

# CREATURES! A BALANCE AND NEW PERSPECTIVES



In our 19th June [article](#), we introduced **CREATURES** (Promoting Creative Tourism through new Experiential and Sustainable routes), a project that sought to preserve cultural heritage and promote sustainable and experiential tourism in the ADRION (Adriatic-Ionian Region). The frame of reference was the ADRION Programme, a European transnational project that invests in regional innovation systems, cultural and natural heritage, environmental resilience, capacity building, sustainable transport, and mobility.

The mission of Project CREATURES was to valorise natural and cultural heritage in fragile and less-known regional territories via sustainable tourism products and visitor attractions, all while ensuring the lowest possible carbon footprint. In addition, a critical factor in developing a successful strategy for cultural tourism was the enhancement and promotion of regional cultural and creative industries as a driver for the local economy.

In this second article, we will describe the most significant actions carried out within the project, the results obtained, the spin-offs on the territory, and the prospects for the future. We will start with the Italian area, as the **Metropolitan City of Bologna** was the leading partner.

Bologna created a new cycling and trekking route connecting the city centre with the Piccola Cassia (Little Cassia), an ancient Roman path linking the North of Italy to the city centre of Rome, crossing the Emilia Romagna Region through the Apennine. Thanks to a collaboration with eXtraBo, an info point dedicated to outdoor activities, tourists now have free maps (including in English) for cyclo-tourism and trekking along the Piccola Cassia path. Furthermore, a second route towards the border with Tuscany on the Apennine Mountains was linked to the Piccola Cassia path to valorise the small town of Porretta Terme (well-known for its spas and annual International Soul Festival). Moreover, the existing network of cycling routes available in the metropolitan city of Bologna - mainly secondary and low-traffic roads - was improved and completed, allowing tourists to escape from crowded city centres and enjoy the richness of the natural and cultural heritage of the countryside via bike.

Following its basic philosophy, the project ensured the active participation of selected cultural and creative industries as critical stakeholders for developing sustainable and experiential tourism products. As a result, ten small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the Apennine district all along the Piccola Cassia were selected to access a business acceleration program, supporting the creation of new green jobs and boosting local and sustainable development.

The other Italian partner was the **Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region**. It created two cultural routes focusing on literary and musical themes. Thanks primarily to cooperation among the region's bodies and cultural and creative industries, a new digital impact was possible: more than seventy points of interest were identified on the regional territory and uploaded onto the project platform. Talking postcards allowed young tourists to log on to the portal, learn everything about each point of interest using audio and video recordings available in several languages, and thoroughly enjoy the routes. Targeted mapping and coordinated promotion strategies in cultural tourism guaranteed maximum coverage and reached new areas still in search of their tourist

vocation. These strategies, based on slow tourism and experiential tourism, produced significant results, not only for the operators in the area, who benefit indirectly from this result, but also for other groups such as school tourism and tourist guides.

Let us now move to the other side of the Adriatic Sea, to **Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia**.

The efforts of the **Regional Development Agency Dubrovnik-Neretva County - Dunea** were focused on creating two new routes (Libertas Perspective and Libertas Horizon) as an example of an innovative sustainable tourist product targeting young people. The pilot location was the Pelješac peninsula, fifty kilometres north of Dubrovnik. With the help and suggestions of local stakeholders, the agency selected forty points of interest and introduced visitors to natural and cultural heritage and economic activities in the area (winemaking and oyster growing as well as outdoor activities).

The Libertas Perspective route valorises the natural and cultural heritage of Pelješac by connecting spots with the most attractive views, including, to mention one, the Napoleonic Road that travels the entire length of the peninsula, or Stonsko Polje and the salt pans, already on the tentative UNESCO list as material cultural heritage.

On the other hand, the Libertas Horizon route valorises life by the sea through the peninsula's maritime heritage. It offers a new museum and four archaeological sites, one undersea, showing sunk boats from antique times to World War II.

**The School of Economics and Business in Sarajevo**, University of Sarajevo, carried out three significant actions within the project.

The first was a training program for creatives and cultural organizations. This program was designed to support entrepreneurs and new companies in planning, running, and accelerating successful businesses in their fields.

The second action sought to enhance cultural tourism development in Sarajevo Canton by creating new experiential tourism routes in collaboration with relevant local stakeholders. The expected result of this action is to reinforce the knowledge of the city's cultural heritage of Sarajevo, mainly among the younger generations of tourists, and to create a permanent local network of stakeholders who can ensure the sustainability of CREATURES' experiential routes.

The third action was related to developing information technologies for tourism through the creation of a mobile application with an interactive map of the two new experiential tourism routes. Plans for the future include the development of information and communications technology-based itineraries and routes, offering virtual reality and 3D solutions.

At the beginning of the project, **the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia** performed an accurate SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the country's cultural and creative industries sector and provided the other CREATURES Project partners with the methodological insights to do the same. Furthermore, as part of the joint acceleration program for cultural and creative industries, a five-module training course upgraded and connected startups and other stakeholders in this sector. One of the main goals of these actions was to highlight the contribution of the cultural and creative industries sector to economic growth and communicate its added value for Slovenia.

In Ljubljana, as a goal of the local action plan, the local tourist organization wanted to develop new

cultural quarters outside the crowded city centre. The organization has designed two creative pilot routes so far, but it will need time to test and develop them. Odd as it may seem, the biggest problem was that there were too many ideas to be integrated into the timespan of a single project, as the Urban Planning Institute underlined. However, both routes are designed to enable several incremental updates.

We end our review with **Albanian and Greek areas**.

Cultural tourism has grown significantly in Albania in recent years, and its contribution to the region's economy is already significant. From this point of view, the **Regional Directorate of National Culture, Vlorë** (in collaboration with Auleda, the Local Economic Development Agency) designed two cultural routes, in Vlorë and Fier. The main objective was to connect different points of interest in an itinerary and diversify the touristic offer, including nature, culture, and local products. Because access to information is a significant problem in Albania's tourist sector, this was also a focal point in the CREATURES Project. It developed different digital solutions, with the collaboration of various partners, to help tourists find helpful information. These solutions were a portal, a mobile app, and two info-kiosks placed in two of the most popular tourist destinations.

In Greece, the **Patras Science Park S.A.**, after thorough preparation (investigation + SWOT analysis) in cooperation with the **Athens University of Economics and Business Research Center**, identified and promoted three practices.

First, Patras Science Park has developed a Joint Acceleration Programme at the country or regional level to support the role of cultural and creative industries in the tourism sector. All the different CREATURES partners contributed to the creation of a methodology + shared guidelines and enforced the Joint Acceleration Programme in their territories. In Patras, seven small and medium-sized cultural and creative industries joined forces in a common project.

Then the Patras Science Park, with the support of all the partners, developed two innovative digital applications for the CREATURES project: a mobile app and software for a multimedia installation to promote the new routes within all the territories involved in the project (currently under test). The project portal, the backbone of both digital applications, is very flexible, allowing for the continuous addition of new content (points of interest) and new, future sustainable routes.

Finally, a bike route in a mountainous area and a cultural/creativity route around the Ancient Olympia sites were defined, studied, and selected for promotion through traditional and digital means.

In each phase, the CREATURES Project aimed at effective territorial collaboration with many local stakeholders, including all levels of public authorities, public and private tourism operators, and environmental associations. Above all, CREATURES encouraged the involvement of cultural and creative industries, small and medium enterprises, and startups operating in the tourism sector. Beyond the individual results, some of them important, the CREATURES Project has paved the way for a new idea of tourism, which until now was not common on both sides of the Adriatic-Ionian Region (ADRION).

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