



A sustainable cooperation between heritage sites (castles) for the joint development and marketing of cross-border heritage tourism

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Type of best practice

Cooperation between Museums and Heritage sites

Keywords

Cultural institutions, joint marketing, cultural management, cross-border cooperation

Austria and Slovenia are characterized by one of the highest numbers of defense fortifications in Europe. Thirty years ago, in order to combine their touristic and cultural offer, castles from the regions of Eastern Styria and Southern Burgenland (Austria) formed the association of the "Castle Road" ("Die Schlösserstrasse"). To ensure further success, as well as to highlight the European dimension, new (transnational) strategies were needed. Therefore, through the INTERREG SI-AT "Castle Road" project Slovenian and Austrian partners explored the joint history and culture of their castles and actively linked them from an academic and tourism perspective. This included the development of special, cross-border adventure and tourism products, resulting in a cross-border association connecting both countries and enabling joint marketing activities.

Organisation in charge of best practice

Association "Die Schlösserstraße", Konsul Mag. Andreas Bardeau, SI-AT Interreg project

Location

Transnational cooperation between Austria and Slovenia, including 37 heritage sites

Dates

2018 – 2022

Description

The "Castle Road" is a cross-border route, which incorporates an area with one of the highest density of castles and palaces in Europe. Dating back in history to the 8th century, Franks in the west and Avars in the east began building two opposite defence lines, spreading from the outskirts of the Alps to the Drava River in the south. The area was long considered a bridge between middle and South-Eastern Europe and witnessed notable battles by the Holy Roman Empire, Mongols, Osmands and other peoples (unfolding over a period of over 1,000 years) for the dominance over this territory. This border area is a rich





of notable remnants from these times and prominent for having one of the highest numbers of such defence constructions in the whole of Europe.

Thirty years ago, the castles and mansions in South-Eastern Austria decided to cooperate within a "Castle Road" association ("Die Schlösserstraße"). Nevertheless, it was realised that without the inclusion of castles and mansions from both Slovenia and Austria, a comprehensive presentation of the border area's most remarkable turning points and diverse history would not be possible. Therefore, the association now also includes members from Slovenia. The association now counts 41 castles, palaces and monasteries that once served as manors or for military protection.

The establishment and development of this cooperation was realized within the context of the European funding programme INTERREG Austria-Slovenia "Establishment of a cross-border sustainable association involving castle and castles in the cross-border area of Slovenia and Austria". More precisely, the project was financially supported by the EU INTERREG SI-AT programme (EUR 978,664.60). Three public project partners were involved: the Research and Educational Centre Mansion Rakičan (Slovenia), the Technologiezentrum Deutschlandsberg GmbH (Austria) as well as the "Stiftung des weiland Fürst Philipp Batthyány zur Erhaltung der alten Güssinger Burg" (Austria). In additions, the following 32 forts, mansions and castles that once formed the historic castle ring confirmed their participation in the project: Aichberg, Deutschlandsberg, Feldbach, Fürstenfeld, Gleichenberg, Gornja Radgona, Grad, Güssing, Hartberg, Herberstein, Kapfenstein, Kornberg, Lendava, Lockenhaus, Negova, Neuhaus, Obermayerhofen, Ormož, Ottersbach, Piber, Pöllau, Ptuj, Rače, Radkersburg, Rakičan, Riegersburg, Schielleiten, Schlaining, Seggau, Slovenska Bistrica, Tabor and Welsdorf. As the project unfolded, other castles and mansions were invited to join. The purpose of the Schlösserstrasse is to preserve and strengthen these historic sites in order to continue and enhance the valuable tourist cultural and educational offer to young and adult visitors, and strengthen the reach and appeal of this route for international tourists. Especially the cooperation through the joint INTERREG project served the following goals:

- To develop a common brand for this association of castles and sites, which will ensure increased international visibility and promotion.
- To propose cross-border cultural packages, in combination with regional thermal hotels, as part of the promotion.
- To cooperate with international media and culture specialized tourist agencies in promoting these sites and the Castle Road.
- To produce targeted material for different visitors, in particular with a focus on guidance for families and content for children, contributing to the additional attractiveness of the region for this target group.
- To foster the international promotion of the route as a unique cultural heritage experience, encouraging more guests to visit the region and the different sites within it.

These well-preserved locations now serve as excursion destinations, museums or event venues. As valuable cultural jewels, these residences impress a broad spectrum of visitors every year. Supplemented by partnerships with regional businesses in the fields of health, culinary, culture and exercise, the Schlösserstrasse offers visitors a broad range of opportunities for discovery and relax, as well as heritage experiences. Each of the members designs and develops its own historical utilization concept, resulting in a wide





range of completely different, yet complementary tourist and cultural offerings. What they all have in common is that their offer is embedded in the existing historic buildings. The offer at the Schlösserstrasse includes an invitation to explore the diversity of the houses and is presented as a recommendation for further engaging with this rich heritage landscape and the history of the region.

Specific outputs of the cross-border cooperation were:

- **Cultural Offer Folder** The aim of the intensive exchange between the partner destinations was to design a folder listing all the partners' offer and detailing the target groups, so to specifically address the different needs of visitors. The possibilities for experiences along the Schlösserstrasse includes: lively music and entertainment; balloon rides; guided tours in museums, crypts, and medieval city centres; wine tasting; treasure hunting games for children; and hosting a wedding reception on site. In the folder, five different travel itineraries were presented: "Grand Castle Tour" focused on music experiences; "Notable Castle Tour" focused on art collections; "Enchanting Castle Road", focused on gardens and architecture; "Magical Castle Road", focused on suggestive experiences; "Heroic Castle Road", focused on fortified sites. The folder also includes information about the sites with their offer (events, guided tours, gastronomy and overnight accommodation options).
- **Schlösserstrasse Quiz** In order to train staff at these heritage sites and expand their knowledge on relevant features of the route and its cultural monuments, a bilingual quiz was developed. It includes a total of 114 questions covering general topics of the Schlösserstrasse as well as location specific ones. The main target group of the quiz are employees in the regions of Styria, southern Burgenland and Slovenia who are in direct contact with visitors on a daily basis. After successfully answering at least 80% of the questions, participants receive a certificate that identifies them as an expert on the respective Schlösserstrasse route.

Overall, the establishment of the transnational castle route shows the potential of forming a transnational, cross-border tourism product, which has a direct impact on single locations, as well as the overall development of the regions and their tourism offer.

Links

[Wissen - Über Schlösserstrasse - Schlösserstrasse - Steiermark, Burgenland, Österreich - Slovenien \(schloesserstrasse.com\)](https://schloesserstrasse.com) [castleroad_verkaufshandbuch_d.pdf \(apswiss.ch\)](#)
[Project - Building sustainable institutionalised cooperation between castles and castles for the development and marketing of joint cross-border offers \(keep.eu\)](#) [Castle Road – EN Interreg SI-AT Castle Road | ZRS Bistra, Ptuj Project - Building sustainable institutionalised cooperation between castles and castles for the development and marketing of joint cross-border offers \(keep.eu\)](#)

Resources needed

The project was made possible by the EU INTERREG programme (with almost a million Euro), which supported the development of the programme. The funding allowed the setting up of the consortium, the planning of the common branding and the development of





the website, as well as the identification of common strands and connections between the sites, leading to the delivery of the outputs described above (cultural offer folder, quiz, ...). The INTERREG project formally concluded in early 2022 and the Castle Road is now being continued by the Association constituted during the project, with the support of local administrations.

Challenges encountered

The cooperation across national border is always a challenging task: language barriers, different organisational cultures and responsibilities, as well as different administrative contexts complicate cooperation also in the heritage sector – usually regarded as a 'soft' cooperation field. The process and development of the cooperation therefore has to be carefully prepared and moderated, so to overcome barriers in organisational cultures and achieve a sustainable and productive collaboration across all members organisations. In this case, the support of the EU INTERREG programme, explicitly trying to bridge these challenges by providing funding for cooperation, was crucial to overcome these barriers and gain the funding for kick-starting the establishment of the association and the identification and development of the proposed solutions.

Evidence of success

The main objective achieved by this project was the establishment of the cross-border association, which allows attracting more visitors across the involved regions. Both new institutions and tourism stakeholders joined the Castle Road association, which can now act as a transnational umbrella brand. The participants can therefore profit from shared costs, a unified image, and increased visibility of the sites, as well as knowledge exchange opportunities and staff training (e.g. through the quiz). In terms of tourism, an increase in overnight stays and visits is a witness of the success of this branding and marketing strategy. Local offer has been complemented by itinerary suggestions connecting more sites, of enjoying e-bike tours, the possibility of offering new experiences, and new activities for children and families. The project website offers an overview of such possibilities encouraging visitors to participate and visit more than one site. For example, the possibility of getting married in one of the many castles' chapels present in the different sites has led to over 600 marriages being celebrated every year in these chapels. Finally, tourism organisations and stakeholders in the region also benefit from the enhanced attention for these sites, with local hotels, restaurants, and shops enjoying the increased visitor numbers.

Potential for transfer

A joint association across heritage sites can be an important step to preserve cultural heritage, improve museum management and collaboration in a region, creating a more attractive and visible offer for visitors. In a transnational context it offers a unique chance to widen the touristic offer, appeal to more international tourists and strengthen knowledge exchange between the involved institutions. While funding is essential to setup the association and develop the initial common approach, once established such association has the potential to bring benefit to the whole region. The potential for transfer the forms of collaboration of the Castle Road is therefore high, by supporting similar heritage sites across a region in connecting and developing a common brand and principles for their marketing offer.





Further Information

n/a



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