

ESPINHO. Cross-project Integration in the City of Espinho

The Castro de Ovil Archeologic Site

Integrated revitalization of historical patrimony

BUILDING SYNERGIES ACROSS INITIATIVES TO VALORIZE CULTURAL HERITAGE. A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT, LESS RESOURCE INTENSIVE BUT MORE CAPABLE TO CREATE IMPACTS IN A CITY.

Ancient historical sites albeit their patrimonial importance have difficulties to attract visitors and to be sustainable on their own. This is the case of first city settlement located on a site called 'Castro de Ovil'

Since 2004 there's an action plan to rehabilitate the archeological site of Castro de Ovil in the outskirts of the city of Espinho, an Iron Age settlement occupied since III century a.C. The project foreseen and interpretation center and musealization of the site with an estimate cost of around 5 million euro. Due to the high amount of investment required the site remained untouched beside the archeological excavations that took place earlier to discover and consolidate structures.



The return of investment for such a project was a concern and in 2017 the municipality decided to take another approach and make instead small investments (such as clearing the paths, signposting the site and repair the access road) and open it to visitors as soon as possible. The main goal was to give use to place, making it known to citizens while keeping the natural landscape of site through minor interventions that didn't include the



construction of a new building for the 'Interpretation Centre' that was planned on the initial plan designed one-decade ago.

Another focal point of the city is the rehabilitation of the urban landscape in the city centre. It comprises two major projects, one was the rehabilitation of the new central square that was created after the train line was put underground and the other is a programme of rehabilitation of heritage buildings in the city centre desperately needing repair. This one, supports the



owners of buildings in the rehabilitation process through tax exemptions and smaller interest rates at financial institutions. Both projects are expected to change the 'face' of the city in the upcoming years, turning it into a lively area.

Building synergies across projects

The city has several projects running in parallel with a common aim: to improve the urban quality of life and promote economic development through rehabilitation and revitalization of cultural heritage. Despite this general common aim, these projects are managed individually, practically unaware of each other. During the implementation phase, the lack of integration became clear, and several synergies were identified that will definitely bring value for each project.



Building synergies among these projects would enhance impact and the return of investment. For instance, during the initial ULG meetings when discussing ways to valorise 'Castro de Ovil', members proposed to connect the archaeological site to the city centre through a bike lane. This would integrate the site in the touristic route of the city, creating a short escapade from the city to a natural and green environment that surrounds the 'Castro'. And in fact, there was another project to build these lanes on the way so by linking both projects we could benefit on both sides. So, why was not foreseen in the first place?



Overcoming the challenges of an outdated supporting system

The problem arises from the financing system itself as different themes correspond to different structures and consequently to different support lines. In this case, we had on one side 'Cultural Heritage' and on the other 'Mobility'. These are completely different areas from the perspective of funding but in the perspective of cities they are just parts of the same overall development strategy. As the support scheme in place will probably not change that quick, it's up to local government bodies to build this linkage and integrate these projects.

Once the mindset was set, the ULG look for other possible synergies and soon came out with several opportunities to explore. The focus area of INT-HERIT was the works ongoing in the city centre. In here three projects presented interesting opportunities to cooperate to build synergies. The first is the rehabilitation scheme put in place to help owners of buildings to initiate the necessary rehabilitation works. The second project is the rehabilitation for public use of the central square and the third is a smaller project to support traditional shops in the city centre. Again, each of these projects had their line of funding and specific management teams.

However it became clear that the investment in the central square and in particular the type of activities that will be promoted here will influence the risk of investment of the private owners. These will much to gain if the investment in the public space succeeds while the attractiveness of the public space will influence the future value of the buildings around it. The same happens with the traditional shops that will be



positively impacted (more clients) by the other projects. In brief, by building cooperation channels among these projects, the city was able to maximize its returns.

Another channel of cooperation was established between some cultural forces of the city and the 'Castro'. The music academy, the municipal museum (FACE) and local cultural associations are working together to devise the best uses of the site while retaining its undisturbed and natural setting. This aspect was highlighted during the transnational meeting held by INT-HERIT in Espinho.

During the peer-review partner cities alert of the importance of the other ruins that are also located in the area of the site, an abandoned paper factory that operate until the mid XX century. This patrimony was overlooked in the initial rehabilitation plan but it tells an important story about the city - the changes brought by the industrial revolution.

This will create the connection between the ancient site which is relatively new to people (its excavation started only in the 80's) and the history of city presented in the FACE museum (where the archeological materials are stored). Collaboration between these entities will help to forge a "story telling" approach to city patrimony. Not doubt that cross-project integration builds important synergies and may induce changes more effectively

What's Next?

The need to to integrate projects, initiatives, events and all that's happening in the city right now was recognized 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 sustainable 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.



"It was important to have a good integration of the community in these projects. The INT-HERIT brought the possibility to present and discuss ideas at meetings that turn into interesting proposals to improve the implementation process."
Vicente Pinto, Vice-mayor

"The ULG of Espinho brings a different look to the city where identity is present and a way of creating attractiveness and brings new actors and a new dynamic thought the collaboration of those in the city that create these dynamics in the city."

Alexandre Santos, Director of the Music Academy of Espinho



"Equally important as protecting and preserving our patrimony is to create patrimony for the future. The capacity to create affordable housing for middle-class families and young people will be decisive in the future of the city. Another sign of the revitalization of the city is the increasing figures of new residents coming from other countries that find the city a very good place to live." "

Nunes da Silva, ULG Member, director of Espinho Business Association



"I have faith and also a big hope that Espinho after all these rehabilitation works can only improve. I think the revitalization of commerce will have much to gain with these improvements in the city. This new open-air 'shopping centre' will bring enormous benefits to the city and its residents."

José Pinto, Shop owner

May 2019

By Pedro Soutinho, INT-HERIT LE

Videos

Espinho Vox pop video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Xryjh_kcqo

Castro de Ovil Case Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJzJ84i3VUc&t=76s>

Espinho Transnational Meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiNQM9EkGZY&t=230s>

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.

