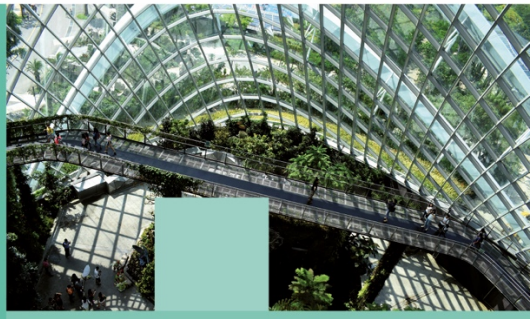
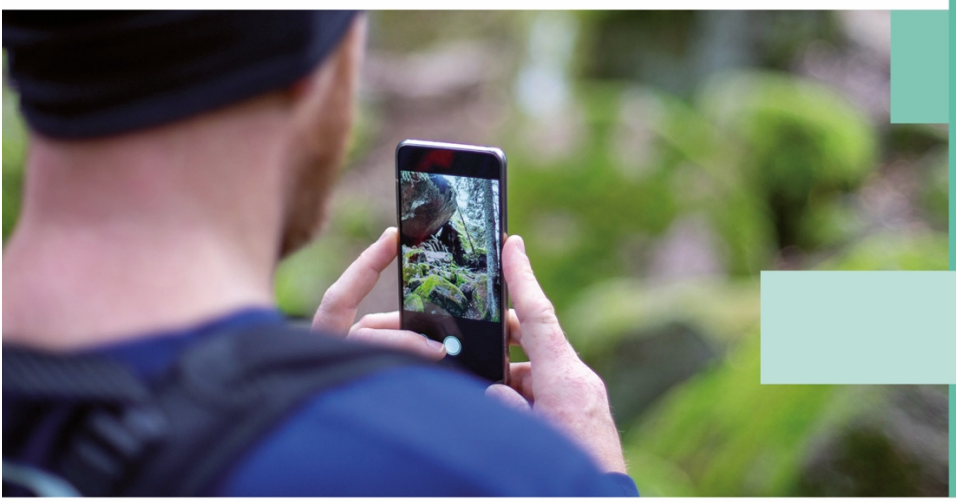
LEADING EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES IN EUROPE

from the 2024 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition





INITIATIVE OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION

Title:
LEADING EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES IN EUROPE
from the 2024 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism competition
This report was prepared in 2024 for the European Commission, Directorate-General Internal market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)

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1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism is an EU initiative implemented by the European Commission. Its aim is to recognise and award smaller destinations that have implemented successful strategies to boost sustainable tourism through green transition practices.

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism was first introduced as the European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) competition by the European Commission in 2007 as an initiative to reward non-traditional, emerging sustainable tourism destinations in Europe. It used to be run under a different theme each year and was based on national competitions. In 2019, the initiative was redesigned und updated in line with the European Green Deal and is set to contribute to the recovery and resilience of tourism destinations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism initiative aims to:

- showcase the best achievements in sustainable tourism and green transition practices across smaller European destinations
- promote the development of sustainable tourism in destinations, bringing value to the economy, planet and people
- establish a framework for participating destinations to exchange best practices and create opportunities for cooperation and new partnerships

2. PURPOSE OF THE BEST PRACTICES FROM THE 2024 EUROPEAN GREEN PIONEER OF SMART TOURISM COMPETITION

In 2023, the European Commission launched the first competition for the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism. Destinations in EU and Single Market Programme – former COSME countries with populations between 25,000 and 100,000 inhabitants were eligible to apply. 11 destinations submitted applications. Grosseto (Italy) was selected as the 2024 European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism.

This collection of best practices has been derived from the applications that destinations submitted to the competition. The report showcases the selection of best practices in sustainable tourism and solely presents and relies on the data that the cities submitted in their applications.

The purpose of this document is to enhance and facilitate the exchange of best practices in promoting innovative and sustainable measures and initiatives for tourism destinations. The report aims at raising awareness about sustainable initiatives, tools, measures and projects, sharing the best practices implemented by destinations and strengthening peer-to-peer learning and sustainable development of tourism.

3. PRESENTING BEST PRACTICES

3.1 NATURE PRESERVATION

3.1.1 Island of Lokrum; Dubrovnik (Croatia): Lokrum Island is the third oldest protected nature area in Croatia, primarily characterized by forest vegetation covering approximately 90% of the island. The 'Historical Gardens of the Dubrovnik Area' project aims to achieve sustainable use of natural heritage and effective management of protected areas. This is accomplished through the interpretation and presentation of the protected natural heritage, with the long-term goal of contributing to sustainable socio-economic development at local and regional levels. Several activities have been implemented to enhance systems that protect local nature in the Lokrum reserve. This includes the installation of two informative presentation panels with a user application providing information, notifications, and interactive maps. Additionally, a visitor counter and two smoke sensors were installed in the forest center, along with Bigbelly smart containers for collecting plastic and mixed waste. These containers, powered by solar energy, reduce CO2 emissions and contribute to environmental protection. The system is energy independent and managed through sensor technology, enhancing effective capacity management by the Public Institution Reservat Lokrum.

Find out more via: https://www.lokrum.hr/eng/

3.1.2 The Regional Park of Maremma; Grosseto (Italy): In 1973, the Municipality of Grosseto created the Regional Park of Maremma. The philosophy behind it is the preservation of nature and traditions. About 30% of the protected area is agricultural and used for agro-tourism activities. The municipal territory of Grosseto has two natural reserves. The Natural Park of Maremma is protecting environments connected to humid areas, with such plants as glasswort and sea wormwood, and protected Knight of Italy and the Kentish plover birds, which lay eggs in the sand, camouflaging them with seashells. The park is also a nesting place for Caretta Caretta turtles (Loggerhead sea turtles). The second natural reserve of the area is the Diaccia Botrona – a significant Italian wetland, home to over 200 species of birds, lake plants and about fifteen species of orchids.

© Municipality of Grosseto

Find out more via: https://parco-maremma.it/en/

3.1.3 Raising awareness of the importance of nature conservation; Geopark Karawanken (Austria / Slovenia): The Geopark strives to make its areas accessible to the general public by establishing and managing interpretational-informative infrastructure for visitors. Situated in front of protected areas of the park, the interpretation points not only inform the visitors, but also encourage them to connect with the outstanding geological, natural and cultural heritage of the area. Through gamifications and story-telling, the visitors can learn about the significance of nature conservation, geo- and biodiversity across the Austrian-Slovenian border. Over the past years, two main Geopark visitor centers have been established: 'Podzemlje Pece' in Slovenia and Geo.Dom on Petzen Mountain in Austria. Numerous interpretational points are strategically located throughout the Geopark Karawanken area. Examples include 'Smrekovec - an extinct volcano' and 'St. Hema Mountain - a 1,500-year-old pilgrimage site'. The park is working on realising a system to count the engagement with the interpretational points by using laser points, in order to monitor the impact of the infrastructure.

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Find out more via: https://www.geopark-karawanken.at/en

3.1.4 Viana do Castelo Geopark; Viana do Castelo (Portugal): The Viana do Castelo Geopark is an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark, a project preserving local geological heritage, promoting education and awareness, and pursuing sustainable development. The Geopark has identified and catalogued several sites of geological interest, of which 13 have been classified as Local Natural Monuments, granting them a legal protection status. For the proper management of these areas, the Viana do Castelo Geopark carries out regular monitoring to assess the effects of human activities, environmental changes and the identification of measures to implement adaptive conservation over time.

© Viana do Castelo Municipality

Find out more via: https://www.geoparquelitoralviana.pt/en/

3.1.5 River rehabilitation; Valongo (Portugal): The municipality of Valongo focuses on the rehabilitation of river ecosystems through the application of bioengineering techniques and nature-based solutions. Conditions were created to improve the ecological, hydro geomorphological and environmental quality of the Ferreira and Sousa rivers, which lead to the strengthening of resilience and reduction of vulnerabilities identified in the Municipal Strategies for Adaptation to Climate Change in this territory. The municipality has created the Leça River Corridor Association, with the target of rehabilitating Leça river, in an extension of 48km from its source to its mouth, taking into consideration the ecological recovery of the river, as well as the enhancement of the landscape, cultural and socioeconomic status of the territory it crosses.

© Municipality of Valongo

Find out more via: https://www.cm-valongo.pt/

3.2. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT

3.2.1 Tourism Seasonality mitigation; Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina): The city of Trebinje encourages private investors to invest in sports and congress infrastructure, leading to the construction of such capacities and the extension of the season to almost the entire year, which successfully reduced the pressure of visitors to the destination in the summer months. Through various projects with UNDP and USAID, the city has developed new tourist products, especially in rural areas, with the aim of enriching the offer of active vacations, staying in nature, etc.

Find out more via:
https://investintrebinje.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Strategija-razvoja-turizma-2020-2030.pdf

3.2.2 Viana do Castelo Geopark; Viana do Castelo (Portugal): The Geopark project promotes sustainable tourism in Viana do Castelo, encouraging practices that minimise environmental and social impact. Low environmental impact tourism activities, such as interpreted visits and educational activities have been developed. The project has installed infrastructures for visits and created digital platforms, allowing visitors to enjoy nature in a responsible way and learn about the natural and cultural values of the spaces they are visiting. The Geopark has 164 equipment pieces, including reception panels, interpretation tables, QR codes and directional boards. The website, virtual visits and APP of Geopark provide content; the app also integrates a geofencing and augmented reality service.

© Viana do Castelo Municipality

Find out more via: https://www.geoparquelitoralviana.pt/en/explore/

3.2.3. Sustainable Destination Project; Mantua (Italy): The 'Mantua, Sustainable Destination' project is a strategic initiative aiming to forge connections between Mantua and neighboring territories, highlighting the city's historical, cultural, and culinary heritage, as well as its relationship with water. This project positions Mantua within a broad national and

international network, catering to travelers increasingly focused on sustainability and the preservation of climate, heritage, and the environment. The dedicated website offers a comprehensive mapping system detailing infrastructure, transport, mobility information, services, physical accessibility, charging stations, and first aid points to enhance the tourism experience. Local tourist operators are encouraged to endorse the 'Manifesto for Sustainability', outlining principles, values, and commitments guiding future actions on environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic value.

© Municipality of Mantua

Find out more via: https://www.comune.mantova.it

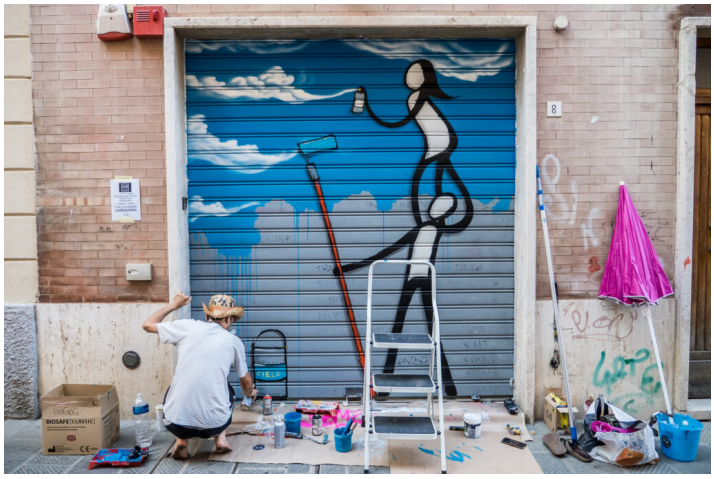
3.2.4. Sustainable events; Mantua (Italy): ARC3A Mantua, officially known as 'Actions for Collective Climate Resistance of Culture and Art', is a local working table orchestrated by the municipality and comprised of 15 associations and organizations. This consortium brings together citizens and professionals from cultural and environmental backgrounds, actively involving the Regional Mincio River Park, a key ecotourism hub. The municipality has initiated a webinar series and published tailored guidelines to train cultural operators in organising sustainable events and festivals. The experiences and tools developed within ARC3A are continually refined and utilized to organize cultural events in Mantua while addressing tourism sustainability. With a focus on various aspects like mobility and resource use, the working table collaborates with events such as 'Festivaletteratura', encouraging sustainable practices and calculating carbon footprints. ARC3A has played a pivotal role in shaping Mantua's 'green' identity, attracting visitors and tourists from across Europe and beyond.

Find out more via: https://www.comune.mantova.it

https://urbact.eu/articles/we-art-change-mantovas-transfer-story

3.2.5. Guided tours; Grosseto (Italy): The protraction of the tourist season is a key goal for the Municipality of Grosseto. To address this, the city has introduced a series of free guided tours organised throughout the year, known as 'Raccontare Grosseto'. These tours aim to engage both local residents and tourists in exploring the city and its surrounding areas at a leisurely

pace, primarily through walking and cycling. A similar initiative, named 'Trame', has been established for the purpose of revitalising the historical center of the city. This project involves painting the closed shop shutters, creating a unique tour of modern street art. 'Trame' will also be integrated into the Grosseto Urban Trekking project this year. This regional venture is designed to promote slow tourism within cities that possess artistic and historical significance.



© Municipality of Grosseto

Find out more via: https://new.comune.grosseto.it/web/comunicati/raccontare-grosseto-2023-ecco-il-programma/

3.3. ENGAGING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

3.3.1. Herzeg House; Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina): The Herzeg House is a project helping farmers to produce, sell and earn more, without spending time on markets. The city sells the farmers' products through shops under the label of Herzeg House. Herzeg house has won 'Green Destinations top 100 sustainable stories' competition as the shortest supply chain from the farm to the customer.

© City of Trebinje

Find out more via: https://herzeghouse.com/?pismo=cir

3.3.2. Community activities; Valongo (Portugal): The municipality of Valongo aims to include the local community in its environmentally friendly initiatives. The municipality annually celebrates the Energy and Environment Week and the European Mobility Week, with various initiatives including campaigns for collecting used batteries, training on composting, conferences with high-level experts at national level in the field of energy and climate, tree planting actions, river cleaning actions, as well as training and road prevention for micro-mobility transport.

© Municipality of Valongo

Find out more via: https://www.ren.pt/en-gb/sustainability/initiatives/reforestation-action-gathers-around-150-students-from-gondomar-paredes-e-valongo

3.4. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

3.4.1. Porto Mountain Park; Valongo (Portugal): Porto Mountain Park is one of Valongo's marks and one of the major attractions in the region. It is a biodiversity hub, offering habitat to protected and endangered species and home of endemic species. The Municipality of Valongo, together with the municipalities of Gondomar and Paredes, constituted the Porto Mountains Park Association of Municipalities, with the specific aim of creating and managing this Protected Landscape and safeguarding and enhancing the landscape and heritage, aiming for the protection of the natural values present, protection of biodiversity, control of invasive species, management to decrease forest fires.

© Municipality of Valongo

Find out more via: https://www.cm-valongo.pt/

3.4.2. Peaks of Balkans; Peja (Kosovo): Peja is at the forefront of a significant cross-border hiking trail initiative known as 'Peaks of the Balkans'. This initiative brings together Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro, seamlessly incorporating three national parks to create a distinctive and unified experience. Notably, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) recognized this pioneering project in 2013 with the Tourism for Tomorrow award. Currently, Peja is actively involved in enhancing the cross-border mega hiking trail, Via Dinarica. This effort includes collaboration with international partners to implement best practices. The initiative engages a diverse range of stakeholders, such as governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and local communities. Volontari nel Mondo and CELIM oversee the implementation of this ambitious project, contributing to the overall redevelopment of the hiking trail and fostering collaboration on a global scale.

© Municipality of Peja

Find out more via: https://pejatourism.org

3.5. URBAN DEVELOPMENT/ACCESSIBILITY

3.5.1. Walking trails; Valongo (Portugal): The Cuca Macuca Staircase Project aims to promote the accessibility from the urban center to various points in the mountains. The infrastructure includes pedestrian routes, wooden staircases, contemplative swings, interpretative points and viewpoints, which attract visitors to explore the landscape of the area.

© Municipality of Valongo

Find out more via: https://www.valongoinoutdoor.pt/escadaria-cucamacuca

3.5.2. SMART Bus Stops; Grevena (Greece): With the aim of significantly enhancing the daily lives of both citizens and tourists and embracing modern practices that bring a substantial upgrade to the urban environment and public transport, the municipality of Grevena has successfully implemented "smart" bus stops. This initiative maximizes available financial resources in support of the citizens within the framework of the Strategic Urban Mobility Plan. These modern, ecologically friendly technology stops offer night lighting, the convenience of charging smart devices, and soon, they will provide a wireless Wi-Fi network and telematics functionality. This includes announcing the arrival times of urban and intercity transport through LED electronic signs. Importantly, they are energy-autonomous, thanks to photovoltaic systems.

© Region of Grevena

Find out more via: https://player.vimeo.com/video/840129094

3.5.4. Mare per tutti; Grosseto (Italy): This project, facilitated by the collaboration between the Grosseto Municipality and the seaside establishments of Marina and Principina, but extending to all 17 bathing establishments in the area, offers a one-week pass free of charge to visitors with disabilities. This includes a seaside station comprising 1 umbrella and 2 deck chairs or 2 sunbeds. The 3 Sand & Sea chairs, acquired by the municipal administration as part of the 'Sea for All' initiative, have been delivered to the Grosseto Beach Association.


© Municipality of Grosseto

Find out more via: https://new.comune.grosseto.it/web/progetti/mare-per-tutti-2023/

3.5.5. Seatracs; Katerini (Greece): The Seatrac initiative by the Municipality of Katerini transforms beach accessibility for individuals with mobility disabilities. With five strategically placed units, this award-winning system features innovative rails and a specialized seat, providing autonomy for people with limited mobility to access the sea effortlessly. Recognized with the 'National Champion' award at the European Business Awards, Seatrac fosters inclusivity, symbolising independence for disabled individuals to enjoy swimming independently. Developed at the University of Patras, it also enhances well-being by seamlessly transporting users from the beach into the water. Each Seatrac installation includes amenities like car parking, beach tracks, restrooms, changing rooms, and an amphibious sea wheelchair for enhanced accessibility. The tourism office's coordination of a volunteer team and the 'SEATRAC KATERINI' Facebook group, with over 720 members, showcases community engagement. The initiative's success resonates beyond disability support, influencing local pride and increasing visitor satisfaction. Seatrac's ongoing impact positions the Municipality of Katerini as a pioneer in developing accessible tourism with innovative and inclusive practices. This commitment reflects a strategic vision to continually enhance services for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and advance Accessible Tourism goals.

Find out more via: https://sea-access.gr/

3.5.6. Geo-hiking; Geopark Karawanken (Austria / Slovenia): The Geopark has implemented visitor paths, biking and thematic trails that can be enjoyed on self-guided and guided tours. The long-distance Karawanken-Karavanke (geo)hiking trail covers 265 km and is divided into 13 daily stages of varying difficulty levels to cater to different target groups. Because of the different landscapes of the area, hikers can choose their level of difficulty from the mountain region to the flat and wide alleys and soft hills. For example, the long distance hike starts in the southern part, wich is mostly alpine, and moves into soft hills, and wide valleys in the northern part. It is not only the topografic situation wich makes a difference for all the different target groups, but also the stories and topics of the hikes. The guided tours led by specialist guides introduce the visitors to the topics of heritage and nature preservation.

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Find out more via: https://www.geopark-karawanken.at/en

3.6. SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

3.6.1. SEADRION; Dubrovnik (Croatia): As part of the SEADRION project, co-financed by the European Program for International Cooperation Interreg ADRION, the replacement of the existing heating and cooling system in the Rector's Palace was carried out. The new facility supplies the City Administration building, the Rector's Palace, the Liberty Cinema, and the Marin Držić Theatre. Through the project, six heat pumps that use renewable energy source as a mediator – in this case, the seawater – were installed. The previous old facility, roughly 40 years old, was not maintained and did not operate at full capacity. The new heating and cooling system is significantly more efficient, the electricity consumption has been reduced, and there has been a reduction in CO2 emissions of approximately 30 tCO2 yearly. With the installation of this new heat pump plant utilizing seawater, the existing air conditioners, which marred the view of the UNESCO-protected building and the city itself, have been eliminated.

Find out more via: https://seadrion.adrioninterreg.eu/

3.6.2. Renewable energy; Dubrovnik (Croatia): Installation of a system of heat pumps with seawater for the need of the city pool. The project involves the reconstruction of the engine room in the mentioned building, aiming to replace the outdated fossil fuel technology with a modern renewable energy system. This system utilizes seawater as a stable and reliable heat source through a hydraulic separation process. The newly planned heat pump, with an expected energy efficiency of SCOP = 7.05, is designed as the main consumer. On an annual basis, the reconstruction of the mechanical system using heat pump technology could result in saving almost 100% of the total annual fuel oil consumption, particularly in heating large and small pools and the facility itself. The installation of seawater heat pumps to heat the Gruž basin is anticipated to reduce CO2 emissions by 89% to 656 tons per year, contributing not only to global environmental improvements but also enhancing local air quality.

3.6.3. Waste Water Treatment Plant; Peja (Kosovo): The construction of the Waste Water Treatment Plant, designed to serve 60,000 inhabitants, marks a significant achievement for Peja. This collaborative effort, supported by the Government of Kosovo, the Municipality of Peja, and funding from the Governments of Germany and Switzerland through KfW (German Development Bank), has successfully redirected sewage that previously entered the Lumbardhi River into the treatment plant, resulting in the generation of clean water. As part of future developments, Peja plans to create an enticing destination—a lake in an area previously impacted by illegal gravel extraction and pollution. Developed with the expertise of Cityfroster from the Netherlands, this multipurpose lake is poised to enhance socio-economic and ecological values, contributing to rural and eco-tourism initiatives in the municipality.

© Municipality of Peja

Find out more via: https://www.ebp.ch/en/node/827

3.7. DIGITALISATION

3.7.1. IT Culture Project; Grevena (Greece): Grevena is actively promoting the advancement of Technologies and Communications in Tourism, as evidenced by the IT CULTURE project. This initiative aims to integrate technology into the tourism sector while simultaneously stimulating the local economy and society. As part of this project, collaboration among all agencies involved in the tourism sector has yielded impressive results. Tourists can easily access information about the rich cultural and historical traditions of the area by scanning the integrated QR code with their mobile phones. Additionally, for those without high-tech mobile phones, the opportunity to enjoy cultural routes is available through touch screens strategically placed in various parts of the municipality.

© Region of Grevena

Find out more via: http://roadstoculture.eu/en/

3.7.2. Geopark Guide app; Geopark Karawanken (Austria / Slovenia): Over the past year, the Geopark region has seen significant enhancements with the establishment of a sustainable and innovative cross-border network of appealing excursion destinations. This initiative incorporates trilingual animation clips and a collaborative tourist web and mobile app known as the 'Geopark Guide'. The primary objective is to enhance marketing, guest care, guidance, and knowledge transfer, all aimed at raising awareness of the region's vital geo- and biodiversity.

Find out more via: https://m.geopark-karawanken.at/content/11371

3.8. COMBATING AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

3.8.1. Carbon Neutrality; Mantua (Italy): Mantua is actively working towards carbon neutrality by 2050 through the establishment of the Carbon Neutrality Alliance, which includes collaboration among local public and private institutions. The city employs various tools and initiatives, such as the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan, the European City Calculator, the National Energy and Climate Plan, and participation in the Covenant of Mayors. As one of the ten pilot cities in the EUCityCalc project, Mantua utilizes an open-source modeling tool to plan the transition towards climate neutrality, enhancing decision-making processes at different levels. The city has also established a permanent working table with cultural actors to collaboratively address sustainability goals, responsible consumption, climate action, and community engagement. These initiatives contribute not only to environmental sustainability but also stimulate economic growth in the tourism sector, creating employment opportunities and generating revenue for local businesses.

Find out more via: https://www.comune.mantova.it