies, and agreed on methodologies for cross-border research.
- International mobility followed, with research secondments in **Croatia, Poland and Italy**, enabling researchers and PhD students to share expertise in fortification studies and digital documentation methods.
- International summer schools provided hands-on training: in Gdańsk, **participants developed a semantic 3D model** of the former *Torpedownia* base, while the *Hvar Fortress* workshop on the island of Hvar focused on **digital documentation techniques** for Adriatic fortifications.
- Field visits linked theoretical learning from workshops and summer schools with practical observation, while technical meetings advanced the planning.

- The partnership developed digital applications and **3D-printed models of fortification routes, and tested shared digital maps** (GIS platform) alongside thematic heritage studies.

Results

- **International summer schools** – Baltic Heritage Route in Gdańsk (40+ participants) and Hvar Fortress workshop in Croatia (35+ participants), focusing on 3D modelling and digital documentation.
- **Secondments** – researchers from Italy, Croatia, Poland, and Venice exchanged expertise in fortification studies and digital heritage methods.
- **Fortifications documented** – Fortica, Fort Napoleon, Fort Veneranda, Battery Andrea and the city walls of Hvar.
- **Digital apps and 3D-printed models developed** – new tools for exploring fortification routes on-site and remotely.
- **Shared digital maps (GIS platform) produced** – offering a common visual basis for fortification routes.
- **Thematic heritage studies drafted** – supporting future cross-border documentation protocols.

Impact

Students, young professionals and Fortress of Culture heritage experts gained valuable knowledge through international summer schools, secondments and field workshops, **with the Adriatic Route serving as a key case study.**

Academic and cultural institutions benefitted from developing shared glossaries, methodological guidelines and digital tools that support ongoing cooperation. In addition, **thematic maps and 3D-printed models continue to diversify** how fortresses are explored and understood.

By strengthening cross-border collaboration, the project supports long-term, innovative documentation and preservation of Europe’s fortified heritage in the years to come.

More information

[CORDIS project page](#)

Night of Fortresses

A Joint European Cultural Manifestation

Co-financed from projects
FORTITUDE, GIFTSnet, FORTIC
Lead partner and manifestation coordinator
Public Cultural Institution Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)
Launched
Spring 2022
Keywords
international collaboration, sustainability, green and inclusive heritage sites, cultural manifestation

Motivation

Across Europe, fortified heritage sites face common challenges: seasonality, limited cooperation among site managers, and the need to offer richer cultural experiences.

In response, the idea of a joint cultural manifestation took shape within the **FORTITUDE project**, bringing together partners from different countries and backgrounds. In 2022, this idea was launched as the **Night of Fortresses (NOF)** - a manifestation that connects sites across borders, engages communities and strengthens the link between identity and heritage.

In **2023 and 2024**, the manifestation continued outside EU project frameworks, sustained by partners who had signed a **Memorandum of Cooperation**, showing their commitment to keep the initiative alive and growing together. Building on this foundation, new EU projects soon followed, opening the way for further expansion and adding new dimensions of cooperation, sustainability and inclusion.

Since 2025, under the banner **Night of Fortresses Goes Green – Step by Step, Event by Event**, the manifestation has placed sustainability at its core. By applying eco-friendly and inclusive practices across all participating sites, NOF not only celebrates heritage but also serves as a model for future cultural cooperation in Europe.

Vision

NOF aims to strengthen its role as a **joint European cultural manifestation**, connecting heritage sites across borders and fostering cooperation among institutions, local communities and visitors, ultimately serving as a model for cooperation in cultural tourism.

As part of the **Goes Green** strand, the event embeds sustainability and inclusion as core values, applying eco-friendly practices and inclusive programming across participating sites.

The initiative supports heritage operators in adopting innovative, sustainable and community-focused approaches through **capacity building** and **knowledge exchange**.

The **Branding Strategy** and **shared communication tools** ensure that NOF is recognised **consistently** across Europe, while leaving room for partners to highlight local specificities.

The identity of NOF is further shaped through the branding archetypes – **Creator**, **Magician** and **Care-giver** – which guide its tone of voice and strengthen its connection with audiences.

This vision is reinforced by the **GIFTS Network**, which brings together cultural stakeholders, promotes sustainable cultural tourism, supports social inclusion and facilitates European territorial cooperation in the cultural and creative sectors.

How?

- From the beginning, NOF has been guided by clear objectives and a strong identity, evolving into a platform for **cross-border cooperation, knowledge exchange, and joint promotion of heritage sites**.
- Organising NOF requires **programme planning, stakeholder coordination, multi-channel communication** and **promotional activities** to reach diverse audiences.
- While preparing activities at its own sites, the Public Cultural Institution Fortress of Culture Šibenik – as **the lead coordinator** – also supports other participating sites, ensuring that all partners share the same values and are supported in organising their events.
- To guarantee a consistent approach, all sites receive **participation kits** with logos, guidelines and resources that maintain a common identity while leaving space for local creativity.
- **Capacity building** has been central from the start:
- **FORTITUDE** introduced workshops on destination management and heritage interpretation, preparing partners for the first edition in 2022.
- **FORTIC** expanded the initiative to Italy and developed the Branding Strategy for the Night of Fortresses, alongside the Green Sustain Guidelines and the international Green Sustain Lab in Šibenik.

- **GIFTSnet** strengthened the network through training that embedded sustainability, inclusion and long-term cooperation.
- Through these efforts, NOF adopted the **Goes Green** label, with the slogan *Step by step, event by event*, supported by practical guidelines that make sustainability part of every programme.
- The official website, upgraded through GIFTSnet, serves as a shared digital platform where partners present programmes, exchange knowledge and prepare for the event.
- After each edition, organisers evaluate activities, participation and results, using the lessons learned to prepare the next edition and steadily raise the scope and quality of the manifestation.

Results

- **2022** – The first edition, delivered within the FORTITUDE project, brought together fortresses and cultural sites across Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. It offered dozens of programmes and attracted thousands of visitors, establishing NOF as a new cross-border cultural event. That same year, NOF was a finalist for *Event of the Year* at Croatian Tourism Days.
- **2023** – Without EU project support, NOF continued through the commitment of partners united by a Memorandum of Cooperation. The manifestation expanded to new sites, confirming its capacity to grow independently and attracting a wider European audience.
- **2024** – NOF reached more than 40 heritage sites in 8 European countries, presenting over 130 programmes – from concerts and exhibitions to eco-workshops and guided tours – and attracting thousands of visitors. The initiative became part of the European Fortress Summer and gained visibility via European networks joined by Fortress of Culture Šibenik - such as EFFORTS, FORTE CULTURA, Culture Action Europe (CAE) and ENCATC.
- **2025** – Under the label *Night of Fortresses Goes Green*, the manifestation expanded further to include 75 sites in 10 countries, supported by the FORTIC and GIFTSnet projects. In that year alone, 193 programmes were delivered, with Fortress of Culture’s sites hosting 8 programmes and 2,064 visitors, while participation across the network exceeded tens of thousands of visitors.

- **2026** – The fifth edition, also under the label *Night of Fortresses Goes Green*, held for the first time over two days, brought together 72 locations in 11 countries through 230 programmes. As part of the event, the Fortresses Break Down Barriers programme connected all four Šibenik fortresses through 4 inclusive tours developed with 4 local disability organisations as shared experiences for the whole community. Each explored a different aspect of accessibility, while a round table and a fashion show featuring persons with disabilities opened a wider conversation about making heritage more accessible and inclusive.
- **Capacity building** – Through the FORTITUDE, FORTIC and GIFTSnet projects, the Public Cultural Institution Fortress of Culture Šibenik developed the Branding Strategy for NOF, produced the Green Sustain Guidelines and organised international training such as the Green Sustain Lab in Šibenik, as well as workshops on destination management, heritage interpretation and eco-inclusive programming. These activities have built capacity across the network and supported the long-term growth of the initiative.

Impact

Night of Fortresses has shown sustained growth, **broadening its international reach over time**, and establishing itself as a model of cross-border cultural cooperation that is widely recognised across Europe.

In 2025, **the Goes Green label strengthened the event’s environmental dimension across** 193 events – from workshops, sustainability tours and exhibitions, to concerts, lectures, theatre shows, fairs and eco actions – engaging diverse audiences and strengthening the link between heritage and community life.

In 2026, the event expanded **to 230 programmes at 72 locations in 11 countries, while its inclusive dimension came more clearly into focus**. In Šibenik, the Fortresses Break Down Barriers programme was shaped together with local disability organisations through tours across all four fortresses. Participants explored the sites from different perspectives, while a round table and fashion show brought the experiences of people with disabilities into a wider public conversation about access to heritage.

At the same time, the initiative builds **professional capacity** by providing training in **destination management, heritage interpretation and eco-inclusive programming**. Shared guidelines help participating sites translate sustainability and inclusion into their local programmes.

The impact also extends through the creation of the **GIFTS Network**, which connects partners, sites and experts, ensuring continued learning, stronger cooperation and long-term sustainability of the initiative. Together with the jointly developed **Branding Strategy for NOF**, it provides a solid framework for visibility, consistency and further growth across Europe.

Lessons learned

- **Build the event’s base** – ensure that NOF has a strong organisational backbone, with a central platform, clear rules and shared tools that enable all partners to participate on an equal footing.
- **Prepare every participant** – provide each site with guidelines, information and materials, alongside training opportunities, so they can design programmes that reflect common values and meet shared quality standards.
- **Lead the network** – as an international coordinator, the Public Cultural Institution Fortress of Culture Šibenik supports partners beyond its own sites, ensuring that their programmes align with the event’s identity, while encouraging local creativity.
- **Translate values into action** – integrate sustainability and inclusion into every layer of the initiative, from slogans and branding to the Green Sustain Guidelines and partner requirements, ensuring that these values are applied consistently and meaningfully.
- **Engage communities** – focus on families, young people and local residents, ensuring that NOF is not only a cultural manifestation but also a shared experience that strengthens community identity and belonging.
- **Sustain the brand** – rely on branding archetypes (Creator, Magician and Caregiver) and a clear communication strategy, supported by the jointly developed Branding Strategy for NOF, to maintain recognisability across Europe and to guide the initiative’s continuous progress, while fostering a lasting emotional connection with audiences.

More information

[Official website](#)
[Night of Fortresses Goes Green Resources](#)

HOT CHAI

Heritage Oriented Tourism preparing for Challenges of AI driven era

Funding programme
Interreg VI-A IPA Programme Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro 2021–2027 (IPA III CBC)
Lead partner
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)
Partners
Agency for Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage and Development of Tourism Potential of Jajce (BA), Municipality of Tivat (ME), Town of Vrlika (HR)
Duration
24 months (09/2026–08/2028)
Project value
2,241,828.85 EUR
Keywords
AI-supported heritage management, accessible cultural tourism, collaborative integration of new technologies

Motivation

The way people travel, seek information, and experience culture is constantly changing, reshaping how heritage sites connect visitors with the stories they preserve. To remain relevant, heritage sites need continued investment in infrastructure and interpretation, as well as services and content accessible to diverse audiences.

Rapid technological change adds another dimension, with **AI offering new ways to improve** visitor experiences, provide information efficiently, and support everyday work. Yet cultural organizations lack the knowledge and experience to use it effectively.

Recognizing these needs and AI’s potential, HOT CHAI combines site improvements with practical uses of new technology to enrich heritage sites and their offer.

Vision

HOT CHAI brings together partners from Šibenik, Jajce, Tivat, and Vrlika around a shared ambition to explore how AI can open new possibilities for their heritage sites.

The partnership is driven by the idea that upgrading heritage sites and leveraging AI can go hand in hand, creating new ways to interpret and experience heritage.

To put this into practice, all four partners will **build their AI skills**, develop internal action plans, introduce and test chatbots on their websites, and showcase the improvements in access, interpretation, and digital services at their sites during **Night of Fortresses 2028**.

How?

- A kick-off conference in Šibenik launches the project, bringing the partners together to review their roles and plan the activities ahead. Regular partner meetings coordinate shared activities and track progress, while each partner manages its own procurement.
- **The largest investment takes shape at St. Michael's Fortress:** reconstructed entrances and the south-western promenade improve access, LED lighting illuminates the walkway, and the north-western tower opens to visitors. In Jajce, Tivat, and Vrlika, restored heritage spaces are being given digital interpretation and visitor facilities.
- The project **looks beyond physical access.** At St. Michael's, two exhibitions and the audio guide are translated into international sign language. Tivat adapts content for visually impaired visitors, while organizations in Jajce and Vrlika involve people with disabilities in souvenir production.
- **Certified training** helps teams identify how AI can support visitor services and daily work. Each partner develops **an internal action plan** using this knowledge. Moreover, externally provided **chatbots** are introduced and tested on all four partners' websites, while Fortress of Culture Šibenik integrates AI tools into My Fortress of Knowledge workshops for children.
- At **Night of Fortresses 2028**, visitors experience the improved sites first-hand and discover new ways of exploring heritage through AI and digital technologies. With an agreement signed in Trebinje carrying the partnership beyond HOT CHAI, the partners celebrate their successful entry into the AI-driven era at the final conference in Tivat.
- **AI capacities strengthened** – 15 staff members certified, and all 4 partners represented at an international AI and technology fair.
- **Internal AI plans developed** – 4 action plans, one by each partner.
- **AI-supported services introduced and assessed** – 4 website chatbots and 4 partner self-evaluation reports.
- **My Fortress of Knowledge upgraded** – AI tools integrated into workshops for children.
- **Night of Fortresses 2028** – site improvements and digital services presented at all 4 locations.
- **Long-term cooperation agreement** – signed in Trebinje to formalise continued cross-border cooperation.

Expected impact

Renewed spaces, better access, and more inclusive interpretation form HOT CHAI's visible legacy across four heritage sites. At St. Michael's Fortress, a previously inaccessible tower opens to visitors, the promenade becomes easier to navigate, and existing exhibitions and the audio guide become **accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors**.

Beyond these visible improvements, its deeper impact lies in helping the partners decide where new technologies can genuinely support their work. By testing AI in real services, creating their own plans and assessing the results, **they turn its potential into practical experience**. In Šibenik, My Fortress of Knowledge brings this exploration to children, connecting heritage education with the digital world already shaping their lives.

Continued cross-border cooperation enables partners to share what they have learned and to improve their approach beyond the project. Its lasting value lies in a partnership better prepared for technological change without losing sight of the heritage and audience it serves.

Expected results

- **St. Michael's Fortress improvements** – reconstructed entrances and south-western promenade, LED walkway lighting, and the north-western tower opened to visitors.
- **Inclusive services expanded** – sign-language versions of 2 exhibitions and an audio guide; adapted museum content in Tivat; inclusive souvenir production in Jajce and Vrlika.

InSite

Developing INclusiveness in cultural heritage SITEs and organizations

Funding programme
Erasmus+, Small-scale Partnerships in Adult Education (KA210-ADU)
Lead partner
Fortress of Culture Šibenik (HR)
Partners
Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons Dodir (HR), RISA Institute (SI), Cultural Centre Krško (SI)
Duration
19 months (11/2026–05/2028)
Project value
60,000.00 EUR
Keywords
inclusive cultural heritage, sensory and cognitive accessibility, cross-sector knowledge exchange

Motivation

Cultural heritage belongs to everyone, yet access to its stories remains unequal. **In 2021, around 25% of EU residents aged 16 and over reported a disability limiting their everyday activities.³ For these visitors**, information at heritage sites is not always available in suitable formats. Tours and interpretation may also overlook sensory, communication, and cognitive needs.

Although many institutions have introduced individual adaptations, these often remain occasional rather than part of everyday practice. **InSite brings cultural institutions and disability organizations together** to strengthen staff skills and make accessible content and inclusive approaches standard practice when welcoming, informing, and engaging visitors.

Vision

InSite is built on the idea that lasting inclusion grows from **cooperation between those who manage heritage and those who understand accessibility in practice**. From Croatia and Slovenia, the Fortress of Culture Šibenik and the Cultural Centre Krško contribute their experience of running heritage sites, while Dodir and RISA bring expertise in sensory and cognitive accessibility.

With support from partner organisations specialising in accessibility, heritage staff can **directly apply their new skills** to developing and testing inclusive tours and accessible interpretive content. The lessons learned through that experience inform the creation of a practical guide for other heritage organizations, offering them a model for enabling more visitors to explore the sites independently and on equal terms.

³ European Court of Auditors, Special Report 20/2023: Supporting persons with disabilities – Practical impact of EU action is limited, 2023.

How?

- InSite begins by creating a **shared understanding of accessibility** before bringing that learning into everyday work at the partner sites. An online kick-off aligns roles, followed by four sessions led by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), Dodir, RISA, and Arena for ALL on accessible tourism, sensory and cognitive accessibility, and inclusive programme design.
- Each heritage team then **moves on to training tailored to the needs of its visitors**. In Šibenik, eight employees are building on a six-month Croatian Sign Language (CSL) course completed in 2024. Dodir refreshes their skills and introduces International Sign (IS) communication, while one employee continues with 50 hours of individual training in CSL to prepare for independently leading an inclusive tour. In Krško, RISA trains staff in easy-to-understand language and adapted guidance.
- **Next, the heritage teams draw on their training to develop tours and accessible visitor information**. Šibenik develops a CSL tour and a video glossary of 50 IS signs and phrases. Five sites managed by Fortress of Culture Šibenik feature QR panels linked to videos in international sign, with English subtitles and audio. Rajhenburg Castle develops an inclusive tour, an easy-to-understand guide, and 30 simple-language audio recordings, all tested with intended users. Both institutions also update their websites to present their inclusive services in one place.
- **Night of Fortresses marks the public launch** of the inclusive tours in Šibenik and Krško as both institutions sign agreements with local organizations representing people with disabilities. Lessons from both locations come together in the InSite Roadmap, a shared guide enabling other heritage institutions to adapt the tested methods to their own sites and visitors.

Expected results

- **4 online accessibility sessions** – delivered by ENAT, Dodir, RISA, and Arena for ALL.
- **13 employees trained** – 8 in Šibenik receive a CSL refresher and learn basic IS communication, while 5 in Krško train in easy-to-understand language and adapted guiding; 1 Šibenik employee also completes 50 hours of individual CSL training.

- **2 inclusive tours developed and tested** – a CSL tour in Šibenik and an easy-to-understand tour at Rajhenburg Castle, launched during Night of Fortresses.
- **5 Šibenik sites made more accessible** – with 5 adapted videos, 5 QR panels (St. John’s Fortress, St.Michael’s Fortress, Barone Fortress, Croatian Coral Center and House of Art Arsen) and a glossary of 50 IS signs and phrases.
- **Rajhenburg Castle interpretation adapted** – through an easy-to-understand guide published in 1,000 copies and 30 simple-language audio recordings.
- **2 websites updated** – bringing together the institutions’ inclusive services and materials.
- **InSite Roadmap published** – providing a shared guide based on methods tested at both locations.
- **2 cooperation agreements signed** – with local organizations representing people with disabilities.

Expected impact

At the heart of InSite lies a meaningful change: **visitors with different communication and cognitive needs gain greater independence** when exploring the heritage sites. Across five Šibenik sites, adapted video content improves access for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, while the new CSL tour becomes part of the institution’s regular programme. At Rajhenburg Castle, an inclusive tour, an easy-to-understand guide, and audio recordings make interpretation more accessible to people with intellectual disabilities.

Staff training and direct work with Dodir and RISA strengthen the institutions’ ability to develop accessible tours and interpretation in the future. **People with disabilities remain part of the process:** intended users test the content before launch, while cooperation agreements keep local organizations involved in its continued delivery and development.

The InSite Roadmap extends the impact beyond the partner sites by making the tested approaches available to other heritage institutions. Together, these results make Šibenik and Krško examples of heritage sites that listen to their visitors and adapt their communication, allowing more people to take part in cultural life.

International Cooperation and Projects Department

Often referred to as one of Fortress of Culture’s strategic development pillars, the Department is committed to driving innovation and to continuously identifying ways to strengthen the overall work of the institution’s sites and venues, making them more attractive, engaging and inclusive.

The Department establishes, develops and manages partnerships at local, regional, national and international levels and prepares and implements projects and funding applications. Its responsibilities also include monitoring funding opportunities and investments, cooperating with professional networks in Croatia and Europe, maintaining collaboration with expert institutions and partners, representing and promoting the Institution’s projects internationally, organising international exchanges, study visits, conferences and public events, while also supporting educational initiatives and community programmes.

Since 2017, numerous projects have been delivered, focusing on the digital interpretation of cultural heritage, audience development, the growth of cultural and creative industries (CCI), participatory governance in culture, cross-border cultural tourism, sustainability, the adoption of environmentally friendly practices in heritage management, capacity building and knowledge exchange, networking and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in cultural life.

The preceding pages provide an overview of the Department’s core work, presenting the Institution’s successfully implemented and ongoing projects. For potential future collaborations and partnerships, the contact details of Department staff members are listed below.

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