Dear All,
in this last newsletter we are pleased to share with you the final results of the REACH project.

The project's three year lifetime has passed very quickly. This final newsletter will provide an overview of the main outcomes of the REACH Social Platform, that has highlighted the role of participatory approaches in the preservation, (re-)use and management of cultural heritage, and demonstrated how social participation and civil engagement enhance the vital and dynamic dimensions of heritage, fostering its resilience.

The results of pilots' experiences, together with the development of participatory models have helped to define the features of a resilient European cultural heritage, able to survive social changes and cultural transformations. The COVID-19 crisis that has had such societal impact this year, is itself a tangible example of where resilience of cultural heritage and participatory approaches have demonstrated their value.

The collection of good practices, drawn from many projects and activities, has produced a wide and multidisciplinary database that is accessible to the whole community of cultural heritage, and remains open to further and future contributions. The REACH Digital Gallery has gathered together a rich collection of posters and videos. Both of these, and many other resources, are available on the open-heritage.eu digital platform.

Results of the REACH four thematic pilots

Pilot on minority (Roma) heritage

Figure 1 The Újpest Roma Local History Collection
Photograph: ujpestiroma.hu

During the pilot, approximately 30 meetings were held with a wide-range of Roma stakeholders, leading to a number of good practice cases being identified. Beyond the initial associate partners (MOME EcoLab - Cloudfactory project, Roma Country House in Hodász, Kesztyűgyár Community House, Gallery8) closer collaboration was established with many institutions that let them become quasi associate partners (Újpest Roma Local History Collection, Gandhi Secondary School, UCCU Roma Informal Educational Foundation and Independent Theatre).

One of the major challenges has been the general weakness of the Hungarian civil society, and given the levels of discrimination that are already apparent, this is exacerbated for the Roma communities. In this context, the ELTE team recognised early on the need to take a more proactive role in the design of the pilot activities. Several examples have arisen from the pilot, which demonstrate how participatory activities can produce stronger impact in terms of community building, social innovation and cohesion. With the attempts to engage and mobilise community members and build connectedness through cultural heritage, the examined practices and initiatives have a unique position in these marginalised communities. On one hand, a wide-range of participatory practices are integrated into the heritage agenda in these 'good practices', on the other

hand, the long-term sustainability of these practices is endangered - among others - by the lack of official recognition.

Pilot on institutional heritage

Figure 2 "Bilderschau" at Industrie- und Filmmuseum Wolfen, Germany
© Friederike Berlekamp, photograph: F. Berlekamp

The pilot focused on participatory initiatives conducted in museums to discuss the role and significance, as well as the potential of museums, historico-cultural collections and museum activities for the communities and society. This work revealed a broad spectrum of civic engagement in museums, such as exploration of the contents of collections, contemporary witnesses' contribution, co-creation of learning materials and exhibitions, organisation of interactive / dialogic guided tours and other forms of exchange, as well as government volunteer programmes.

This pilot highlighted the great benefits of collaborative and participatory work for all those involved directly (the people, the museum and its staff) and indirectly (the communities and society). It has become clear that the involvement of and collaboration with laypersons, but also with external experts, is indispensable for the museum's work. It is only this diversity, together with the exchange and interaction, that enables the museum to recognise and respond to the many different needs, wishes and expectations of its visitors and thus to meet the great diversity of society and current challenges. In order to be able to develop sustainable and relevant activities, however, suitable framework conditions are required (especially with regard to the budgeting including personnel planning and time dimensions). This pilot on cultural heritage in institutions demonstrated that participatory engagement is a cross-sector undertaking that needs collaboration within the institutions and with external partners. Museums want to be active for the public and with the people. Citizen involvement requires understanding, interest and commitment.

Pilot on rural heritage

Figure 3 Cleanliness of Fuente de los Caños, Spain
Photograph: E. Aramburu and R. Corselli

The pilot's activities, carried out in collaboration with the irrigation communities provided access to participatory assemblies and their residents. Activities resulted in an increased acknowledgment and awareness of the importance of traditional irrigation systems from cultural, environmental, social and agronomic perspectives. There is also an acknowledgment of the important environmental role that traditional systems play; this can be linked to a growing consciousness as regards global change and climate breakdown. Important local institutions such as rural development groups, the National Park of Sierra Nevada, ecologist, cultural associations and many municipalities are now supporting traditional communities to manage water and lobby against industrial agriculture. Traditional irrigation areas are defended as identitary elements for the local population and their cultural values are being used ever more as an argument for their protection.

UGR's community archaeology strategy has had a positive effect on the local population and beyond. In Mojácar (Almería), people's perception changed dramatically as a result of the open excavation and the participatory activities developed, generating enthusiastic support, with a very high level of interest and involvement. Local people were also very critical of the local institutions responsible for heritage and landscape protection, and requested further cultural activities related to their past history, their memory and their identitary places. This impact has been translated into several proposals from local authorities and the regional government to replicate the research and participatory activity in several archaeological sites in provinces throughout Almería and Granada. From an academic point of view, UGR has also noted an increase in interest from colleagues towards this kind of approach, and Mojácar has been transformed into a model for new projects and for students, as an important case study in promoting participatory approaches towards rural cultural heritage.

Pilot on small towns' heritage

Figure 4 Vysočina open air museum, Czech Republic
Photograph: J. Krajíček

The pilot on small towns' heritage delved into the complexities of heritage uses in small towns. An array of small towns were surveyed in three regions of Eastern-Central Europe, with the aim of identifying plurality of engagement with heritage, variety of heritage representations, and a range of heritage-based strategies. The results highlighted both good and bad practices, both of which provide valuable lessons. The findings were shared and partly co-produced during debates with local stakeholders and cultural heritage institutions, who

provided further insights into potentials and limits of heritage preservation, management and (re-)use in small towns.

The conclusion drawn is that heritage is seen and widely used by many actors as an important resource for small towns, and that it may help them to become more resilient to external and internal challenges. Yet the impact can also be small, or even contradictory, when heritage is narrowly understood, strategies are biased or ill-defined, measures poorly communicated, and staff resources insufficient and unskilled. Initiating stronger participation from below requires sustained communication among stakeholders, between professional and amateur heritage activists, across different sectors, and finally wide-ranging support to heritage professionals and enthusiasts in small towns. These are some of the options available for developing a better regime and for finding optimal solutions to the benefit of everyone.

Results of REACH Online Services

The REACH social platform provided two online services:

- The first service is open-heritage.eu. It is a digital platform that offers access to a wide and varied range of cultural heritage resources. Papers, data and links to projects document experiences and practices produced by the work of a multi-disciplinary community of researchers. Open-heritage.eu is conceived as a long term product which will continue to be available and to develop also after the conclusion of the REACH project.

Figure 5 Open-Heritage.eu Digital Platform

- The second service is the REACH Posters and Videos Digital Gallery. This gallery demonstrates the richness and diversity of approaches taken by European researchers and institutions to valuing cultural heritage. The posters and videos cover a wide range of themes, including societal cohesion, sustainability and environmental/ecological responsibility, rapid societal change, narratives, place-making and identity.

Figure 6 Poster Collage of the REACH Digital Gallery

Due to the variety of its posters and videos, the REACH Digital Gallery provides an excellent collection of examples of resilience and citizens' engagement, which can inspire actors of the cultural heritage community to adopt and develop more participatory practices.

The REACH Digital Gallery will remain accessible in the coming years via the open-heritage.eu platform.

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Evaluation of project results

Evaluation of the project results, testing each of the pilots in turn against the project's participatory frameworks, has reviewed the outcomes of local encounters and pilot activities, aggregating the requirement that have emerged from participating users, examining successes as well as determining key factors in barriers to participation and how to overcome these, in order to inform and develop future policy frameworks for participatory preservation, management and (re-)use of cultural heritage. By discussing each pilot and findings from the pilots' various project activities, evaluation has also considered the broader themes that emerge from the pilots: community empowerment and meaning-making; tangible and intangible cultural heritage; forgotten heritage and unwanted heritage; ownership, ethics and Intellectual Property (IP); education and knowledge exchange (including cross-cultural, intergenerational and interdisciplinary); responding to societal change; using new technologies: digital approaches; a sliding scale of top-down and bottom-up approaches; and resilience as adaptation, rather than resistance, to change, a theme that is especially pertinent given the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic. These key themes have, in turn, opened up a number of important lessons learned and considerations to be borne in mind when designing participatory approaches for a resilient cultural heritage and for developing social cohesion. The initial (and projected longer-term) impact of the project is clear and demonstrates how participatory activities have intrinsic economic and societal benefits. As such, they must be promoted as an asset, not a liability, and as an investment rather than a cost.

Further details are available on the project's website, and public deliverables page.

The results of the REACH Social Platform are offered to the cultural heritage community to continue the construction of a permanent coordination for its research. Such coordination will be able to deliver stronger impact and wider benefits to the European society, contributing to the transition towards the ambitions of the new Horizon Europe programme.

REACH Consortium
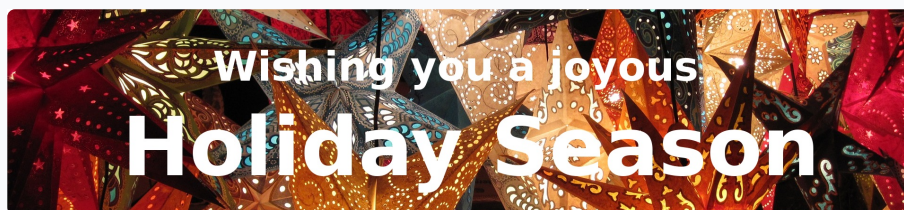
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REACH Network Coordinator
PROMOTER S.r.l.
Information technology, research and innovation
Via della bonifica, 69 - 56037 Peccioli (Pisa), Italy
Tel. +39.0587.630207
P.I.01968960508