



CROCUS

Cross-border Cultural and Creative Tourism in Rural and Remote Areas

A Horizon Europe-funded project aiming to unlock the potential of cultural and creative tourism as a tool for economic, social, and environmental development in rural and remote areas across Europe.

Duration: 2024-2027

Coordinator: Aalborg University (Denmark)

Website: www.crocuseurope.eu



Why CROCUS?

Rural areas: challenges and potential

Rural and remote areas represent over 80% of the EU's territory. Despite their rich cultural and natural heritage, these regions often face:

- **Population decline and youth outmigration**
- **Low employment opportunities**
- **Limited infrastructure and services**
- **Weak integration in national and EU tourism flows**

Yet, these same areas hold enormous potential to become hubs for creative and cultural tourism, based on authenticity, heritage, and sustainable experiences.



CROCUS aims to:

- **Making cultural tourism models more sustainable**
- **Strengthen cross-border cooperation in marginal areas**
- **Promote culture as a driver of sustainable development**
- **Develop policy scenarios to support cultural tourism development**



Methodology and Action Pillars

Our Approach: Three Pillars of Action

1. Place-based business models

Tailored strategies based on local heritage, resources, and identity.

2. Sustainable tourism development

Emphasising long-term value, resilience, and respect for community dynamics and ecosystems.

3. Policy and governance frameworks

Co-developing policies to integrate rural and remote areas into broader tourism strategies, especially across borders.



Our Tools

- Transdisciplinary research and mapping
 - Participatory Living Labs with local stakeholders
 - Multi-level dialogue with institutions and practitioners
 - A Navigation tool to share models and best practices on our web site
- www.crocuseurope.eu



The Living Labs

Sondrio & Valposchiavo (Italy – Switzerland)

This Living Lab explores cross-border cheese tourism in the Alps, connecting rural heritage with culinary innovation. It focuses on sustainable production, identity, and circular economy models, with the “100% Valposchiavo” initiative as a case study of integrated development.

Husum & Southern Jutland – Schleswig-Holstein (Denmark–Germany)

Here, the focus is on coastal and rural festivals as drivers of tourism and community cohesion. The Lab explores how culture, food, and seasonal events can foster regional identity, cross-border cooperation, and creative entrepreneurship.

Mulgimaa & Vidzeme (Estonia – Latvia)

This Living Lab revitalises local traditions and intangible heritage through community-based storytelling and creative industries. It tests tourism products based on folk crafts, songs, and historical narratives to create year-round sustainable offers.



The Living Labs

Matulji & Ilirska Bistrica (Croatia – Slovenia)

Focusing on industrial heritage and mobility, this Lab reimagines former railway infrastructure and cross-border transport corridors as cultural tourism routes. It also promotes local gastronomy and creative reuse of abandoned rural sites.

Dobrudzha (Bulgaria)

The Dobrudzha Lab works to develop tourism based on the agricultural heritage and folklore of northeastern Bulgaria. It builds experiences around traditional food, music, and crafts, integrating them into a broader strategy for regional development.

Tornionjokilaakso & Tornedalen (Finland-Sweden)

This Lab focuses on youth involvement and digital innovation in rural tourism. It explores the role of creative sectors, gaming culture, and immersive media in making remote Finnish areas more attractive to new generations of tourists.



The Living Labs

Zala and Pomurske (Hungary-Slovenia)

Combining wine heritage, crafts, and landscape interpretation, the Pannonia Living Lab promotes experiential tourism and rural entrepreneurship. The aim is to balance authenticity with innovation and ensure economic opportunities for local producers.

Goriška & Udine (Slovenia-Italy)

The cross-border Living Lab brings together the Goriška region in Slovenia and the Province of Udine in Italy to explore rural and remote tourism solutions. It serves as an open-air testing ground for cultural, environmental, and hospitality-based innovations. The Lab fosters collaboration between institutions, communities, and businesses to co-design sustainable tourism models.



Outputs and Innovation

What will CROCUS deliver?

- **Innovative and replicable business models for cultural and creative tourism**
- **Policy recommendations targeting cross-border and macro-regional cooperation**
- **A website to share tools, data, and best practices**
- **Capacity-building for local actors (knowledge sharing and toolkits)**

All outcomes will be open-access and designed for transferability.



Partnership

Who we are

Coordinated by Aalborg University (DK), the CROCUS consortium includes 10 partners from 9 countries, combining universities, research institutes, tourism organisations and NGOs:

- **ATLAS Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (NL)**
- **University of Bergamo (IT)**
- **University of Oulu (FI)**
- **University of Maribor (SI)**
- **Tallinn University (EE)**
- **University of Rijeka (HR)**
- **University of Pannonia (HU)**
- **Zangador Research Institute (BG)**
- **Group Nao (DK)**



Join the CROCUS community

CROCUS is building a community of practice for rural tourism transformation. Whether you're a policymaker, community member, creative professional, or researcher — your voice matters.

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- 👉 Share your experience and help shape new models**