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Table of Contents

<u>1.</u>	<u>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>2.</u>	<u>WHITE PAPER.....</u>	<u>4</u>

1. Background Information

Table 1: Technical Information

Project Full title		Rural regeneration through systemic heritage-led strategies	
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2. White Paper



White Paper

on
“Cultural and
Natural Heritage
as a driver
for Sustainable
Development in
Rural Areas
in the EU and
beyond”

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An aerial photograph of a hillside. In the foreground, a wooden boardwalk made of light-colored planks leads towards a series of stone ruins, including large circular stone structures and rectangular foundations. A person in a white jacket is walking on the boardwalk. The hillside is covered in dry vegetation and scattered stones. In the background, a dense urban area is visible, nestled in a valley with mountains in the distance under a hazy sky.

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Executive summary

This work has been developed in the framework of the European project RURITAGE: Rural regeneration through systemic heritage-led strategies that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 776465.

Cultural and natural heritage in all its manifestations are pillars of the identity, cohesion and well-being of communities. The *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* recognizes the importance of heritage management and protection in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 Target 4: *Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage*. However, as it has been highlighted by the heritage community, cultural and natural heritage can contribute to the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, rural areas have usually been relegated under the urban goal (SDG 11) and other international agendas, with a focus on agricultural activities for rural development without considering the power of culture for rural regeneration. Bringing up rural areas as crucial poles of sustainable development and vital cradle of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CNH) exploring path, tools and methods for creating sustainable future are the main inspiration and objectives of RURITAGE.

The RURITAGE project funded by the European Union (EU), proposes a methodology to capture the benefits and contributions of CNH by using it as a resource and as a driver in the context of rural regeneration towards sustainable development and growth.

In this white paper, the RURITAGE approach is framed within larger global initiatives linking CNH and the Agenda for Sustainable Development, in order to boost the achievement of sustainable development by disseminating RURITAGE contributions to rural regeneration and bringing evidence for policy-making for the achievement of the SDGs.

I. Introduction

Cultural and natural heritage in all its manifestations are pillars of the identity, cohesion and well-being of communities. The *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015) recognizes the importance of heritage protection in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 Target 4: *Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage*. However, as it has been highlighted by the heritage community, cultural and natural heritage can contribute to the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Labadi et al., 2021). For example, among others, by promoting traditional livelihoods, poverty challenges could be addressed (SDG1), enabling cultural practices can lead to better health and well-being (SDG3), or retrofitting historical buildings can contribute to climate change mitigation (SDG13). Furthermore, the protection of natural heritage is fundamental for sustaining life on land and the oceans, key for achieving SDGs 14 and 15, among others. Nevertheless, there is a need to gather evidence on the benefits and contributions of cultural and natural heritage (CNH) to the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 in order to further consolidate its position as a driving force for sustainable development. At the same time, it is important to address the common perception which antagonizes heritage and development¹.

The RURITAGE project funded by the European Union (EU), proposes a methodology to capture the benefits and contributions of CNH by using it as a resource and as a driver in the context of rural regeneration towards sustainable development and growth. RURITAGE works transversally within the European policy frameworks to integrate CNH as a key element for addressing current regional social, economic and environmental challenges including rural regeneration, climate change and migration, with a special focus on rural territories². In order to reinforce social sustainability, RURITAGE focuses on the co-development of heritage-led regeneration plans integrating a wide range of stakehol-

ders, particularly focusing on the interrelations between built heritage and intangible cultural heritage (De Luca et. al 2021, Åberg et al., 2020).

In this white paper, the RURITAGE approach is framed within larger global initiatives linking CNH and the Agenda for Sustainable Development, in order to boost the achievement of sustainable development by disseminating RURITAGE contributions to rural regeneration and bringing evidence for policy-making for the achievement of the SDGs.

II. International Overview: Linking CNH, Sustainable Development and Rural Regeneration

The *Convention concerning the protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage* (UNESCO, 1972) is the first and still unique legal international instrument to focus on both cultural and natural heritage. Even though, the Convention is not focused on development, it integrates a sustainability perspective when calling for the protection of heritage for future generations. Furthermore, in its article 5, the Convention calls for State Parties “to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes”, advancing the important role that CNH can play for the benefit of people.

In 1992, the integration of three categories of cultural landscapes (clearly defined and designed, organically evolved -relict and continuing- and associative) in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2021, para. 47) marked a milestone in the international recognition of rural landscapes of heritage value - which may fall into categories of organically evolved and/or associative - and their role of interlinking natural and cultural heritage, as well as tangible and intangible heritage, and the diversity of manifestations of the interactions between humankind and its natural environment. In this context, the need for communities' engagement into conservation efforts became indispensable, highlighting the need of participatory approaches to heritage management and the integration of inclusive governance arrangements, which led to the addition of “Communities” as one of the five *World Heritage Strategic Objectives* in 2007 (UNESCO, 2002; World Heritage Committee, 2007). As heritage con-

1 The protection of cultural and natural heritage from rapid urbanization and development was one of the concerns leading to the adoption of the World Heritage Convention in 1972 (UNESCO 1972).

2 The European Union has developed a number of policy instruments to advance sustainable development where cultural and natural heritage are featured as important drivers: European Landscape Convention (2000), Faro Convention (2005), European Green Deal (2020), EU Policy on Rural Development, Europe Cultural Heritage Green Paper (2021), among others.



servation and development have tended to be seen as opposed, the World Heritage Committee has placed efforts into clarifying the contributions of World Heritage and heritage places in general to sustainable development and human well-being. In 2015, it adopted a *Policy for the integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2015) in order to align the implementation of the Convention to the larger global sustainability framework and include sustainability principles while respecting the main mandate of the Convention which is to protect *Outstanding Universal Value*³. Nevertheless, integrating sustainable development to World Heritage management remains challenging, especially in places where conflicting activities - mining, over-tourism, transportation infrastructure development, etc. - are deemed necessary by communities for their economic development (Bialostocka, 2021).

The *UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme* launched in 1971, on the other hand, focuses on the relationships between people and their environments, exploring the potential for sustainable development while conserving natural heritage. Biosphere Reserves are established globally as “learning places for sustainable development”, creating an international network for exchanging models adapted to national contexts and local needs. The Biosphere Reserve model consists of a zoning which interrelates the conservation of a protected area (core zone), to the socio-economic development of rural areas (buffer zone) and more populated areas such as towns and urban areas (transition zone). In a number of cases, Biosphere Reserves overlap partially or completely with Natural and/or Cultural World Heritage sites or other internationally-designated areas (Clamote Rodrigues and Schaaf, 2016) harnessing the potential of cultural and natural heritage for sustainable development. More than forty years later, in 2015, UNESCO Global Geoparks were created as a network of areas with outstanding geological significance, where protection is coupled with sustainable development and following a bottom-up approach to management which relies on the commitment of local communities.

Whereas UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks are directly connected from the outset to sustainable development, World Heritage is focused

3 Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) “means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity” (UNESCO, 2021, para. 49.)

on CNH conservation, bringing two different approaches to heritage management that can influence in how communities may be or could be involved in heritage planning. In addition, in 2003, UNESCO adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ICH) (UNESCO, 2003), recognising the importance of social practices, cultural spaces, performing arts and traditions that are of value for specific communities and nations, and providing a path for synergies between the conservation of heritage places and the ICH embedded in them, centering the efforts on people and communities as heritage holders and custodians. Among the rural territories where RURITAGE has tested and implemented a heritage-led regeneration strategy under a community-based approach, there are also areas under one or more of these three UNESCO international designations⁴, while there are also small villages and municipalities, local associations and NGOs and cultural centers.

In parallel to UNESCO's efforts on CNH, in the scope of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) adopted in 1992 by the United Nations, the article 8(j) on *Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices* declares that, subject to specific national contexts, Parties shall “*respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity*”, reinforcing the role of local communities and their traditional knowledge for conservation and revealing the interconnections between cultural and biological diversity (UNESCO, 2008).

In the context of the CBD, the *International Satoyama Initiative* launched by the Ministry of Environment of Japan and the United Nations University in 2009 promotes the maintenance and development of social-ecological productive landscape systems or SEPLS around the world, exploring on the humans relationships with nature in a diversity of places, from an interconnected social-ecological point of view. Thus,

the work of the Satoyama Initiative is concentrated in rural areas globally, highlighting the similarities of the Japanese concept of *satoyama* - which means forest and mountain - with land use management strategies present in different cultures and places in the world through a holistic lens, giving an important role to cultural practices, intangible cultural heritage and nature-culture linkages in the maintenance of biodiversity and larger well-being of communities.

Also the UN FAO-GIAHS - *Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems* programme is placed in the interface between rural regeneration and heritage. It proposes this new concept where the focus is not placed on conservation, as in the case of World Heritage Cultural Landscapes, but in the continuous development of a living and evolving system of human communities and their territories and biophysical and wider environment, showing resilience and contributing to rural livelihoods. It promotes the continuity of traditional agriculture and similarly to the Satoyama Initiative, looks at using traditional knowledge for the conservation of biodiversity and also promoting food security.

These international frameworks which are applied at global level could be another path of exploration of rural territories and synergies with the RURITAGE approach. They highlight the values of rural areas as social-ecological systems and the involvement of communities to continue their traditions. However, as for the case of cultural landscapes of heritage value, the question of continuing certain cultural practices and particular ways of life becomes challenging, when communities are not sufficiently engaged in the efforts to maintain traditional livelihoods. In this sense, the necessity to understand better the integration of sustainable development in heritage management with emphasis placed in communities not only engaging but leading and coordinating these efforts becomes essential. Thus, community-based management has become instrumental, and the RURITAGE methodology could assist in aspect.

In the context of urban regeneration, community-based approaches are already advanced departing from the Agenda 21 initiative (UN, 1992) through the New Urban Agenda (NUA) adopted in 2016 (UN, 2017), which places special attention to the integration of sustainable development at local level, promoting participatory approaches to planning and decision-making, and emphasising on local leadership. This model is extended to urban-rural linkages, seen as fundamental for an integrated territorial planning and development, breaking with the urban-rural divide. Even if focused on urbanization, UN-Habitat also integrates rural areas, de-

⁴ Role models, replicators and digital replicators have been established in rural territories within: World Heritage sites in the French Way (Burgos Cathedral and Las Médulas, Spain), Lesvos Islands UNESCO Global Geopark, Greece, Coffee Cultural Landscape, Colombia, Visegrád, Hungary, Katla UNESCO Global Geopark, Iceland, Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark, Greece, Izmir Geopark, Turkey, Magma UNESCO Global Geopark, Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark, Bergstrasse-Odenwald UNESCO Global Geopark, Germany, Lower Prut Biosphere Reserve, Moldova, Eisenwurzen UNESCO Global Geopark, Austria, Mariñas Coruñesas Biosphere Reserve, Spain, Archipelago Sea Area Biosphere Reserve, Finland, and Ifugao Rice Terraces, Philippines.



fining them as geographic areas located outside towns and cities with low population density and small settlements (UN-Habitat, 2020). Noticing the gap between rural and urban areas, and the pace of urbanization at a global level, the implementation of the NUA calls for inclusive approaches and synergies between the rural and the urban through the integrated approach to the sustainable development of the urban-rural continuum, asserting that “[u]rbanization and rural transformation can no longer be addressed separately and the processes must be mutually reinforcing” (UN-Habitat, 2019, p.2). In its principle 9 entitled Participatory engagement, the *Guiding Principles for Urban Rural-Linkages* call for special consideration to local and Indigenous cultures, integrating a cultural dimension for interventions (UN-Habitat, 2019, p.12.)

The territorial approach has already been incorporated in efforts to place culture in the map of urbanization, especially through the use of urban heritage for regeneration (UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO, 2018) and having promoted the inclusion of culture in the NUA. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO, 2011) adopted in 2011, already calls for a territorial approach to the management of urban heritage integrating conservation and sustainable development, which is being implemented in World Heritage cities and other urban areas globally.

Another instrument developed in the field of cultural heritage placing the focus on rural areas are the *ICOMOS-IFLA Principles concerning Rural landscapes as heritage* adopted by the General Assembly of ICOMOS in 2017 (ICOMOS, 2017), proposing a broader definition of the rural as “*terrestrial and aquatic areas co-produced by human-nature interaction used for the production of food and other renewable natural resources,(...) At the same time, all rural areas have cultural meanings attributed to them by people and communities: all rural areas are landscapes*” (ICOMOS, 2017, p. 2). In these principles, there is also a distinction between the rural landscape as heritage where both tangible and intangible aspects are considered, such as physical attributes of water systems but also knowledge and practices.

These definitions which place emphasis on the cultural dimension of the rural areas, are not aligned with the development sector definitions, such as that of the FAO, which similarly to that of the UN-Habitat relates more with population density and location:

“What makes a place rural? It might be its people living far apart from one another, its location re-

lative to small and widely spaced towns and villages or big cities, and the presence of farming or forestry. A person’s view probably depends on her own experience, so that a Belgian and an Ethiopian would likely have very different pictures in mind. Such subjectivity in identifying rural places is to be expected, but it makes it harder to agree on a common definition of a rural area for statistical purposes. And, indeed, there is no standard international definition of rural.” (FAO, 2018, p.10)

However, it is acknowledged that from country to country that definition or perception of the rural may differ, and therefore, an international definition has not been agreed. Moreover, it is pointed out that, the different definitions would vary according to the purpose of use, such as policy development or statistics⁵ (FAO, 2018, p.10).

It becomes evident that international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank or FAO address rural poverty and development focused on the economic activities undertaken in rural areas, relating more to the SDG 2 *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*. However, when thinking in local action, culture cannot be ignored, and the cultural dimension needs to be highlighted. In this line, the European Commission’s project “Voices of Culture” has highlighted the role of culture in non-urban areas (Murphy, A. and Cameron, G., 2020) with the aim to actively recognise and support cultural life and expressions in rural areas by all levels of government. In 2020, UNESCO launched Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda (Culture|2030 Indicators), to monitor the progress of culture’s contribution to national and local implementation of the SDGs. The 22 indicators, which assess both quantitative and qualitative data, are being tested on a pilot phase. In this context RURITAGE is proposing a monitoring system for the territories where its methodology of heritage-led rural regeneration can be tracked and the implementation of the SDGs identified at local level showcasing the EU experience.

⁵ For example, EUROSTAT defines a rural area as an area where more than 50 % of its population lives in rural grid cells, as used in the degree of urbanisation. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Rural_area), but the European Environment Agency defines a rural area as a “geographical area where the population density of humans is low and the main economic activity is agriculture, forestry, or hunting.” (<https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/eea-glossary/rural-area>)

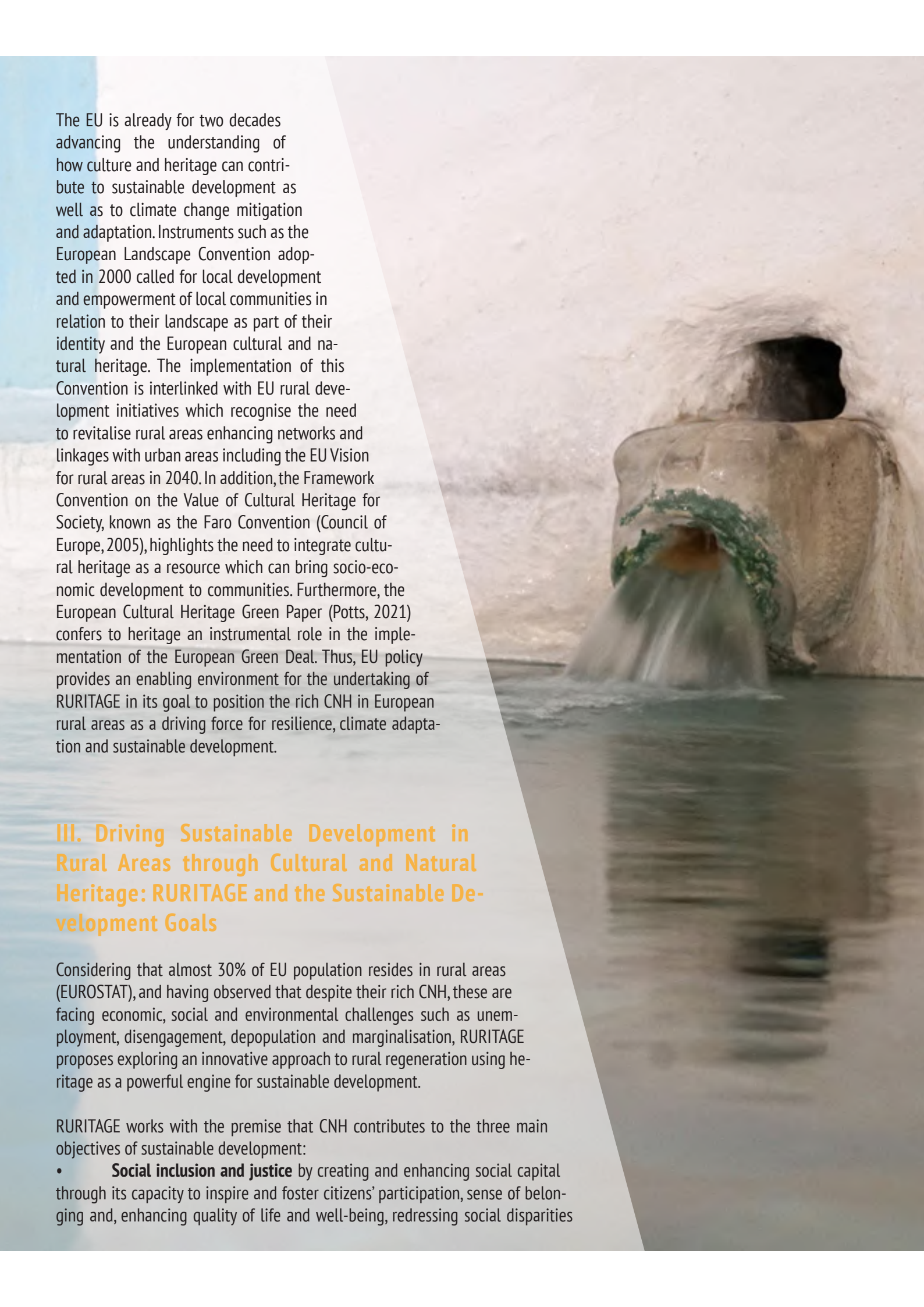
The EU is already for two decades advancing the understanding of how culture and heritage can contribute to sustainable development as well as to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Instruments such as the European Landscape Convention adopted in 2000 called for local development and empowerment of local communities in relation to their landscape as part of their identity and the European cultural and natural heritage. The implementation of this Convention is interlinked with EU rural development initiatives which recognise the need to revitalise rural areas enhancing networks and linkages with urban areas including the EU Vision for rural areas in 2040. In addition, the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, known as the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005), highlights the need to integrate cultural heritage as a resource which can bring socio-economic development to communities. Furthermore, the European Cultural Heritage Green Paper (Potts, 2021) confers to heritage an instrumental role in the implementation of the European Green Deal. Thus, EU policy provides an enabling environment for the undertaking of RURITAGE in its goal to position the rich CNH in European rural areas as a driving force for resilience, climate adaptation and sustainable development.

III. Driving Sustainable Development in Rural Areas through Cultural and Natural Heritage: RURITAGE and the Sustainable Development Goals

Considering that almost 30% of EU population resides in rural areas (EUROSTAT), and having observed that despite their rich CNH, these are facing economic, social and environmental challenges such as unemployment, disengagement, depopulation and marginalisation, RURITAGE proposes exploring an innovative approach to rural regeneration using heritage as a powerful engine for sustainable development.

RURITAGE works with the premise that CNH contributes to the three main objectives of sustainable development:

- **Social inclusion and justice** by creating and enhancing social capital through its capacity to inspire and foster citizens' participation, sense of belonging and, enhancing quality of life and well-being, redressing social disparities



and facilitating inclusion;

- **Economic growth** through sustainable tourism (pilgrimage, hiking and culture-driven forms of tourism), renovation and maintenance of the built heritage, and through the development of local cultural associations and NGOs fostering social innovation, sustainable growth and the creation of new jobs; and
- **Environmental balance** by promoting an innovative and sustainable use of CNH in European landscapes and environments.

In order to test this approach, RURITAGE selected 13 rural territories as **Role Models (RMs)** and seven as **Additional Role Models**, where CNH is being successfully integrated in planning and socio-economic development (see the map on the back cover). RMs are rural territories coming from EU and beyond that successfully undertook a regeneration process led by heritage and local culture. Departing on evidence collected from the 13 RMs, RURITAGE recognized six **Systemic Innovation Areas (SIAs)** as drivers of rural regeneration through the recognition of heritage potential within rural communities.

The six SIAs are: **Pilgrimage, Resilience, Sustainable Local Food Production, Integrated Landscape Management, Migration and Art and Festivals**. The SIAs integrate the tangible and intangible, cultural and natural assets of CNH, and are divided into challenge-based (resilience and migration) and opportunity-based (pilgrimage, sustainable local food production, integrated landscape management and art and festivals) strategies. These allow to make available practices and solutions which can be a source of inspiration and replicated in a wide variety of contexts across Europe and beyond and mainstreamed in territorial development policies (Egusquiza et al., 2021).

This experience has been packed and transformed by RURITAGE partners, in charge of gathering the information and translate it to a transferable methodology. The methodology developed allows the knowledge transfer between RMs and rural territories denominated **Replicators (Rs)** (see the map on the back cover). Rs function as laboratories to test the RURITAGE methodology and have been selected based on their peculiar CNH and first attempt in promoting heritage-led activities based on the 6 SIAs.

At local level, RURITAGE specifically managed to set up within each RM and Rs territories the so-called **Rural Heritage Hubs (RHH)**. RHH should be considered social, cultural and physical multifunctional spaces where stakeholders and

communities gather and exchange around the RURITAGE activities. RHH are mostly located in existing historical buildings and community spaces, with community-recognized heritage values to foster participatory management, responsibility and ownership of CNH in RMs and Rs. To support local participatory processes, RURITAGE developed a methodology for community-based heritage management and planning made of a series of workshop that support rural territories in collectively creating a vision and actions plans for rural regeneration (De Luca et al., 2021) that has now been successfully tested in 35 RHHs around the world.

Within RURITAGE, rural communities around the world have been working in developing community-based heritage-led regeneration strategies. Through detailed **actions**, defined in heritage-led rural regeneration plans for each rural territory and summarized within the RURITAGE Decision Support System⁶, RURITAGE is addressing most of SDGs. Experts from UNESCO and the University of Bologna evaluated to which targets each action contributed (Pavlova and de Luca, 2022, forthcoming). In total 108 actions, including 66 RMs' actions and 42 Rs' actions, were cross-checked versus 169 SDGs' targets. Analyses revealed that 108 actions are contributing directly to almost all SDG targets (Figure 1). From the 169 SDGs' targets, there were 20 to which RURITAGE actions were contributing the most (Table 1).

Boxes 1 to 7 provide examples of how RURITAGE practices have addressed SDGs showcasing how specific RMs' and Rs' actions contribute to the achievement of the SDGs targets based on creative community solutions built on a sustainable use of heritage resources across seven rural territories. Examples in Boxes are only selected cases of actions contribution to SDGs, the complete list is not present here due to the paper format. See Pavlova and de Luca (2022) for the full overview.

Detailed description of Role Models' and Replicator's actions are available in the open access repots⁷.

⁶ <https://ruritage.almende.com>

⁷ <https://www.ruritage.eu/resources/deliverables-2/>

Deliverable 1.1: https://www.ruritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/fv-contest/c1/Deliverables/D1.1.RURITAGE%20Practices%20Repository.pdf?_t=1589553878

Deliverable 1.2: https://www.ruritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/fv-contest/c1/Deliverables/D1.2.%20RURITAGE%20Inventory%20of%20Lessons%20Learned.pdf?_t=1589554350

Deliverable 1.4: https://www.ruritage.eu/wp-content/uploads/fv-contest/c1/Deliverables/D1.4.Replicators%20Baseline%20Assessment%20Repo.pdf?_t=1589554615



SDGs' targets addressed by RURITAGE actions

1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

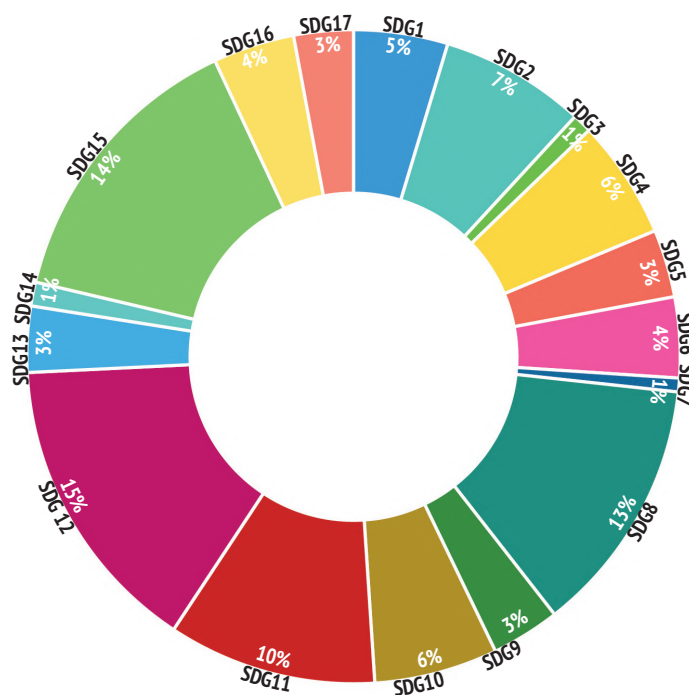


Figure 1: Overview of RURITAGE Role Models and Replicators actions contributing to SDGs.



LOCAL FOOD



SDG 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Agro-food production in Apulia (Italy, RM). The aim of DARE in Apulia, Italy is to combine its traditions, its history and production vocations with innovation and technology. Its main objective is to protect its environment while creating employment opportunities and attracting tourists to hinder depopulation. Increasing the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by supporting innovation and local infrastructures is part of the action plan. **Actions:**

- Support local farmers and producers in innovation projects;
- Identify, prioritize and monitor technologies, resources, and skills in the agro-food production of the area;
- Definition of marketing and communication strategies for the products;
- Definition of standards of quality for the selected products;
- Promote the environmental sustainability of the agro-food production, packaging and selling.

Focus related Target: 2.4 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 1 (T 1.1), SDG 2 (T 2.1-5 and 2.c), SDG 3 (T 3.9), SDG 6 (T 6.1, 6.3-6, 6.b), SDG 8 (T 8.2-5, 8.9), SDG 12 (T 12.1-3, 12.5, 12.6, 12.8), SDG 15 (T 15.1, 15.9, 15.a)



7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature

12.b Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships



RESILIENCE



SDG 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Teaching culture for learning resilience in Crete (Greece, RM). The action plan in Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark, Crete, Greece has defined three main objectives: cultural and natural heritage preservation, sustainable tourism support and risk assessment training. Facing poverty and ageing, the population is building resilience through its heritage resources. | **Actions:**

- Organizing training - also using an informal education methodology- to improve the resilience of local people children, adults and elderly people, professionals, public authorities etc.);
- Develop interactive exhibitions to attract a broader audience;
- Development of toolkit for resilient citizens;
- Participatory mapping of the heritage sites at risk;
- Support the definition of guidelines for risk assessment and mitigation actions.

Focus related Target: 4.7 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 1 (T 1.5), SDG 3 (T 3.d), SDG 10 (T 10.2), SDG 11 (T 11.4), SDG 12 (T 12.8 and 12.b), SDG 13 (T 13.1 and 13.3), SDG 16 (T 16.7)



PILGRIMAGE



SDG 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Pilgrimage route to Hemmaberg in Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark (Austria/Slovenia, R). The Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark, Austria/Slovenia relies on its cultural and natural heritage - the pilgrimage route and its traditions, to regenerate local and sustainable tourism while facing regional depopulation and unemployment. Additionally, the Geopark actively promotes its rural food production and organizes yearly festivals to boost local identity. | **Actions:**

- Design a set of new touristic and cross border packs, integrating different cultural experiences;
- The digital use of the Karavanke/Karawanken Geopark;
- Safeguarding and making the site of St. Hema mountain - St. Rosalia cave accessible again;
- Selection of "Geopark partners" sharing RURITAGE vision of local food as part of local heritage;
- Boosting local identity and sense of belonging by experiencing the local heritage.

Focus related Target: 8.9 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 1 (T 1.4), SDG 4 (T 4.7), SDG 8 (T 8.3 and 8.6), SDG 9 (T 9.1 and 9.4), SDG 11 (T 11.4 and 11.a), SDG 12 (T 12.2), SDG 15 (T 15.1-6, 15.9, 15.a)



ART & FESTIVAL



SDG 8. Reduce inequality within and among countries

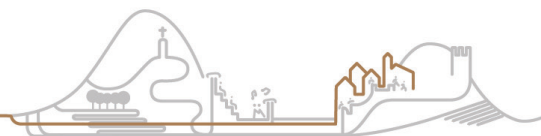
Festival of Love in Negova village (Slovenia, R). KIBLA, Slovenia aims to promote and renovate its heritage, the Negova Castle, through the organization of festivals and artistic programs, encouraging local and rural communities to take part in activities. As the region offers many types of local food and crafts, KIBLA works to brand local products as part of its cultural heritage. | **Actions:**

- Making Negova Castle accessible and connectable;
- Organisation of Festival of Love: Days of Summer;
- Organisation of Festival of Love: Spring and Autumn Day / The Herb Day;
- Organisation of Festival of Love: Autumn Day / Medieval day;
- Building new skills and knowledge about rural creativity.

Focus related Target: 10.2 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 4 (T 4.7), SDG 8 (T 8.1-2, 8.4-6, 8.9), SDG 9 (T 9.2-4), SDG 10 (T 10.3), SDG 11 (T 11.4, 11.a-b), SDG 12 (T 12.1-2, 12.8, 12.b), SDG 15 (T 15.9)



RESILIENCE



SDG 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Katla UNESCO Global Geopark (Iceland, RM). A top priority of the Katla UNESCO Global Geopark, Iceland is to protect the natural environment, promote local sustainable development, introduce local culture and place a strong emphasis on nature tourism. | **Actions:**

- Discover and diffuse the traditional storytelling and superstitions as means to understand the natural environment and to promote the place ownership;
- Promote a participative process in order to create a cohesive resilient community (educational activities and event, monitoring and rescue teams, etc.);
- Promote the awareness of the natural features acting as hazard barriers;
- Foster the knowledge and awareness of the link between the traditional construction techniques and the natural environment.

Focus related Target: 11.4 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 1 (T 1.5), SDG 3 (T 3.D), SDG 4 (T 4.7), SDG 9 (T 9.1), SDG 11 (T 11.b), SDG 12 (T 12.8), SDG 13 (T 13.1 and 13.3)



MIGRATION



SDG 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Migrants integration in Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald UNESCO Global Geopark (Germany, R). A main objective for the Geo-Naturpark of Bergstrasse-Odenwald, Germany is to better integrate migrants in the territory, through learning about the Geopark's heritage. Additionally, it promotes its cultural landscape and local production through guided tours, sustainable tourism and international festivals. | **Actions:**

- Organizing a Mountain biking Event with tech-courses and forest-teaching by rangers for migrants;
- Welcoming booths at Geopark-events;
- Utilizing GIS-Tools to map citizen's opinion and interaction with the natural and cultural heritage on a personal level and in regard to climate change induced vulnerability;
- Educational material for language skills supporting migrants' understanding of natural and cultural heritage;
- Author reading and family events at visitor centre of UNESCO World Heritage Site Messel Pit;
- Increasing the awareness of cultural and natural heritage with cultural landscape interpretation;
- Local and new inhabitants are an active part in preserving Orchard meadows and old Fruit varieties;
- Strengthening the bonds between migrants and residents through creative land art and forest artwork;
- Migrant internships with International Forest Art Centre and international artists.

Focus related Target: 12.8 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 1 (T 1.3), SDG 4 (T 4.7), SDG 8 (T 8.8), SDG 10 (T 10.2-3, 10.7), SDG 11 (T 11.7 and 11.a), SDG 12 (T 12.2), SDG 13 (T 13.3), SDG 15 (T 15.6), SDG 16 (T 16.3)



LANDSCAPE



SDG 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Douro cultural landscape, driver for economic and social development (Spain, RM). Douro, Spain actively promoted its heritage resources to create an international brand. This strategic tool combined to innovation strategies safeguarded and enhanced the existing heritage, while elevating the region as a touristic and competitive territory. | **Actions:**

- Promote joint actions (also through Private Public Partnerships) to enhance heritage resources and create an internationally recognized brand;
- Establishment of a Social Innovation Laboratory for the valorisation of the CNH;
- Support the implementation of a regional Heritage Territorial System (STP);
- Develop strategies to understand and manage changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity;
- Develop high level training programme for the management of the territory as a cultural landscape (addressed mainly to professionals, researchers and public bodies' staff).

Focus related Target: 15.1 | **Other relevant SDGs (and targets):** SDG 2 (T 2.4), SDG 8 (T 8.9), SDG 10 (T 10.2), SDG 11 (T 11.3-4), SDG 12 (T 12.2), SDG 14 (T 14.2), SDG 15 (T 15.9), SDG 16 (T 16.7)

IV. Challenges and Recommendations for the Sustainable Regeneration of Rural Areas using Cultural and Natural Heritage in EU and beyond

Even though RURITAGE is proposed as an EU initiative, in initially exploring how the methodology could be applied at a global level, the partnership also counted with the involvement of territories in non-EU Member States (Turkey, Norway and Iceland) and one Latin American country (Colombia) as full partners. Moreover through the launch of two additional calls for Additional Role Models and Additional Replicators, RURITAGE managed to further expand its network counting now on 24 additional partners, including six from outside Europe (See the map on the back cover).

Drawing on lessons learned from RURITAGE implementation, the analysis of relevant international strategies around rural development and heritage, and thanks to the implementation of the RURITAGE regional workshop for Latin America (UNESCO 2022) and for Africa (2019), this White Paper draws some challenges that have been identified through the testing of the methodology and recommendations on how heritage-led rural regeneration strategies could be applied in different contexts to boost sustainable development.

Challenges

Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs provide a global intersectoral framework to advance towards achieving prosperity in a more resilient, socially just and environmentally protected planet. However, the heterogeneous political and economic conditions at regional and country level, represent a barrier for the equal implementation of SDGs at local level.

In this global context, first and foremost, because the EU has developed a common and robust policy framework for rural revitalization and regeneration, climate action and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, the RURITAGE project could harness this opportunity highlighting the importance and potential of rural territories' CNH for sustainable development. Other regions are not as strongly connected in terms of policy as the EU, and conditions might differ from country to country. In contrast with urban areas which count with a specific SDG - SDG 11⁸ - and an international agen-

da - the NUA -, **diverse understandings of the rural** hinder the development of a wider international approach to rural areas. Therefore, the potential application in other regions of the RURITAGE approach will depend on the regional, national and local policy environment. In this sense, **funding** becomes as well a challenge, especially when rural areas are not a specific target for governmental or private investment resources, usually presenting a lack of funding opportunities.

The **COVID-19 Pandemic** presented additional obstacles for the implementation of the RURITAGE methodology, especially by limiting the possibilities of face-to-face encounters among members of local communities and other stakeholders to co-develop heritage-led rural regeneration plans. Even though digital solutions supported the possibility to engage in alternative ways, the **digital gap** and limited internet access in some places, particularly in remote rural areas, can restrict the implementation of collective and collaborative planning at the heart of the RURITAGE approach. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic also offered opportunities for revitalization of rural areas, which showed, mostly during times of lockdown and restrictions Rural areas showed a higher resilience and quality of life, that started to attract digital nomads and smart workers to re-populate these areas. While this trend could generate benefits to rural development, this also raises issues related to possible un planned gentrification of rural areas (De Luca et al., 2020).

Other existing barriers are at the governmental level, where a **lack of coordination and alignment among policies and plans**, can prevent the heritage-led actions to be implemented, and at organisational level, where the **lack of awareness among decision-makers about the role of cultural and natural heritage** and **conflicting interests among stakeholders** may represent an impediment and delay for developing collective plans and implement them collaboratively. In this way, the lack of participatory forms of governance and planning might hamper rural regeneration. These challenges are connected to social aspects, such as resistance to change, disengagement of rural communities and low public awareness of the of cultural and natural heritage and its potential, **technical**, with a lack of expertise, skills, and advanced technologies, and **structural and spatial barriers**, like the lack of adequate infrastructure.

8 Even if the SDG 11 addresses “communities” and “human

settlements” where rural areas could be included, the targets are focused on the urban environment.



Recommendations

Considering these challenges and barriers for the implementation of the SDGs in rural areas, the experience of RURITAGE brings evidence and potential solutions for policy-making and local action. By framing the RURITAGE approach within larger global initiatives linking CNH and the Agenda for Sustainable Development in section II, this White Paper recommends to a diverse range of policy-makers at all levels to address the above-stated challenges and support the role of CNH by:

Going beyond the usual urban/rural divide

RURITAGE brings forward rural territories as equally significant as the urban, advocating for their complementarity. Supported by concepts such as the urban-rural continuum or urban-rural linkages, the NUA and other strategies advocating for sustainable local development mainly focused on SDG11, policies should further integrate the role of rural communities, reversing the narrative of dependance that has characterized the urban-rural relation in the last decades. Giving back attention and responsibility to rural communities, highlighting the potential of their heritage resources could support their transition towards sustainability.

Empowering rural communities through a shared heritage governance

RURITAGE claims for a wider participation of rural communities in heritage management and planning processes. Acknowledging the crucial role of heritage recognition and communities' ownership, maintaining and building upon heritage resources with community-led strategies could empower people and bring solutions for sustainable development addressing SDG10 reducing inequalities. RURITAGE highlights the need to disseminate participatory approaches to heritage management based on inclusive governance arrangements, showcasing successful cases and examples from all over the world.

Adopting CNH as key driver for rural regeneration


Following the existing international conventions and recommendations which highlight the role of culture and heritage for sustainable development, and the EU frameworks interlinking climate action, heritage and sustainable development, RURITAGE calls for the creation of policy that recognises CNH as a pillar for sustainability in rural territories, addressing SDG11, 13, 14 and 15.

Investing on capacity building in rural areas


Promoting people-centred approaches to heritage management and planning by building capacities in communities

is of paramount importance for strengthening local sustainable development and addressing SDG4. RURITAGE has developed methods and tools that can be used, adopted, replicated and adapted locally to build on and reinforce traditional skills and knowledge, and that can support processes in rural environments globally.


As a result, these actions could support reverting urbanization processes and outmigration from rural areas by promoting rural territories through their CNH. As rural areas, especially close to heritage sites, are particularly vulnerable to the high influx of people, there is a need to plan regeneration processes. If encouraging the in-migration of former urbanites to rural areas, it should be steered properly by ensuring affordable housing, basic infrastructure, and services. If not, the risk of high flows, especially seasonal visitors, may cause possible gentrification processes and displacement of locals. Bringing people back to rural areas and providing youth with alternatives for their livelihoods would support not just rural communities, but would also support a higher quality of life in currently overpopulated urban areas. While RURITAGE mostly focused on EU territories, these recommendations remain relevant to all other regions, and levels, as was already demonstrated with RURITAGE activities with non-European partners. Based on the usage of the RURITAGE approach, local action for sustainable development is recommended with the potential to be initiated by local communities' members:

 Rethinking CNH as potential resources for sustainable development, specifically by exploring:

Opportunity-based strategies and actions

 **Pilgrimage**, hiking, and other routes crossing rural landscapes have been found to be particularly valuable in terms of restoring local identities and accompanying regeneration processes through the development of slow and sustainable cultural tourism (see Box 3 on SDG8);

 Old traditions, **arts and crafts**, performing arts and other forms of intangible cultural heritage are an incredible resource for rural areas, offering possibilities for young people to stay or to move to these territories and to improve the quality of life of rural communities by promoting cultural initiatives (see Box 4 on SDG 10);

 **Local agricultural practices and local food production** can be a core driver of rural development supporting local farmers and producers in innovation projects, for example, by branding local food and ethnobotanical products to make natural heritage a priority in the territory (see Box 1 on SDG2);

■ **Landscape** represents the interlinkages between natural and cultural heritage and encompasses traditional practices and tangible infrastructure. Rural landscapes' diversity and potential as areas for tourism activities, biodiversity conservation and regeneration of traditional local knowledge provide opportunities for participatory approaches to landscape management built on heritage (see Box 7 on SDG 15).

Challenge-based strategies and actions

■ Analysing opportunities of **migration patterns and trends** highlighting the role of refugees and migrants in the repopulation of rural areas and boosting their integration through local heritage practices and processes (See Box 6 on SDG 12);

■ Supporting the definition of guidelines for risk assessment and mitigation actions that could be used for disaster risk and climate adaptation plans (See Boxes 2 and 5 on SDG 4 and 11 respectively).

RURITAGE offers resources through the RURITAGE Resource Ecosystem online platform⁹ and a Replication Toolbox which based on the RMs and Rs heritage-led regeneration plans' implementation, captures the step by step to uptake SIAs strategies and actions. This toolbox aims to offer a guide to developing a heritage-led rural regeneration process for any interested rural area framing the results from the RURITAGE project as replication resources. The tool is based on the WHAT-WHO-HOW framework, and functions as a wizard that suggests tools, examples, and documents that facilitate the implementation of each regeneration step (HOW) corresponding to specific SIAs (WHAT) and initiating actors (WHO). It allows non-expert users to explore the different activities and the recommended stakeholder engagement processes in a user-friendly interface. The interactive tool conceptualises the knowledge generated in RURITAGE in a sequence that enables the upscaling of the RURITAGE framework for heritage-led rural regeneration with very diversified rural contexts. In this way, the RURITAGE methodology and tools are paving the way to linking sustainable development and rural regeneration.



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Acknowledgements

The images used in this document had participated in the RURITAGE Photo Competition, for which 168 participants across the world submitted their photos:

Cover: Margarita Campos Chorva, Haciendo el camino de Santiago, en la etapa de: Ravanal del Camino a Ponferrada, observé que un peregrino cuando pasaba por delante de un edificio antiguo, se fijaba en cada uno de los detalles de lo que hace años sería una vivienda importante, donde el escudo todavía permanecía en la fachada, French Santiago Way through Castilla & Leon (Spain)

Pages 2-3: Serkan Çolak, People walking in the ancient theater, Izmir Geopark in Gediz-Bakircay Basins (Turkey)

Page 5: Laura Jean Zito, An Tiaracht, most western of the Great Blasket Islands off Ireland's west coast, westernmost point of Irish land, and most westerly point in Europe after Iceland and the Azores, has an 1870 lighthouse, the steepest funicular rail track in Europe, and quantities of important seabird populations. Wild Atlantic way (Ireland)

Page 7: Adam Levente, Szeretettel, Csíksomlyó. Via Mariae (Romania)

Page 9: Athina Kritikopoulou, Lesvos island is famous for its hot springs since ancient times. The photo was taken in the Hot Springs of Gera Gulf. Lesvos Islands Global UNESCO Geopark (Greece)

Page 11: Michael Chant, Starlings on the Levels. Whilst the Somerset Levels are well known for starling murmurations, these artistic alternatives also enjoy life in the midst of the Somerset countryside. Art amongst the wildlife comes as a welcome surprise during a country ramble. Take Art, County of Somerset (UK)

Page 17: Oda Leth-Jøssing, Traditional fishing. Every summer we fish wild salmon, and the equipment we use has been at the farm for generations. We are the (as we know) the 5th generation of salmon fishers at the farm, and we hope it will last some generations more! Austratt and Orland landscape (Norway)

Page 19: Alfonso Mata, The General Archive of Simancas, founded by Carlos I, is the first and oldest official archive of the Crown of Castile and the witness of the evolution of the valley Duero since 1540, Duero Cultural Landscape (Spain/Portugal)

Pages 22-23: Pascal Weber, The picture shows Lorsch and its monastery at dawn. One of the buildings is shot through the arch door of the big hall. Geo-Naturpark Bergstrasse-Odenwald (UNESCO Global Geopark) (Germany)

RURITAGE



Heritage for Rural Regeneration

RURITAGE seeks to transform rural areas in sustainable development laboratories, through the enhancement of their unique cultural and natural heritage potential.



PILGRIMAGE

Heritage routes to sacred and historical places are drivers for sustainable and economic growth in many rural areas



LOCAL FOOD

Using food, wine and gastronomy is a widespread way to improve the economic and environmental sustainability of rural areas



ART & FESTIVAL

Festivals and arts attract tourists and bring economic resources in many rural areas, promoting youth entrepreneurship and a "creative rural economy"



MIGRATION

Beyond the challenges presented by the migration crisis, the arrival of 'incomers' also creates opportunities for repopulation, growth and rural regeneration



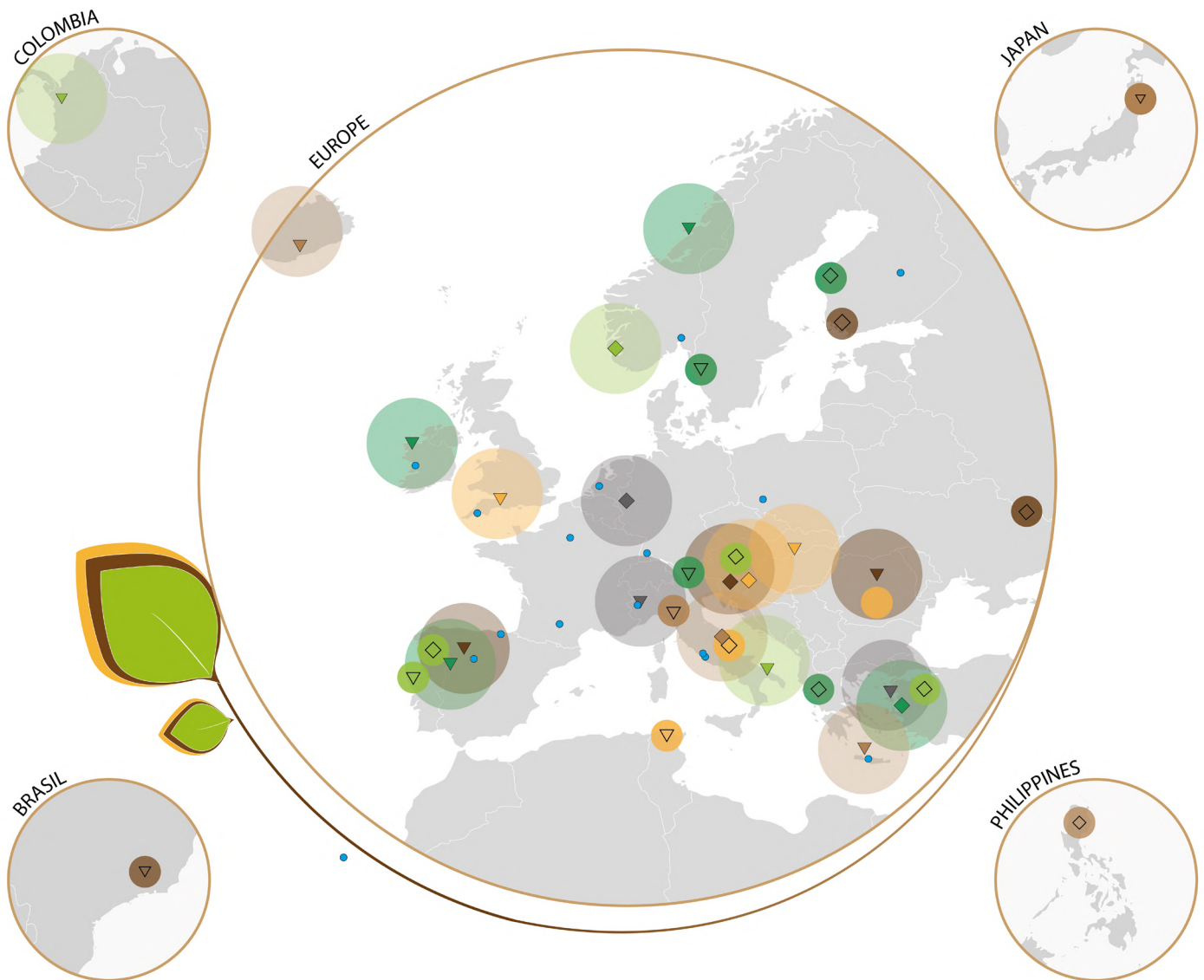
RESILIENCE

Enhancing Cultural and Natural Heritage against climate change and disasters, rural communities protect themselves and boost economic growth



LANDSCAPE

Successful examples of participatory landscape management built on heritage is a crucial driver of rural renaissance



Replicators



Additional Replicators



Role Models



Additional Role Models



Knowledge Facilitator Partners

June 2018 / May 2022



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