



## Promotion of rural heritage sites in the vicinity of pilgrimage routes - rurAllure

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*Type of best practice*

VR/AR & Technologies, inc. Gamification & Immersive performances

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*The project rurAllure has established a broad ecosystem of private and public institutions which aims to promote heritage in geographically and socially isolated areas by means of digital innovation. Connecting historical pilgrimage routes and cultural heritage in rural surroundings, the initiative generates tourism activity and greater social and economic impact in less popular areas. Mapping heritage landmarks along the walking routes, the project develops a digital repository of cultural points of interest which guides hikers and pilgrims along the routes and helps them to discover heritage without significantly deviating from the original route.*

### **Organisation in charge of best practice**

University of Vigo

### **Location**

: Galicia region (Spain) and Northern Portugal; Italy with a specific focus on Veneto, Tuscany and EmiliaRomagna regions, south-eastern Norway; Hungary, Slovakia, and Romanian Transylvania

### **Dates**

2021-2023

### **Description**

“rurAllure – promotion of rural museums and heritage sites in the vicinity of European pilgrimage routes” is an Horizon2020 project aimed at fostering cultural cooperation and sustainable tourism in the proximity of European historic pilgrimage routes.

The project started on 1 January 2021, has a duration of 36 months and a budget of € 2 999 205. Its International Consortium consists of 16 institutions from 6 European countries and more over 100 associated partners from 13 European countries. Those include





universities and educational institutions, research centres, municipalities, companies, European projects, cultural routes, associations, private and public bodies working in tourism.

rurAllure was born with the aim of creating a network between territories, pilgrims, tourists, heritage, cultural richness, citizens, and local communities, paying special attention to the involvement of rural areas, while its main phases include: identification of pilot areas and relevant heritage sites; definition of common and communication strategies in each pilot area; development and implementation of a technological platform.

The pilgrimage routes have undoubtedly become a significant economic and political asset for Europe. On the one hand, the thousands of travellers mobilise substantial resources around them, to the point that the economic impact of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela alone was estimated to exceed 300 million euros in 2019. On the other hand, since many of the pilgrimage routes are transnational, they act as vehicles for cultural exchange and cross-border relationships. It is no surprise, then, that some routes have received (and are receiving) substantial support from regional, national, and European institutions.

The rurAllure project addresses one weak point hidden behind this depiction of success: the pilgrimage routes may be traversed by thousands, but their impact is almost exclusively perceived in the places located directly on the paths, rarely permeating into the surrounding rural areas. Thus, entire provinces and regions of a predominantly rural nature, which are facing significant economic and demographic challenges all over Europe – as is the case of the provinces of Ourense and Lugo in the north-west of Spain, not far from Santiago de Compostela – become passive witnesses of the flows of pilgrims, whereas they could add much of content and value to the experiences.

The opportunity for the project is reinforced by the aim to set the basis for rural communities to develop relevant and cohesive tourist products that may help facing the economic challenges arising with the COVID 19 crisis – considering that tourism is one of the most affected areas, the EU should put strong focus in the future into domestic tourism and well as outdoor activities.

The goal of rurAllure is to overcome this situation through the allure of the cultural heritage found in the rural environment. The opportunity arises from the fact that pilgrimage is usually planned with some flexibility regarding dates, distances travelled in successive journeys, places to rest, etc. Many pilgrims are amenable to serendipitous findings, too. This makes pilgrimage largely different from other types of cultural and touristic experiences, thus opening possibilities of increasing the numbers of visitors to the least-known heritage sites by:

- Assembling meaningful cultural experiences with resources found in the rural environment
- Mobilising transportation, accommodation, and dining in one click
- Offering the whole packs to the pilgrims through tailor-made means of promotion
- Creation of a network of pilgrims, tourists, travellers, local stakeholders, heritage and fostering the exchange of knowledge and experience.





The project is developed according to four pilots, which function as "laboratories of ideas" within the project and work on different thematic areas in different geographical areas: ● Pilot 1: Literary heritage on the ways to Santiago de Compostela. ● Pilot 2: Thermal heritage and others on the ways to Rome. ● Pilot 3: Ethnographic heritage on the ways to Trondheim. ● Pilot 4: Natural heritage on the ways to Csíksomlyó.

Mapping heritage sites along and in the proximity of the routes constitutes the core of the project's action. The materials are compiled into a digital repository of cultural points of interest, available both as web platform and mobile application. Pilgrims can use the tool to discover new cultural spots, integrate them into their travel itineraries and share featured travel plans with the community, while private and public stakeholders can contribute to the heritage repository to strengthen the visibility of local resources.

The project's innovative approach consists in developing a synergy of slow tourism, rural cultural resources, and digital technology. The rurAllure platform, one of the principal deliverables of the project, is free of charge and brings benefits to a wide range of stakeholders: travellers, willing to diversify their experience with cultural visits; public institutions, seeking to gain a greater visibility for local heritage; private vendors, making part of local tourism infrastructure.

Finally, the project contributes to Sustainable Development Goals, addressing the greatest modern challenges in the environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The rurAllure project's impact is particularly evident in the action fields, formulated by SDG n.3: 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages', SDG n.8: 'Decent work and economic growth', SDG n.9: 'Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation', SDG n.11: 'Sustainable Cities & Communities', SDG n.13: 'Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts', SDG n.17: 'Partnership for the goals'. The project provides a favourable environment for tourism enterprises in provincial localities, empowers local communities, promotes local culture and products. Focusing on walking and cycling environmentally-friendly activity, it valorises healthy lifestyle and reduces the risk of acquiring various diseases such as diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases.





### Links

<https://rurallure.eu/>

### Resources needed

n/a

### Challenges encountered

The extensive work of mapping of cultural, historical, artistic, and natural heritage, and services for tourists and pilgrims along and around the project routes resulted into the creation of the rurAllure digital repository. It comprises more than 7700 Points of Interest (POIs), featured travel itineraries and guiding narratives for cultural sites along the four project pilot routes. This tool facilitates scalable and cost-effective design of shared digital exhibitions, in the shape of sequences of multimedia contents connected by meaningful narratives and delivered to the pilgrims by: - an online digital platform - a mobile App - a constantly updated website displaying all news related to the advancement of the project and its digital tools.

### Evidence of success

Both the online platform and the mobile app are free of charge and aimed at tourists and local stakeholders, providing access to: - more than 7700 POIs, mapped in 10 countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, U.K., Switzerland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Norway) along and in the vicinity of the 6 routes involved. Each POIs includes important information such as: map and geographic coordinates, description, photos, and other useful



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information. - recommended travel plans created and shared by platform users. - 70 narratives in the form of text and audio files that allow users to deepen and enrich their knowledge of the areas explored discover interesting information. - practical information about accommodations, transports, diverse tourist services, etc. This information is uploaded from service providers and vendors, who has direct access to the platform after registration. Furthermore, the digital platform and App include a dedicated space where public and private vendors can register their activities related to cultural heritage as well as to pilgrims and tourists facilities. Thus, rurAllure digital tools help match supply and demand by strengthening the visibility of local resources. On their side, by joining the platform, vendors contribute to its richness. POIs information on digital platform and App is available in English, French, German, Spanish Italian, Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian), while it is possible to listen and read narratives in project national languages.

### **Potential for transfer**

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### **Further Information**

- The project created a European network of public and private entities that, on the one hand, facilitates outreach to policy makers and lobbies, and on the other hand irrigates and supplies new visitors to rural museums and other heritage sites. The network takes advantage both of the flows of pilgrims along big transnational routes and the stakeholders acting in the territories crossed by the routes. The network increases impact by inviting other researchers, heritage managers and tourism industry professionals through a range of dissemination and outreach actions, including events, workshops, fam trips, study visits, etc. - To ensure sustainability of the initiative after the formal completion of the project, a manual of transfer of good tourist practices, a white book of recommendations and a clearly-defined strategy for exploitation of the project's results were produced on the basis of the findings resulting from the pilots.

