



CROCUS NEWSLETTER N° 2

CROCUS ATTENDANCE IN INTERNATIONAL EVENTS IN 2025

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE TOURISM: THEORIES, PRACTICES AND TOOLS

Insights from the ATLAS Annual Conference 2025 - Vila-Seca, Spain

The 2025 **ATLAS Annual Conference** (Vila-Seca, Spain) featured a special session dedicated to “*Cultural and Creative Tourism: Theories, Practices and Tools*”. Organised by the **ATLAS Special Interest Group on Cultural Tourism** in collaboration with the **Horizon Europe CROCUS Project**, the session gathered leading researchers and practitioners from across Europe to explore how Cultural and Creative Tourism (CCT) can foster **sustainable and inclusive destinations**.

As global destinations face **overtourism in major cities** and **depopulation in rural regions**, cultural and creative tourism is increasingly recognised as a way to **rebalance tourism flows**, **revitalise local economies**, and **strengthen community identity**.

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Local Empowerment

Greg Richards opened the session with the paper “*From the Centre to the Periphery: Intangible Cultural Heritage in Rural and Remote Areas*”, based on research conducted within **CROCUS**. The study explored how **crafts, gastronomy, storytelling, and language** shape local identity and sense of place.

“We need to move beyond the idea of intangible heritage as something to ‘see’, and start treating it as something to ‘do’ - to co-create with communities.”

- Greg Richards

Richards’ presentation identified key challenges that CROCUS seeks to address - from developing **sustainable business models** for small creative enterprises to promoting **governance structures** that empower local stakeholders.

Business Models for Sustainable Cultural and Creative Tourism

Laura James and Henrik Halkier (Aalborg University) presented *“Business Models in Cultural and Creative Tourism: Typologies and Sustainability Challenges”*. Using the **Business Model Canvas**, their study identified four key value propositions in CCT:

- **Looking & Listening** - passive engagement through observation and storytelling
- **Making & Doing** - participatory, hands-on experiences (crafts, cooking, workshops)
- **Touring** - mobility-based models connecting small destinations
- **Buying & Consuming** - experiences centred on local products and gastronomy

Each model raises distinct sustainability challenges, from **emission management** to **fair compensation** for local creators.

“The key challenge is aligning community empowerment with market viability - ensuring that cultural authenticity is not lost in the pursuit of economic sustainability.”

- Henrik Halkier

From Imported Creativity to Local Innovation

Discussions in the CROCUS track also examined how creativity in rural contexts is often **imported rather than locally generated** - a dynamic that can inspire innovation but may disrupt existing community balance. Strengthening **local skills, creative education, and collaboration** emerged as key priorities for building resilient cultural ecosystems.

Innovative Practices Across Europe

Beyond CROCUS, the track showcased inspiring examples from across Europe:

- **Asturias (Spain)** - rural branding campaigns promoting craftsmanship and gastronomy as identity markers.
- **Slovenia** - adaptive reuse of heritage sites revealing both potential and fragility of creative tourism ventures.
- **Italy** - participatory cultural mapping workshops involving residents, artists, and planners in reimagining landscapes as shared cultural spaces.

These experiences reflect a broader European trend towards the **“placeification of heritage”** - merging tangible and intangible heritage into **holistic, community-based experiences**.

Key Messages and the Road Ahead

The discussions in Vila-Seca reaffirmed that **Cultural and Creative Tourism is an evolving ecosystem**, connecting disciplines, policies, and practices. Common themes emerged:

- Transition from **top-down branding** to **bottom-up participation**

- Integration of **creative practice as co-production** rather than consumption
- Need for **sustainable funding mechanisms** ensuring accessibility and equity

“Creative tourism should not only generate economic value - it should build cultural confidence and connect people to the stories and skills that make places unique.”

- Laura James

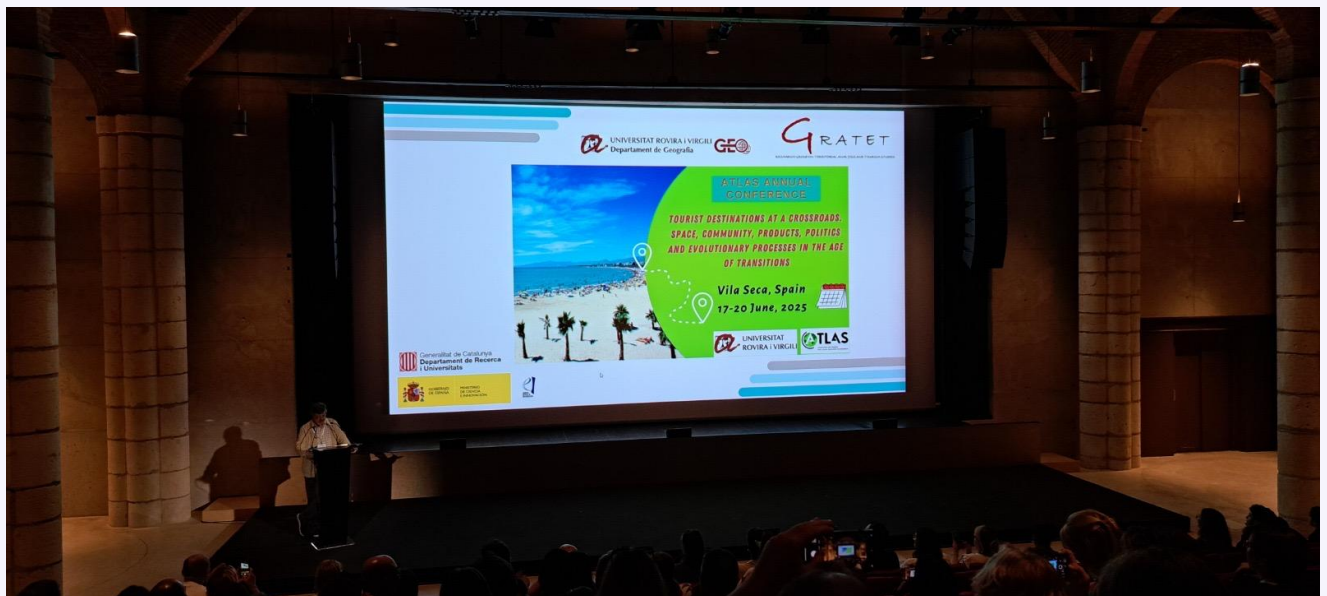
The collaboration between **ATLAS** and Horizon Europe projects such as **CROCUS**, **SECreTour**, and **Culturality** is paving the way for a shared European framework that **bridges rural and urban divides**, **encourages local ownership**, and **develops new tools for responsible tourism**.

For **CROCUS**, the next step is to continue testing and refining its models through **Living Labs**, **participatory workshops**, and **stakeholder networks**, ensuring that cultural and creative tourism truly contributes to the **well-being of rural and remote communities**.

CROCUS - Cross-Border Cultural and Creative Tourism in Rural and Remote Areas

Funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe programme

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RURAL TOURISM AS A RESPONSE TO OVERTOURISM

Insights from the University of Bergamo's participation in Expo Osaka 2025

The participation of the **University of Bergamo** in the thematic programme of **Expo Osaka 2025** provided an ideal occasion to reflect on one of the most pressing challenges facing global tourism today: **overtourism**.

The conference *“Rural Tourism as a Response to Overtourism: A Comparative Perspective”* began from a shared observation: while international tourist flows continue to grow-Italy alone recorded over **129 million arrivals** and **458 million overnight stays** in 2024, while Japan reached nearly **37 million**

international visitors-this quantitative expansion is often accompanied by **social, cultural, and environmental tensions**.

From Overtourism to Shared Tourism

The cases of **Venice** and **Mount Fuji**, discussed at the conference, exemplify how emblematic tourism destinations risk becoming victims of their own success. Excessive visitor pressure not only undermines the quality of life of residents but also degrades the very cultural and natural assets that constitute a destination's appeal.

Survey data presented by the University of Bergamo reinforce this concern: nearly **half of Italian tourists** reported experiencing discomfort linked to overcrowding in 2024, and over **40%** declared a willingness to pay more for less congested and more authentic experiences.

These findings mirror a broader paradigm shift in global tourism - a move towards valuing **depth over quantity, authenticity over spectacle**, and **participation over passive consumption**.

CROCUS: A New Approach to Sustainable Tourism

Within this framework, the **Horizon Europe project CROCUS** was presented as an innovative case study. CROCUS promotes **cultural and creative tourism** in rural and remote areas, fostering **cross-border collaboration** to unlock hidden potential and redistribute tourism flows sustainably.

Among its most promising fields of experimentation, **cheese tourism** in Alpine regions was presented as a compelling example. Cheese production in the Alps embodies **centuries-old know-how**, deeply rooted in community life and agro-pastoral traditions, while offering opportunities for immersive visitor experiences.

Recent studies in Italy confirm that cheese tourism is no longer a niche activity: more than **30% of respondents** have participated in cheese-related experiences in the past three years, and interest in **hands-on workshops** and **cheese-making sessions** continues to grow.

Challenges and Opportunities in Alpine Regions

Preliminary research conducted by **CROCUS** in **Sondrio (Italy)** and **Graubünden (Switzerland)** highlights both opportunities and obstacles. On one hand, the **symbolic power of cheese as a cultural product** allows destinations to position themselves beyond mass-market logics, attracting visitors seeking experiential authenticity. On the other hand, **structural challenges** remain: fragmented coordination among stakeholders, limited infrastructure, and the difficulty of linking heritage valorisation to broader territorial strategies.

To address these issues, CROCUS is activating **cross-border Living Labs** - participatory platforms where communities, cooperatives, tourism operators, and policymakers co-design solutions. This approach not only stimulates innovation but also **strengthens local ownership**, ensuring that tourism development supports rather than disrupts rural life.

Global Resonance from the Osaka Dialogue

The resonance of CROCUS at **Expo Osaka** was particularly significant. By showcasing Alpine case studies within a global forum, the project underscored how lessons from remote European valleys can inform international debates on **sustainability and responsible tourism**.

The Italian-Japanese dialogue revealed strong convergences: in both contexts, there is an urgent need to **rebalance visitor flows**, **valorise rural and peripheral territories**, and **redefine tourism** as a vector of cultural continuity and community well-being rather than a purely economic activity.

“Cheese tourism is not only about gastronomy; it becomes a laboratory for reimagining tourism itself - showing how heritage can create authentic, low-impact, and emotionally engaging experiences.”

From Mass Flows to Meaningful Journeys

The Osaka conference reaffirmed a conviction central to the **CROCUS vision**: the future of tourism lies in **diversifying its geographies** and **deepening its cultural content**. For Alpine regions, this means leveraging cheese heritage as a magnet for experiential travellers. For Europe and beyond, it means recognising that **rural and peripheral areas can play a central role** on the global tourism map.

CROCUS will continue to advance this vision through empirical research, stakeholder collaboration, and innovative cultural tourism models. The work presented in Osaka marks an important step forward - a shift **from overtourism to shared tourism, from mass flows to meaningful journeys**.



International Workshop on Gastronomy and Rural Tourism

Rural Tourism as a Response to Overtourism: A Comparative Perspective

12th July 2025

10:30–18:00

Auditorium,
Italian Pavilion
at Expo Osaka 2025
Yumeshima, Osaka

FEATURED SPEAKERS:

Roberto AMADDEO (Provincia di Bergamo) **Federica BURINI** (University of Bergamo) **Daniela CAMPORA** (AITR-Italian Association for Responsible Tourism)
Valeria Benedetta CANIZZARO (University of Bergamo)
Luca CESARI (University of Cagliari) **Dominga COTARELLA** (Terranostra-Coldiretti) **Graham DAVIES** (Ishinoko Kitchen) **Damiano DE MARCHI** (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) **Thusitha DILSHAN** (Toyo University)
Francesco FRATTO (Terranostra-Coldiretti) **Roberta GARIBALDI** (University of Bergamo) **Alberto GOTTARDI** (La tavola di Mecenate ETS)
ISHIDA Masayoshi (Ritsumeikan University) **Federica MONTAGUTI** (CISET-Centro Internazionale di Studi sull'Economia Turistica) **Chiara Rita NAPOLITANO** (Kyoto University) **NAKABASAMI Chieko** (Toyo University) **Giovambattista PALUMBO** (Eurispes) **Angelo RADICA** (Associazione Nazionale Città del Vino)
Daniel Dante SAUCEDO SEGAMI (Ritsumeikan University) **Luca SCANDALE** (Puglia Promozione) **Francesco TAPINASSI** (Toscana Promozione Turistica)
Paolo VIZZARI (Journalist and Gastronomic Critic) **WATANABE Megumi** (Slow Food Japan) **Kana WATANDO** (INOW Kamikatsu) **Dauro Mattia ZOCCHI** (University of Bergamo)

AND WITH:

Elisabetta BANI, Flaminia NICORA & Cristian PALLONE (University of Bergamo)

More info and live stream
available here:



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CROCUS AT THE 12TH CULTURAL ROUTES TRAINING ACADEMY

Strengthening Cooperation Between Research, Innovation and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

From 11 to 13 June 2025, the city of **Torres Vedras (Portugal)** hosted the **12th edition of the Training Academy on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe**, organised by the **European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR)** together with **Destination Napoleon**, **Iter Vitis**, the **Rota Histórica das Linhas de Torres**, **AMPV**, and the **Municipality of Torres Vedras**.

Dedicated to the theme “**Cooperation and Cultural Routes**”, this year’s edition gathered representatives of the **48 certified Cultural Routes** to exchange strategies for collaboration, visibility, and innovation across Europe.

CROCUS and the Research Dimension of Cultural Routes

The **CROCUS project (Horizon Europe)** was represented through a coordinated presence of its academic partners:

- **Greg Richards**, ATLAS Network,
- **Tina Šegota**, University of Maribor,
- **Ágnes Nóra Raffay**, University of Pannonia.
- **Emanuela Panke**, Living Labs Coordinator for the **University of Bergamo** and President of the Iter Vitis Route,

Their contributions, embedded in several workshops and plenary sessions, highlighted how **Living Labs, participatory governance, and creative business models** can reinforce cooperation among Cultural Routes and foster innovation in heritage-based tourism.

“Cultural Routes are not only networks of sites; they are laboratories for experimenting with sustainability, creativity, and shared governance,” underlined Greg Richards during the plenary session on social innovation and cultural heritage co-construction.

Workshops on Cooperation, Visibility and Sustainability

- **Tina Šegota** facilitated the workshop “*Visibility & Marketing Strategies for Cultural Routes*,” focusing on storytelling, digital engagement, and brand cohesion across European itineraries.
- **Ágnes Nóra Raffay** led “*Project Development & Hands-on Training*,” guiding participants through project design methods and KPI definition for route success.
- **Emanuela Panke**, as moderator and Iter Vitis representative, contributed to the final session “*Cultural Routes Beyond European Borders*,” showcasing how CROCUS could support with its researches the

role of Cultural Routes for the development of Creative and Cultural Tourism in the Remote Rural Areas in particular through sustainable wine and gastronomic heritage networks.

A Platform for Dialogue and European Cohesion

CROCUS' participation in the Training Academy was more than a scientific presence - it represented a **bridge between academic research and policy practice**.

By aligning its themes of **creative tourism, community engagement, and cross-border cooperation** with those of the Cultural Routes programme, CROCUS contributed to building **a shared European vision for sustainable cultural tourism**.

The Training Academy also served as a vital international showcase for the project, strengthening synergies among **Iter Vitis, Destination Napoleon**, and other networks working to integrate **culture, creativity and sustainability** into Europe's tourism landscape.

Looking Ahead

As the Cultural Routes community prepares for future collaborations, the presence of CROCUS at the Training Academy reaffirmed the importance of **research-based innovation** in shaping the next generation of cultural tourism models.

Through continued cooperation with the European Institute of Cultural Routes and member itineraries, CROCUS will keep advancing its mission: **transforming rural and remote areas into vibrant spaces of creativity, participation, and shared heritage**.

12 TRAINING ACADEMY ON CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COOPERATION AND CULTURAL ROUTES

TORRES VEDRAS, PORTUGAL, 11-13 JUNE 2025

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