

DODONI. "Echo yourself in Dodoni" - Building a territorial approach

The Crowdsourcing Initiative

Cultural Heritage Valorisation in Dodoni

IMPLEMENTING CROWDSOURCING FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND VALORISATION. USING ONLINE PLATFORMS TO ENGAGE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY; SUPPORT BUSINESS CREATION IN THE TOURISM SECTOR THROUGH A TERRITORIAL APPROACH.

In a context of an economic crisis, the municipality of Dodoni is taking steps to take advantage of the important cultural assets of the region. From the magnificent ancient theatre among the ruins of the important archaeological site of Dodoni (place of the oldest oracle of ancient Greece) to the rich cultural traditions of the 56 local communities, the region of Dodoni wants to develop cultural tourism by promoting and upgrading their current offer for lasting and sustainable impacts in the economy of the region. The challenge of the municipality is to balance valorisation of cultural resources with sustainable tourism, supporting the expansion of related businesses. The main goal of this implementation strategy is to provide a unique, special, and participatory tourist experience that will bring with it jobs and economic development. It intends to offer an authentic experience, respect the social and cultural way of life of the host community while ensuring the sustainability and authenticity of their tourism product.

The main attraction of the region is obviously the ancient Greek theatre of Dodoni. As "Protection Zone A" it is almost impossible to build anything at the site or its surroundings. However being a focal point of the region with 50.000 visitors per year it can and should work as the main entry point for visiting the region.



In this sense, it is of utmost importance to use the welcome structure at the site to promote this offer.

Currently, there's only a small shop ran by the monuments authority with general information about the site and selling copies of archaeological items found all over Greece. However there is almost no information about the region, (no even a touristic map of Dodoni) so visitors can't gain a clear vision of what the region has to offer. In order to change this situation the municipality is initiating a dialog with the national authorities to analyse what are the possible options that can be implemented at the site without violating any of the rules derived from the "Protection Zone A" classification.

The municipality is still discussing the best approach. There is a proposal on the table to build a new museum next to the site however but there are some concerns regarding the amount of investment necessary and the expected local impact. It could be good for increasing visitors to the site but will have minimal impacts for the region. Alternatively, during the transnational meeting of INT-HERIT held in Dodoni, peers suggest that the use of virtual or augmented reality solutions can much improve



the experience of visitors, promote the regional offer with much less investment or negative impacts on the preservation of the site as there's no need for new constructions.

The main idea is to work the "story telling" of the cultural assets of the area and use it to promote tourism. One of main projects is recover the spirit of the pilgrimage tradition of the oracle of Dodoni, very popular in ancient times, and reuse the concept to create a touristic route through the ancient paths that crossed the regions. By creating a network of interesting sites and spots in close cooperation with the local associations, this route will connect villages scattered across the territory and will build a consistent offer for visitors. It will motivate visitors to extend their stay in the region.

"ECHO YOURSELF IN DODONI"

This moto was created during the transnational meeting in Dodoni. It express the expeiences endured by other cities while peer-reviewing the challneges undertaken by the municipality. The idea bheind it is to create an unique, special, and participatory tourist experience that aims to capture some of the visitors that arrive at Dodoni to see the ancient theater, boosting economic development , namely through job creation in the region.

No doubt that thr theater remains the main highlight of the municipaliy however people tend to stay only a few hours and then drive somewhere else. Raising the number of overnight stays is thefore an important objective of the projects taken by the city council. Being a focal point of comming visitors , the

monument is therefore crucial to promote the complete touristic offer of the region and provide practical information about accommodation, where to eat, what to see and what makes this region unique.

One of the most interesting plans was to recreate the ancient sacred function of the site, namely for instance by reproducing the oracle with modern technologies where visitors can express their questions and receive answers (from the virtual world in this case). This will expand and enhance visitors' experience while visiting the site. The small lead tablets that pilgrims used to write down their questions to the oracle (unfortunately in display in another nearby city, the Museum of Ionnina, and not in Dodoni) could be reproduced again to be displayed at the site. The idea is to even revive this tradition and put equipment in place that allows modern day visitors to experience how was to be a pilgrim of these ancient Greek cults. This means that the collection will be increased with the wishes, requests and thoughts of visitors. This will recreate the feeling and hope that lied beyond this prayer to the sacred oracle of Dodona and will provide an experience to visitors that will make them want to know more. The main purpose is of course to use this important asset to 'sell' the all region through "story telling".

However this nor an easy task to do since the monument is under the authority of the central government cultural heritage entities. This means that anything that is implemented there must have their authorisation forcing the municipality had to implement an integrated vertical approach to establish a channel and build a dialogue with these authorities in order to accommodate these new functions. This is the case of animation events take place at the site. There is an annual cultural event taken place here but the city wants to increase this number. However, there are many restrictions at the site limiting the type of initiatives that can be held here, so for instance, an international rock concert is not viable as it can threaten the preservation of the site. Therefore the city wants to focus not only in arts but also in the display of the cultural and natural assets of the region. Gastronomy, well being and senses' enlightenment are the keywords that come to mind after staying for 2 to 3 days enjoying the regions. This is much more than just promoting an ancient structure!

In parallel, the city perspectives of the region such as gastronomy or nature. To overcome the limitation of accommodation the municipality (currently there are only 56 beds in hotels), peers propose to create a programme involving the community to rent local houses during the festival period. This will provide an opportunity for visitors and volunteers to get a different perspective of the region and get to know other things than the archeologic site.

The city summarized their implementation strategy in the following actions:

1. Build a “story telling” about the region and use the most important heritage sites to promote it.that integrates the archeologic site in the region;
2. Involve the local community, work with hotels and restaurants to create a touristic package; build a network of houses available for renting or receiving volunteer during the festival. Articulate this offer with existent hotels and restaurants;
3. Recover the ancient traditions of the oracle; explore sound and the splendid nature around it to create a sacred atmosphere where people can experience a lot more than only ruins. Explore the “Mystery” of the site through the festival. Create activities to recreate the ancient spirit of the site;
4. Using new technologies will enhance the experience of visitors. Use it to promote the region;
5. Create a specialize group to steer the tourism sector in the region; involving the municipality staff and some ULG members.

What's Next?

The need to to integrate projects, initiatives, events and all that's hapenning in the city right now was recognize by the ULG and a proposal was launched in the final meetings to achieve this. The idea is to create a specific body in the city council structure with a cross-departmental team focusing on the integration aspect, identifying, exploring and coordinating these possible synergies among different projects and initiatives. This new structure will continue the work developed by the ULG but in a more formal structure in order to empower people. It will be channelling citizens proposals and promoting its incorporation in the city policies; it will also integrate all initiatives under the same hat, allowing for a proper management of cultural heritage under the strategic vision for developed for the city.

There are many things going on right now at the city and everyone expects that these investments will change the face of city, promote the well-being and quality of life of its citizens and creating the roots for a participative and sustainale approach to cultural heritage revitalization. This is still too soon to see relevant impacts in the city as the works are still going on but there's a real hope among citizens that things will be brighter for the future of this beautiful city.



"The INT-HERIT Urbact Project has a key role to play focusing in cultural heritage management by exchanging views and experiences proving a holistic common strategy of action in order to give prominence to the local culture"

Mr. Vassilios Hira, (Vice-mayor of Dodoni

"The ULG gathered together people from very different cultures, activities and businesses, and that was very fruitful because we have come to an output that will positively affect the municipality and allowed people of Dodoni to see how much can be created from a cooperation like this "

Mrs. Maria Mizithra, ULG Member, CEO at the Co-operative Bank of Epirus



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By Pedro Soutinho, INT-HERIT LE

Videos

Dodoni Vox pop video (Vassilios Hiras) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4VHASF1Wnk>

Dodoni Vox pop video (Maria Mizithra) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uB1ZwCLQYBM>

Dodoni Transnational Meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkKYpSIsQjQ&t=17s>

About the INT-HERIT Project

The INT-HERIT project is an Implementation Network under the Urbact Programme that identifies, collects and exchanges knowledge across nine small to medium-size cities sharing similar challenges when tackling cultural heritage protection, conservation or valorisation. Implementation has all sorts of

constraints and variables that may influence the final results. New smart, low cost initiatives are being implemented to overcome these constraints by adopting an integrative and participative approach towards stakeholders aiming to increase the value created for the community through heritage conservation projects. This article provides an overview of some of the initiatives currently taking place in the city in order to contribute for a knowledge base of solutions that will be hopefully useful for other cities across Europe while managing their cultural heritage.

